

Risk perception of Norwegians in the online debate space

Eivind Dybvik

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Abstract

Risk is a topic that is important to have a lot of knowledge about in order to navigate around the places where there is some risk present. In the online debate, many of the Norwegian population are present every day, so it is therefore extra important to learn about the risks that exist and what can be done to minimize these. It is also important to learn about the place where these risks are present. In this thesis, I focus on the online debate in a qualitative survey with 20 participants where the focus is divided into five parts. What is the climate like in the online debate, what kind of risks are there, why do my participants choose to be active here, how do they think this online debate can be improved, and finally how do they think about privacy. The most important findings in my thesis show that my participants think the climate in the online debate is not very good. They believe the risks associated with being active here are getting a lot of negative comments, spending a lot of time, and losing their reputation from saying something wrong. I also go into the chilling effect and find that this is highly present in the Norwegian online debate. On the topic of privacy, I find that my participant does not care that much about their privacy online, but that they wish it was easier to navigate.

Sammendrag

Risiko er et tema som er viktig å ha mye kunnskap om for å kunne navigere oss rundt de stedene der det er en del risiko tilstede. I nettdebatten er det mange av den norske befolkning tilstede hver dag, her er det derfor ekstra viktig å lære om hvilke risikoer som finnes og hva man kan gjøre for å minimere disse. Det er også viktig å lære om stedet der disse risikoene er tilstede. I denne oppgaven tar jeg for meg nettdebatten i en kvalitativ undersøkelse med 20 deltakere hvor fokuset er delt opp i fem deler. Hvordan klimaet i nettdebatten er, hva slags risikoer som finnes her, hvorfor mine deltakere velger å være aktiv her, hvordan de tenker denne nettdebatten kan forbedres, og til slutt hvordan de tenker om personvern. Oppgaven viser at mine deltakere synes klimaet i nettdebatten ikke er særlig bra. De mener risikoene som er knyttet til å være aktiv her er å få mye negative kommentarer, bruke mye tid, og miste omdømme sitt fra å si noe feil. Jeg går også inn på nedkjølingseffekten og finner ut at denne er tilstede i den norske nettdebatten. På temaet personvern finner jeg at deltakeren min ikke bryr seg så mye om personvernet deres på nettet, men at de ønsker at det var lettere å navigere.

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Chapter 1

Introduction

Have you ever seen someone online getting frustrated by some news story and then proceeding to comment their feelings and thoughts about it, then other users jump into the comment section to say how they feel about it? This type of debate happens all the time on the Internet [1], you have probably also seen some nasty and unnecessary comments towards other users. This type of behavior is getting more normalized in comment sections in social media sites like Facebook, Twitter and Instagram. This type of behaviour can lead to risks for users such as harassment and hate speech [2]. A Danish study found that 17% of comments in a newspaper comment section could be classified as hate speech. What type of risks does this behavior cause, and how do people cope? [1] We are already seeing a news story about some of the risks attached to having a presence in the online debate space—everything from people losing their jobs to mental health issues from negative feedback and cyberbullying. [3] [4]

1.1 Topic covered by the project

This project thesis will cover the topic of risk perception in online debates. It's essential to understand what risks are attached to the everyday activity of being active in the comment section and the rest of the online debate space [2]. The perception of this risk will come from Norwegians involved in these types of debates and therefore have experience and knowledge to share. In addition to finding out the dangers attached to discussion online, the author wants to investigate what topics are causing the most heated debates. Are their people afraid to discuss online because of some repercussions? How, if possible, can we make this debate space better.

This thesis will explore the topics of risk perception and awareness of Norwegian participants in these social media environments and try to find out what risks exists when debating and putting opinions on social media is.

1.2 Keywords

Privacy awareness, Social Media, cyberbullying, Risk perception, Online debates, chilling effect, Internet mob.

1.3 Problem description

More of the public's conversation is being held online with new technology. Social media, where these online conversations mostly take place, is led by algorithms that feed on engagement from their users. Designers of these algorithms have found out that feeling angry towards something or someone causes a lot of engagement. [5][6] When the technology are being led by an algorithm that feeds on the engagement of their users. the users tend to get information they already agree with, which can create echo chambers [3] Because of this, the conversation and especially the debates can have a high degree of polarisation According to some Norwegian experts there is also an growing tendency of this polarisation in the online debate space of Norwegians [2]. We often hear news stories of individuals that have suffered consequences of different sorts from something they have said online. For instance, in 2014, there where a court case about a man putting out hate speech against a woman politician. He lost in the court and was sentenced to pay the woman fifteen thousand NOK. In another case, a man was sentenced to sixteen days in prison for writing hateful and harassing remarks on a public Facebook page and paying the victim eight thousand NOK. [7]

There can be certain risks attached to participating in the online debate space. The risks can cause a chilling effect where people don't dare to say their own opinion online because they are afraid of the consequences of having the "wrong" idea about a particular topic. [8] With this thesis, I want to investigate more of the risks in the online debate space, especially in the Social Media space, and through interviews, get the Norwegians perception of the overall chances of participating in online debates.

1.4 Justification, motivation, and benefits

With the amount of time people spend on social media increasing each year, polarisation and debates have skyrocketed [3]. This political polarization has already been a massive problem in the United States [5] [9] and as well as most things Norway could quickly follow in their footsteps [2]. It's essential to understand this trending and evolving issue that is very effective in getting the worse out of people and ineffective in solving problems. [10] In a world with many problems that need to be addressed and solved for the survival of humankind, getting a proper way of communicating and debating is vital for the better of the future. By better understanding the people behind either side of today's way of discussing online, there can be a better understanding of when and why conversations go from product-

ive to unproductive and what makes certain people keep coming back to these debates. By also talking to people that have debated online before but are now choosing not to, or people wanting to discuss but fear the negative responses from putting opinions online, I will try to get a better understanding of the online debate climate as a whole.

1.5 Research questions

My research questions

- How is the Norwegian online debate space climate?
- Sub-question: What factors contribute to its negative reputation?
- Sub-question: What topic creates the most heated debates?
- What are the risks of participating in online debates?
- Sub-question: Is there a chilling effect in the Norwegian online debate space?
- What is it that makes people come back to the online debate space?
- How can the online debate space be improved?
- What are the privacy concerns among online debaters?

Through these research questions, I will try to get a better understanding of the risk that is present in the online debate space, how people relate to these risks, and what mechanisms contribute to making these risks present.

1.6 Planned contributions

This thesis aims to give a better understanding of the Norwegians public awareness of the risks that come with debating online. This is a field that has barely been studied previously in Norway but is something a lot of people indulge in and where stories of the opposing sides are heard more often. To do a scientific study on the perceived risks by the people participating and are aware of the online debating will benefit the understanding and awareness of the public that post opinions or indulge in discussions in various social media and comment sections.

1.7 Thesis outline

This thesis will first give background information about all the topics the reader needs to know about. Then I will present previous work done by academics on this topic and topics surrounding it. The methodology is then presented with a thorough understanding of how I conducted my research and the reason for doing it. The result of the research follows with a discussion about the findings and how it relates to the related literature afterward. Lastly, I give my views on future work and present a conclusion on this thesis.

Chapter 2

Background

In this section, I will give a more clear understanding of the main theme in this thesis, namely online debates and the places where these debates most often take place. First an introduction to the phenomena of online debates, then a more thorough background on the places in which these debates take place, social media, and comment sections.

2.1 Online debates

An online debate is a form of debate that takes place on the Internet. The most commonplace these debates take place are in a comment section on various Internet platforms like the Social Media sites explained above. The debate is between individuals that have made a user account on these platforms. A common way for an online debate to take place is that a user either shares a link (like a news article) or posts their opinion about a certain topic, often something that is a hot topic (discussed a lot in the media). Other users then proceed to use the comment section underneath the post and share their opinion on the topic thus causing a debate. When a user has started commenting on a post, this user has created a "thread", other users can then continue on that thread by commenting on the user's comment to the post, then other users can comment on that user's comment, causing another thread and so on. Therefore, a single post can cause several debates about different topics. Instead of posting a comment, users can also react to the topic by clicking on various emojis that represent their agreement or disagreement about the topic. It is the user that agrees with the post that most likely will use this type of reaction, while the people that disagree most likely will feel the need to share their opinion. [2]

2.1.1 The law on online debates

The Internet is not a space where laws do not apply. Rather, the same laws apply to this space as in any other form or format. Anyone that publishes an opinion

online can thus be judged according to the same provisions as if they spoke in any other channel, like in a newspaper, in leaflets, or from a wooden box in the square. People are therefore responsible for what they choose to publish on different social media platforms or in a comment section. From the Norwegian laws, there are some provisions that one need to be aware of when it comes to potentially publishing illegal or infringing content online, these are:

- Violence or threats against public officials - Section 155 of the Criminal Code
- Encouragement to a criminal act - Section 183 of the Criminal Code
- Hate speech - Section 185 of the Penal Code
- Threats - Sections 263 and 264 of the Criminal Code
- Reckless behavior - Section 266 of the Criminal Code
- Violation of privacy - Section 267 of the Criminal Code (and Section 3-6 of the Damages Act)
- Defamation - Section 3-6a of the Damages act
- The right to one's own image (personal image) - Section 45c of the Copyright Act

In the two cases mentioned in the introduction, the first one from 2014 got sued for defamation and breach of privacy, while in the other case from 2017, the accused was convicted for violating the rules on hate speech and reckless behavior.

In addition to being responsible for one's own published utterances, there is also stipulated in Section 15 of the Penal Code that anyone who "contributes to the violation" of a penalty provision can also be punished. It is thus possible to hold different persons accountable for what someone published. For a user-generated post or comment, this will probably mean that an editor, moderator, front-line manager, etc., that does not act when they become aware of illegal content on their website, could in principle be held liable for both violations of the civil law provisions in sections 3-6 and 3-6a of the Damages Act.

2.1.2 The culture of online debaters

A large number of studies have shown that online debates can easily be characterized by hostility, personal attacks, and aggression. This is a complicated issue where researchers on one hand point out the danger of filtering too much, because this can create echo chambers, where people only get introduced to ideas they agree with, decreasing nuance and creating even more polarization between groups. On the other hand, the researcher sees trends that online debates are only attractive to a small percentage of the population, whereas the rest see it as unattractive to discuss topics in such a hostile environment, causing a chilling effect, where people avoids speaking out in fear of being ridiculed or offending someone.

These types of online debates that have a clear characteristic of aggressive or hostile verbal behavior are often referred to as flaming or incivility. These debates are not about criticism and disagreement between opponents of opinion, but about the use of language that is considered insulting and aggressive according

to usual norms for conversation and debate. The most common form is with personal attacks, where people refer to each other with stigmatizing attributes, and weaken the moral character of the other party or make offensive references to inherent characteristics such as gender, age, or appearance. This wording is often characterized by slurs or insults that are not part of the ordinary daily expression.

Another term related to flaming is trolling. Trolling is defined as people who on purpose provoke or upset people online by writing insulting, unrelated, and often controversial comments with the purpose of creating an emotional reaction from Internet users, thus luring them into a meaningless debate. The primary difference between the flaming debate form and trolling is the motivation that lies behind it. Flaming is looked upon as an uninhibited response of aggression while trolling is a calculated and intended form of commenting, though they can be hard to tell apart. [2]

With the introduction to the Internet, one thought that this would be a positive reinforcement to democracy, having debates online where everyone can tell their opinion about a topic and have a fruitful discussion. A positive practice arena for democratic behavior and participation where more and more people gradually develop more democratic attributes. The research tells us another story about the development of the debate from on the Internet and the culture there within. In some parts of the Internet, there have developed cultures with an acceptance of hateful speech, where aggressive and hostile speech is the normal way of expressing disagreement. These cultures where the moral codex is in such contrast to the moral codex in everyday speech, have been growing in numbers, and are contributing to a more acceptance of this speech in the overall Internet culture as well. Researchers have identified some common features of the online debates that promote the flaming forms of expression. One is the absence of social information of the users on the digital platforms, being more anonymous makes it easier to say things without being known. Another of these features is the absence of tone, body language, and facial expressions which lead to people not taking other people's emotional reactions into consideration. Not having these inputs leads also to more misunderstandings, so much of our understanding of other people's thoughts come from other things than what they actually say. These platforms can never integrate these important factors like tone, facial expression, body language, etc., though Reddit has found a way to integrate sarcasm. Users do this by ending their sentences with /s, though this representation of sarcasm loses its touch. [2]

The extreme internet culture

Extremist gets addicted to radical ideas and conspiracy theories. The broadcasters of the conspiracy theorist have a feeling that they must always outdo themselves in order to keep people hooked so they talk about crazier things throughout the years and don't have the evidence to prove it, but since they have been shown to

be right previously people believe whatever they say. Another highly positive thing about having crazier conspiracies theories is that the crazier the theory the more views and clicks it gets, and the more you believe in it, the more people agree with it. Never show signs of weakness. And they hate to have wrong because that lessens their credibility, which in their business quickly becomes career-ending for them, or at least if they admit to being wrong about something. This type of Internet culture was investigated by the Norwegian program "bak fasaden"¹. The interviews they conducted, either with someone who was aware of the culture from being a part of it to an expert in extreme thinking and Internet culture there within gave the same type of answer to how this culture is formed and what type of people tend to join them. The common characteristics of these people that tend to get lured into these communities are mainly men between 15-25, strong in resources, and in search of meaning and finding out who they are. A common way into the extreme internet culture is that they first get on a forum-based website like 4chan, and join a community with politically incorrect content to be a part of the humor against how politically correct the society tends to be. Eventually, when you are exposed to this form of humor over time, where it started with the truth and you agreed with it, you naturally create a bias against that part of society. Then, when one starts to agree with one thing, the limit of what one agrees with is constantly being expanded until one finally agrees with much of the radical often hateful content. Humor as a tool to make people agree with what they say is a powerful tool, especially for young people.

2.1.3 Norwegian online debate space/climate

The online debate climate separates itself from the face-to-face real-life debate climate in a number of ways. For instance, there is a choice of anonymity in the online space. Being anonymous in a debate makes it a lot easier for the individual to make claims he/she does not have to back up by anything.

In the general debate climate, online words like I disagree with you/don't think what you said is correct, etc are very often substituted with words of hatred and verbal attacks. The nuance of disagreement disappears and thus the fronts are strengthened.

2.2 Social media

Social media (SoMe) got first introduced in 2006 with Facebook in order to link people together online. It has from then become a multi-billionaire business that most of the world population uses. To cover the most common social media functionalities, Kietzmann et al. developed a seven-part honeycomb framework to explain this. This is the extent to which users (i) know about others accessibility (Presence), (ii) connect to each other (Relationships), (iii) know the reputation

¹<https://sumo.tv2.no/programmer/fakta/norge-bak-fasaden/sesong-2/norge-bak-fasaden-2-episode-2-1621579.html?showPlayer=true>

of others (Reputation), (iv) form communities or groups (Groups), (v) communicate with each other (Conversations), (vi) share and receive content (Sharing), and (vii) reveal their identity. [10]

In this thesis the social media that focuses most on conversation, relationships and sharing will be most suitable to look at. Since I am looking at the perspective of Norwegians, there will be a focus on the platforms Norwegians mostly uses. This will be Facebook, Twitter, and Reddit, as well as some News sites' comments sections, as these often produce debates.

Facebook is an online social networking service where people around the world can connect with each other. First, a person thirteen years or older must register as a user, this user then creates a profile where they can reveal information about themselves and post content sharing their thoughts and/or photos of their life. Since this over the Internet users is able to connect to other people's profiles by becoming their "friends". A user can also join and pages of their liking, buy and sell products and use integrated applications on the platform. Users can also have a more personal connection with their "friends" through text and video-calling via their integrated app Messenger. Most active users on Facebook use it for their own public diary, telling all their "friends" about their life, what they have done and are going to do. But a lot of the active users also use it to express their feelings and thoughts on a topic, most likely a topic that is active in the media. Having a subjective opinion on something and at the same time having around 1000 of these so-called "friends" where a lot have different subjective opinions that they are used to expressing, can cause these online debates. [11]

Twitter, founded in 2006 by Jack Dorsey is a microblogging service where its users share whatever they like within the limit of 280 characters, though by replying to their own comment it is possible to publish a message longer than 280 characters. Twitter is the place where most famous people share their opinion and thoughts about certain subjects either in their own life or more generally hot topics. It is known for having a lot of political discussions, for instance on the 2016 US election day, there were over 40 million tweets about it. Navigation on Twitter happens by using hashtags, these hashtags or categories of words are clickable and show all the "tweets" that users have written in that hashtag/category. [12]

Reddit on the other hand is a forum-based social media platform, it focuses heavily on the community aspect of social media. Here, each user selects the forum, the so-called "subreddit", of their interest and follows it, they can engage and post within the rules of the respective forum. The user base on Reddit is anonymous, making conversation and discussions based on votes by other users rather than who is more famous and have a bigger following. They self-promote as being the "front page of the Internet", with the meaning that they have everything on their site that the internet can offer. With this thesis, there will only be one "subreddit" of interest, namely the Norwegian one "r/Norge" where everyone talks and are Norwegian. [13]

2.2.1 The dark side of social media

These social media platforms mentioned are great ways for people to navigate through their lives if it's to catch up with friends, discover the world and how it thinks, or find like-minded people. There is no doubt social media have a hugely positive history of people connecting and getting opportunities in life because of it. But at the same time, there is no doubt there are dark sides to social media as well. In September of 2020, Netflix released the documentary *The Social Dilemma*², showing in an easy-to-understand way the possible harms social media have the capacity to do because of its algorithms and way of making money. The overall dilemma posed by the documentary is "never have a handful of tech designers had such control over the way billions of us think, act and live our lives.". This dilemma can further be split into three important dilemmas our world faces because of SoMe, The mental health dilemma, the democracy dilemma, and the discrimination dilemma. With the mental health dilemma, studies have found that higher use of Social media is in direct correlation with self-reported declines in mental and physical health and overall life satisfaction. In the democracy dilemma, reports have found that political campaigns with disinformation on social media have doubled in the past two years. Lastly, and most relevant for this thesis is the discrimination dilemma where the report has found that because of the Facebook algorithm, 64% of the people who joined an extremist group were steered there by the algorithm.

2.2.2 Social media algorithm and design

The dilemmas mentioned above are a direct result of how social media and its algorithm are designed. Like the persuasive design techniques of notifications, likes, and endless scrolls creating a feedback loop that keeps their user's attention. With social media advertising, anyone who likes has the tools to reach huge numbers of people with their message and/or product, which causes the opportunity of bad actors to fuel their disinformation and political diversion. The social media algorithms have been put together with the sole purpose of keeping people engaged and active on their platforms. It just so happens to be that outrage and hate is the content that creates the most engagement, and what causes more of this than extreme ideas? Within groups, the algorithm amplifies the already perceived opinions, causing different groups with a different set of facts of the same topic, which again causes polarisation. The social media algorithm has its introduction when Facebook introduced its "Like" button. [11] This was the moment the social engineers of Facebook had tools to experiment with an algorithm. With the "Like" button users had a simple way of interacting with other user's posts and this in combination of commenting and "X"-ing out what you don't like, Facebook now had a way of showing its users what they most likely would like to see on their News Feed. Only having these bits of information to feed the algorithm made

²<https://www.thesocialdilemma.com/faqs/>

it pretty simple, but it didn't take long before Facebook added more features that gave increasing information about the user that then was fed to the algorithm growing more powerful by each year. The focus of Facebook's algorithm is to gain a individual "picture" of each user so the algorithm make the a News Feed that keeps the user engaged ³. In the later years though, because Facebook has become the epicenter of misinformation and fake news sources, the algorithm has had a bigger focus to minimize this trend. An example of this is their implementation of the "news ecosystem quality" or NEQ. This is an internal ranking system of the credibility and quality of the news sources published on Facebook. In practice this should help ensure that substantiated and trusted news stories are displayed more often in the News Feed. [2] [14]

2.2.3 Comment sections

To get into the real debate climate, the comment section is the way to go. This is the place regular people can express their views and opinions on topics. The conversations taking place here is different from the conversation in a real life. For instance, if you want to get seen or heard you need to have a strong opinion on the topic to get attention. The comment section is not the place for long-formed conversation, so the answers or opinions presented need to be precise and on-point. The environment in which the individual is present is also an important difference, not being able to feel the presence of the other people(s) one is talking to, makes it easier to feel no moral obligation towards fellow Internet users. [2]

2.2.4 Moderation

Moderation is the way platforms that allow for discussion try to direct the discussion to the best of their liking. This can be done in two ways, either by having employees or so-called moderators actively choosing what post or comment are contributing to the discussion and where they see fit, they delete the comment or post. If the user posts especially bad content or shows bad behavior over a longer period, the moderators may ban the user so they can not partake in that platform or site anymore. Another way of moderating is using algorithms, platforms with a huge user base like Facebook have AI's based on algorithms that do this job of moderating. Here it is the people in charge of the algorithm that choose what is allowed to post on their platform and what should be deleted. There has been a lot of discussions around how to best moderate the online discussion so as to see a debate where people are respectful to each other, stay on topic rather than attack the person behind the opinion, and have the least amount of false information. Most of the debates that happen online happen on big social media platforms like Facebook and Twitter. These platforms have therefore gotten the responsibility of choosing what opinions and speech are allowed to have. This moderation is done through algorithms that delete anything that is in disagreement with their

³<https://www.thesocialdilemma.com/faqs/>

guidelines. Facebook has come up with its own solution to get away from the discontent they get for deleting so much unnecessary content. They use a hide function that will hide comments the algorithm doesn't see as useful to the discussion so that the other users can't see these comments, but at the same time the user that made the comment doesn't get to know that they were censored. Reddit, the forum-based social media has found another way of moderating. They have got the power of everyday people to take on the job as moderators. In each forum, the so called Subreddits, there are a set of moderators that delete and censor content on the basis of a set of rules in each Subreddit that is made by them. [2]

Chapter 3

Related literature

This chapter will look at state-of-the-art related literature around the most significant topics in this thesis. These are Norwegians in online debates, social media, and its risks and risk perception. The related literature presented here is built into different sections where the sections in total represent the research questions and overall topics of the thesis. The related literature presented in this chapter is based mainly on scientific and papers cited. When choosing which article or paper to use, the date of publishing, amount of citations, and relevance of the topic is considered. There should not be anything older than 2005 as the phenomenon of online debate has been new and changed a lot in the last twenty years.

