

News Media's Rhetoric on Facebook

Journalism Practice

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Abstract

While Facebook is an important distribution channel for today's media houses, there is a lack of research on how news outlets choose to present their stories in social media. The present study aims to narrow this gap by analysing two weeks of Facebook updates by the Norwegian tabloid *Dagbladet* and the public-service broadcaster *NRK* and comparing them to the corresponding stories on their news sites. An important objective is to uncover if and how the Facebook updates depart from established text norms for online papers. The method is triangulated. A quantitative content analysis reveals that newsrooms tend to utilize a wider range of speech acts when writing presentations specifically for Facebook. A follow-up qualitative analysis identifies five rhetorical strategies for unique promo texts on Facebook: adding emojis, posing questions, making requests, expressing emotions and stating subjective points of view. Qualitative interviews with responsible journalists confirm that these strategies are more common the less controversial the stories are. However, the newsrooms have few explicit guidelines for when it is acceptable to transgress traditional journalistic text norms. The findings are summarized in a model that connects the continuum of decreasing story controversy to a corresponding continuum of increasingly interpretative and subjective rhetoric.

Keywords: Facebook, social media, news, digital journalism, rhetoric, text norms, genre, shareworthiness

Introduction

"Can we not cope with a little snow in Norway?" The question is raised in a Facebook update from Norway's third largest online newspaper *Dagbladet* on April 25th 2017 (figure 1). Below the question, we find an archive picture of the Icelandic volcano Eyafjallajökull having an eruption, and the headline "Worst day at Gardermoen since the ash clouds in 2010". Gardermoen is Norway's biggest airport and had been hit by a sudden snowfall the previous day. Therefore, a likely interpretation of the update would be that the airport did not have satisfactory routines to handle normal weather, which would obviously be scandalous.

 **Dagbladet**
3 t · 🌐

Tåler vi ikke litt snø i Norge?



Verste dag på Gardermoen siden askeskyene i 2010.

DAGBLADET.NO

👍 Liker 💬 Kommenter ➦ Del

😬 👍 😱 95 Kronologisk ▾

13 delinger

Figure 1. Excerpt from Dagbladet's Facebook page April 24 2017.

The Facebook update links to a full story on the news site *Dagbladet.no*. According to this story, there is nothing to suggest that Gardermoen did not handle the situation well. True, the airport had to cancel several flights the previous day because of the snowfall, but the weather was far from normal. Gardermoen's communication manager tells *Dagbladet* that the airport had never experienced such amounts of snow in springtime before, and that it was the most difficult day since Icelandic ash clouds forced the whole airport to shut down in 2010. Still, the snow-clearing crew kept on doing their jobs, and by the time the story was written, the problems were almost solved. Even the front page of *Dagbladet.no* emphasised at this point that "flights are soon back on schedule", without implying any critique. Why, then, would *Dagbladet* add the question about coping with snow when running the story on Facebook?

Online papers might alter the headlines and pictures of their stories when they share them in social media, and they often include promo texts written specifically for the social platform, as in the example above. Obviously, these changes are adjustments to the context of social media. However, as the rhetoric of journalism meets the rhetoric of social media, journalists may allow themselves to present their stories in ways that would be considered unacceptable on their own news sites. In this respect, social media platforms like Facebook cannot be seen as mere distribution channels. They are also arenas of experimenting with and challenging the existing text norms for journalistic stories. To enrich our understanding of how this is done, the present article analyses official Facebook updates from two major Norwegian newsrooms: *Dagbladet* and *NRK*. My research questions are:

1. To what extent do *Dagbladet* and *NRK* change the presentation of their stories when they publish them on Facebook?
2. Which rhetorical strategies do *Dagbladet* and *NRK* apply on Facebook that transgress the text norms for their own news sites?

Some elaboration is needed to contextualize the research questions. The analysis builds on a socio-textological approach to rhetoric, as outlined by Berge (2011). I am concerned with how implicit text norms are developed to facilitate communicative tasks within a given text culture, and how such norms are being contested and changed over time.

Different sets of text norms apply to different rhetorical situations. When a particular rhetorical situation manifests itself as recurrent in a given text culture, the text norms associated with the situation constitute a genre (Miller 1984). The Facebook update is a genre, however not a journalistic one per se. When news media like *Dagbladet* and *NRK* use Facebook updates for journalistic purposes, they contribute to a growing sub-genre that merges traditional journalistic text norms with general text norms for Facebook and social media. The configuration of these norms is under continuous negotiation, not least because the social context and technological affordances keeps changing. A crucial part of answering the research questions above is therefore to identify and explicate current text norms for the journalistic Facebook updates.

Further, utterances are acts, and genres are means of social action (Miller 1984). Applying rhetorical strategies is therefore not merely a question of following the genre; it is also about taking advantage of the available text features in order to get the message through to the readers, and in the present case, to make the readers click and share. In order to analyse which linguistic actions the journalists take on Facebook in this respect, I will also draw on the pragmatic speech act theories developed by Austin and Searle in the 1960s and 70s (Austin 1962, Searle 1969, 1976). This will be further explained in the methods section.