3.1 The online debate space

Can social media be considered a public sphere? The paper "Social Media as a Public Sphere? Politics on Social Media" investigates this question. [15]The article defines the public sphere as where private people influence political change. The public sphere has equal and protected participation, unlimited access to information, and no institutional influence, especially from an economic impact. The result in this paper came from in-depth interviews with Millennials and Generation Xers. It showed that people do not engage in communication typical of the public sphere in social media. They found three factors that influence this: fear of surveillance in the workplace and online harassment. The second was that there is engagement with others of similar political views. Finally, the third factor is the characterization of social media being the place for "happy" interactions.

In the paper "Whose voice is heard in online deliberation?: A study of participation and representation in political debates on the internet" [16], Albrecht explores the vision of 'electronic democracy' where the Internet permits free and equal access to all voices in the political debates. Though as the author points out, this has not been the case for online discussions because there is a digital divide, which is a divide between users as one of the obstacles.

The author also pointed out factors that outline the determinants of participation and representation in online debates. To determine who participates, there are two main domains of factors, one of political participation, economic background, education, age, and political interest. The other is determinants of Internet usage. Here the factors are economic background, education, age, gender, online skills, and value orientation. To determine what is communicated, the paper points out four factors from properties of large-scale communication. These are news factors, attention economy, communicative tradition, and rhetorical forms. These are exciting factors for my thesis because I want to know who participates and why they are participating, and the reason for the topic of communication.

The scientific article with the name "Public Sphere 2.0? The Democratic Qualities of Citizen Debates in Online Newspapers" [17] samples over 15 thousand comments from five national newspapers in the UK, France, United States, Spain, and Italy. From this sample, Ruiz et al. investigated how the audience of these newspapers behaved and looked at the online newspaper site to learn about their moderation strategies and how they set up their ethical guidelines and legal framework. This allowed the paper to investigate different online newspaper discussion settings to have as broad point of view as possible to understand the nuances. From this analysis, two models of audience participation were made. *Communities of debate* were formed based on the discussion between different points of views that were respectful. The other one, *homogeneous communities*, were made from the data pointing towards people domination their contribution by expressing their feelings about current events rather than having an argumentative debate.

The scientific paper "Online debates and elections in Ethiopia - From hate speech to engagement in social media" [18] outlines engagement from Ethiopians on Facebook to add new perspectives on the potential risks of social media. The risks this paper is most interested in are the growing concerns about the use of hate speech, which may incite hatred and violence. One of the significant findings is that hate and dangerous speech is marginal forms of speech in social media, with only about 0.7% of the statements in their sample being in this category. Almost all of the dangerous speech (92%) is done by individuals who seek to hide their identity. There is less polarization than expected in social media on political and cultural views. Lastly, one of their findings claims that despite comments that go against the majority are few, they produce more reactions and travel further than other statements.

The author A. Dhrodia published an article about how toxic place social media is for women with the title "Unsocial media: A toxic place for women" [19]. Referencing an Amnesty International online poll, she says that about 23% of all women had experienced online abuse or harassment, with the lowest country being Italy with 16% and the highest being the US with 33%. Of these women, about 26% of them said they had received threats of physical or sexual assault, with 41% of

them saying they had felt their physical safety threatened. The author also studied how much public woman figures receive abuse online. From an analysis done by Amnesty International, they used Twitter to see how many abusive tweets multiple public political women got in a period of six weeks. The analysis found that three percent of all tweets sent to these women were identified as abusive.

The scientific article "Flames and Debates: Do Social Media Affect Satisfaction with Democracy?" [Ceron] investigates a very interesting topic in regard to my thesis, whether social media affect democracy in any way. The authors (A. Ceron and V. Memoli) focus on Internet consumption and compare how traditional media versus social media can have a positive or negative effect on democracy. They find out that the consumption of traditional media tends to have a positive effect while social media has a negative effect because of the online disagreement and emergence of flames that tend to happen here. The article exploits data related to 27 European countries to show the link between Internet usage and satisfaction with democracy in the country.

In "Echo chamber and trench warfare dynamics in online debates" [20], R.Karlsen et al. explore the claim that the online discussion dynamics are described as echo chambers and trench warfare where opinions are reinforced through contradiction and confirmation. The result from the article shows that people claim to discuss with people of opposing views. It also showed that confirming and contradicting arguments do have an attitude reinforcement in similar ways, which indicates that echo chamber and trench warfare dynamics do characterize online debates.

The author M. Nelimarkka et al. explores the topic of polarization in social media discussion and how the design causes more polarisation, in the paper with the title "Social Media Is Polarized, Social Media Is Polarized: Towards a New Design Agenda for Mitigating Polarization" [21]. Throughout the article, the authors discuss new approaches toward a new design in social media in order to mitigate polarisation in the online discourse.

The Danish national human rights institution published a scientific paper with the name "Hatyttringer i offentlig nettdebatt" [1] that studies hate speech in online public debate spaces in Denmark. The data set was of about three thousand comments from the Facebook page of two of the biggest news media in Denmark. These were collected after the moderators on the page had edited them. The result showed that about 15% of the comments that were allowed to stay contained some sort of hate speech. They also found out in which type of posts hate speech is most common. These are topics on religious beliefs, refugees, migration and asylum, and gender equality. The topics that attract the most hate speech are violence, crime, and the legal system, as well as foreign policy political topics. There is also an increased chance of one comment containing hate speech if there were previously comments containing hate speech. Male debaters were in majority for making hateful comments by having 76% of them. These comments typically target a group rather than individuals. These comments are usually not in the most extreme form of hate speech, which indicates that moderators edit only the worst

kind of hate speech, those that can be perceived as threats.

A poll of Facebook users in Denmark showed that people refrain from participating in online debates if they perceive the tone as harsh. They especially stay away from debates concerning migration, asylum, refugees, religious beliefs, and integration. There was more woman than men avoiding these debates. This shows that many Facebook users surrender their freedom of expression and stay away from participating in online public debates.

3.1.1 Previous work on Norwegians in online debates

From Denmark to Norway..

The Norwegian institute for research of society published in January of 2021 a research report with the title "Gray zones and online border crossings: A study of participants in heated and aggressive online debates" [2]. This study was done through both a quantitative research method of a questionnaire and a qualitative research method of interviews by asking Norwegians that are often in heated debates questions about it to get a better understanding of the online debate climate in general, with a focus on the people behind the typing. From their quantitative study, they found out that around five percent of the Norwegian population indulges in online debates with a "hard" tone. Between one and two percent say that they themselves engage in obscenity, in the form of provocative speech, like harassment, racism, or other forms of hate speech. In this quantity of people, they found some interesting characteristics. There is a predominance of men among those who participate in heated online debates, and especially those who express themselves provocatively. Among the 1 to 2 percent that speak out provocatively, there is also a predominance of people with low education and people who have conservative attitudes towards immigration and homosexuality. From their questionnaire, they also found that the victim of hateful speech said that in well over half of the time, the sender was a stranger to them, but not anonymous. In about one in four of these cases, the sender was anonymous.

They interviewed 9 debaters with different backgrounds and styles of debating to get a full picture of the type of debaters as possible, though the sample could be higher. These were on the whole of the political scale, some on the far right, some on the far left, and some in the middle. In the news article made with the most important findings from the qualitative research study, they point out four similarities between the 9 Internet users that are heavily involved in the online debates. First, they all feel the society is under some sort of threat and that they, therefore, need to use tough language in order to make people understand and underline how serious this situation is. Secondly, the informants feel that their use of toxic language is a fair retaliation of others' inappropriate attacks. They are just lowering themselves to the level that their opponent already has set, and responding in the same manner. Thirdly, the debaters feel that what they say is simply facts and neutral information, they don't acknowledge that what they say

can be understood as controversial. It may provoke some people, but it is not their problem if someone is offended by not acknowledging the "truth". Lastly, all the informants emphasize that in order to endure these debates over time, it is absolutely necessary to develop a thick skin, meaning not getting hurt or provoked by the opposition. Many had therefore stated that their strategy is to provoke others while remaining untouched by the retaliation, though they admitted that it didn't always succeed. As a conclusion of the qualitative findings, they found, quite surprised that the debaters saw themselves as victims of the debate culture they are a part of. They experience that many of the posts that cross the line are a result of anger and frustration of not being heard in other forums.

Another important finding in the study is about the motivation of participating in these debates. There is a distinction between what they named "the political" and "the readers". The political has a clear ideological position, with their own ideas of enemies and work towards concrete political goals. This could be reducing immigration, counteracting fascism, etc. The "speakers" on the other hand present themselves as apolitical. They are concerned with counteracting what they see as a distorted public debate. They discuss controversial topics as well but present their posts as fact-based contributions to provide reflection and nuance to the debate. Though these are the two biggest differentials of motivation, they found also that some debaters are motivated purely by the entertainment of a heated debate. They see it as a nice way to spend their time and a source of different opinions and engagement.

There were also some interesting findings of the dynamic of the online debate. It is not always about an active attacker and a passive receiver of the toxic communication, but rather, they found that the ones that say they participate in the debate with a hard tone often themselves have been victims of hate speech from others. This indicates that provocative, toxic speech often is a part of the dynamics of these debates, where the boundaries are challenged and moved till we come to a place where you expect online debates to have a toxic element to it. All of the participants also felt that the different levels of anonymity on these platforms play a big role in that the online debates often go in a toxic direction. The researcher state clearly that this dynamic does not legitimize the individual users that put out threatening hate speech, but it is important to understand this dynamic if one is to mitigate a public debate with so much toxicity.

Furthermore, the research literature shows that the absence of face-to-face contact suggests that group mechanisms are enhanced, where the self is erased to benefit the group affiliation that is reinforced by various types and degrees of anonymity in the form of avatars, nicknames, and the development of one's own "online persona" that differs from the one that you otherwise behave as. This group dynamic can lead the users to adopt the norm behavior of the group, which has a tendency to be of the flaming debate type behavior. This group affiliation creates these echo chambers where people get fed so much information from the same

side of the story, that when they see another group with different opinions, they already have a notion from all the memes and comments about them that they know how to react towards them, without thinking critically or objective about the other side of the argument. Since they "know" the right answer to the topic of discussion many of them rather attack the user behind the argument than the argument itself. This does that the debates on social media and the like are so much affected by the strong feelings, aggression, and hostile verbal use that this becomes the norm rather than the exception of online debates.

From the new Norwegian report mentioned earlier, they asked their informants direct questions about how they feel about moderation in online debates. They have various perceptions of current moderation practices that are used. Where some put an emphasis that there is too little moderation of the discussions, others hold the notion that there is too much moderation and that certain types of opinions are disproportionately moderated. Both sides agreed that moderation is biased and unfair towards a certain type of opinion. They call for more straightforward moderation standards and better reasoning as to why, in particular situations, their comments are removed. This also is reflected in their key informant that is a moderator for the NRK's Facebook page. He sees a clear debate dynamic where the debaters "fire each other up". The debates are proper and good as long as the moderating is done, though he says that without frequent moderating the debate quickly turns into aggressive and hateful content.

Also here, four topics have been drawn out as being especially prone to heated debates. These are immigration, religion, gender, and climate.

This finding is very relevant for my thesis and also shows a clear need for more data, especially on the qualitative side of it, which is the type I will be looking at.

3.1.2 Moderating in online debates

From the article by "Norsk redaktørforening" [22], they come up with ten tips on how to navigate the online debate space as a moderator in an effective way. These are:

1. Clarify the debate rules and the users' own responsibility

The first rule of all debate is that the one who speaks out an opinion is also the one who is responsible for uttering these opinions. This should be clearly stated towards the users that may choose to join the debate. An example of how this can be done from the Norwegian newspaper "Nordlys": "Here you are welcome to debate the matter further. But think about how you want to appear and what expressions you use. A small rule of thumb: Do not write something that you could not have shouted out in the square with a large audience. You must use your full name - fake profiles will be banned. Stick to the cause, show respect, and great generosity towards others. Harassment, threats, and hate messages will be deleted. "

2. Make sure you have a proper registration scheme

In order to identify the users of the forum, it is absolutely crucial that you have a proper registration scheme. Even if you allow for nicknames, the editorial staff should know the user's identity. This registration scheme should be set up so that it is as difficult as possible to be able to go around it or make fake profiles through it. This is also important if someone wants to prosecute those who have made criminal statements. Some ways to register users are via Disqus, aID, Facebook account, and others, though Facebook is not secure enough in terms of creating false identities.

3. Carefully consider which topics/cases are suitable for comment fields and do not open more comment fields than the editor can follow

The time for having comment sections on every case and topic the editorial published is over. There need to be taken precautions about which cases could produce a good debate and which is more likely to be infiltrated by harassment, verbal abuse, off-topic comments, etc. A few examples of the type of cases that shouldn't have comment sections are topics and cases that go into mental health, accidents, and generally cases that go close into individuals.

4. Reinforce moderation on certain issues

There are some cases that deserve to be debated, that are still prone to have illegal and unethical utterances by the users, and where the debate quickly can develop in a direction the one would not like. Typical themes in this direction are integration, religion, sex, abortion, etc. On topics like these, moderation needs to be enforced in order to keep up with the amount of unwanted content that most likely will occur.

5. Use filter programs and alert buttons

There is a lot of different filter programs of varying quality on the market, so getting these to actually filter out what one wants and give the right alerts for this could prove to be difficult, but is still a recommendation to try them. When one chooses to delete a post or comment, it is best if the debater got to know the reason for the deletion. There should also be a possibility for the users to report posts and comments that violate the law or ethics.

6. Allow for ranking of posts

Inviting users to focus on posts they think are good, rather than one disagree with or find offensive, can help cultivate the discussion in the direction you would want. This could also be combined with rewarding users who follow the rules so that their debate posts have greater visibility.

7. Moderators, journalists, and editors should participate in the debate

A lot of cases and topics have the potential for a useful debate to take the topic at hand further, it is therefore important that moderators, journalists, and editors are joining the debate at times. The editorials that have prioritized this noticed that when their staff joined the debate, this contributed to muting the most extreme comments and prevented the debate to trail off. It would be important that if one would join the debate to have the right

attitude, to be polite while also having a clear tone. Entering into a dialogue with the debaters can help to keep the debate at a factual level and help to establish a common understanding of what the topic is.

8. Close the debate for periods

There should always be people who are operational in the editorial office and have an opportunity for some monitoring of the debate when these are open and also handle alerts from users. This means that for a lot of newsrooms that the comment sections should be closed at night and also during periods on the weekends when it is little or no staff operational. From experience, most of the extreme statements are published at those times of the day when there are naturally few people in the editorial staff.

9. Shut out those who breaks the rules

Most editor-controlled media have the exclusion of individual users as their strongest sanction. The length of the quarantine, if a user is excluded, varies, but most operate with three months as a first-time sentence.

10. Block search engines / do not publish on social media

Finally, the editorial should consider the option to close for publishing or sharing cases from your newsroom on social media and to also block search engines. This is of course also a double-edged sword in the sense that you would reduce traffic and attention to your site and cases significantly. Though the benefit is that it is then easier to control the spread and retrieval of any illegal or unethical comments.

With these ten online debate advice, Norwegian editors and moderators have a set of guidelines to follow in order to have the best possible debate space on their website.

3.2 Social media risks

In this related work [23] with the title "Why People Use Social Media Platforms: Exploring the Motivations and Consequences of Use" the author Hallikainen explores the motivation and consequences of being on social media. The author proposes a research model that explores the motivation and consequences of social media use which include the perception of social capital and the social rewards as the primary factor for use of social media platforms. His reasoning for doing this research is to better understand the motivation behind the use of a platform that rapidly has become important to businesses and organizations' daily business processes.

The paper clearly defines some consequences of being in social media which is interesting and relevant to my research question. One of the main subjects of this paper is to investigate why people are active on platforms that have debates, like social media. This question is relevant to this research question because to investigate the risk, one should first have the knowledge of why people use the thing that possibly provokes risk. He identifies five value categories that all play

a part in keeping users keep coming back to social media. These are functional value, social value, emotional value, epistemic value, conditional value.

The paper "Social media? It's serious! Understanding the dark side of social media" [10] provides a view on the negative effect of social media. Here the authors present the negative effects to include cyberbullying, addictive use, trolling, online witch hunts, fake news, and privacy abuse. It's great for my research to find diversity in risks presented in social media to fully grasp the risk of putting one's opinion online. All of these social media risks are also present in the risk of putting opinions online and in online debates.

The paper also presents the seven fundamental functions for social media to existing. These are to the degree users of social media can share content (1), have conversations with each other (2), have people know of their presence(3), the relationship they form(4), forming groups (5), revealing their identity (6) and get to know the reputation of other users. The authors proceed to explain the dark side of each of these functions in detail and show how the combination of these are the key constructs to the dark side phenomena of social media. When trying to better understand the public's choice of indulging in social media and online debates it is helpful getting a fundamental understanding of how social media works and the in-depth dark version of it. This paper is relevant to all my research questions. The authors also have a section for how social media researchers should proceed to expose the dark side.

The new generation is losing the sense of empathy as they no longer see the face of the one they insult and what their action actually do to people. Like them, adults hiding behind anonymity are quick to disregard people publicly without knowing all the necessary details. On social media, people are guilty until proven innocent, and even then it is usually too late. The social media mob can be a wave of terror for a lot of people and even organizations where it causes loss in stock and bad reputation, just need something to go "viral".

"Demographic and psychosocial variables associated with good and bad perceptions of social media use" [24]. Here the authors research what the perception of good and bad social media users is among different type of demographics. Bad perception of social media was measured with the items "conflicts or drama in a relationship", "invasion of privacy", "encourages procrastination", "feeling left out". Good perception of social media was measured with the items "share pictures, thoughts, and ideas", "get to know people better", "create your own image", "entertainment", "keep in touch with family and friends". Throughout their anonymous questionnaire research, they found out that angry individuals with a strong social group reported the best benefits of social media, while angry individuals with poor self-esteem reported the worse perception of social media. Their interpretation of this is that working adults experience a lot of various stress and therefore use social media as a coping behavior to release this stored anger and to gather social support, but also leaving them vulnerable to criticism, feeling left

out, and reduced self-esteem. Having knowledge of the perception different type of demographics has of social media helps with understanding the reason people leave social media, the reason they keep coming back, and the reason for there being a chilling effect present here. It also helps to identify the risks certain types of people feel social media could yield. For example, adults with bad health reported a negative perception of social media perhaps due to privacy violations revealing their health problems.

The scientific article with the title "Social comparisons, social media addiction, and social interaction: An examination of specific social media behaviors related to major depressive disorder in a millennial population" [25] focuses on finding specific social media behavior that increases the symptoms and likelihood of depression in individuals. The author A. Robinson et al. found five key social media behaviors/factors that are associated with Major Depressive Disorder (MDD). These were comparing oneself to others, being bothered by being tagged in unflattering pictures, not posting pictures of themselves along with other people, following less than 300 Twitter accounts, and being highly addicted to social media. The population is very relevant to my thesis.

There is also a risk of encountering hate speech and discrimination online. This scientific paper with the title "Psychology, discrimination, and hate groups online" [26] goes into this, where two issues are in focus. First, should hate speech be regulated? And second, do the effects of hate expressed online increase violence and hostility between groups in the physical world? In order to understand these issues better, the author K. Douglas provides psychological perspectives on online hate groups and their motivations, strategies, and purposes. She also gives insight into this online behavior, what actions to take to combat cyberhate, and challenges for the future with the tools of psychological theories and research.

On the topic of cyberhate, the authors T. Quandt and R. Wendt published a paper on cyberhate with the title "Cyberhate" [27]. Here they describe cyberhate as online communication by hate groups where their purpose is to distribute propagandist messages, strengthen group identity, attract new members, coordinate group action, and attack societal groups and individuals with hateful messages. The authors found that these groups portray themselves as being oppressed by a far more powerful enemy, thereby justifying their own hateful and extreme behaviors.

3.2.1 Cyberbullying

Cyberbullying is a common phenomenon that is being talked about a lot in the media [4]. How common is this phenomenon really? Is cyberbullying only a phenomenon of kids and young adults, or is this also prevalent in the adult world? These are interesting questions to investigate in the related works on cyberbullying.

"Cyberbullying: An overrated phenomenon?" [4] argues that the cyberbully-

ing phenomenon which is discussed in media a lot, as well in some studies is greatly exaggerated, because of the little empirical scientific support of the claims they have. The author D. Olweus, contradicts the common cyberbullying claims by studying them in proper context. He finds that it is a low-prevalence phenomenon that has not increased over time nor has it created a lot of "new" types of victims and bullies, that have not traditionally been involved in this type of behavior. The claims from this article are based on two large samples of students, one from Norway and one from the USA, done over periods of four to five years. The advice from the author is to get schools to focus on the traditional anti-bullying campaign but to also do some system-level strategy against cyberbullying. This article have an interesting and surprising claim about cyberbullying that is important to include in this thesis. Since the sample is younger than mine, it would be interesting seeing a similar study being done on cyberbullying on adults in the online space versus traditional bullying in the real world.

In the paper "Consequences of Cyberbullying and Social Overload while Using SNSs: A study of Users' Discontinuous Usage Behavior in SNSs" the author Cao et. al. [28] studies the phenomenon of cyberbullying and social overload and the individuals experiences of distress and exhaustion from it. Social cognitive theory indicates that the origin of this phenomenon is the interactive impacts of discontinuous environmental, personal, and behavioral influences, which are the main specific drivers of social networking sites (SNS) intentions for use. They also find that this distress and SNS exhaustion make user's be more likely to discontinue using SNSs.

3.3 Risk perception

This article by D.Tsoy et al. with the title "Role of Social Media in Shaping Public Risk Perception during COVID-19 Pandemic: A Theoretical Review" [29] discuss how influential social media is in shaping risk perception among the public, showing it even more influential than the traditional media. The article concludes with that because of the risk perception form social media causing a huge potential to form peoples opinion, and with the huge variety of fake news and misinformation, this could be dangerous. Therefore, the article suggests governments and the like form crisis communication management on this issue. They urge the governments to become reliable sources of information so that the public does not form conclusions based on the unreliable and often incorrect information of social media.

The paper "Seeing light in the dark: Investigating the dark side of social media and user response strategies" [30] use the knowledge and encouragement by Baccarella's et al. [BACCARELLA] paper to investigate more of the dark side of social media. They do so by investigating user perceptions of the risk on social media identified by Baccarella et al., how users respond to reducing these risks, mapping out the difference in social media risk to the user risk reduction strategies, and investigating the users' heterogeneity in the perceptions of, and response to, the

dark side of social media. The findings they make contribute to the understanding of social media that are highly relevant for my thesis. Since the research on how to mitigate these risks are limited, the paper synthesized the available research where users manage the possible risk of social media and thereby identifying five different strategies and tactics. These five are **balancing perspectives** the problem of the echo chamber, where the user's existing beliefs are reinforced and opposing views are shut down, are addressed. From research of 3.8 million Twitter users, they found that topics are initially discussed broadly before shifting to a more polarized conversation. This suggest that users are more open to diverse range of ideas than previous thought. Broadly speaking, there are two type of human desires with information, one of the desire to be informed and the other a desire to be insulated, like being in a "information bubble". For users of the first type, social media could assist them in maintaining a balance of perspectives. **Minimizing usage** is naturally another mitigation technique mentioned, where the problem of internet addiction is tackled. The method of countering the risk posed by social media is simply to minimize their usage. This method is also suggested for users facing cyberbullying, and users concerned with the negative effects of their relationships. Features such as Apple's screen time have been but in place to help with this. **Masking identity** is also a way users tend to mitigate the privacy concerns. A wide number of research investigations on how users respond to online privacy concerns found that most users tend to reduce the amount of information disclosed as well as become more aware of the information they reveal. **Self-regulating content** by being self-aware of the content one publishes, is common way to mitigate the concern people have of having the things they shared and overall presence on social media be a negative cause in their life, like being denied in a career-related or personal situation. **Reporting inappropriate posted content** is a way users can reduce cyberbullying either by using the reporting functions social media platforms have put in place or by confronting the cyberbully themselves and alerting others of them. This strategy is used both to rally support from others and shame and frightens the bully. [30]

Through their research they found that the social media reduction strategy users find most popular is Self-regulating shared content and Minimizing usage, while Reporting inappropriate posted content and Multiple personas are the least employed strategies.

From the paper "Facts and Fears: Understanding Perceived Risk" [31] Slovic et. al. make a case for what biases occur when perceiving risks by looking at numerous studies. They come up with 5 judgmental rules people employ to reduce difficult mental tasks to simpler ones when confronted with risks. With **Availability**, if some instances of situations are easy to imagine or recall, people judge this event as likely or frequent. For instance, if people hear about certain topic a lot from the media the person will think this happens more often than it really does. People tend to be too **overconfidence** when making judgements about something. They also have an **desire for certainty**. People have difficulties in solving the risk-

benefit conflict, even in situation where the gamble is a simple one to make. **It won't happen to me** is a common belief people have even if they know the risk exists and are somewhat common. They consider themselves immune to the perceived risk. **Reconciling divergent opinions about risk.** People's views shift quite slowly, and the way subsequent evidence is perceived tends to shape initial perceptions of danger. If a piece of evidence is consistent with the original opinion, it is considered credible and informative, while data is considered unrepresentative or false contrary to the initial belief.

A report on Norwegian security culture is published each year from 2016 by Norwegian Center for Information Security (NorSIS) [32]. From the 2020 report, they categorize the digital security culture into five subjects:

- Attitudes towards digitization and digital security
- Trust and risk perception
- The view of management and control
- safety behavior
- Knowledge, learning and interest

For each of these subject, NorSIS provides explanation and quantitative data for how Norwegians behave and think about them. Questions and data findings here will be relevant for my methodology and research. From their data, they find that there is a weak or nonexistent indicator on whether there is positive development in the digital security behavior of Norwegians.

From their expertise and findings they come up with some possible solutions to the security awareness culture in Norwegians. In order to make people learn about good security behavior, this should be done through security training. Though the point with the security training should not only be to make people knowledgeable about the security threats, but rather get the people in training to develop norms, behavior and attitudes to make them more safe in the digital space on a daily basis. The security training hasn't shown to much progress in this regard. NorSIS, therefore, proposes to look to other alternatives. They found that the key to change behavior comes from motivation psychology and the expectations of mastery. One way to do this is to include mastery in the security training. The report went also into some of the effects Covid-19 had on the people's behavior of digital risk. They found that most people feel that the digital risk in society has gone up, just not for themselves (It won't happen to me).[32]

In the newly published scientific paper, the authors of "risk perception in social media"[33] analyzed through their quantitative questionnaire data what the perceived risks of social media use is among Norwegians. The average participant found Facebook and Twitter to be the riskiest social media platforms. The authors suggested this to most likely be because of the open platform approach where everything is published public unless the user have strict privacy settings on their account, this is especially the case for Twitter. Reddit where found to be the least

riskiest, mostly because of its anonymous approach. From their findings, they made a proposed threat model for social media activities. Here they score each activity that could be perceived as risks in the social media and put the correlating exposed information and threat together in a table. Participating in debates got the second-highest risk score, where political views, opinions and standpoints where the exposed information, while harassment and bullying where the threats in this activity. Sharing ones political views where the fourth-highest risk with the same exposed information and threat as participating in debate. Having such a high score among all activities one can do on social media tells me that there is a need of a better understanding of the online debate space.

3.4 Chilling effect

Chilling effect in the online debate space like in social media, is not something that has been studied in depth, though there are a few papers that have focused on it. In "The extended 'chilling' effect of Facebook: The cold reality of ubiquitous social networking" [8], the author B.Marder et al. highlight the fact chilling effect is an established and present phenomenon in Social Network Sites (SNS) from previous research as well as in their own research. Though they also find out that there is an extended chilling effect present where people constrain themselves in the offline world as well because of the threat of surveillance from these sites. The novel finding of this report suggests the dangers of online peer-to-peer surveillance for the freedom of expression in peoples offline lives. This article gives me an better understanding of the extent to which chilling effect can affect the public that are involved in Social Networking Sites.

From an article in a Norwegian newspaper ¹, two students raise the issue of "chilling effect" on digital platforms, claiming that people are afraid to say what they really mean online. Anki Gerhardsen also problematized newly in an interview that there is an increasing trend towards a more intolerant debate climate in Norway ². She claims that this development has its roots in the American debate culture, where there is a strong polarizing trend. She claims that we are being exposed to a "sneak Americanization", meaning that the Norwegian culture slowly but steadily adopts the ways of the American culture. This makes the notion that the societies are equal which they are far from, the experiences from history and the compositions in the society are totally different. The interviewer Torp and Gerhardsen then go into some Norwegian examples of this, one example of a Norwegian professor making a joke about a German invasion in one of his lectures and one German student getting upset and demanding an apology and money for feeling victimized, which he got. Another example is of people demanding that a statue of a Norwegian alchemist from the 1800 hundreds that had somewhat we today would see as controversial or in some opinions wrong views about hu-

¹<https://www.bt.no/btmeninger/debatt/i/Gar7GV/vi-toer-ikke-si-det-vi-egentlig-mener>

²<https://tv.nrk.no/serie/torp/2020/NNFA52102120/avspiller>

man beings. On the topic of the second example, Gerhardsen states that there is an ethical cleansing of history by looking back and taking away things we today don't see as correct with the 2020 glasses, who knows what the standard of these glasses will be in 2040 if we continue to go in the same direction. Though she does emphasize that it's often done with good intention, people do have real vulnerable experiences that cause this activism, but what we often see is that they are willing to sacrifice the freedom of speech to get their points across, and the outcome of that is catastrophic. She feels that some of the fundamental values of democracy are missing, that you have to believe in the conversation, listen to the one you agree and disagree with in order to sharpen your own thought. The direction right now is more ideological-based thinking and the aspect of free-thinking is fading away. With ideological-based thinking, there is naturally a bigger tendency toward group affiliation. People tend to think what the group they feel affiliated with is thinking, so instead of being criticized for the character and actions of a person, the criticism is rather based on which group the person belongs to.

At the end of the interview, Gerhardsen goes into the difference between fighting the identity policy on the right versus the left. When going against the right one might experience harassment and be verbally attacked but one doesn't lose social capital of any particular degree. On the other hand, if you fight against left-wing identity politics, it is precisely the social capital you lose. It is not as shameful to fight against right-wing identity politics as it is to fight the left in today's online debate climate. How to criticize these groups that are so vulnerable to receiving provocation, without being perceived as wanting to hurt them, when you only want the best for them. Here many people withdraw because of this. If one is to be able to have a better debate climate here, voices from the left must dare to come forward to make it easier because they have enough status to be listened to. If there are so many who are afraid to be silenced to express their opinion, this is also an attack on freedom of expression. Internally in environments and groups, it is a disciplinary form for whether you are with us or not, is seen as a betrayal if one goes against the group's opinions. This makes for different power structures being created without any criticism or opinions from outside.

They go into four categories that they then felt that was the most heated debates in, this is race, ethnicity, gender/orientation, and history, some of these will be relevant for me to look into though the most heated topics are most likely different today.

Both these sources feel that such polarizing and alienating tendencies are becoming increasingly visible in the Norwegian exchange of views. The students conclude the article with the notion of how important open dialogues are. "In your fiercest opponent, there is room for valuable dialogue - even truths. This dialogue is absolutely crucial for a well-functioning democracy. It is in the breadth of exchange of opinions that we can decide for ourselves what we mean. When this breadth is brought to silence by incitement, boycott, and alienation, we all lose a useful raw material to decide what we think. When the width is brought to silence, only more echo chambers are created for one's own opinions. The consequences

can be fatal."³ These open meanings about the Norwegian debate climate will be important to look at for my thesis.

3.5 Privacy in the online debate space

The definition of privacy: "Privacy concern is a desire to keep personal information out of the hands of others" [34] from the scientific article "Analysis of Internet Users' Level of Online Privacy Concerns". From examining survey results related to the demographic characteristics of Internet users, this article presents what the privacy concerns are across groups divided by sex, education level, income level, and race. The result show that there are small differences in the privacy concerns among these groups, where all are preferring privacy to convenience. This article give also an overview of the literature on privacy studies.

When one is on social media and Internet in general there is always privacy concerns to take into account. The more one person is showing off their identity on the Internet and social media, the more personal information the Internet has about them. People indulging in online debates are good examples of such users. Therefore, the theme of privacy will naturally come up in the interviews with the participants. Personal information is all information related to a person, whether related to the individuals private, professional or public life. This information has shown itself to be the new economic good, as described by this paper [35]. People's own personal data is up for sale. All evidence analyzed by the paper show that other people and organizations use this data to grow their businesses or to just sell it forward as it is valuable. There have come some regulations to prevent this, like the GDPR. The most important individual aspect of the General Data Protection Regulation is that everyone has the right to be informed and forgotten about the storing of personal information, they have the right to access it and also to give clear consent before anyone start processing their personal data.

The scientific paper with the name "Who Commits Virtual Identity Suicide? Differences in Privacy Concerns, Internet Addiction, and Personality Between Facebook Users and Quitters" [36], compares three factors between two groups of people; the one that has quit using Facebook (n=310), and active users of Facebook (n=321). The three factors examined by Stieger et al. were privacy concerns, Internet addiction and personality traits. The authors found that Facebook quitters cared a lot more about their privacy than active users and that as many as 48 percent stated that the reason for quitting Facebook were privacy concerns. The Facebook quitters scored higher on Internet addiction and were found to be more conscientious than active Facebook users.

³<https://www.bt.no/btmeninger/debatt/i/Gar7GV/vi-toer-ikke-si-det-vi-egentlig-mener>

Chapter 4

Methodology

The description of the research procedure is presented in this chapter. It contains information about the research method employed and a rationale for that approach's use. The chapter also goes over the many research steps, such as participant selection, data collecting, and analysis.

4.1 Choice of method

The methodology can be divided into two primary categories; quantitative and qualitative. As described [37], they are not opposites but instead sit at each end of the spectrum. The quantitative end is in its frame of reference, describing the interface of knowledge, often with numeric data. The main point of this method is to use numeric values to analyze, test, and verify these different relations. Qualitative research on the other end of the spectrum uses non-numeric data, often in linguistic narratives, to make descriptive knowledge claims. A quantitative method often makes claims from a large data sample, while the qualitative usually has a less data sample but with more information per sample.

Limitations in choosing method This project was done alone without any previous data available for my usage. Therefore I will need to make my data which leads to some limitations in my choice of method. Here I will present some of these limitations for my project. The research method I choose needs to reflect the limitations presented here. First of all, there is a time constraint on this project spanning from January to July. The time to research data, find interview candidates and perform the methodology is limited. The time constraint will make me have to be as precise as possible in my data collecting, having a clear connection between my chosen method of data collecting and my research questions. Getting the right sample that reflects the population and characteristics needed will be difficult to achieve in perfection within this time scope. Since the research has not pre-suggested candidates, the sample will not be random and will consist of Norwegian people with the right characteristics that I can reach out to. I found

some gaps between existing literature and the research I intend to find when re-searching this topic. Almost all previous study was done using a quantitative data collecting method [1] [24], with only a few performing qualitative research [2]. There was no previous research doing qualitative in-depth interviews on the same topic. There was not a lot of Norwegian research similar to this topic, but a large amount of international research was similar to my topic.

Since my research questions want to understand what people with experience in the online debate space think of it, I need data that gives a thorough and subjective answer to these questions. A quantitative research method is not suitable because of its low degree of subjectivity and getting in-depth on topics [37]. It would also be a risk to get a qualified sample with a quantitative method because I do not have the resources to do this. It has been researched before with the quantitative research method in Scandinavia with the Norwegian [2] and the Danish study [1]. According to Leedy and Ormrod [38], a qualitative method on the other hand is chosen when one wants to dig deep into a phenomenon in order to get a more complete understanding of it. There are some advantages with qualitative research that the author Leedy writes about that I feel would benefit this field of research. Getting more exploration into this little studied phenomenon, it can reveal multiple layers of complexity in this phenomenon, like the setting, people in it, system, etc. It can also verify or put a question mark to the validity of some common claims on this phenomenon. Getting in depth knowledge about this phenomenon could help develop new concepts and different theoretical perspectives. It would also help identify key problems and obstacles in this phenomenon from talking to the ones who experience it. Lastly, it has the possibility to evaluate the current situation of the phenomenon and judge or applaud the effectiveness of current practices, policies and innovations, and where to go from here [38].

As the broad scope of methodology is chosen, it is time to look into what specific qualitative method this project is most suitable for. According to Leedy and Ormrod [38], there are five qualitative research methods, case study, ethnography, phenomenological study, grounded theory study, and content analysis. With **case study** you want to study an individual, group, or event in depth. The researcher often goes into the natural setting to get as close to the case as possible. This is not relevant for me as I do not have a situation or type of people where I need to be physically present or in their natural setting. A **grounded theory study** is a method where the researcher wants to derive a theory from the data rather than vice versa. The researcher seldom starts with the literature. I am not interested in making my theory from my data alone, but rather in seeing what literature exists and comparing them with mine. With a **content analysis**, the researcher looks at particular material or data to identify specific characteristics in these. The purpose is to find patterns, themes, or biases in the data. The data or material is often some sort of human communication like books, newspapers, Internet blogs, etc. I don't want to look at the material of online debate space and the participant's experience. In an **ethnography method**, the research seeks to understand a group of people and how behaviors shape their culture. This could fit me if I wanted only

to study the people in the online debate space and how their behaviors reflect the online debate culture. Lastly, a **phenomenological study** is a study where the researcher wants to get people's perceptions and perspectives of a particular situation or setting. After looking at the available qualitative research questions [38], the most suitable for this thesis is a phenomenological study. This is because this study aims to interview a small sample of participants that have direct experience with the phenomenon being studied. This is because this study wants to learn from a small sample that experiences a particular phenomenon. The method of collecting the data will be semi-structured interviews.

Because of the subjective form qualitative research brings, I will need to do a literature study on some of my research questions to compare my data to previous literature. Each of the research questions I have identified needs to be researched further. Some of them have a lot of previous research and are suitable for qualitative and literature studies. In contrast, some do not have a lot of research, and the answer to the question relies on my participants' subjective experience and opinion. Research question 1, with its sub-questions, has a lot of related research and will have both a literature study to compare with my qualitative analysis. Research question 2 also has a lot of data in related literature, so both research methods are suitable here. However, the sub-question will rely on my own created data since there is not any research available on this particular question on Norwegians. Research questions 3, 4, and 5 will also rely on my qualitative data since the nature of the question wants experienced individuals' answers and what the literature says in these topics to compare them.

4.2 Applied method - Phenomenological study

From the proposed qualitative research designs of the authors of "Practical Research - Planning and Design" [38], the phenomenological study is the most accurate type to perform in my thesis. The goal of my research is to understand the experience of participating in online debates through their point of view. This falls under the phenomenological study research design where a given situation or setting is the target of research, and the group engaged in it is the target participants. The primary data collection method in this study is an in-depth interview of people having first-hand experience of the setting in question. These interviews should be around 1 hour in length with a relatively small, carefully chosen sample of about 5-30 participants. The interview form should be relatively unstructured where the focus lies more on getting to the heart of the matter. This means that the interview relies heavily on both the participant and the interviewer having the proper connection where the interviewer mostly listens while the participant does most of the talking.

I conducted semi-structured in-depth phenomenological interviews with three different types of Norwegian participants, the ones involved in the online debate, people who actively stay away from the discussion, and experts in this field. My

questions in the interview were made with the research questions as an overall theme. They had as a goal to get the participants to tell me about their experience, feelings, beliefs, and perceptions about the theme in question. I tried to get the participant to be as comfortable as possible to describe what they thought and felt about the topics. The interview structure was set with the help of three interview guides, one for each type of participant. These were made with each research question representing an overall category I wanted to get answers from—the interview guide design was three columns. The research question to the left shows the overall theme of that section. In the middle, I made points and possible themes that could come up in this category to help me throughout the interview. Knowing what previous research says about this topic helps me get on track and ask the best follow-up questions. Lastly, I have the direct question I asked them to the left with possible follow-up questions beneath them.

In the introduction section, I introduced myself and the thesis and asked the participant to tell me about themselves and their relationship to the online debate space. I then started with the first category, the online debate climate, asking them how they experienced it. After this initial question, different follow-up questions occurred, depending on what they answered. These could also be from different categories to get the best flow possible. Generally, though, the order of the category and themes in question were in alignment with the interview guides presented in appendix A. At the closing section of each interview, I asked the participant if they had anything they would like to add to what we had discussed and asked them if they had any participants they knew of that I could contact to get an interview with. This became my number one source of getting participants.

After the interview, I saved the recording and wrote a summary of the interview and my thoughts about it and the participant. Each interview was transcribed in Norwegian using the transcribe function in word online. This made me a wall of text from the interviews that were understandable but clunky and with many errors. Therefore, I made documents of the participants where I left out the bad parts of the transcription and wrote a better representation of the interviews. This turned a roughly 32-page document into a 5-page file. Though with some of the participants, the notes I took during the interview and the summary write-up afterward were sufficient for that participant, so the extra work of transcribing was unnecessary and would mean time waste which I can not allow myself.