Previous research on news in social media

There is a limited but growing amount of research on news outlets' Facebook updates. Most of the studies are quantitative, and most of them focus upon user response, commercial benefits or changes in the journalist role. It is well documented that Facebook is the main traffic driver from social media to online papers (Kalsnes and Larsson 2017, Ju, Jeong and Hsiang 2014). We also know that the numbers of shares, likes and comments are closely monitored by editors and to a certain extent affect editorial decisions (Dwyer and Martin 2017, Ferrer-Conill and Tandoc 2018). Still, the interactive assets of Facebook do not necessarily increase the journalist–reader dialogue – in fact, Larsson (2017b) found the opposite is true (see even Larsson and Ihlebæk 2017). Particularly interesting for the study at hand, Larsson (2018) found that active users were more likely to press “Like” than the alternative buttons “Angry”, “Haha”, “Wow”, “Love” and “Sad”. However, the readers used these alternative buttons more frequently in “tabloid” outlets' updates than in the

“broadsheets” updates, which might indicate that the former’s Facebook rhetoric has a stronger emotional appeal. The qualitative findings of the present study will add to this picture.

In an interesting case study, Tandoc and Vos (2016) observed how news journalists would utilize social media to break stories before they were even written on the news sites, as well as to boost traffic to older stories and promote regular news. Tandoc and Vos did not examine the rhetoric by which this was done, as they focused upon participant observation rather than textual analysis. However, it is worth noting that the journalists they observed and interviewed experienced a change in their journalistic role towards being more of a distributor and a marketer.

When it comes to Facebook’s commercial value, there is no doubt that Facebook and other social media generate substantial traffic to Norwegian online news sites. However, they are not crucial. A study of 65 Norwegian newspapers concluded that merely 7 percent of the traffic came via Facebook during a random week in 2014 (Nedregotten 2015). A more recent Danish report found that social media generated 14 percent of the traffic to Danish news sites in 2017, 95 percent of which came from Facebook (Slots- og kulturstyrelsen 2017). Another Danish study from 2016 found even higher numbers: 38 percent of the traffic to twelve major digital news media came from Facebook (Birkemose 2016). The inconsistency in these findings might partly be due to different ways of measuring traffic. In week 13/14 2018, social media provided 19 percent of *Dagbladet*’s digital users, 10 percent of the reading sessions and 4 percent of the page views (Cornelia Kristiansen, pers. comm.). The corresponding numbers for *NRK.no* were 16, 13 and 9 percent respectively (Eivind Waage, pers. comm.).

Early in 2018, Facebook declared that their algorithms would give news stories less priority in the future (Thompson and Vogelstein 2018). Nevertheless, the visibility and spreading of the newsrooms’ Facebook updates will still depend on how the readers react upon those updates. Journalists need to take into account what makes people read, react and share in social media. That is, they have to consider the shareworthiness of the stories along with their newsworthiness (Trilling, Tolochko and Bursher 2017). In this respect, studies on news virality tend to emphasize the emotional aspects of the updates. Eberholst and Hartley (2014) found that news updates that express strong emotions, like joy or anger, generate considerably more response than more neutral updates. However, the evoked emotions need to be of a high-arousal character; a sad or content reader is not likely to share (Berger and Milkman 2012, Berger 2013). This may in part explain why Larsson (2017a) identified immigration as one of the topics that boost user activity the most. Furthermore, readers tend to share soft news more often than hard news, and opinion pieces more often than news stories, at least when it comes to Norwegian media outlets (Kalsnes and Larsson 2017, Almgren 2017).

In *NRK*, social media journalists pay particular attention to Jonah Berger’s STEPPS-model when deciding what to publish on Facebook and how to present it (Eivind Waage, interview 23.2.18). STEPPS is an acronym for six factors that explain “why things catch on”: Social currency, Triggers, Emotion, Public, Practical value, and Stories (Berger 2013). Adapted to the context of Facebook updates, the model implies that people tend to comment and share if it increases their social status, if the story relates to frequent aspects of their everyday life, if they experience high-arousal emotions, if the updates are highly visible, if the readers learn something useful, and if there is a good story in there. From a rhetorical perspective, Berger’s model covers the three classic modes of persuasion: The reader shares in order to strengthen her *ethos* (construct a particular public persona), in order to acknowledge the *logos* of the message (pass on relevant information) and because she is affected by *pathos* (emotionally aroused).

All in all, the incentive to gain virality has made scholars raise questions whether the rhetoric of social media might affect editorial prioritizations, possibly pushing towards increasingly emotional and opinionated journalism (Kalsnes and Larsson 2017, Almgren 2017, Larsson 2017c, Paulussen, Harder and Johnson 2017 – but see Steiner, Magin and Stark 2018 for a contradictory view). Still, few studies – if any – have focused upon *how* such emotions are invoked in the news outlets' Facebook updates, and to what extent the rhetoric of the updates reflects the rhetoric of the stories themselves. An important question is how far the newsrooms are willing to go in adjusting their rhetoric to social media without giving up traditional journalistic ideals about ethics, objectivity and genre norms – as well as the particular ethos of their own brand.

Some limits are evidently absolute: At least in Scandinavia, newsrooms are not supposed to take ethics less seriously in social media. In 2016, The Norwegian Press Complaints Commission (PFU) condemned an online paper for presenting a potential drunk-driving as a fact on Facebook, while making necessary reservations in their online paper (PFU 2016). Likewise, another online paper was condemned in 2018 for insufficient fairness and thoughtfulness in a Facebook update, in which a woman who had lost a lawsuit was described as a “woman on revenge raid”. The PFU declared that “the same publication rules apply for social media as for the medium’s own publication platforms” (PFU 2018). However, the ethical code of practice for the Norwegian press does not cover implicit statements very well, and there is a vast grey area between the established journalistic rhetoric of the news sites, and the explicit violations of the formal ethical norms. It is not uncommon that journalists are accused of taking advantage of this unregulated space on Facebook, while acting more soberly on their own news sites (e.g. Michalsen 2017).