Bias

In these types of research studies, especially in a phenomenological study, some biases may come up and need to be addressed. Doing a semi-structured interview where the participants tell how they perceive a situation or phenomena comes with the possibility of participants telling me things they think I want to hear. This can also cause the participant to only take one side of the phenomena or situation into account because they feel passionate about it or that this is freshest in their memory. There can also be a bias in the researcher using his subjective

thoughts and feelings about a topic to ask leading questions that provide answers that are not necessarily a hundred percent of their thinking. I have, of course, a lot of experience with this topic myself, not indulging in the online debate space but spectating it and following it for a large number of years. This causes me to have predisposed thoughts about the phenomenon, influencing my attitude towards specific questions or answers. It is not possible to be objective, but I have considered this when doing the interviews. I have always tried to behave the same towards all participants and not show my feelings about specific themes within the online debate space topic. To keep a good conversation flow and make the participant feel as comfortable as possible, I did not or showed myself verbally to often agree with what the participant said, no matter my predisposed thoughts about that topic. This was done to make the participant feel comfortable telling me about their thoughts and feelings about that topic.

Written consent

To perform research that is approved by the NSD (Norwegian center for research data), participants need to consent to a written consent form that describes the study, the participant's role in the interview, why the interview is being conducted, and how the researcher maintains the participant's privacy. There were two different written consent forms, one for the expert participants and one for the type 1 and 2 participants. The main difference between the two forms is the privacy part, where the expert-type participants didn't have to have their identity anonymized while I did have to deidentify and have more strict privacy rules to the participant types 1 and 2. The written consent form was sent in Norwegian, but the one presented in appendix B has been translated to English.

4.3 Participants

With the phenomenological research method, you want to look at multiple perspectives of the same situation to generalize what something is like to experience from an insider's view [38]. That's why this type of study almost exclusively depends on lengthy interviews with a small sample of participants. To get the best general understanding of this phenomenon, the selection is of a broad spectrum of participants, where both sides of the political spectrum are present, the heavily active ones, those who are moderately active, and those who actively stay away. Then there are experts on the topic, people with a university degree and those with only a high school degree, and lastly, there are wide variances of ages from 24 to 68. The participants are split into three categories when interviewed. These are the ones that are heavily or moderately involved in the public online debate space (1). Those who have been active but chose to stay away or don't want to be a part of it (2), the last type are expert participants that have more in-depth knowledge on this topic from studying it or being a public voice on it (3). From these three subsets of participants, the data have a nuanced depth to it where a

lot of voices with different viewpoints and backgrounds got to tell their experience with the public online debate. There is naturally a higher percentage of the (1) type participants because they are the ones with the most experienced in the debate space and have been the most interesting to get the viewpoints from.

The sampling was done using "purposive sampling," which is "a method of sampling where the researcher deliberately chooses who to include in the study based on their ability to provide necessary data" [38]. The essential characteristics that had to be in place within the participants were having sufficient knowledge and/or experience in the public online debate space. Other than that, the sampling had to get participants with different world views and differences in debate style to get the Norwegian public's generalization on this phenomenon. The sample size of 20 participants is adequate to represent what the overall population thinks about the phenomenon in question. The interviews were conducted online using Zoom or Microsoft Teams, primarily because of the convenience of the corona pandemic. This also led to the participants being in their own home or at least a friendly environment where they feel safe. Apart from the mini delays and the connection problems that did occur on several occasions, where there no clear noticeable downsides of using the online video calls for doing interviews, though there could have been a better relationship between the interviewer and the participant in real life in-person setting.

Pilot test There were done three pilot testing with friends of the interviewer before the interviews were done. In these interviews, I could test out the interview guides and ensure all the recording and video call software were working correctly. It was a good experience to try out the questions on friendly faces and then discuss the interview with them to understand better what worked fine and what questions I should ask differently.

4.4 Data analysis

This section will go through how the data have been analyzed. The data analysis will be based on coding.

The following steps were taken to do the data analysis. First, gather the data from the interviews. There were taken notes and a small summary of each participant in the interview. Then transcribed the participants using the tool in word online. The next thing was to make a document of each participant from three to five pages, get the essential data from them, and lastly, take all the data into one big PDF file data set. In the middle of doing interviews and transcribing, the first coding list was made. Here all the data gathered got put into categories representing each answer and how I thought these would look like. The final code list was then made after the data set had been made to update the code list and provide more information about each category and how many answered in each of them. There were also data analyses of each participant where information was conducted into a table.

After the participants' data had been transcribed and had a summary and clean notes from the interview, these were made into individual documents and then put into one big PDF file to find keywords easier using the search function. The coding process was then finalized to get out the most relevant data from the data set into clear categories that were representations of the answers from the participants.

4.4.1 Coding

Coding is a process where you try to find relations between concepts in the text you are analyzing, and it is linking the data set you have to the overall research questions in the thesis [38]. This is a helpful tool to organize and examine the data in a structured way. I will use data-driven coding, where the text gives me the concept and themes for the codes without conceptualizing them first. This will first be done when I have sufficient data from a large enough sample to make the codes with confidence. There will be codes added to the start list throughout the interview process. This list will have five main codes representing each research question and overall theme. There will be a set of subcodes representing the participant's answer and perception of each of the themes in each of them. [38] When preparing a huge amount of data gathered from interviews, there needs to be a process in place where the researcher can easily bulk them into smaller pieces and gather them into categories. In qualitative research, a common way to do this is to derive codes and subcodes from the research questions and the theoretical framework. These codes will be put into a list (start list) that will show roughly what themes and categories this research will rely on. The code list is an interactive process, so the start list will be reviewed and then updated with a final list while conducting the interviews. The final list, which will be presented in the result, will have a more thorough explanation of each code, how many in the sample talked about the code, and a direct quote from a participant to show the validity of the code.

4.4.2 Start list

Start list		
Number	Descriptive label	Code
1	The online debate climate and factors leading to its negative reputation	DCNR
1(1)	Group thinking	DCNR-GT
1(2)	Few active voices	DCNR-FAV
1(3)	Rhetoric of debaters	DCNR-ROD
1(4)	Most heated debate topics	DCNR-HDT
1(5)	Anonymity	DCNR-A

1(6)	Social Media design Media	DCNR-SMD
1(7)		DCNR-M
2	Risks in online debates	RIOD
2(1)	Negative Feedback	RIOD-NF
2(2)	Time consuming	RIOD-TC
2(3)	Negative psychological impact	RIOD-NPI
2(4)	Losing friends and family	RIOD-LFAF
2(5)	Getting threats	RIOD-GF
2(6)	Become disqualified	RIOD-BD
2(7)	Lose reputation	RIOD-LR
3	Reason for being active in the online debate space	RAODS
3(1)	Be the voice you wish to see	RAODS-VWTS
3(2)	Gain reputation	RAODS-STW
3(3)	A need for debating	RAODS-NFD
3(4)	Meeting new people	RIOD-MNP
3(5)	Learning outcome	RIOD-LO
4	Chilling effect	CE
4(1)	Highly present	CE-HP
4(2)	Minority groups	CE-MG
4(3)	Women	CE-W
4(4)	Perceived consequences of participating	CE-
4(5)	Negative outcomes	CE-NO
5	Privacy concern	PC
6(1)	Care alot	PC-CAI
6(2)	Don't bother caring	PC-DBC
6(3)	Too much privacy focus	PC-TMPF
6(4)	Takes too much time	PC-TTMT
6(5)	Bad designing	PC-BD
6	Ways to make the on-line debate space better	ODSB
7(1)	No anonymity	ODSB-NA
7(2)	New debate platform	ODSB-NDP
7(3)	Not possible	ODSB-NP
7(4)	Participant's responsibility	ODSB-PR
7(5)	Better moderation	ODSB-BM

Table 4.1: Code: start list

4.4.3 Data codes: Final list

The final codes list is the updated start list with a description of each code and how many participants answered each code.

The online debate climate and factors leading to its negative reputation			
Code	Full name	Description	Nr. of participants
TODC-EC	Group thinking	In the online debate climate there tend to be a group affiliation that often leads to users having the same or similar views as the ones their group have. In this type of answer, there were some common keywords that were mentioned, these are echo chambers, extremism, polarisation, and trench warfare.	14
TODC-TW	Few active voices	A common view about the debate climate were that it is often the same few people that choose to comment and speak out a lot.	9
TODC-ROD	Rhetoric of debaters	Rhetoric is the techniques used to inform, persuade or motivate specific audiences in specific situations ¹ . The type of rhetoric online debaters often use was seen as condescending and contributing to the debate in a negative way.	16
TODC-HDT	Most heated debate topics	What topics create the most heated debate in the Norwegian online debate space. I asked each participant what topic they thought of as the most heated.	20
FCNR-SMD	Social media design	The design of social media is made to have as much interaction from its users as possible, this leads to its algorithms promoting behavior and discussion that provoke emotions, which again can cause a polarized and negative debate.	9
FCNR-M	Media	Some participants pointed out the popular media's very one-sided posting about the debate climate as an important factor to the reputation of the online debate space.	6
Risks in online debates			

¹<https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Rhetoric>

RIOD-ONF	Overwhelming negative feedback	Things like cyberbullying, harassment, and being verbally abused are common for on-line debaters, this can cause a negative psychological impact on the individuals or just a bad experience of the users in the online debate space	15
RIOD-ONF	Threats	An expression of intention to do something harmful or dangerous toward another user. A few participants reported having received threats from other users or had heard about others receiving them.	5
RIOD-ONF	hate speech	The type of comments and feedback that are so severe that they are categorized as hate speech which is illegal. Something is so harsh that it is categorized as hate speech is rare, but some participants had experienced it in this space	2
RIOD-TC	Time consuming	There was a clear consensus that it takes a lot of time when taking part in the online debates.	19
RIOD-LR	Losing reputation	Having a voice in the public online debate space, people can see what you think and write about certain issues. This can lead to people being stigmatized, getting a bad reputation, losing jobs, or getting rejected by friends and family.	10
RIOD-RIRL	Risks in real life	If one chooses to be active in the debate space, a lot of private and, in some cases, sensitive information will be available to the public, this can cause people to know where you live and want to hurt you in some way in real life.	5
Chilling effect			
CE-HP	Highly present	Feel like the chilling effect is very prevalent in the Norwegian online debate space. This means that there are a lot of people not daring to speak up about something because of the repercussion of doing so.	16
CH-NP	Not present	Did not feel it were a chilling effect present in the online debate space.	1
CH-GMA	Groups most affected	What groups of the Norwegian population did the interview participants feel were the most affected by the chilling effect.	14

CE-TDFS	Negative effects of the chilling effect	.	7
Reason for being active in the online debate space			
RAODS-VWTS	Be the voice you wish to see	A lot of participants decide to be in the online debate space to be a good example of a voice they wish they saw more of.	6
RAODS-GR	Gain reputation	Some of my participants said that being active in debates and social media was seen as absolutely necessary for their career and/or living.	9
RAODS-NFD	A need for debating	Having a place where one can vent one's opinions and emotions were a factor that was shared by some of my participants.	8
RAODS-MNC	Make new connections	From being active in the online debate space, they make new connections with people from all over the country or even the world. Especially prevalent if they find someone with the same opinions and views as themselves.	4
RAODS-LO	Learning outcome	Being exposed to so much information and discussions make it a great place to learn, not only about the information you see but also about yourself and how well your arguments hold.	11
Ways to make the online debate space better			
ODSB-NA	No anonymity	With anonymity, users have something they can hide behind, this makes it easier for them to condescending and trolling towards other users without it affecting them because no one knows who they are	14
ODSB-NDP	New debate platform	Having a new debate platform that is not based on the same design as the social media platform could help eliminate some toxic elements attached to the online debates.	9
ODSB-PR	Participants responsibility	Some of the interview subjects meant that it is the debate users themselves that can make the debate space better, it is their responsibility to arrest people they see are not contributing to the discussion. There needs to be a shift in the global online consciousness.	7

ODSB-BM	Better moderation	Moderation is a common tool used in online debates were you delete, block or give warnings to comments that are not in according to the sites guidelines.	13
Privacy			
PC-ITC	Important to care	Ones personal data is the new gold, its therefore important to care about who gets access to your information and why.	6
PC-TMPF	Too much privacy focus	One participant meant it was too much focus on privacy generally and that the GDPR is a perfect example.	2
PC-SCM	Should care more	Were the most common answer to privacy concern was that they should care more about their personal information online, but that they just accept every cookie and is not too concerned what information the big companies have of them.	10

Table 4.2: Code: final list

This Start list was how I intended to categorize the answers from my participants, but as I continued with the interviews and started on the final list, I updated the categories to put together two that were similar and made some new were new data had presented itself.

4.5 Ethical considerations

In this section, I will go through how I got permission to do the study with an attached letter, the invitation I gave to each participant and the attached consent form I sent, and some general information about the ethical and privacy consideration done throughout this research.

4.5.1 NSD

I filled out the form to conduct research in Norway on NSD's website in early February. In this form, I had to thoroughly explain what the point of my research was, who I was contacting and what information I would like to gather from them, and how I was going to preserve their privacy. On the 26 of March, I got a confirmation from NSD that they had gone through my form and asked a few questions about my research and the reason for gathering sensitive information. After my reasoning and updating some part of the form, I got final approval from them to conduct this research with their message: "The processing of personal data is assessed by NSD. The assessment is:

It is our assessment that the processing will be in accordance with the privacy legislation, as long as it is carried out in accordance with what is documented in the notification form on the current date with attachments, as well as in the notification dialogue between the notifier and NSD. The treatment can start."

4.5.2 Invitation mail and attached consent form

The participants were mainly contacted through mail, though a few were contacted through Facebook. The mail was achieved through acquaintances and the participants recommended me names in the interview. Each participant was sent a mail describing me and my thesis, then telling them why I think they would be a good fit for my research, what themes the interview will cover, and lastly information on my supervisors to gain some trustworthiness. After they replied and said they were interested, I proceeded to ask them when a suitable time for an interview would be and in the same mail explained that I would need them to consent to the attached consent form that explains their participation and how I will perceive their privacy. They approved the consent form by replying to the mail with "I approve," which I told them to do. There were two consent forms, one for the expert-type participants and one for the other participants.

The consent form starts with me introducing the research and myself (1), then there are four sections that go into the participant's role for the interview (2) and what I expect from them (3), what the participants will do for this research topic that there is not much research on (4), how I preserve their privacy (5), and lastly what they can do and who they can contact if they feel their privacy is breached (6).

See appendix B for the written consent form.

Chapter 5

result

Here I will present the findings from each main theme I went through in the interviews. There were of course a lot of data from the 20 interviews I made, and all of these could not make it to the result section. All of the participants were represented in the final list table, in this section, I will focus on the answers that best represent each type of answer given by the participants. First, there will be an introduction to each explaining the category/theme and then what the main talking points from the participants were. Then there will be more direct examples of answers from my participants to show exactly how they thought.

5.1 Introduction

The result from this thesis aims to give an overview of what important and relevant data I have found on the topics of risk perception in online debates. The problem statement in this thesis: what are Norwegians perceived experiences in the online debate space when it comes to the reason for being here, what risks and consequences come with participating, why some don't participate and how can it be done better. The purpose of the study is therefore to get these users' perceptions of these topics in the online debate space through interviews. The research questions which is the main themes in the interviews and study is:

- How is the Norwegian online debate space climate?
- Sub-question: What factors contribute to its negative reputation
- Sub-question: What topic creates the most heated debates?
- What are the risks of participating in online debates?
- Sub-question: Is there a chilling effect in the Norwegian online debate space?
- What is it that makes people come back to the online debate space?
- How can the online debate space be improved?
- What is the privacy concerns among online debaters?

The purpose of this chapter is to give the reader a full overview of the data findings from this thesis. The structure starts with a presentation of the sample gathered in the research, then there will be seven sections, one where each re-

search question is represented. In these sections, there are subsections that function as the categorized answers of the participants. Here I will first give an explanation of the theme of the answer and then show how the participants answered using quotes and explanations of their answers interchangeably.

The research design used in this study is the phenomenological study. This type of qualitative research design aims to offer an insight into how a given person, in a given context, feels and makes sense of a given phenomenon. This study is used to describe online debate users' perspectives of the online debate space. The approach in these studies is an in-depth semi-structured interview with about 5-25 participants. An important thing to note in this type of study is that a phenomenon means "how things appear to one's consciousness". People have different thoughts about this phenomenon and the researcher must suspend all their judgments and previous notions about the phenomenon, and the only thing to be considered is how the participants experience the phenomenon from their point of view.

The data collection technique used in this study was in-depth interviews, done over Teams or Zoom, lasting about one hour, some shorter some longer. The sample was divided into three categories, the ones being actively involved in the online debate space, the ones that are actively staying away, and expert participants that have knowledge in this field from studying it or being a public persona in it. It consisted of 12 men and 9 women with different backgrounds, the only common denominator was that everyone was Norwegian and had the experience of the online debate space.

The data gathered from the interview were first processed into notes during the interview, then a brief summary by me afterward. Then, many of the participant's interviews were transcribed using the transcription function in word online. This produced a lot of text to which I made into a much briefer more understandable document. Then each document was put into one to have an easier search function so as to easier categorize and code the findings. The first code list was made circa halfway through the interview process to get an overview of the category of answers. Here, each research question functioned as an overall code and the answers as subcodes. The final code list was made after the interview process and consists of a more detailed explanation of each code and subcodes as well as how many of the participants answered each.

The trustworthiness of the data collected was established mostly through the written consent from where I went into detail how I would preserve the participant's privacy, and how I would store the data collected in a secure location with only the researcher can have access to with two-factor authentication. In the interview setting, I made myself friendly and non-intimidating, and their set was in a preferred location (most likely at their home). This made me a trustworthy person for them to tell their experience unfiltered and gave them space to think thoroughly through their answers. If they got stuck on a question I tried to help them by explaining the question further and giving examples on other kinds of answers.

5.2 Sample

The sample consists of 21 participants, 12 of these are men and 9 women, described in figure and table. There was a wide variance of different types of people, which was important for this study, to see how different types of people with different backgrounds feel about the same phenomena that are the online debate space. I will briefly give an introduction to each participant, so the reader can get a better understanding of what type of people gave these answers. The information given will not be personal or sensitive information, one should not be able to identify these people based on these descriptions.

5.2.1 Diagram of the sample data

Here I will present four diagrams to show the data presented in the tables.

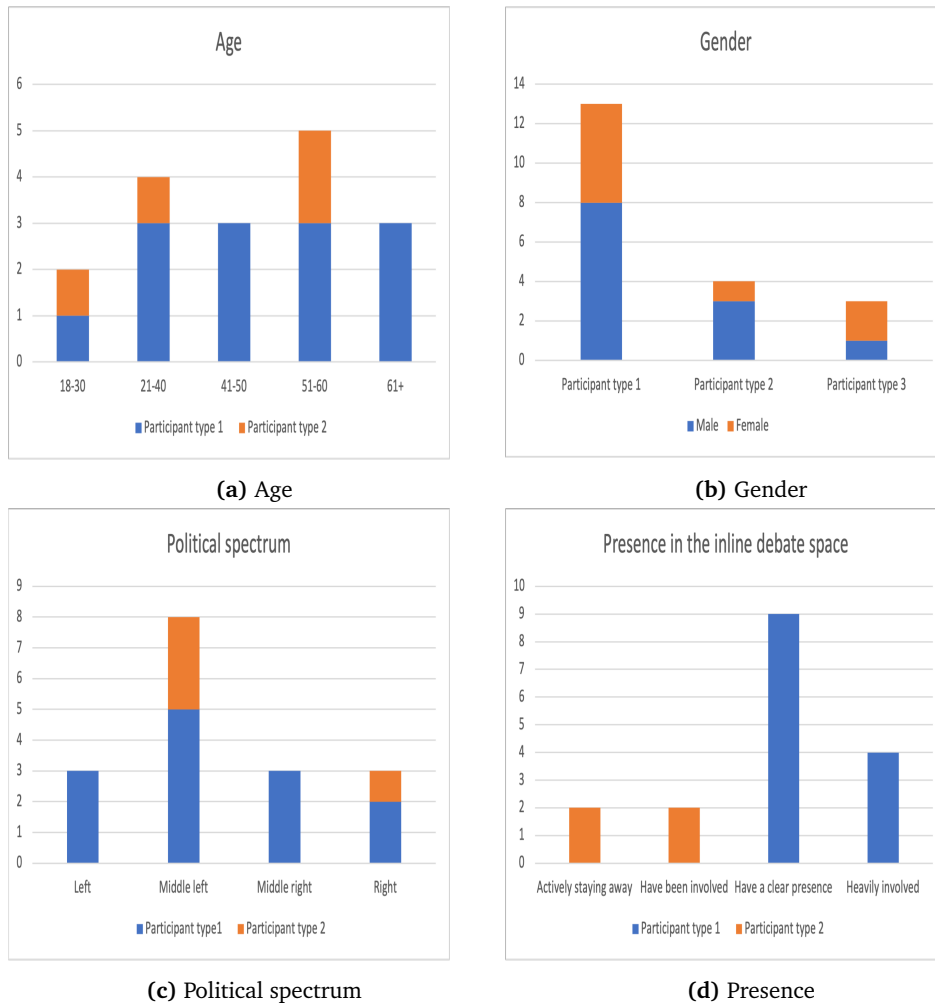


Figure 5.1: Four diagrams showing the sample data

Following is a table for all of my participants showing the demographic and some details about them. Who is female /male, in which degree they are a part of the online debate, which degree they are on the left or right side of the political spectrum etc. The degree is from 1 to 4, where 1 is far left of the political spectrum, 2 is in the middle but a bit more to the left, 3 is in the middle but a bit more to the right and 4 is far right. For the presence in online debate space there will be a degree of 1 to 4, where 1 is actively staying away from the debate space, with 2 they have been heavily involved in the debate space, but are actively avoiding it, 3 is the ones that clearly have a presence in the online debate space, but are not heavily involved and 4 is the one that is heavily involved in the debate space, meaning they spend a lot of hours every day here commenting. All of the participants, regardless of whether they are heavily involved or not have an experience of the debate space either from reading or hearing about it or from actively spectating the online debate from various places on the Internet. Age is also a scale from 1 to 5 where 1 is 18 to 30, 2 is 31 to 40, 3 is 41 to 50, 4 is 51 to 60, and 5 is over 60.