The question of genres and text norms here comes to the fore. For instance, the example in figure 1 addresses whether the distinction between “news” and “views” is articulated differently in social media compared to legacy news sites. Within the traditional paradigm, news are supposed to appear unbiased and facts-oriented, leaving opinions and more subjective framings to the commentary genres. Often this is achieved by assigning the subjective views to sources. That is, if a news journalist wants to express that Norway cannot cope with snow, she will have to find a source who can claim it for her, to retain the image of objectivity. Even in journalistic genres that resemble those of social media, news journalists are overtly careful not to step into the opinion journalists’ domain, as long as the communication takes place within the borders of their own news site (Hågvar 2017). The example therefore triggers the question if journalists are inclined to be more subjective and explicit in their news interpretations on Facebook compared to their news sites.

Despite anecdotal evidence, we do not actually know if news media tend to push the ethical and journalistic boundaries and feel less responsible for their updates on social media compared to publications on their own news sites. The present article offers an initial contribution to fill this research gap.

Method

A triangulation of methods is needed to answer the research questions sufficiently. I approach research question 1 by a quantitative and comparative content analysis, which in turn lays the foundation for a qualitative rhetorical analysis that answers research question 2. Both analyses are contextualized by qualitative, semi-structured interviews with journalists responsible for social media in both newsrooms.

There are good reasons for choosing Facebook as the social media under scrutiny, as it generates substantially more traffic to news media than Twitter and other social media, as mentioned above. Further, Norway is a relevant area to examine, as both Norwegian media and the Norwegian audience can be considered advanced users of social media (Larsson and

Inlebæk 2017). Finally, the national tabloid *Dagbladet* and the public-service broadcaster and online newspaper *NRK* are interesting media houses to compare because they both have major influence on Norwegian public discourse, while they represent opposite poles on the commercial and tabloid scales. By 2017, *Dagbladet* is the third largest online newspaper in Norway, both in terms of unique visitors and pages read, while *NRK.no* ranks as number two (TNS Gallup 2017).¹ On Facebook, *Dagbladet* is bigger than *NRK*.² *Dagbladet* is a fully commercial media house with a tabloid style and a culture-radical legacy. *NRK*, on the contrary, is a commercial-free, public-service broadcaster and website, primarily funded by licence. That said, *Dagbladet* is also known for serious and investigative journalism, and *NRK* is experimenting with new formats to legitimate its financial model towards the younger audience in particular. Thus, both media houses perform “quality” and “tabloid” journalism, but *NRK* is more associated with the former and *Dagbladet* with the latter.

Both media houses provide several Facebook accounts. The present article explores the most news-oriented of them, which means the main account of *Dagbladet* (“Dagbladet”) and the specific news account of *NRK* (“NRK Nyheter”). The collected material consists of all Facebook updates from these accounts throughout two random weeks: April 24–30 and May 8–14 2017. This is 452 updates altogether, 306 from *Dagbladet* and 146 from *NRK*. The updates are *not* instant articles but posts that provide links to full stories in the corresponding online papers, with the exceptions of certain videos that play directly on the screen. I have downloaded the full stories for comparison, as well as the front pages of the respective online papers. The material was downloaded manually several times a day, about every 2–3 hours, with the Zotero tool.

The prototypical Facebook update consists of three elements: A headline, a picture above the headline, and a short text above the picture (see figure 1). The present analysis pays particular attention to this top text, which I will refer to as the *promo text*.³ As the promo text is written exclusively for Facebook, this is where we first and foremost might expect to find Facebook-specific rhetorical features. However, the quantitative part of the study will examine the headlines as well, as these might differ from the corresponding headlines on the news sites. Alas, there has been no room for analysing the visual rhetoric in the present article, although the pictures obviously contribute substantially to the overall rhetoric of the update and should be analysed carefully in forthcoming studies.

To map how these Facebook elements do or do not diverge from the online papers, each update was for the content analysis coded by four variables that capture verbal, graphic and communicative changes:

1. Is the Facebook headline identical to the front page headline in the online paper, to the inside headline (the headline of the full story) or to none of these?
2. Is the promo text unique for Facebook?
3. Does the promo text include emojis?
4. Which speech act dominate the promo text?

Variable 2 and 4 need some elaboration. Promo texts are defined as unique for Facebook if they present information that is not available in the original story, if they reframe information in a way that clearly affects the angle of the story, or if they provide speech acts (explained below) that could not be recognized in the online paper, e.g. by posing questions to the readers (as in figure 1). On the other hand, promo texts are *not* coded as unique if they

¹ Number one, the tabloid newspaper *VG*, is not included here. *Dagbladet* is known for more “tabloid” Facebook updates than *VG*, thereby offering a better illustration of the rhetorical span between commercial and public-service media. In week 17, 2017, *Dagbladet.no* had 595 274 unique visitors, while *NRK.no* had 958 541.

² By April 2017, the “Dagbladet” account had received about 285 000 likes, while “NRK Nyheter” had about 267 000.

³ In both newsrooms, they use the Norwegian terms “innsalg” or “følgetekst”.

paraphrase information that has merely a slightly different wording in the story, or if they put forward information that is down-prioritized in the story but nevertheless is there. Two examples can illustrate the difference:

- A *Dagbladet* story about traffic problems due to an unexpected snowfall is equipped with the promo text: “You are right, this IS actually a particularly bad Monday.” The promo text is unique, as the story itself addresses neither the readers’ opinions nor the concept of bad Mondays.
- Another *Dagbladet* story, titled “He killed his one year old daughter – live on Facebook”, had the promo text “The video clip was available on Facebook for 24 hours”. In the story, this information does not appear before the eighth paragraph of the body text: “Facebook is now heavily criticized by a number of users because the video clip was not removed for 24 hours.” Still, rephrasing and putting this information upfront on Facebook does not reframe the story in a significant way, and the promo text is coded as *not* unique.

When it comes to the speech act framework, I distinguish between assertives, directives, expressives, commissives, declarations and evaluatives (Searle 1976, Roksvold 2005). Slightly simplified, assertives are statements that can be proven true or false. Directives are utterances that require a kind of response, such as questions and orders. Expressives are utterances that express emotions, like congratulations or surprised outbursts. Commissives are obligations to forthcoming actions, such as promises. Declarations are utterances that in themselves alter reality, such as convictions or wedding vows. Evaluatives are subjective or normative statements that cannot be proven true or false, which can usually be rephrased as “I think that ...”. A quantitative challenge is that promo texts might include more than one speech act. For instance, a written (verbal) assertive might be supported by an expressive emoji. In these cases, I have coded for the verbal act. There are also instances of ambiguous speech acts such as “Horrorific video shared in social media”, which on the surface is assertive but also includes an evaluation of the video. I have chosen to code for the most explicit act, in this case the assertive.

I have coded all updates manually. This secures that coding is consistent, and that context is taken into account when coding uniqueness and speech acts. As the whole material has been coded by a single coder, there are certain limits to the reproducibility of the quantitative results. However, my aim is not necessarily to provide indisputable statistics but rather to point towards broad tendencies that call for a more thorough qualitative exploration. The coding was done in Excel and transferred to SPSS for further analysis.

The content analysis answers, at least in part, research question 1. Research question 2, however, requires a more qualitative approach. The qualitative part of the study builds on the quantitative part by doing a closer analysis of the promo texts I found to be unique for Facebook. Drawing on the speech act framework in particular, I identify and give examples of five distinct rhetorical strategies.

Now, rhetorical analyses can be accused of not taking intentionality into account: How do we know if the choice of words is part of a conscious strategy or a mere coincidence? To avoid this pitfall, I have conducted qualitative interviews with relevant representatives of the two newsrooms. In *Dagbladet*, I have interviewed Cornelia Kristiansen, who is head of social media and writes a substantial number of updates herself. In *NRK*, I have interviewed Eivind Waage, who is head⁴ of the “NRK Nyheter” site on Facebook. The interviews were conducted respectively 22. and 23. February 2018. All forthcoming quotes refer to these dates. In addition to provide valuable context, the interviewees have commented upon and helped explain both the quantitative and the qualitative findings. Both interviewees have controlled

⁴ Norwegian: arbeidsleder.

their quotes, which lead to a few minor clarifications. The interviews are approved by the Norwegian Data Protection Official for Research.

Brief context: General routines in the two newsrooms

In both *Dagbladet* and *NRK*, journalists do not publish their own stories on Facebook. In *Dagbladet*, this is done by a team of primarily Kristiansen and a close co-worker, assisted by five desk editors working shifts. As a rule, they publish a new story about every 25 minutes. There are no explicit editorial guidelines for the selection and presentation of stories on Facebook. However, Kristiansen performs continuous traffic analyses and provides advisory feedback based on the numbers. The most popular stories tend to be stories that affect people’s everyday lives, like road tolls, or stories that generate intense feelings, like national sports victories. Even Gallup polls are popular, as they carry a sports aspect. Overall, it proves important to crystallize the narrative of the story.

Compared to *Dagbladet*, *NRK* was less organised on social media at the time of the study. Social media were given low priority compared to the official website *NRK.no*, which meant that one journalist was responsible for the Facebook updates between 9 a.m. and 4 p.m., while random desk editors would take over the rest of the day and night. “Totally gaga”, Waage concludes – and claims that routines have improved significantly between 2017 and 2018. *NRK* is not supposed to publish anything exclusively for Facebook; the overall strategy for social media is to attract more readers to *NRK*’s own platforms. Waage agrees to Kristiansen’s view of which stories increase traffic, and confirms that metrics are important for *NRK* as well when deciding which stories to share.