Expert			
Participant name	Gender	Profession	Experience on the online debate topic
Exp1	F	Researcher	Published research related to this topic including one report on the behavior of Norwegians in online debates.
Exp2	M	Professor in philosophy	Were heavily involved in the debate space early, have since studied extremism online.
Exp3	F	Journalist, media critic and member of the free speech union	Been a voice on the topic of online debate climate with a focus on the importance of free speech and the danger of some of the trends in today's debate climate.

Participant type 1: Involved in the online debate space						
Nr	gender	Age	Profession	Political spectrum	Presence in the online debate space	debate style
P1	M	5	Professor	2	3	Tough but fair. We are all human, and its tough not to counterattack when people are unreasonable, but try not to.

P2	M	1	Escape room employee	1	3	Fact based, only part of debates he feel passionate about. Can use rough language against the one he feels are wrong. Use fake accounts when debating on Facebook.
P3	F	4	Adviser	2	3	Wants to hold a nice tone in the debate, do this by being open, ask questions and be disarming.
P4	M	5	Engineer	3	3	Likes to keep it serious and fact based, don't like seeing other users being attacked, will defend the victim if it gets too heated.
P5	M	5	Author and advisor	2	3	Conscious of never being condescending, ridiculing or other domination techniques. Trigger happy - likes to be a part of the conversation.
P6	F	2	Politician	2	3	Factual as long as it is possible, avoids attacking the person, doesn't say anything I couldn't say face to face.
P7	M	2	Politician	1	4	Have the best tone possible. Fact and experienced based - make people understand my ideas, why I think these cases are important.
P8	F	3	Executive coaching	4	4	Clearly honest with good intentions, always questioning. Use a lot of time on researching. Can be aggressive, rarely personal attacks.
P9	M	4	Politician	3	3	Very factual, try to use humour where it is appropriate.
P10	F	3	Politician	2	3	Confrontational - not ruthless, uncompromising, open to new ideas, important for me to have a factual and professional background for what I mean, sources are important.

P11	M	4	Civil engineer	1	4	Provide a lot of links to factual sources, like FHI, SSB etc. I rarely go to personal attacks when debating. Likes to use questions as a counterattack when debating.
P12	F	3	Yoga instructor	4	4	Clear and concrete, try not to be condescending towards others. Use a lot of time when posting my own content, read thoroughly through my sources and different information I get, very important to have correct formulations in my posts.
P13	M	2	Politician	3	3	Informative and long-formed, concerned with good reasoning. Try to behave online as I would do to people in real life. Were more aggressive and ruder previously in debates.
Participant type 2: Actively staying away from participating in online debates						
Nr.	Gender	Age	profession	Political spectrum	Presence in online debates	Reason for not being active
P14	F	4	Advisor	2	1	Don't want to be known as someone who argues on social media, feel like it could negatively benefit my job, seems like a waste of time.
P15	M	1	Student	2	1	Have no need to debate random people online or to state my opinion public, seems like a bad use of my time spending so much time in the digital world.
P16	M	4	Janitor	4	2	Were active online debater, but because of all the hate I got and the fact that I got censured on Facebook because of my meanings, I choose now to stay away from the debate.

P17	M	2	Writer	2	2	Were a part of alt-right forums and groups, from experience here I have a good understanding of these forums. A few years ago I tried to be a part of the online debate again, because of my insight, but I got so much hate from people telling me how I am wrong even though I now I'm right, so I stay away from the online debate space now.
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5.3 Findings

This section presents the findings from the phenomenological study. It is categorized where each research question is an overall category and the themes representing the answers are presented beneath each category. In each section, I will first give a general explanation of each of them, with examples from what the participants said. I will first present what answers the expert participants gave and then look at the other two participant types, how many of each participant answered this, and what their general answers were. There will be a table at the end of each research question with an overview of how many in each category answered.

5.3.1 The online debate climate

The first research question aims to give an answer to how the participants feel and experience the online debate climate, in addition, what they think causes the negative reputation of this climate. The first main theme in the interview was to ask about their experience of the online debate climate present today. There was a wide variance of different answers on this topic, and some themes were clearly agreed by several of the participants. Here I will first give some examples of what some of the participants said about the debate climate, then go a bit more into the specific factors people felt were the main reason for its bad reputation. A sub-question here was to find out what topics my participant felt were causing the most heated debates.

The table shows how many and which type of participants answered the question.

Research question 1 - the online debate climate				
Participant answer	Expert participant	Participant type 1	Participant type 2	Total answers
Group thinking	Exp3	P1, P3, P9, P11	P15	7
Echo chamber	Exp2	P1, P2, P6, P8, P11, P12	P14, P16, P17	10
Polarisation and trench warfare	Exp3	P2, P3, P6, P11	P17	6
Extremism	Exp1, Exp2	P2, P4	-	4
Underrated debate climate	Exp1, Exp3	P3, P4, P7, P9	P14, P15	8
Sub question - Factor contributing to negative reputation				
Rhetoric of online debaters	Exp2, Exp3	P1, P2, P3, P5, P6, P11, P12	P15, P17	11
Social media design	Exp1, Exp2, Exp3	P2, P5, P7	P14, P16	8
Media	Exp3	P1, P12, P13	-	3

Expert participants The expert (exp1) thinks its two main reasons for there being a negative reputation of the debate space. "One is that they [the online debaters] have themselves to thank in that the online debate reflects the tone that is actually there. The second is the attention we and the media have given to this problem."

She also gave the characteristics of the online debaters. "More men than women as safe findings, beyond that there is not much knowledge that is based on safe findings. Young and young middle-aged are overrepresented, but when we interviewed the moderators they were very surprised by the finding, they had the impression that it was the oldest who was the worst, which makes it a bit messy. No educational difference between those who participate in hard online debates, but when it comes to those who admit to being behind it, it is over-represented with those with lower education, but this does not mean that it is only them, there are all kinds of people who write hate speech just that it is those with low education who admit to being behind online harassment. How one understands oneself and one's own debate activity and how fluent one is has a lot to say for how the comments are perceived. People with higher education may be more well-articulated and better at wrapping their message in a way that makes it less perceived as neat, even though the message may be. But that those who admit to being behind online harassment are more skeptical of immigration and homosexuality or sexual minorities than the general population."

Participant type 1 The first participant (P1) said this about the debate climate, from his experience in Twitter. "Much tougher and more unreasonable than in a classic debate in an edited medium. But not sure if that is because it's electronic or not. What matters is whether it is edited or not, and what format it is in. With Twitter it will be so short, so it will be more punchlines based."

Participant type 2 For P17, the online debate climate was the reason he didn't want to be a part of it anymore. "I just got too much, so many hateful and wrong comments directed towards me is not worth my time. Though it is important to emphasize there are a lot of nice comments and useful information, but too far in between."

Group thinking

A lot of group thinking in this climate, cause echo chamber, polarisation and can also cause a different type of extremism according to some of my participants.

Expert participants (Exp3) clearly feel groups play an important role in the online debate space climate and dynamic of the trajectory of the debate. "When people are affiliated with a certain group or ideology online, there is a tendency where the users of the groups think exactly what the group thinks, and they often have "enemies" or type of people they dislike and need to stand up against. So a phenomenon happens where a user finds someone that clearly fits in the category of someone they disagree with and tell the rest of the group, then the phenomena of internet mobs are created where a large number of users show their disapproval to the user(s)." Exp3 also says that the Internet mob mentality we often see or hear about in the debate space, where a large number of users decide to go after a user that has posted something they don't like, is a byproduct of the group based thinking has become. "There is now a group for everything and you can easily find a group suitable for you. We see that when such groups are formed, there will often be a common enemy in form of an idea, political based, specific people, etc.. When they find some that fit the category for the enemy, one starts and then gets others to join them or they see one in their group has said something against some "horrible" idea or user."

Participant type 1 This was also experienced by participant P9, "I have experienced the Internet mob coming after me several times. One time when I had written about child welfare there was a lot of negative feedback coming from people. It was clear to me that a user had posted me in their group and told them to get me. It was really bad."

"When I post something about a topic, suddenly a lot of Norwegian activists jump into the conversation with a large number of comments without value. Using a lot of the straw-man argumentation, these arguments I have heard a hundred

times before. It is a form of activism that appears in some debates. This is especially evident when I take part in the debate on gender incongruence." -P1

P3 thinks the reason for the bad debate climate comes from social groups on the internet not being happy. "Reflecting is totally gone, people just put out things they feel is true, because their group affiliation feels it. [When asked about the reason for bad reputation] social groups don't have it good."

P11 thinks it is important as a user to stand up against certain groups in the online debate space. "It's important to stand up against these groups [far right groups], to avoid radicalizing. The biggest radicalizing motto in Norway is Listhaug and the like, [they] scare away Muslims from the society, it is an extreme amount of fake news out there against Muslims. It's important to teach the young ones and make them not get into the hate groups."

The informant uses a lot of his time online debating these types of groups to fight this cause of eliminating far-right hate groups. There were a lot of statements by these informants that mentioned group affiliation as an important factor for the climate here.

Participant type 2 P15 also put an emphasizes that group affiliation steers the online debate in his experience. Saying that even how right you think you have, if you are one voice against a group there will always be the voice of the group that steers the conversation and speaks the loudest.

Echo chamber

Was one of the keywords informants used when describing their view of the climate in many parts of the online debate space? Echo chambers are characterized by online debates that have conformation from the views already present and little to no opposing arguments [39].

Expert participant (Exp2), who has a lot of experience from forums and the debate space doesn't like the term echo chamber, but rather draws parallels to the greenhouse effect. "I don't like the term echo chamber, don't feel it describes the phenomena good enough. An echo chamber should be a room where the feedback confirms the perception you already have as if it were an echo where answers are sought with little information outside this. Research shows that this is not true, because such websites have been investigated. The access to information here is much greater, they read the mainstream media that they write so contemptuously about. I, therefore, believe a better metaphor is the greenhouse. Simply because it is about you being a place where you of course get your perceptions confirmed and they are reinforced. But here you get input from others who supplement and substantiate your views with more information. This is a greenhouse when you have the right temperature, you get the same sunlight and the gardener fertilizes immediately. Then you will find an environment where many share the same views and where the platform itself, i.e. the editorial ones, is close to what you yourself

believe. Is then socialized to ignore the information you get through other channels, here also comes the greenhouse effect - the glass plates in the greenhouse, let in sunlight, and then they prevent the heat from coming out. So even though you know that these are people who watch the daily popular news show and such other types of sources, they learn from these sites how to ignore what they have read or seen from these mainstream channels. But here is the paradox, because while they sit here and agree that the mainstream media does not represent reality, they also come up with examples of how bad things are with immigration, integration, etc., then they just use articles from the 'Dagbladet', 'Aftenposten', etc.

The point is that in this greenhouse, the glass panes represent a type of glasses that filters out what does not confirm their perception of reality. When you are then confronted with the fact that there is something different in the media than what you are talking about here, it is because mainstream media leads us behind the light - and then you really have those who go off the shaft with conspiracy theories. Often about 'Arbeiderpartiet' controlling the media. "

This informant made an informed and nuanced answer to the topic of echo chambers, it shows he has a lot of experience in these spaces to have made this observation.

Participant type 1 "Every little group has its own arena now and then they have their own echo chamber you could say. Can see this in Twitter threads, that people are fueling each other up. But it is the degree of the echo chamber that means something, it is not as big in Twitter threads as it is in other places though." -P1

"Having a new platform for the online debate space, where the algorithms are not steering towards echo chambers as they tend to be now, that what makes one addicted, but would probably not be as popular because of this." -P6

Participant type 2 There was a clear consensus that echo chambers form pretty quickly on the Internet because one can easily find groups they align with, as well as how the algorithms promote echo chambers as they tend to give people more of what they already like. One participant (P16), when talking about the chilling effect, said that this effect also causes echo chambers. "If you have an opinion about a heated topic, you would rather talk about this in a private group that shares your opinions, than to take these opinions to the public debate space and get this overwhelming negative feedback so many are afraid of."

Polarisation and trench warfare

Is a phenomenon in debating where each side preaches their own argument without trying to learn or listen to what the other side is trying to say. Creates a dynamic where opinions are reinforced through contradiction as well as conformation. [39]

When being asked about the debate climate, some of the participants thought of a polarised debate climate where users dig their own trench with a set of opin-

ions, while the other side of the argument does the same while also calling each other negative, unreasonable comments that fuel the digging even more. The majority of participants one had witnessed a polarising debate several times, and some said they experienced it almost every time they posted something.

Expert participant Exp3 said that "the polarising trend you see in American digital debating climate is something a lot of users think about when they hear about debate climate, but that the Norwegian debate climate is nowhere near as bad as they have it. Though there are some tendencies to the American polarisation also here, and we move in that direction"

Participant type 1 "People just dig their own trench so quickly and stays there arguing their side, not listening to what the other side is trying to say, [I] have experienced it very often [in my Twitter and Facebook feed]." -P3

"You can't be diplomatic in the trench warfare" - P6

This was not the most common answer by the informants, but from the one who had observed it, it seemed like an ever-growing problem that decrease the online debate space experience.

Extremism

Extremism is those who hold extreme views in a domain of belief, having a presence online makes it easier to find like-minded people and spread the word. Calling other users for extremists is a common counterargument to use.

Expert participant Exp2 is worried about the extreme tendencies in the online debate space, but make a point that there have not been that many violent cases from these corners of the Internet: "But over time, there are very many who have been exposed to hateful, dehumanizing utterances, but still it is a very modest minority who commit violence against political opponents, immigrants, etc., so that is not a simple one to one relationship between hate speech and violent acts. "It remains my concern that the normalization of the extreme standpoint, first and foremost those normative extreme views, the fact that one violates someone's utterances through words. It seems dehumanizing and then lowers the threshold for violence and, in the worst case, murder." - Exp2

It is said, as previously mentioned in this thesis, that those with more extreme viewpoints tend to use the Internet for their distribution channel. This causes the public online debate to have a higher than a normal representation of extreme viewpoints. The expert exp1 said that these types of debaters have a few characteristics in common if they are on the right or left side of the political spectrum.

Participant type 1 P2 thinks anonymity has one of the reasons there is a bigger tendency towards extremism on the internet. "People are more likely to argue from the standpoint that is more extremist than the attitudes they really have, that's what this anonymity effect has, the fact that no one can touch you back makes it easier to argue from the more extreme point of view."

"There seems like it is a war they have to win, no matter the cost, like the world will not go forward if they don't get their message through." -P4

Extreme standpoints and groups have clearly been witnessed by some of the participants and made some reasoning as to why they think it exists.

Underrated debate climate

Expert participant Exp3 made emphasizes that it is not as bad as people and media make it out to be. She says there are a lot of good conversations here as well.

Exp1 also answered something similar to what Exp3 said. "There are a lot of nice well-functioning online debates as well, and I have to say that these big news media have a really good apparatus of moderators who do a great job, at least that's the impression I got. Therefore it is important to emphasize that this is a marginal phenomenon with harassment and the like, one must not paint the situation black."

The expert participant Exp1 that has researched people's experience of receiving and posting hateful content told me some general information about this part of the dynamic of the online debate. "Is not such a big phenomenon as one has the impression of when you look at how many people themselves have experienced receiving hate speech directly, like seven to ten percent of those who responded in the survey. One to two percent of the population admits that they are behind hate speech online, which indicates that this is a marginal phenomenon. At the same time, 70-80 percent in our surveys say that they have observed hateful statements online, which tells us that the few are visible online, but also that few have experienced being direct recipients of this."

Exp1: These online debates have led to positive democratization. Giving a space of expression to people who before did not necessarily have it, made it pronounced much more accessible to all, do not have to go through these "gate-keepers" for better or worse.

Participant type 1 P4 also felt the online debate climate to be a lot better than what was portrayed to be. From his perspective, the discussion he is a part of almost daily is well functioning and with high value. "There is almost always a nice tone to the discussion I am witness to on my Facebook page."

Participant type 2 P14 has seen a lot of improvements in her experience of the online debate climate, especially on Facebook.

5.3.2 Factors contributing to its negative reputation

The rhetoric of online debaters

Naturally, one of the most common answers from my participants was that the online debaters themselves were an important factor in the negative reputation of the online debate space because so many can't behave properly when they are on it.

Expert participant Exp3 says that "I have experienced hatred and harassment, and it seems so many have experienced it. These hateful speeches, show up everywhere. But what do you mean with harassment and hateful expression, there is a huge problem where big words are used about everything and they get watered down."

Exp2 has some thoughts on why the rhetoric of online debaters tends to be bad. "Terribly hard to say. I think it's about frustration about not being heard. One then resorts to strong words and expressions. These are value issues that have a powerful emotional component, which means that emotions play a big role in the debate and how you develop here and help to give you an identity. If you have experience and are involved in online debate, you know how this can trigger emotions. Many people are triggered by the experience of injustice - this is not fair. Then creates a landscape where someone can consciously and unconsciously play exclusively on emotions."

Participant type 2 The use of big words to silence people is something (P17, previously active in the debate space) also talked about from his previous experience in the debate space. "You know we went into these toxic landscapes on purpose. The group often decided together on who to get and how to get our message out. The type of debate style we had was highly aggressive, often ridiculing and using sarcasm. I am sure I was seen as a troll from the way I often behaved here."

Participant type 1 "These very unreasonable comments, they ruin the debate, makes it so that you can not talk about things in a relaxed and good way." -P1 He then proceeds to talk about the users he sees making these comments. "Read a survey that it is lonely men who do not get women who come with racism online. But this is not my experience at all, it can be very highly educated people who make such junk comments. Communication consultants can, for example, come up with posts that are not of this world, that is, and it can be women as well as men and younger people. I also do not believe in this myth that it is the old pig that is an online troll, although there are some as well." A bit later in the same answer, he says "These very unreasonable comments, they ruin the debate, mean that you can not talk about things in a relaxed and good way."

The vast majority of the informants had enough experience with this negative type of rhetoric to point it out as an important factor to the negative reputation of the online debate space.

Social media design

The way social media, where by far the most public debate are performed online, is designed in a way many of my participants felt contributed to people behaving in a way that negatively influenced the debate space.

Participant type 1 For instance, P7 said that he noticed how the algorithms show you more of what you already see a lot of and the things you like and comments. "I and my partner's Facebook page is totally different. They give you more of what you already like, or at least what you engage most with."

Expert participant Exp2 also made this comparison "...especially in Social Media where these [the algorithms] enhances these feelings by allowing users to get more of the things they react the strongest to. We didn't have algorithms where I discussed earlier. There, the debate was steered by itself. "

When asked about the Social media design and algorithms, Exp1 admitted these could play a factor as well. "Many who are interested in how Facebook algorithms reward discussions that have the potential to trigger affect that make active discussions a self-reinforcing and escalating dynamic due to these algorithms. Something I am very interested in and think are important, but also something I do not know much about."

Participant type 2 Another participant (P16) mentioned the like system as unfair to a lot of users because it is a popular contest, where the most popular views get the most up-voted.

P14 felt that there is naturally a more informal tone when the discussion is being done in a social medium. "It's not as serious as writing a reader post in a newspaper." She also said that the design of social media played a role in the negative reputation of the online debate space.

Media

The media has a tendency to focus on the negative side of things in order to generate clicks from engagement. This can cause it to focus more on the negative side of the online debate space more than the positive.

Expert participant The media is known for posting news about the negative sides of things because this causes the most amount of clicks and engagement. "When you have a huge information source almost only posting information about one side of the online debate, most people will think this is how it really is all over the online public debate, you can't say anything before you get cyberbullied. That is definitely a factor to the negative reputation, and even though some of it is true, there is a bigger picture that is not framed properly." - Exp3

Participant type 1 The first thing P13 said when asked about factors contributing to the negative reputation: "I think it is the media that rattle things up because they make a living out of clicks."

Some of the informants felt the business model of modern media made the online debate space and its climate worse than it actually is.