Quantitative findings

Headlines

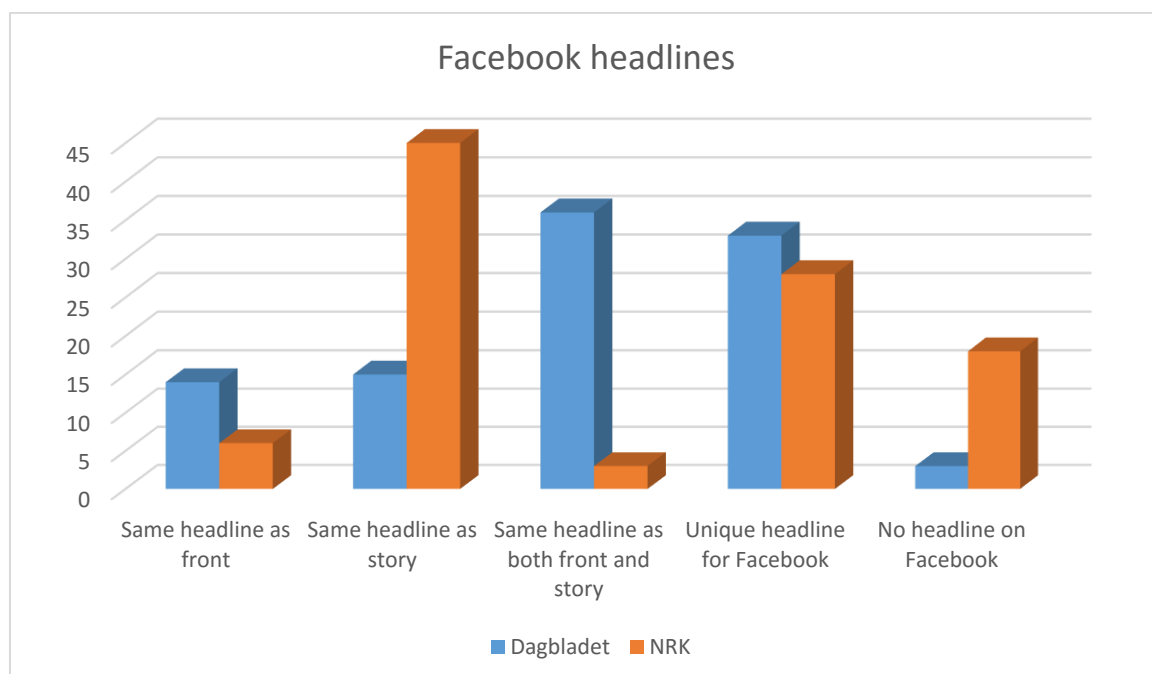


Figure 2. Features of Facebook headlines. Percent. N = 452.

Between one third and one fourth of the updates have a different headline from the online papers (figure 2). However, the alterations are modest: Headlines are shortened to adjust to Facebook’s maximum number of signs, or parts of the original headlines are extracted and

used as promo texts. From a rhetorical perspective, then, even the “unique” Facebook headlines are quite similar to the headlines in the online papers.

When copying headlines from the online papers, both of my informants say they prefer to pick the front page headlines rather than the headlines of the full stories (the inside headline), as the former have more in common with the Facebook updates genre-wise. Both are designed to attract readers to the full story, both need to compete with a lot of surrounding headlines to gain the readers’ attention, and none of them needs to take search engine optimization⁵ into account. However, the material proves differently. In *Dagbladet*, front page headlines and inside headlines are used equally often on Facebook. NRK even shows a diametrical opposite picture: When choosing between the front page headline and a different inside headline, NRK picks the inside headline in 88 percent of the cases. The main reason, according to both informants, is that this is the default solution. Unless it is deliberately altered, the inside headline automatically becomes the headline on Facebook as well. It is lazy not to check the front page headline or consider a Facebook-specific headline, concludes NRK’s Eivind Waage, while Cornelia Kristiansen states that her staff at *Dagbladet* should wait at least ten minutes to find out what works on the front page before choosing a title for Facebook. A supplementary, and maybe more important, explanation for this “lazy” choice of headlines might be that the publishers put their rhetorical efforts into creating catchy promo texts rather than optimizing the traditional headlines.

Promo texts

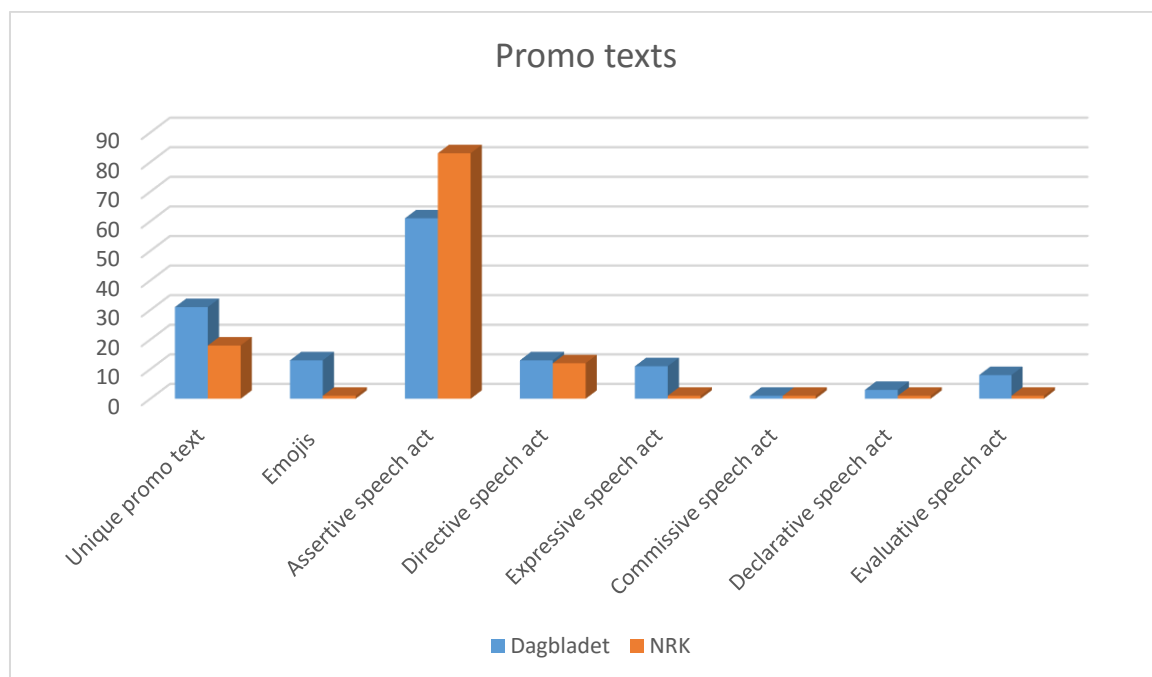


Figure 3. Features of promo texts on Facebook. Percent. N = 452.