5.3.3 Most heated debate topics

The next research question is about what topic the participants experience gets most heated when discussed and debated online. By heated means that the debate is sensitive to a lot of users and evokes a lot of emotions to which people feel they have to say what they feel. With the participants, it was clear they had the understanding when asked this question to mention the topics they had experienced had the most polarisation and went toxic quickly. Like what (P1) said when I raised the question: "Yes, I know of a few topics that get out of hand way quicker than other topics, it really shows how provoking these topics are to a lot of people. And it gets out of hand so quickly, people saying unreasonable things with a condescending negative tone, it ruins the debate climate, but it happens almost every time on these topics." Underneath is a table showing every topic mentioned and how many of the participants mentioned each topic.

This was a type of answer here: "For me, the most heated topics [in the online debate space] are the debates around gender and the trans movement, Israel conflict, and Covid pandemic. I notice the engagement [when posting about these topics] are much higher." -P1

Debate Topic	Nr. of participants
Immigration/refugee	12
Corona pandemic	10
Trans movement	9
Climate/environment	7
Vaccines	5
Windmill	5
Religion	3
Child welfare	3
Freedom of speech	1
Mee too movement	1
Mental health	1
Racism /discrimination	1
Donald Trump	1
Woke / anti-woke	1
Israel conflict	1

5.3.4 Risk in online debates

Here I will present the findings for the main research question of my thesis on the perceived risks in the online debate space. Grouped into the main themes I will go through each, presenting the answers which gave life to these categories.

Research question 1 - the online debate climate				
Participant answer	Expert participant	Participant type 1	Participant type 2	Nr of answers
Overwhelming negative feedback	Exp1, Exp3	P1, P3, P7, P8, P9, P10, P12, P13	P16, P17	11
Threats	Exp2	P8, P9, P12	-	4
Hate speech	Exp1, Exp2	-	-	2
Time consuming	-	P1, P3, P5, P6, P8, P10, P11, P12	P17	9
Losing reputation	Exp2, Exp3	P5, P7, P8, P12	P16, P17	8
Risks in real life	-	P7, P11	P17	3
Encourage of violence and hate	Exp2	P2	-	2

Overwhelming Negative feedback

My participants perceived the risk of getting overwhelming negative feedback as detrimental to the public online debate space. There is a few types of negative feedback that goes into this category. First of all, is the sheer amount of negative feedback that may not on its own be harmful but is multiplied when the number of people with these comments is very high, the so called Internet mob is after you.

This risk can occur to some users that are debating certain heated topics or get a lot of attention for some reason. When this happens and you are not prepared or have no experience of dealing with that amount of negativity towards yourself, it can get consequences.

The vast majority of participants mentioned this as a clear risk of being in the online debate space. They have either heard/read about people receiving threats and overwhelming negative feedback, and some participant have experienced it first hand.

Expert participant When talking about this topic of negative feedback, exp3 felt it was important to emphasize that it's hard to grasp what people mean when they say they have received negative. "I have felt harassing ridiculing comments

and people have clearly, it sticks and presents itself as it was everywhere these harassing and hateful speeches. But what do you mean when you say you have received harassing and hateful speech. I think it's a big problem that big words are used about everything and being watered down. It seems like it is boiling of hatred and violent threats and the like."

"Some negative feedback you have to expect going into the online debate space, it's just the overwhelmingly negative feedback people seem to get that worries me, people are just too quick to jump to conclusion without hearing the full story first, or even listening to what the other side has to offer." - Exp3

Participant type 1 P3 told me about her own story getting overwhelming negative feedback after she made a podcast episode about begging for money online. This triggered fury among a lot of users. This was uncomfortable for her and she said she had to lay low on Twitter for two weeks before it had settled down and people weren't that aggressive. Though it was uncomfortable getting that amount of negativity, she never had any real negative implications from it.

There is a lot of negative feedback on my posts and in general, but when it gets overwhelming I just delete or block them from participating in my Facebook page. - P12

"The negative feedback I got, especially after one incident when I wrote about child welfare, deeply affected me. I lost sleep over it and thought about many times throughout the days." -P7

P10 has had a lot of experience with negative, condescending, and harassing comments, as well as users that are stalking and bothering her on her Facebook profile. "They are ruining the debate climate. I have done this so many years now that I know what is smart to debate, I carefully choose my battles."

"It is a destructive place to utter one opinion, I have gotten a lot of people sending me private messages that they totally agree with what I write and would like to have a voice themselves but that they don't want to be victim to the toxicity of the Internet mob and people in the online debate space, which is totally understandable." - P8

Threats

Threats are an expression of intent to do something harmful or dangerous towards another user.

Expert participant Threat is an occurring theme in this negative feedback category, but it's not all that are affected by these. Like exp2 that told me about his experience with threats:

"Threats of getting a knife in my stomach affect me minimally. Will not take a death threat seriously, smiles at being called such things. Often tempting to answer back, you dare not do anything but writing shit on social media, but can not lower yourself to that level, it gets too stupid. Then you also contribute to

littering the debate yourself, because threats are the ultimate littering of public debate, that's why you can not answer with the same coin. In principle, I believe that threats should be reported as the public discourse is of such a nature that it is the core of democratic processes, and if this is littered with threats and violations, it is a threat to the functioning of a democratic society. But it is difficult to report. You have to physically deliver it on paper to a police station with a signature, can only report bicycle theft online. Seems it is unnecessarily complicated. The other problem is that the police have too much to do also do not prioritize such threats. Has a couple of examples of cases where online threats have been followed up, including an Islamist who was convicted of threatening Abid Raja [Norwegian politician], and a few other examples."

Participant type 1 P8 is used to people being condescending, ridiculing, and the like. She also says she gets indirect threats like "you should watch out what you post online, or else... It's something like 90 percent negative and against my opinion and ten percent that agrees with me. Being in such often toxic space, I have had to get myself a tough skin to not let this get really into me." She thinks this has gotten a lot to do with her age and being confident in herself. "This would have affected me way more if I was younger like your age [student/researcher - age:25]"

"No experience with threats and the like, more that I heard about it [getting threats online] and more for women than for men is my understanding." - P9

It was an occurring theme that the participants had heard of users getting threats in this space, but only a few had actually experienced it. Though there was a common answer where everybody that talked about it meant it was terrible for the online debate space and should not exist. No one admitted to giving threats themselves.

Hate speech

Hate speech is comments that are illegal and one can be judged accordingly, this is described in paragraph 185 in the Norwegian law ¹.

Expert participant When asked about risks, exp1 said that there is a small minority that is exposed to hate speech when being in the online debate space so it is a clear risk, but not something that's common. "But in general, when most people express their opinions online, it is not the case that you then receive a ton of hate speech, but the topic is, of course, an important factor here and which forum you have expressed yourself in. However, we see that those who are first exposed to hate speech experience negative emotional reactions in the form of being upset and scared. We also see a tendency with withdrawal from these, that they become more careful about saying their opinion in public."

¹<https://lovdata.no/dokument/NL/lov/2005-05-20-28/KAPITTEL2> – 5185

exp2: "There are many media outlets that dropped their online discussion forum because they did not want to be a platform for hate speech in fear that he would inspire someone to commit actions."

He also later said this about hate speech in online debate spaces: "When it comes to hate speech, it is more effectively dehumanizing to write learned and intelligently written content that is racist but sounds better than a quick silly hateful comment. You will not be charged with hate speech if you write a racist post with footnotes and talk about gen polo with curves and stuff. There is a class dimension to the issue of freedom of expression. Those who are caught for hate crimes online are the resource-poor."

Hate speech was not mentioned by a lot of the informants as their thought of risk in the online debate space, as not many had seen something they thought was as bad as it could be categorized as hate speech and thus be illegal. Though some participants had some thoughts about it.

Time-consuming

Using big chunks of time debating online was the most common answer to what risks and/or consequences the participant had when debating online. Ranging from being a few hours a week to several hours a day online finding information, writing posts, or commenting on other posts. This led to some of the participants feeling bad for their close ones that they could not be more present with them.

Participant type 1 P10 says that she gets addicted to writing posts, which causes her to use a lot of time in the online debate space.

P12 uses a lot of time when writing her posts, first, she needs to know for sure that the information she provides is real, then she makes sure the post is written without errors in an easy to understanding way and without any clear mistakes.

P11 which where one of the participants uses most time online said he does get some abstinence when not being online for a longer period, but do say he is not that addictive that he needs it all the time. And is mindful of not going into the useless threads.

"You know it [being active in the online debate space] takes so much time, there is always someone to answer, some threads to join, or some topics to start a discussion on. Time flies, so I always calculate it to take the whole evening if I decide to start." -P6

Participant type 2 "I have a lot more time now that I am not active debating or being a part of a group on social media and the like. Makes me use my time for better, more important things, like writing." - P17

Losing reputation

Other common risks of being in the online debate space were that you can easily lose reputation if you decide to join certain debate topics. Some gave examples of professors getting in trouble for speaking their minds on topics that are heated and sensitive.

Expert participant Exp3 talked about losing social capital if you decided to speak against the left side of the political debate. She felt that one can barely say anything on certain topics before being stigmatized as a phobic or something similar to the topic or you get put in a box with other people you clearly do not identify with. Another type of answer in this category was that one can not get a specific job because of the things one has published online.

Exp2 doesn't get affected by threats to any degree, but sees that to be canceled as his biggest risk being active in the online debate space. "I think more about being canceled, which is constantly heard about, as my biggest risk. I choose my battles carefully. Am uncomfortable discussing things I have no idea about. When I know something, I'm not modest, I quickly say that you have no idea about this, I know more than you, as I have researched Islam for over 30 years, I know more than most."

Participant type 1 P5 thinks his biggest risk being active in the public online discussion is the possibility of saying something that gets him stigmatized or makes him look bad. "Part of my living is to sell myself into the business world, I don't want to have people avoiding having something to do with me because of how I am perceived online. I have had messages from political colleagues telling me something I said looks bad for the political party."

When P7 mentioned being socially excluded from family and friends as a clear risk of being in the online debate space, he told me an experiment a journalist did. He decided to participate in the online debate with extreme opinions, he noticed that people pulled themselves away from him, his close friends did things without inviting him, etc. After hearing about this experiment he noticed a friend on Facebook that had similar views as the journalist where he was very condescending and going hard out against the infection control measures. "So I reach out to him, told him my own views, and discussed with him, there were, of course, a lot of disagreement. He told me that his sister didn't want anything to do with him anymore. asked him how he was doing and about his views and where they come from etc, he said he gets so upset by what people write. It's important that the ones closest to them are holding them back because everyone is exposed to conspiracy theories, and when we see someone getting too into them it is important not to dismiss them but rather to like them for who they are and be with them."

For P8, the main risk was losing friends and family because of her opinions

online. She is afraid of being misunderstood and stigmatized for something she is not.

"I noticed neighbors and parents of my children off and not wanting to talk to me as much because I had become that woman with these crazy that choose to take a stand and write about things, I fully believe to be true but are not aligned with the mainstream views." -P12

Participant type 2 P16 is not threading lightly when presenting his perceived risk of being in the online debate space. "You can ruin your life, lose your reputation, and get accused of things that are not true."

P17 said that getting your personality torn to shreds in public space was a risk. "I felt this storm of Internet users telling me how wrong I was talking about extreme people online. These comments, you can not point out politely where we disagree or where I think he was wrong, means that I can not get back up on my feet easily. It foes on my credibility, my whole personality is in doubt. It would be very hard to endure if I did not know I was right. Like young people writing their first post, a bit clumsy moralistic post, then there are adults that get angry from this. You need a tough skin to be in this space."

Risks in real life

Having one personal information exposed online is a common characteristic when participating in online debates. Therefore, some of my participants said that one's personal or even sensitive information could be used against them. Either in an attempt to attack the other user, or to get them in the real world.

Participant type 1 This happened to P11 where his boss got some mails and phone calls telling him how bad this person had behaved online and that he shouldn't have the job etc. He also received an envelope that was covered with stamps, in it were a list of two hundred points against Muslims in Norway. "I did report it to PST, they close the case even with obvious threats. "

"...They are good at writing to my boss, I have had several people send messages telling him all these negative things about me, also giving threats, etc." -P11

P7 has increased his home security with recommendations from PST because of possible repercussions by having a public voice in the online debate space.

Participant type 2 Another participant (P17) told me about "doxing" and "swatting" that are pretty common in the USA. "Doxing has become a tactic some use to get people. This is when someone posts information about an individual (often in a group), like the home address, where he/she work etc and says something like "do what you will with this information". There have been some examples of this happening in Norway, someone shows up at the victim's home address or calls their work telling them about their views of his/her behavior online. An even

worse version of this is swatting where one calls the police or swat team and says that this person (the online person they want to get) is dangerous with weapons and needs to be taken care of immediately, this is his address.”

Encourage violence and hate

There are a lot of forums encouraging violence and hate against certain groups or politics. Even though many are meant as humor and memes, there are some serious and could be misunderstandings of this content.

Expert participant Exp2 mentioned this as a possible risk in the online debate space. "It is still my concern that the normalization of the extreme standpoint, first and foremost the normative extreme standpoints, the fact that one violates someone's utterances through words. It dehumanizes and then lowers the threshold for violence and, in the worst case, murder. But over time, there are very many who have been exposed to hateful, dehumanizing utterances, but still, there is a very modest minority who commit violence against political opponents, immigrants, etc., so that there is no easy one to one relationship between hateful utterance and violent acts.

It is a risk in these forums that you use hateful statements and mental images that encourage violence, but where you do not expect ordinary people to do anything. But if a mentally disturbed person in this environment sees these urges, he may think it's okay or actually good to go around committing violent acts. In short, I am not afraid that mentally disturbed people will capture what is being said by humanizing rhetoric, but that dehumanizing rhetoric will be normalized in such a way that it has consequences for politics and the like in the form of physical violence."

5.3.5 Chilling effect

Chilling effect is the phenomenon where individuals or groups refrain from engaging in various contexts like discussion and debates because of the fear of the repercussions of doing so. When given this question, some participants didn't know what this phenomenon was, and when they learned about it said they thought it was present to a degree or said immediately that it was highly present.

Sub research question 2 - Is there an chilling effect in the Norwegian online debate space				
Participant answer	Expert participant	Participant type 1	Participant type 2	Total answers
Present	Exp1, Exp2, Exp3	P1, P2, P3, P4, P5, P6, P7, P8, P9, P10, P12, P13	P14, P15, P16, P17	19
Highly present	Exp3	P1, P3, P8, P10, P12, P13	P16, P17	9
Not present	-	P11	-	1
The groups most affected	Exp1, Exp3	P3, P4, P5, P7, P9, P11, P12	P16, P17	11
Negative effects of the chilling effect	Exp1	P1, P7, P8, P13	P15, P17	7

5.3.6 Present

Almost all of the participants said that they thought the chilling effect was present in the Norwegian online debate space because they could see the reasons certain people didn't dare to speak up in this space even if they wanted to because of negative feedback or other repercussions.

Expert participant The expert participant Exp1 have some research-based answer to the question of chilling effect in the Norwegian online debate space. "Yes, we see that it is present, but to what extent that effect is large or small, is it something worth caring about or not. But we clearly find that some people experience being scared away from speaking out. It is important to emphasize that this applies not only to those who have direct experience of receiving incitement, hatred, and threats, but can also apply to people who have observed others who receive this, and with it creates an awareness of what the online debate can be. Also as mentioned, it is disturbing then and a challenge that it is not entirely coincidental who it is that is scared from participating. There are some special groups that are scared away to a greater degree than others, and these groups are also recognizable historically to have been less present in the debate."

Highly present

A lot of participants said that the chilling effect was highly present in the online debate space.

Expert participant Exp3 said that the politically correct movement plays a big role in creating the chilling effect where you can suddenly get the Internet mob after you if you say what in their opinion is the wrong thing. "Yes, there is a high degree of chilling effect present in the online debate space. I know several people, and some of these are experts in their field, but do not dare to say anything in the public online debate space because they know how much negative pushback they will get for having an opinion on this topic." - Exp3

Participant type 1 P1 said this when asked if the chilling effect was present in the Norwegian online debate space: "Yes absolutely. There are certain things that are so inflamed. Some researchers within Covid who do not dare to enter the online debate for the debate climate are as tough as they are. I do not think it is so easy to regulate it, we must get a change of attitude so that we behave more properly. Crosses a line when convening the human resources department due to something that is said in the online debate."

P3 had felt the Internet mob's real presence one time after she and two friends made a podcast talking about something that triggered them, she made an observation of most of these users. "When they [Twitter users] starts getting momentum in their negativity towards me I noticed that most of them didn't even listen to the podcast episode, but just jumped into the debate based on what others had commented previously."

Participant type 2 Participant P16 (previously active debater) felt the chilling effect to be clearly present and had a clear understanding of how it could be as it is. "It is difficult to go into the [online public] debate to say what I stand for. I have gotten so much hate from it. You have to be willing to take this negativity and to often stand in it alone. Nobody wants that, it was the reason I left, getting my opinions out in the public debate is not that important. I have friends I like to debate with in real life. The main problem for me isn't the hate I get, because I can handle that, it's more the fact that I get presented as something totally different from what I stand for." Last on this topic, he presents advice to people not active in the online debate space "Keep away from the [online] debate space if you want the best for yourself. "

Not present

Participant type 1 There was only one participant (P11) that were skeptical if the chilling effect were present in the online debate space. He said that he didn't think people were staying away from the online debate space because of any repercussion of being there, but rather that people just didn't feel like spending time debating on the Internet, which he felt were perfectly logical to not want. "No, I don't think it is a chilling effect present. Some people don't want to be a part of the

online debate, but I don't think it's because they are afraid of it. It takes up a lot of time if you choose to be active here [Facebook] debating." Though he did admit later on that he could understand some minority groups being afraid to get a lot of negative feedback as he had been a witness to something like this happening.

The groups most affected

When asked which groups they thought were most likely to feel the chilling effect, the most common answer was minority groups like immigrants or people of color.

Participant type 1 Like P5 said about these groups "It's a lot tougher [to debate] when people go against your identity, get quickly checkmated, not much you can do. A lot worse than people disagreeing with what you say." P5 also said that there has been a threat assessment of political women where they found that one in ten has considered to withdraw [from politics] because of the harassing and ridiculing from social media and media.

"A minority women in the left side of the political spectrum in SV, with everything she says there are always answers that target her hijab and identity. These are mechanics used to try to take away the freedom of speech." -P11

Expert participant Exp1's answer is also in alignment with most of the participants. "Women, various minorities, and people with an immigrant background. See [in the research] that the more minority characteristics you have the greater the likelihood that you will hold back. People who belong to a historically stigmatized and marginalized group are also those who are most at risk of disappearing in the public debate."

Exp3 agree "I feel that minority groups like immigrants are most affected by the chilling effect, there are a lot of people that are against immigration, so if they try to speak up on the topic they will probably get a lot of negative feedback, and being harassed for your background and how you look is the worst."

Exp3 also said "I have also some friends that are affected by the chilling effect when it comes to the corona pandemic. This has become such a sensitive topic, so even though she is an expert in this field and has useful knowledge to contribute with, she does not want to expose herself in the online debate space because of the repercussions and pushbacks she would get."

Negative effects of the chilling effect

Some of my participants felt the chilling effect present in the public debate space had some negative effects on the public debate and therefore also the democracy.

Expert participant Exp1 had some clear thoughts about the negative effects of the chilling effect: "What is dangerous about the chilling effect is that you lose certain perspectives and certain voices disappear. For it is not 50 plus men with

jobs in newsrooms who are scared away from the debate, but it is rather the voices that are not present in the first place. It is dangerous that such a climate of debate threatens the diversity of perspectives and voices."

Participant type 1 "It is very serious [the chilling effect]. You limit your settings because you get a lot of negative comments and disagreements, but we are in a completely different class of threats when it comes to losing your job. It is like the Soviet Union level of the chilling effect." - P1

He continues talking about the importance of a diverse debate: "I think it is very important to have a diverse public debate where people dare to say what they think. As the public debate as a phenomenon a lot, and it is important that this is enlightened and releases a diversity of opinion where one is not afraid of losing their job, I think that is very important and a prerequisite for democracy simply." -P1

For P8, having a voice in the public debate space is detrimental for her cause. "The democracy can not stand if we do not dare engage us. I have therefore considered starting a course on how to debate online, how to take care of/safeguard your own integrity while putting your own opinions online."

P7 Feel the online debate space has changed a lot these last couple of years, with an increasing threat to democracy with the freedom of speech being violated. "This influences the debate where you need to have a thick skin in order to join the public debate, which again leads the threshold for joining much higher. We lose important voices in the discussion."

"If it becomes a culture of things we are not supposed to say to not seem offensive, there will become a more narrow corridor of meaning, which will make it more difficult to get through to a shared sense of truth and meaning." - P13

Participant type 2 "Some voices do not appear in the public debate because they feel they are too controversial, this creates a divide in democracy and prevents them from getting away with it in a way, even if they have thorough analyzes and is based on facts and has good points it is difficult to come up with because different opinions are not welcome as they are deferred immediately. This is something that is especially prevalent in the corona pandemic. You should not say something that can weaken the spirit of service, everyone must be behind the same information and such." - P15

P17 clearly feels there is a narrower meaning corridor with a lot of people that are afraid to express themselves. He claims the woke culture in the USA is an important contributing factor to this. "It's more social justice than truth now, though in a democracy we should be together in discussion finding out together where the truth it should be together in discussion towards truth."