The promo texts are unique in 31 percent of *Dagbladet*’s updates and 18 percent of *NRK*’s (Figure 3). It is important to keep in mind that being unique for this variable means addressing the readers differently or clearly reframing the story – simply rephrasing a point from the news story does not qualify for uniqueness. *Dagbladet* is also more inclined to use emojis as well as a wider range of speech acts.

⁵ Full-story headlines often include as much specific information as possible about who and what the story is about, in order to make it easily searchable on e.g. Google and thereby increase traffic – as opposed to click-bait headlines which consciously retain vital information.

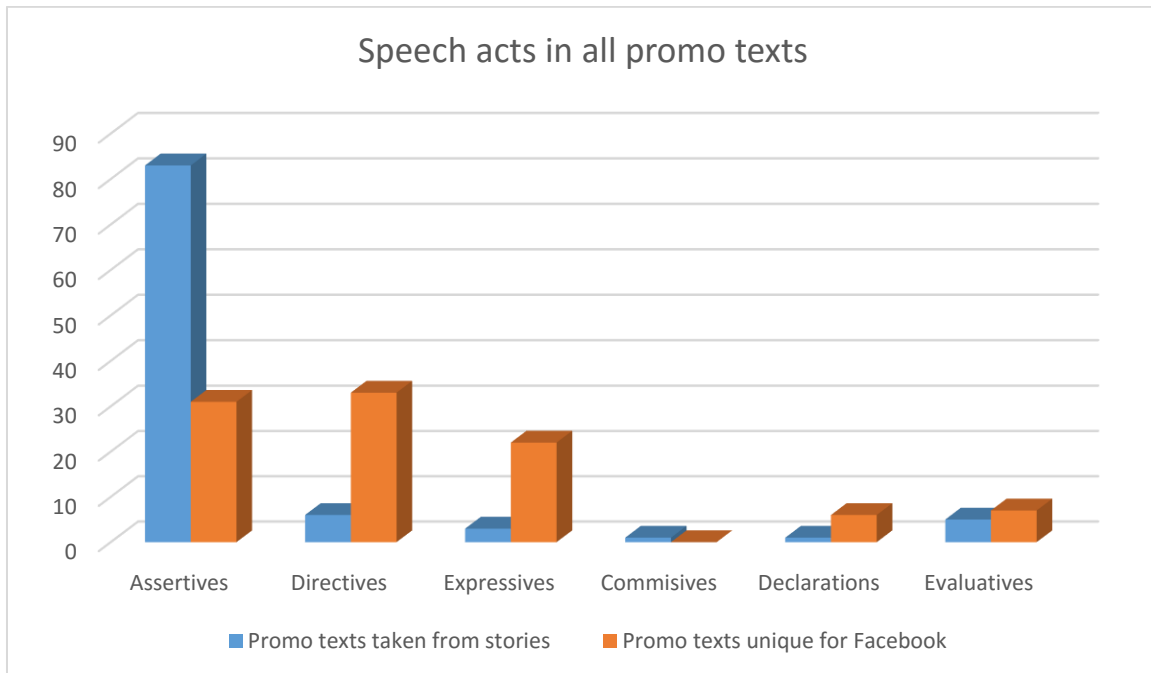


Figure 4. Distribution of speech acts in non-unique vs. unique promo texts, both newsrooms together. Percent. $N = 452$.

Both emoji use and speech act distribution are clearly connected to uniqueness. 74 percent of the promo texts that include emojis are unique for Facebook, and so are most of the non-assertive speech acts. While the vast majority (83 percent) of the non-unique promo texts are assertives, figure 4 shows that directives – questions and requests – are most frequently used among the unique promos (33 percent): “Have you missed Barack Obama?” Even expressive speech acts, such as “What a match! 😲”, make up 22 percent of the unique promo texts.

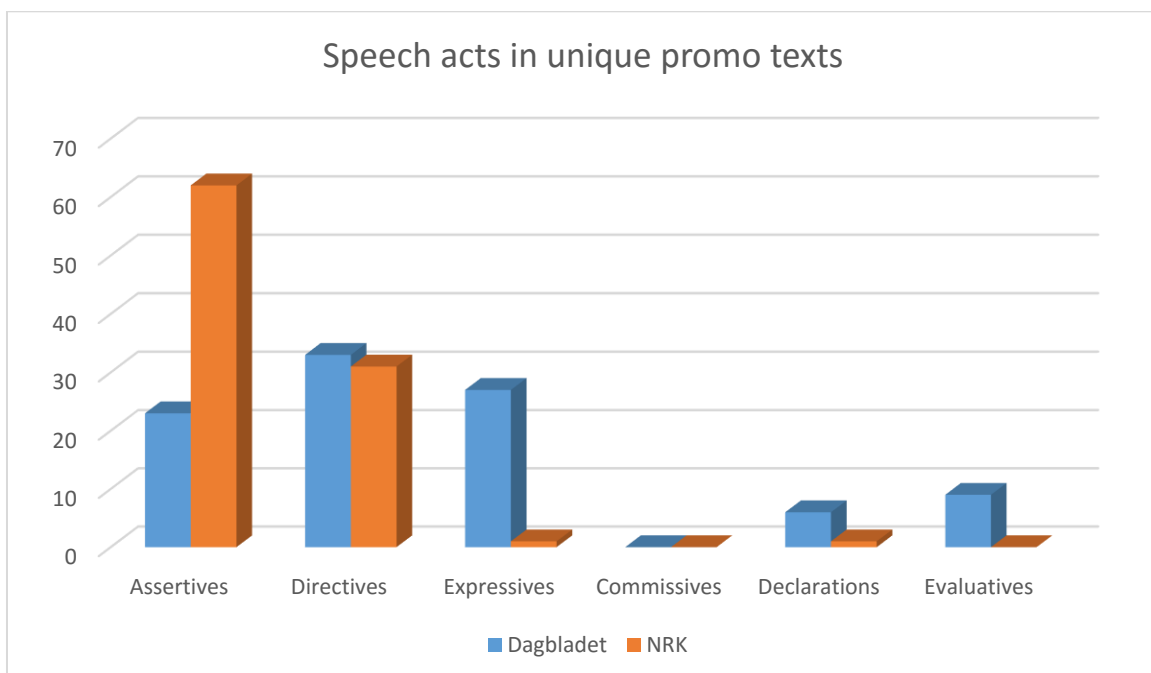


Figure 5. Distribution of speech acts in Dagbladet’s and NRK’s unique promo texts. Percent. $N = 122$.

Isolating the unique promo texts reveals further similarities and differences between the newsrooms (figure 5). In this context, both of them are equally inclined to pick directive promo texts, whereas *Dagbladet* goes considerably further in using expressives (27 percent), evaluatives (9 percent) and declarations (6 percent).

Clearly, then, journalists utilize a considerably wider range of speech acts when creating promo texts specifically for Facebook. We could also look at it the other way around: These promo texts become unique for Facebook because the speech acts do not fit into the traditional journalistic rhetoric. While journalists in the news take care to appear unbiased and distanced on the surface, leaving the interpretations of the stories to the readers, these Facebook updates promote opinions, emotions and subjective interpretations. The following section will explore more qualitatively how this is done.

Qualitative findings

I have found five distinct rhetorical strategies characterizing the promo texts that are unique for Facebook. All of the strategies involve an expanded register of speech acts and graphic solutions compared to the corresponding online papers.

Strategy 1: Adding emojis

As by 2017, neither *Dagbladet* nor *NRK* publishes emojis on their own websites. On Facebook, however, they flourish – though unevenly distributed between the two news organizations, cf. figure 3. There is one single case of *NRK* publishing an emoji (1 percent). The occasion is a video of the public celebration of the King and Queen’s common 80 years birthday. *NRK*’s promo text reads: “Happy birthday to you! 😊 Do you see someone you know? Tag them!” *Dagbladet*, however, uses emojis frequently. 41 of their updates (13 percent) contain one or more emojis. And whereas *NRK* picks a common smiley, *Dagbladet* opens the full tool box of emojis.

Basically, emojis serve to strengthen the emotional aspect of the message. In this respect, emojis can be interpreted as expressive speech acts. Some of *Dagbladet*’s promo texts consist solely of emojis. When a headline reads “The star bragged about travelling in a private plane. Then the fans did a quick search on Google” (and found out he was lying), *Dagbladet* merely adds three monkeys covering their eyes with their hands, and a laughing smiley with tears: 🙈🙈🙈😂. In this way, *Dagbladet* signals that the story is supposed to be read with malicious pleasure; it is embarrassing to the star and funny to the reader. There are several such examples in the material.

In the most modest sense, emojis are added to promo texts that verbally resemble the style of the online paper, in order to enforce the implicit message. One story is headlined “This one-family house went 5,3 millions over estimated price”, along with the promo: “Almost 100 000 kroners per square meter – before renovation 📦”. The verbal text does not say that the buyers payed too much, but the image of a flying parcel of bank notes makes this interpretation more explicit. Thus, the readers are encouraged to react towards the crazy development in the real-estate market, the stupid buyers who have no understanding of private economy, or maybe the ignorant well-heeled people who have lost every connection to the common man.

When stories are emotionally intensified by emojis, the suggested emotions are quite uncontroversial. Most readers would probably agree that the house was expensive, and that the cocky pop star deserved to have his lies exposed. The visuals have the advantage of being in a rhetorical limbo between the implicit message of the story and a fully explicit statement like “he got what he deserved!”. As such, the news providers can tell you how to feel without being accused of converting the news story into opinion journalism.