5.3.7 Reason for keep coming back

What is the reason the online debaters I interviewed are kept coming back to the public online debate space?

Research question 3 - Reason for keep coming back				
Participant answer	Expert participant	Participant type 1	Participant type 2	Total answers
Be the voice you wish to see	-	P8, P12	-	2
Gain reputation	-	P1, P6, P7, P9, P10	-	5
A need for debating	Exp2	P12	-	2
Make new connections	-	P4, P7, P8, P9, P13	-	5
Learning outcome	-	P3, P7	-	2

Be the voice you wish to see

Some of the participants decide to be in the online debate space to be a good example of a voice they themselves wish they saw more of.

Participant type 1 "I am not participating in the online debate space to try to convince the ones on the other side debating against me, I'm doing it for the silent majority that are watching the debates and what I write, to be a good example for them" -P8

P12: "I have studied this for fourteen years, went deep into the rabbit hole, I felt I had to do this now to get the information out there. I do this for me because my conscience tells me I have to do this, there is so much misinformation out there." She continues later on this thread on why she is in the online debate space: "I do this for the silent majority that sees my comments and posts but do not dare to comment or post themselves. I have gotten a lot of messages from these people saying that they love what I do and say how strong I am of staying in it even though I get so much pushback. "

P12 also feels the mainstream media and a lot of the information out there is a direct abuse against us as the Norwegian people. "As long as the society is where it is now I will continue spreading my message".

Gain reputation

Some of my participants said that being active in debates and social media was seen as absolutely necessary for their career and/or living, this was especially prevalent in the politicians I interviewed.

Participant type 1 "For me, it is a low-threshold way to promote important issues and my views on them, a good way to get in touch with voters as a politician. It is an important factor if being a local politician. Also often very giving, get in contacts with other politicians, have good conversations that don't have these vague, gibberish answers, which is also important for the local voters." -P6

P7 said many of the same things when asked this question "Spread messages that are important to convey to the world, get my policy out to as many people as possible. Most importantly for me is for people and voters to understand why I think different issues are important, what I spend time on and what I fight for. The Internet is a great way to reach a lot of people with minimum effort, being active in online debates can be a great way to gain reputation and followers. Especially when, as a politician, my job depends on my reputation in the community."-P7

A need for debating

Having a place where one can vent one's opinions and emotions was a factor that was shared by some of my participants.

Expert participant "...And then you have the individual dimension - that someone really loves debating, and I have been that myself since I was a teenager. For me, this has to do with the expression of opinion, that anyone can express themselves about anything. Great development from before when you had to get a place in the reader's contributions in the newspaper and the like so that people could hear your opinion about things." - Exp2

Participant type 1 "I love to write, and there is a real joy of putting together a post I am happy with" -P12

Make new connections

From being active in the online debate space they make new connections with people from all over the country or even the world. Especially prevalent if they find someone with the same opinions and views as themselves.

Participant type 1 P4, P7, P9, and P13 all said that they see the online debate platforms as ways to get connections with people.

"I have found so many great people after joining the online debate on Facebook especially. It is so nice finding other people with similar views, who have done the same amount of research and found similar answers. Makes me feel less lonely." - P8

Learning outcome

Being exposed to so much information and discussions make it a great place to learn, not only about the information you see, but also about yourself, and how well your arguments hold.

Participant type 1 P3 Gets a lot of positive learning outcomes from being active here. She says she learned a lot about things she is interested in - a channel for insight.

P7 thinks that getting constant feedback is a way to remain on top of his own argument and change them when appropriate feedback seems to be correct. "A great way to keep me on top of my political game".

Participant type 2 "I have gained a lot of my education from the Internet and from the experience of being in online debates - there is nothing better than a good debate I learn so much from a good debate" -P17

5.3.8 Ways to make the online debate space better

What did my informants answer when I asked how they thought the online debate space could be improved.

Research question 1 - the online debate climate				
Participant answer	Expert participant	Participant type 1	Participant type 2	Total answers
Participants responsibility to make it better	Exp2	P1, P7, P10	-	4
No anonymity	Exp3	P1, P2, P5	-	4
Better moderation	Exp1	P10, P12, P13	-	4

Participants responsibility to clean up the mess where they see it

Participant type 1 Just like when you hike in the woods or on a mountain you pick up the trash you see because it ruins the experience for everyone, online users often in the debate space should tell the debaters they see ruining the debate space that they should try to behave better. -P10

That I say it in a nice way that I think you should delete that tweet because it is personal characteristics or something like that. Then it is not uncommon for people to do it and think yes, it was maybe a bit on the edge or racist. So maybe it should be a popular jury that decides what is good content and not for a debate. We must create an attitude among ourselves where we do not think such language is acceptable. -P7

You have to crack down on people that say meaningless, condescending opinions and comments. I try to do this myself, I do it almost daily, and it is often effective." -P1

Expert participant Exp2 said that the most important thing of all is the response from users and debaters that see hateful and unnecessary comments. "...to say that you should not have said this, I think you should delete this post as it is offensive. The environment is the most important factor in developing a decent public discourse. We all have a responsibility for the improvement of the public discourse. We must have a public jury."

No anonymity

Having no anonymity in the online debate space were considered one of the most effective way of getting a better debate on the Internet.

Participant type 1 To solve this anonymity issue that the online debate space can have, some participants said that there should be a new social media platform that is based on having a productive debate. "...there should be bank-id level of publicity in order to be able to join this new platform of public debate, people should have the right to know who they are debating and that they are debating in a public room with their full name visible. I think this would cause at least some better communication because you loose the uses that are hiding behind an avatar and fake name and think they can say whatever they like because there is no consequences."- P5

P2 also feels anonymity plays a large role in that the debate space can be toxic. "Online debate tends to be very toxic. It's so clear because you have this anonymous shield that lets you be a keyboard warrior.

"...A lot of the replies [of the toxicity part] is coming from anonymous people, but not only (and some of these you would have thought better of) but anonymity is probably important because it gives a volume to it." - P1

Better moderation

Moderation plays a big part in keeping the online debate space under certain boundaries and regulations. When asked how the debate space could be improved, a lot of participants mentioned moderation as the most important factor to get right. Though how to get it properly functioned in the public online debate space were not as easy to answer and provided some very different type of answers.

Participant type 1 P10 said that moderation should be more present in the online debate space.

There were several participants that felt moderation was often done unfairly, especially on the most popular social media platform Facebook. P13 said that he got censored for speaking his mind on certain issues. P12 had several times gotten warnings from Facebook because of her content.

Expert participant Exp1 said that when moderators are clearly present and manage to set the tone of the online debate to an acceptable level by very explicitly reminding the rules of the game from the start, one manages to prevent an immediate escalation.

5.3.9 Privacy

Research question 5 - Privacy				
Participant answer	Expert participant	Participant type 1	Participant type 2	Total answers
Care about it	-	P2, P4, P12	P14, P16, P17	6
Don't want to violate privacy of others	-	P4, P7, P10, P13	-	4
Too much privacy focus	Exp2	P1	-	2
Should care more	-	P5, P6, P7, P8	-	4
Aware, but doesn't do anything about it	-	P1, P3, P11, P12	P14, P15	5

Care about it

A lot wanted to care about privacy because they understood the importance of preserving it and caring, but practically it is not easy to do it seemed.

Participant type 1 "I would like to leave the least amount of data as possible because it is a huge system that is monitoring everything that you do. It is very frightening what is happening in China now with mass surveillance. It's dangerous with new technologies, if they get used in the wrong way, that's why I like to leave the least amount of trail." -P4

"Very important to me, I don't post sensitive information online or personal information about my children. I am cautious not to agree to every box that pops up when I enter a website." -P12

"I can't always be aware of all the possible consequences my data have. Therefore I approach it with a precautionary principle that if my data has no possible

way of getting out, then there are no problems. I care about privacy, use the privacy browser DuckDuckGo and other privacy-focused tools like that." - P2

Participant type 2 P16 tries to restrict his own use in social media to limit the data he gives to these big corporations. He uses a privacy mail as well as the privacy-focused browser DuckDuckGo.

Don't want to violate the privacy of others

Participant type 1 There is one thing to care about one's self privacy and the information one chooses to put out in the world, but a whole another thing to care about the privacy of others that don't get the chance to approve. Like P4 said, "I wouldn't post pictures of children there [Facebook], I am very afraid of violating the privacy of others."

P7 also answered something similar: "Very aware on what information I share of a private character, careful not to show a picture of where I live and of offices and such. "

Too much privacy focus

There was two participants that didn't like how much focus privacy has gotten in the last couple of years with the introduction of GDPR.

Participant type 1 "I do not care much about privacy and about protecting the data I provide from me being online. I think it has gone too far with personal data, it is almost not possible to conduct research anymore, there are such strict ethical regulations around it." - P1

Expert participant Exp2 also doesn't like the GDPR because it's too detailed. "I protest against signing such consents. Don't like GDPR because it is too detailed."

Should care more

Seeing the importance of privacy and wanting to care and do more was the most common answer from the participant. There were a few different reasons they didn't care as much as they would like. First of all, the convenience of not bothering about privacy when browsing the Internet was a big one.

Participant type 1 People don't want to read through privacy rules and regulations when surfing the Internet. "It is the convenience that gets us and then we get trapped by it. I do sometimes use [the privacy-focused browser] Duckduckgo, but it is not as convenient. You know google tend to give better search results, and a lot of login information is connected to my user account on Chrome."-P8

Some participants felt the design of privacy should be different in order to get more people to really care about their privacy. For instance, P6 said that he thinks the default option on whether you agree with the cookies when entering a website should be no. Then websites should focus on operating without taking data from their users, and if people would like to get specialized ads and websites they can choose to say yes.

Different stories from the participant's experience of how searching online and/or having the phone listen to conversations and specific words being used were common to hear from them. From P7, "I just searched the web for some shoes I needed and quickly found someone I liked and went and bought them. But after this, there were a lot of days afterward where every social media and website I went into had ads that were related to those shoes I bought. It was annoying because I didn't need it anymore.

"I think it is an important topic and something I should pay more attention to. But I use these information-grabbing websites and browsers, and then I get these commercials for two weeks after I searched for it once, it's ridiculous. And when I'm going into websites I just accept everything, I want to see the website I clicked into, not read some privacy-based checkboxes." -P5

Some of the participants admit that they should care more about their privacy because they think their data is an important asset that needs to be better-taken care of.

Aware, but doesn't do anything about it

Every participant was aware of privacy and the debate going around it. But there were some that didn't really care about the repercussions of giving out data online.

"Fully aware that it exists, and I am a bit careful that I don't blindly consent to everything, but I don't care too much about the information and data I put out there, If they want my information there are a lot of ways to get it, already registered in a lot of different systems. Don't use too much time in protecting myself."

P11 has mixed feelings about privacy, he cares about his own personal information and won't post that. He used nicknames when debating previously because he wanted to mask his identity, but now he uses his full name, which he sees positive and negative sides with. "Don't care that much about leaving behind my data, have already given out so much, don't feel like its a point in starting to care about that side of privacy now."

Chapter 6

Discussion

6.1 Discussion of the result

Here I will go through the most important findings from each research question. In each research question, I will first begin by discussing the research question and whether it was answered based on the result and compare them to the related literature.

6.1.1 How is the Norwegian online debate space climate?

The purpose of this research question was to get users in the online debate space point of view when it comes to the climate and dynamic here. It worked well as an introductory question as I could get a sense of how the informant viewed and experienced this space so as to know where they stand. The result section shows the answers to this research question which address how my participants think about the question of the online debate climate. As we can see from the answers, the direction which they went with was with a notion that the climate in the online debate space is negative and a problem. The theme of answer from most of the participants was to focus on how the climate is in terms of how people and groups of people behave in the internet discussion format.

The first answer was formed around participants answering that group affiliation has a big influence on how the climate is in the online debate space. This was something a lot of type 1 participants had experienced to some degree, either having had groups go against them or seen this type of group behavior. It was also considered to be a positive characteristic of the online debate climate since it is easier to find a group you feel affiliated with and can feel free to discuss with like-minded people.

The next answer, echo chamber, came from 10 participants across all types that thought of this as an important way to describe the climate here. The same was true for the answer "Polarisation and trench warfare". Both of these two answers build upon a belief that the online debate space climate has a lot of bad ways of discussing and is what can define the dynamic here. These answers are backed

up by the paper [20] by Karlsen et al. where indeed echo chambers and trench warfare is found to be a significant part of what makes up the dynamic of online discussions. Echo chamber is also mentioned as something occurring in the online debate space in the papers [30], [2] and [10].

Then there were three participants one, expert and two participant type one that felt the online debate space climate had a tendency to form extremist behavior. The participants underlined that these are rare, but that they still had witnessed it or had friends who had witnessed it. Exp2 said that even though there are more extreme forms of debate online there haven't been many cases of physical violence that have come out of it. The literature also has some equally views on extremism in the online debate space, like the Danish study [1] found that it was hate speech present in Facebook but still not dominant and that the moderators block the most hateful content. The article [27] also focuses on hate speech and extreme tendencies in the online debate space, but claims here it comes mostly from groups towards other groups and that they justify it by claiming a far more powerful enemy that they need to stand up against.

The last answer from this research question states that the online debate space is underrated and better than what is portrayed by media and people in general. A common answer from the eight participants here was that the online debate space is mostly a good place for discussion but that there are some people and some topics that create a negative reinforcement loop, and that this engagement causes the news headlines and gets the focus of the debate space climate. This was especially the expert's standpoint. There was no related literature that I found that had this particular answer as their focus.

The answers in this section were mostly as anticipated, most of them immediately started to address the negative sides of other debaters and how toxic and messy this place can be. As expected, there was a lot of emphasis on the group affiliation aspect in the online debate space. From the research literature group, mechanics are enhanced in the online debate space, so it was not surprising that many of the keywords I have read from studying this topic were also mentioned by the majority of the informants. These were polarization, echo chambers, group affiliation, trench warfare, and extremism. From each of these keywords, I got different representations on how these contribute to a negative climate in the online debate space. Interestingly, the participants had a lot of experience of other users doing things they perceived as a negative contribution to the discussion, but only very rarely said that they themselves also indulged in this kind of behavior even when being directly asked about this by the interviewer. There could be a bias here where the participants don't feel comfortable telling me about their own misbehavior, or that they simply ignore or don't look at their own behavior as wrong even though a lot of users would say otherwise. Of course there probably are some of the participants that don't contribute negatively to the online debate space. An interesting and unexpected point made here was Exp2's description of echo chambers that he rather referred to as more of a greenhouse effect. This made a lot of sense and was a good example of showing how group affiliation can make

a message or ideology a lot stronger by introducing it to these echo chambers or greenhouse effects that occur in a lot of online forums and platforms.

What factors did contribute most to the negative reputation of the online debate space according to my participants?

After asking the neutral question how is the Norwegian online debate climate, I asked a more leading question, following up on some of the participant's answers about the negative side of the debate climate, which everybody I spoke to focused on in some sense without me leading them into it.

The rhetoric of the online debaters was mentioned by 11 participants across the types. This being on the top is not that surprising as this is who the users here are experiencing firsthand. When being asked directly why my participant thinks there is a negative reputation, they think of the one they have actually experienced from, which is the users in the online debate space. From my related literature, there are also many research papers stating that the rhetoric of active online debate users can often be direct without thinking of the receiver at the other end. [2], [20], [27] and [26] all go into the behavior of online debaters that negatively affects other users.

Social media design was the second type of answer to this question. 8 participants answered this, with all the experts agreeing that social media algorithms and design played a role in the online debate space having a negative reputation. The related literature does have some theory on this answer, especially the paper [21] that explored social media design and how it contributes to more polarisation in online discussions.

The last type of answer that came up during this question was that the media have some blame for the negative reputation the online debate space has. This answer was mostly represented by the expert participant 3 that had a strong sense that when the media focus on mostly the negative aspects of the online discussion taking place, this forms the way everyday people feel about it and talk about it even though they don't have that much experience. From her own experience, the debate space wasn't as bad as is the general consensus. From the related literature, author D. Olweus [4] argues that cyberbullying is an overrated phenomenon that is greatly exaggerated by the media. In the paper "Facts and Fears: Understanding Perceived Risk", the author Slovic et al. [31] have availability as one where biases occur. Here people judge an event as likely or frequent if it is easy to recall, the authors take the media as an example here, that if people hear about a certain topic from the media, like how bad people behave online, they will think it happens more often than it really does.

This question was only answered by three participants which shows it is not something at least people think about as the biggest factor to the negative reputation, but still, it is one of three found by the answers of the participants in this thesis.

When it comes to

the most heated debate topic , which was another sub-question here, the answers here were pretty similar to what I was expecting from research done previously. Topics like immigration, climate, gender, etc. were mentioned by other literature [2] and [1] as topics that can cause so-called heated debates in the online debate space. Some of the low mentioned topics I have not seen before but were only mentioned by a few informants. The only huge differential was the topic of Corona making a lot of heated debates. Because this pandemic happened during the last year it is not surprising this topic was a differential here.

The research question and its sub-questions were, as shown above, answered. There was a clear consensus among the participant that the Norwegian online debate space climate had toxic elements in it and gave reason to it having the bad reputation it has. There was a clear consensus that there were some topics causing heated debates and these were similar to what I had from related literature, except for the topic of the corona.

6.1.2 What are the risks of participating in online debates?

The main research question for this thesis. The question here was aimed to get the participant's perception of which risks they perceive is present in the online debate space from both their own experience and use of it, but also in terms of what they have heard or seen as risks here. There were three risks that got the most attention from the participants, as this was the closest to their experience/reality. The rest didn't get as much traction but is more focused on the related work, which is an indication that it happens more rarely, but that they are more serious when they happen.

Common risk participants mentioned was getting overwhelming negative feedback from other users. A total of 11 participants thought of this when asked what they perceived as risks in the online debate space. A lot of users here have experienced it happening in these spaces. From their answers, it seems that it is something one has to get used to in order to be in this online debate space. Like Exp1 and her paper [2] said about people that use a lot of time in comment sections, "they develop a tough skin, in order to deal with all of the negativity and hurtful comments thrown at them". I got that impression myself after talking to a lot of the participants. They saw it as a risk, getting so many negative comments, and didn't like it, but just said that they deleted or blocked them and weren't that much affected by it.

Time-consuming is not the most severe risk in terms of damage physical or mental but is still something my participant felt were very relevant to this topic of risks in the online debate space. Though no experts saw this as big enough of a risk to mention it. It still shows people caring about how they use their time and that spending time discussing and debating can be bigger than expected. Whether this use of time is seen as waste or use is up to the debater themselves. From my participants, it was different views. Some mean that this use of time was absolutely essential in order to write the best post and comments. Others were more negative

towards their own use of time, calling it a waste of time and claiming that they used way more time on this than they intended when they first got involved. There was no literature I found that specifically pointed out that debating online consumes a lot of time for some individuals.

The last answer in this category that got the most amounts of answers here was losing reputation as a risk being in the online debate space. Exp3 explained it as losing social capital when choosing to debate on unpopular or controversial topics. These answers were both something my participant had witnessed happening to other users they knew or something that had directly happened to them. This topic of losing reputation when uttering opinions on the world wide web is something that is popular in media, but there is also some scientific literature that goes into this topic. The paper "Social media? It's serious! Understanding the dark side of social media" [10], talks about getting a bad reputation from the social media mob getting after one as a part of the dark side of social media. "On social media, people are guilty until proven innocent".

Threats and hate speech are two that didn't have that many answers from participants (4 2) but have a more heavy risk and consequence in the online debate space. The paper "Gray zones and online border crossings: A study of participants in heated and aggressive online debates" [2] goes more deeply into these topics. These were not that often mentioned as they are not something you see every day online. Though there were some of the participants that had experienced threats. But since they were used to so much negative feedback, threats didn't affect them as much, similar to what M. Nadim et al. said in their paper [2] about debaters here getting tough skin. Hate speech so bad as being deemed as illegal was not something the participant had witnessed, which speaks for the case that Exp1 brought up that it is just a small minority that is exposed to hate speech in the online debate space.

Risks in real life were only mentioned by three participants and were mostly based on things they have heard or read about, not something they have had direct experience with. The same can be said of Encourage violence and hate. The answers that were mentioned were experiences from reading about online behavior and how it relates to violence and hateful behavior. Exp2 was worried this could happen because of the sheer amount of hateful comments that exist online but said that actual violence being a result of online behavior was low.

There were two risks that I have got from researching this topic, mostly from "Social media? It's serious! Understanding the dark side of social media" [10], that was not mentioned by the participants. These are the risk of addiction to being here and the risk of being exposed to fake news and misinformation. It is not that easy to see yourself as addicted to something before it is too late, so the informants didn't feel it was that bad yet. Though there were some (P8, P11, P12) that used a lot of time every day here (4-8 hours). The risk of being exposed to fake news and misinformation is quite similar in that you don't know that you are being exposed to misinformation, or else you would not believe it. I would also think that exposing their own privacy would be mentioned as a risk to being active

in the online debate space, but this was not mentioned in this question. Though when I asked later specifically about privacy, the participants said that they see it as more important to not expose the privacy of others, but some did also admit they should care more about their own privacy.

The answers I got in this section were mostly expected, from the related work section I have looked at most of these as potential risks or consequences of being in the online debate space. The exception here must be time-consuming as I haven't seen that one before. It was also the one most people answered, but also the one with the least amount of consequence. It was interesting seeing that losing reputation was this high up in terms of what people answered. It shows that there is a lot of experience from people that have heard of or experienced losing some sense of reputation from something that has been said online. This again causes people to be afraid of saying the wrong things because they don't want to end up losing their jobs, or friends, and family.

This research question was answered in a lot of different ways by my informants. All of them clearly thought the online debate space to have risks and consequences in it, and it was interesting seeing all the different things the participants thought of as risks here.

Is there a chilling effect present in the Norwegian online debate space?

This sub-question of the risk research question aimed to find out more information on why some voices are not present in the online debate space and for whom is it most present. Even though not every participant had heard of this effect, after I explained it to them, almost everyone had the same notion that this is definitely an effect present in the online debate space. Some felt it was potentially a problem to the future of debating and freedom of speech. Like the two students pointed out in my related work section about people being afraid to say what they really mean online, P16 said that he was an example of this. He had been an active debater here, but because of all the negativity and hurtful comments, as well as he gets portrayed as something he is not, made him not want to be a part of this debate space anymore. Many of the other informants understood why some voices didn't want to speak up and some (P1, Exp1, Exp3, etc.) went as far as to say that it is a big problem to our democracy and free speech. Every voice needs to be present in a democracy.

The groups that were most affected by the chilling effect according to my informants were immigrants, minorities (especially women), and women in general. Looking at the most heated debate topics, it is not difficult to understand that immigration and minorities are the groups most affected by the chilling effect as these topics are so heated with a lot of opinions. Though it was also totally different people that were affected by the chilling effect like Exp3 mentioned that experts in medicine do not want to speak up on the topic of coronavirus because there are so many different opinions about it, and the debates surrounding this topic can be toxic.

Only one participant said he didn't think there was a chilling effect present in the Norwegian online debate space, but that rather people just didn't want to participate in debates here. He did say later that he could understand that some types of the group would not want to speak up though. But in either way, with the numbers being 19 claiming it is present versus 1 claiming it is not, the evidence here shows it is highly present.

There was not that much scientific literature that had investigated the topic of chilling effect in the online debate space. One article by B. Marder et al. [8] did highlight the chilling effect as a real phenomenon present in Facebook and other social media sites.

From the article presented as a footnote in related works, the two students clearly present their own feelings about how they feel the chilling effect is present in the Norwegian online debate space ¹. This is quite similar to what some of my participants, especially Exp3, explained to me that she knew of several people, even some with medical degrees that were afraid to speak up in online public space.

The answer to this question is quite clear a big 'yes'. This sub-question was very interesting to look deeper into throughout the study and is something that should be more looked into how it can be approved.

6.1.3 What is it that makes people come back to the online debate space?

This research question was aimed to give a better understanding of why my participants choose to spend time being active in the online debate space. It was primarily aimed at participant type 1 as is reflected in the table showing which participant answered.

From the previous research, the paper "Why People Use Social Media Platforms: Exploring the Motivations and Consequences of Use" [23], has some reasoning for the motivation of using social media. The author named five value categories here, functional value, social value, emotional value, epistemic value, conditional value. From the five categories that were made from the answers from the participants, these can be put into these value categories as explanations for why they feel the importance to be active in this space.

Be the voice you wish to see is an emotional value of wanting to see more of a type of voice you feel is important for the conversation and future of debating. The comment P8 made is a good example of this, she said that she feel guilty if she were not active in this space to be a good example of the silent majority that feel the same as her but does not dare to speak up.

Gain reputation is a category that fits well into both functional and social value. Functional, because many of the participants said it was absolutely necessary for them to be active in the online debate space because of their career that makes them a public person with opinions where they want others to understand

¹<https://www.bt.no/btmeninger/debatt/i/Gar7GV/vi-toer-ikke-si-det-vi-egentlig-mener>

how they are thinking and why. It is also a social value because other participants want to feel a belonging by being active in the online debate space, it gets them better social capital by being active here. This can though go both ways as we saw in the risk section.

A need for debating is a category of answers that also fits well into the emotional and functional value. The participants that answered this have a need to vent their opinions and emotions in an arena. The online debate space functions well as this is, hence the functional value. These participants are very fond of debating.

Making new connections is in the social value category. They have a need to gain new connections and have experienced the online debate space to sometimes be an optimal place for this. They gain social capital and social connections.

Learning outcome is an epistemic value. It is the value of getting knowledge from being in this space that keeps them active here. Both the knowledge from reading and learning from others, but also the reinforcement of their own ideas and opinions they get from being active in debating.

This question gave me a better understanding of why my participants and users here, in general, choose to be active in this space. There was a wide variance of reasons for this, and the reason often reflected who the participant was.

6.1.4 How can the online debate space be improved?

This question was asked to make the participants that have first-hand experience from the online debate space information on how this space can be improved according to them. There was quite a decent bunch that passed on this question because they had no good answer for it.

All three answers had four participants each answering it.

With the first answer, participants responsibility to make it better, some of the participants meant that the only way to go in a positive direction of a better online debate space was to shift the way people behaved and the responsibility user have when they see something they see as wrong. They felt that users should be more strict when they see wrongdoings as then we can maybe go in a better direction to make the internet culture nicer to each other, which again makes for better conversations. Though this is a correct and good thought to have, the people answering it also said that they don't see it happening right away. There were a few that suggested a new debate platform in order to shift this way of thinking. The consensus was that they wanted an online debate space that was more focused on having a productive conversation instead of being only concerned with how to make money. Some said that they wanted strict login credentials to know that the person you are discussing with is really who they say they are.

In the answer no anonymity, the general consensus was that in their experience, most of the users behaving in insincere and toxic ways were those that were anonymous. This can be backed up by several related works of literature, like [10] and [2]. The participants thought getting away from anonymity would be an ef-

fective way of getting a better debate space. Even though this could be true, there is still a lot of valuable reasons to have anonymity on the internet as a possibility.

Better moderation was also a common answer here. There was a consensus among the answers here that moderation should be more present in the online debate space, as well as being fairer towards everybody. Like the research paper "Gray zones" [2] suggested, some of the participants there wanted a more fair moderation, they felt that some voices were actively silenced. Exp1 had some data that suggested that having moderators more clearly present sat a nicer tone in the debate. This could be a great way of getting a better debate space, but the resources needed to make moderators always be present are not possible to meet as of now.

This research question got answered with three possible ways of making the online debate space a better place to debate. Though in all of these one could make counterarguments as to why it probably won't work in today's Internet age. It is still important to know where the problem lies in order to come up with solutions for them.

6.1.5 What is the privacy concerns among online debaters?

This research question aims to give a better understanding of how Internet users think about privacy concerns. The expert participant was not questioned here as I wanted to know about the everyday Internet users,

There were quite mixed answers about the concern of privacy among the participants. Six of them said that they did care about privacy to such an extent that they were cautious to leave as little data trail as possible. Four participants said that they don't want to violate the privacy of others, and are care more about that than their own. The reason for this is that they have no consent from them and that it is a whole other thing to care about the privacy of others.

A common answer here was that they wanted to care more about privacy, but that it took too much time getting into it, and to care about privacy was not their biggest concern. A lot of these users said they would use a privacy-based browser or social media if it were more available. There was only a small portion of the participants that had heard of privacy-related browsers like DuckDuckGo. When I mentioned it to the most said they would look into it and try it out. But as P8 said, the trap of convenience they are already in will probably make them come back.

Two participants said that it was too much privacy focus now with the GDPR actively used. Their point was that as professors and doing research there is a lot of extra work that goes into caring and following the privacy rules.

The scientific paper "Analysis of Internet Users' Level of Online Privacy Concerns" makes a similar study showing the concern of Internet users. They found that there were small differences in privacy concerns, which is pretty similar to my finds, and that all were preferring privacy to convenience, which is not similar to my finds. According to my finds, there were more than preferred convenience

over privacy.

The scientific paper "Who Commits Virtual Identity Suicide? Differences in Privacy Concerns, Internet Addiction, and Personality Between Facebook Users and Quitters" [36], made the conclusion that Facebook quitters cared a lot more about privacy than active users. This is similar to my findings, where three out of the six that care about privacy are of the participant type that are not active in the online debate space anymore.

The answer research question is that people's concern over privacy is mixed, where the majority prefers convenience over caring about privacy. There was a clear majority of participant type two that cared about privacy.

6.2 Weakness and limitations

This study was done by an information security student, which can be seen as a limitation when the topic is in between many fields, such as psychology, sociology, and technology. There is a weakness here that I may not represent the field of psychology and sociology in a good enough way. This is a part of the information security field because of the vast amount of information and data that are in the online debate space. This information and data can be a threat to society and democracy as I have pointed out in this thesis, it is therefore important to understand this topic better and what risks are present here.

Because of the corona pandemic, there have not been possible to do interviews in real life. The pandemic also set a limitation to my working environment because writing the thesis in the university has not been possible.

6.3 Future Work

This thesis has presented qualitative research on a topic that does not have a lot of data in it. The knowledge presented here should be used as an introduction to the issues that need to be looked further into. The thesis has data suggesting online debate climate have a bad reputation to it. There should be future work investigating this deeper in order to have the best available data for the development of this ever-expanding Internet space. There is a problem in the online debate space as it is presented today, where many people are subject to risks that affect them in their everyday life. There should be more research on the topic of chilling effect in the online debate space. This thesis has presented that people feel that there is a strong chilling effect in the Norwegian online debate space, which is limiting the voice of certain groups. The topic of privacy is also something that needs to be looked more into, why is it that so many don't really care about their privacy? What should we do about it?

Chapter 7

conclusion

The online debate space can be an excellent place to discuss ideas and opinions with other users around the world, though it can also have some dark sides where some clear risks and consequences become present when being active in this place. This thesis has gotten into topics surrounding the online debate space. I have gone into the topics of online debate climate, risk in the online debate space, reasons for being active here, ways to make this space better, and lastly privacy concerns of Internet users.

How is the Norwegian online debate space climate? There was a clear consensus that the climate in the Norwegian online debate space has a lot of toxic elements in it where people are rude to each other and come with harassing and unnecessary comments. There were also some participants that vouched for this climate to be underrated and not as bad as the media and people, in general, make it out to be.

Sub-question: What factors contribute to its negative reputation The factors that contribute to the negative reputation here are group affiliation, the rhetoric of the debaters, social media design, and mainstream media.

Sub-question: What topic creates the most heated debates? The four most heated debate topics according to my participants are immigration, gender, corona, and climate.

What are the risks of participating in online debates? The risks of participating in the online debate space are getting overwhelming negative feedback where you get cyberbullied by other users, you can be threatened online, hate speech is one that is present but not that common, you can lose your reputation, like losing your job or social capital by saying something other deem as wrong. There are

physical risks that can happen in real life from something that originated from the online debate space. And last but also the one most answered, you can and will consume a lot of time.

Sub-question: Is there a chilling effect in the Norwegian online debate space?

There is definitely a chilling effect present in the Norwegian online debate space according to my participants. It is highly present and the groups most affected are immigrants, minorities, and women in general.

What is it that makes people come back to the online debate space?

People have many different reasons why they come back to the online debate space and choose to be active here. Some of the participants said they need to be the voice they themselves wish they saw more of, they need to be there for the silent majority that does not dare to speak up. Others said they are there to gain reputation because of their career or to gain social capital, and some needed a place to debate and vent their feelings and opinions about topics. Learning something from this space was also a common answer here. The least common answer here was the need to make new connections through this online debate space.

How can the online debate space be improved?

According to my participants, the online debate space can be improved by having no anonymity so that you know who you are talking to. Having better moderation was also a common answer here because many felt it was unfair and often not done correctly. Some of these participants meant that a new debate platform was the solution to these problems. Others mean that the only way to better the online debate space is if individual users take more responsibility and call out when they see other users being unnecessarily rude, there needs to be a shift in the online culture.

What is the privacy concerns among online debaters?

The privacy concern is not that high among the participants I interviewed. The consensus was that they had no time to read through every privacy concern and consent that they see often. Some of the participants saw the importance of caring about this topic though and would like it to be more accessible and easier to care about. A few said that they thought there was too much privacy focus already.

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Appendix A

Interview guide

Interview guide

This is an interview guide that aims to get the participants view of the research questions in my thesis. Each section has the overall research question, themes that are related to it where the possible talking points are mentioned. The question section are direct questions to the participant, and some possible talking points and follow-up questions that are marked with *italic*. Each section can be explained if the participant doesn't understand the theme or question. The question asked in each section will vary from who the participant is. The order will be more loosely in the actual interview.

Research questions and sub-questions	Themes	Questions
Introduction	<p>Introduce myself and my thesis.</p> <p>Some general questions to know the participant a bit better.</p> <p>Some questions about their internet use</p>	<p>Can you start by telling me a bit about yourself, age, job, and relation to the online debate space etc.</p> <p>How much time would you say you spend each day on the Internet?</p> <p>How much of this is spent commenting/posting reading others post/comments?</p>
<p>How is the Norwegian online debate space climate?</p> <p>What topic cause most heated debates?</p>	<p>Dynamic of online debates:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Behavior • Debate style • Moderating • Type of people • Polarization • A war-like behavior where one do everything to win the argument <p>Hot topics: Climate, vaccines, Covid19, politics, immigration</p> <p>Personal debate style</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Behavior • Choice of topic • Tactic <p>Personal experience of the debate space</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Behavior • Type of people • Moderating 	<p>What's your previous experience in online debates? Where do you most often comment/post etc.?</p> <p>What is your experience with the dynamics/climate of the online debate?</p> <p>What type of topics do you most often participate in/feel most passionate about?</p> <p>What topics create the most heated discussions?</p> <p>How would you describe the debate style in the online debate space?</p> <p>How would you describe your own debate style?</p> <p><i>Ask follow-up question about the participants behavior in this topic they mentioned.</i></p>

<p>What is the risk of participating in the online debate space?</p> <p>What is the awareness of risk when putting one's opinion online?</p>	<p>Risk in:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Online debate space • Social media use • posting controversial opinion online (public) • Engaging in negative/toxic environments • Forming opinions based on content from Internet use • Getting one's personal information used against oneself <p>Specific risks/consequences: Addiction, cyber bullying, negative mindset, cancelled, time waste</p> <p>Awareness of the risks</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Think about it (before and/or after posting) • Notice any of it • Comprehend it 	<p>What is the first thing you think about when you hear risk or consequences in participating in online debates?</p> <p>What is your own experience with consequences and/or risks in online debates and/or in Internet use in general?</p> <p>What is your awareness of these risk when being in the online space or debate space?</p> <p><i>How do they comprehend/deal with these risks?</i></p> <p><i>Do they use some of this awareness of the risks to their advantage, a part of their debate techniques?</i></p> <p><i>Ask about specific risks, like cyber bullying (how this effects people), and his/her thoughts about it.</i></p>
<p>How prevalent is the chilling effect in the Norwegian online debate space?</p>	<p>Chilling effect: When people don't dare or want to speak out because of repercussions of doing so.</p>	<p>Chilling effect, how prevalent do they think it is in the online debate space. Why do some don't dare to post online?</p> <p>Which groups are most affected by it?</p>

<p>What is it that makes people keep coming back to these debates?</p>	<p>Reasons for continuing debating online:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Feel the need to change people’s mind • Fighting for a cause • Just for fun • Addicted • Work related • Improve knowledge about a topic <p>Reason for quitting</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Mental health • Time waste • Cyber bullying • Negative effects on different parts of life 	<p>What is it that makes you keep wanting to come back to debating online?</p> <p><i>Ask follow-up questions about the things they mention. Important that the reasons come from them. Only come with examples if they ask you to.</i></p> <p>Have you thought about quitting debating online, and if so, why?</p> <p>Do you feel like there would be a loss of some sort if you decided to not post or comment anymore?</p> <p>Do you see any benefits of not posting or debating online anymore?</p>
<p>What factors contribute to the negative reputation of the online debate space?</p>	<p>Possible reasons:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Algorithm • Moderation issues • Cancelling culture • Political views • Social media with the power • Fake News / misinformation • Platform design • Clicks as a revenue source • Polarization in the culture • Echo chambers 	<p>What factors do you think contribute to there being a negative reputation of online debates and there being consequences of putting one’s opinion online?</p> <p>Are some contributing more than others? <i>Follow-up questions about why these contribute to the dynamic of the debate , try to get into the specific reasons</i></p>
<p>How much do online debaters care about privacy?</p>	<p>Privacy:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Sensitive and personal information online • Posting about other people, family or random <p>Cookies and putting out personal data when browsing the Internet.</p>	<p>How much do you care about privacy when spending time in the online debate space?</p>

<p>How can the online debate space be improved?</p> <p>How should moderation in the online debate work?</p>	<p>New platform Anonymity Take responsibility an</p> <p>Moderation in the online space</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Actively moderate • Algorithm based moderation <p>Moderate before posting</p>	<p>What can be done to improve the online debate space?</p> <p>How should moderation in the online debate space be done in the best way?</p>
<p>Ending the interview:</p>	<p>Themes throughout the interview.</p>	<p>Thank the participant for valuable information.</p> <p>Ask if they have something to add to any of the topic discussed or something related.</p> <p>Do they have any questions/comments for me and my thesis?</p> <p>Ask if they know about other possible participants to partake in this interview, either expert or participants</p>

Appendix B

Written consent

I am asking you to participate in a research study titled “Public Risk Perception of Norwegians in Online Debates”. I will describe this study to you and answer any of your questions. This study is being led by Eivind J.G. Dybvik, master student in the department of Information security at NTNU. The faculty advisor for this study is Gaute Wangen, department for digital security at NTNU.

What the study is about

The purpose of this research is to investigate what the public of Norway thinks of the risks and consequences attached to participating in online debates. It is a clear notion that online debates often have an aggressive and toxic tone to it, where a lot of people have reports and stories of being harassed and threatened by other users in these online debates. Therefore, this study wants to look at the most heated forms of public discussion on the Internet. These are hot topics that have a lot of controversial opinions about it. In addition, this study will research the reason why some part of the population is active in these debates, while some chooses not to engage. Understanding why the debates have gotten the reputation it has, and what factors contribute to that will also be a relevant part of this study.

What we will ask you to do

I will ask you to tell me your personal experience of engaging in these online debates. What are the reason you are keep coming back or staying away of these debates, what type of risks attached to participating in these debates have you noticed/experienced and what kind of consequences have you felt yourself from this participation. I will also ask you about what political views you have and what kind of debates you most often engage in, and why. There will be some questions regarding what your thoughts are on what factors you think contribute to creating this debate climate and how you think it can be approved. The interview will take about one hour, but you can choose what questions you would like to answer and stop the interview at any time you like.

Benefits

There will be an expected benefit to society, where people in the future will have a clearer understanding of the online debate space and what risks and consequences that are attached to it so they can better navigate this space.

The scientific knowledge generated by this study will help a field of study that there is currently very little scientific knowledge about. To get a better and clearer picture of these debates there need to be done studies on what the people that are active in these debates actually think about their behavior and what consequences their words and the words of other actually is.

Privacy/Confidentiality/Data Security

Since there will be some sensitive information gathered from the participants, it is very important to me that the information provided are anonymized in the publication. In order to do that, the data presented will be de-identified by not including personal information that may be identifiable. It is very important for the researcher that the participant feel comfortable in the interview to share whatever he/she feels right. The

researcher goes into the research with a genuinely wish to get an understanding of the participator's perspective.

The data from the interviews will be kept secure in an electronic environment provided by the university where the data stored will be protected by a two-factor-authentication login. There will only be the researcher that will have access to this account where the data provided in the interviews are held.

Taking part is voluntary

Your participation is voluntary, you may refuse to participate before the study begins, discontinue at any time, or skip any questions that you don't want to answer. After the interview is done you still can contact me to withdraw your consent or to have me remove any specific information you provided.

Audio Recording

The interview would benefit from audio recording because then the researcher can better focus on the interview with the knowledge that I can listen to it afterwards and type out the interview from the audio, thus getting the most accurate representation of the participators of the interview. If there is no recording, the interviewer would need to only rely on the notes taking during the interview and then after the interview write down everything the researcher remember that the participant said, which can result in inaccuracy data from you.

The audio recording will be deleted after the project is done on the first of June 2021.

Please let me know if you are not willing to have this interview recorded for audio. You may still participate in this study if you are not willing to have the interview recorded.

Your rights

As long as you can be identified in the data material, you have the right to:

- access to which personal information is registered about you, and to receive a copy of the information
- have personal information about you corrected
- have personal information about you deleted
- send a complaint to the Datatilsynet about the processing of your personal data.

If you have questions

The main researcher conducting this study is Eivind J.G. Dybvik, a graduate student at NTNU. Please ask any questions you have now. If you have questions later, you may contact Eivind J.G. Dybvik at ejdybvik@stud.ntnu.no

Consent

By replying the mail with "I consent" you agree to having the information provided by you in the interview used in my research.