The big question, then, is where to draw the line for the use of emojis. One of *Dagbladet*'s updates pictures a man being overpowered by security guards in a courtroom, while the headline reads: "Loses it as the mass-murderer grins scornfully. Suddenly attacks". The promo is a sole, angry face, suggesting sympathy for the bereaved man who was provoked by his sister's murderer and attacked him in court: 😡. In retrospect, both of my interviewees believe this example is crossing the line, because of the nature of the story. Kristiansen recalls *Dagbladet* being ridiculed on a satire show on TV for having used angry emojis to sell in a story about plastic waste in the ocean. As a consequence, she made an explicit guideline not to use emojis at all on grave stories. However, such guidelines are rare. In both newsrooms, the norms for emoji use are fluid and pending. The informants see no problems in using emojis per se:

*When people comment upon us using emojis, they think it is childish and stupid.
And then I say "agreed" – but a lot of what we do might seem childish and stupid
but still have a function, which often is about distribution and attention.
(Kristiansen)*

In particular, emojis are supposed to give readers a quick idea of the nature of the story when scrolling by: "This is a heartwarming story, this is a feelgood-story, this is frustrating, this is funny ..." (Kristiansen). Waage emphasises that it is crucial for *NRK* to be at "eye-level" with their audience; they want to talk *with* people instead of talking *to* them. In this respect, emojis can make the communication less formal and closer to the rhetoric that the readers are familiar with from private conversation.

If this is true, however, why do not *NRK* and *Dagbladet* use emojis on their own online platforms? Waage does not think emojis violate any journalistic norms in themselves; whether it is OK depends on the story rather than the platform or the genre. He says quality online papers have adjusted to social media before, e.g. by adopting videos as a key element: "I believe it is necessary to realize that things that work well on social platforms can work on traditional platforms too." Kristiansen, on the other hand, reveals that she has already experimented with smileys on the front page of *Dagbladet.no*: "Someone had made a meme of a picture, and then I put it on front and added a laughing emoji." The experiment was no success, and Kristiansen is puzzled about why: Perhaps the smiley made too much visual noise, particularly on mobile, or perhaps the readers simply were too conservative? In any case, none of the informants are troubled by the general observation that emojis suggest certain interpretations of the stories, whether on Facebook or in the online paper – it is the context that matters.

Strategy 2: Posing a question

Another common strategy is to ask the readers a question. This comes more naturally on Facebook than on the news sites, as the Facebook readers can react immediately by posting an answer. The questions can be divided into four kinds: open questions, rhetorical questions, tag-requesting questions and content questions.

On the surface, open questions simply ask for the readers' opinions. When *Dagbladet* publishes a story called "No longer possible to turn up at Nav without an appointment", the journalist asks: "Good or bad idea?" Nav is the Norwegian labour and welfare administration and is well known for its long queues. Those who read the full story, will find that this new rule is made to give the case handlers more time to speak with their clients, instead of serving drop-in-clients who in most cases could easily have found their answers online, according to one of Nav's directors. There are no critical sources in the story. However, as the headline puts forward the negative consequences, readers are indirectly encouraged to express anger in their comments – which they do: "Stupidity!" "Arse about face!"

In another news story, *Dagbladet* interviews an environmental activist who claims we throw away too much food. The promo text is on the surface an open question: “What shall we do to stop this?” However, the formulation presupposes that the food waste needs to be stopped. Hence, the journalist supports the view of the source, making the promo text more subjective than the story.

Rhetorical questions are even more leading. The question from figure 1 belongs to this category: “Can’t we cope with a little snow in Norway?” Although highly irrelevant to the story, the question triggers a recurrent Norwegian topic of conversation. Every year, motorists in the southern part of the country are caught off guard by the first snowfall, and the media are full of stories about cars driving off the roads, metros breaking down etc. Just as recurrent are the stories about people from the northern part of Norway ridiculing those in the south, as those up north have massive experience with snow and cold and claim to be prepared at all times. As the Gardermoen airport lies in the south, many readers automatically follow this line of argument when they comment upon the story: “The minute there falls a little snow down south, everything is closed down ...” Still, as mentioned in the introduction, there is no reason to believe that *Dagbladet* actually thinks Gardermoen’s actions were exaggerated. In fact, the previous day *Dagbladet* published the promo text “You are right, it IS actually a particularly bad Monday ...” as a comment to the headline “The meteorologists woke up to a 32-year old snow record being broken”. This update interprets the snowfall as a real problem and is in no way ridiculing people’s efforts to cope – on the contrary, they receive *Dagbladet*’s sympathy.

The third category of questions encourage readers to tag their friends: “Invites to nude golf in the middle of downtown Oslo, and the response has been enormous. Do you know anyone this would be perfect for?” Obviously, a lot of readers tag their friends as a joke.

Dagbladet asks these three kinds of questions more frequently than *NRK*. Indeed, *NRK* asks questions too, but while *Dagbladet* typically aims for the readers’ opinions or reactions, *NRK* tends to ask questions that are answered in the full story: “How and why is a viper radiomarked?” “Is taking snuff not increasing the risks of cancer after all?” These are content questions: If you read on, you will find out. While such questions might trigger the readers’ curiosity, they are not as likely to make the reader write a comment, tag a friend or otherwise spread the story.

The purpose of asking questions, then, is at least threefold. First, readers might be more inclined to stop and reflect upon the story when they are addressed directly, especially if they are asked for their opinions. This goes in particular when the questions are likely to trigger high-arousal emotions like awe or anger (Berger and Milkman 2012, Berger 2013). Second, like emojis, questions can have the effect of levelling out the interpersonal asymmetry between the newsroom and the readers and facilitate the eye-level contact that *NRK*’s Eivind Waage strives for. Third, Facebook’s algorithms will ensure that updates with a lot of comments are distributed more widely.

Waage states that it is usually a bad idea to ask the readers to do something, such as tagging a friend, posting pictures or using a particular hashtag. It simply does not work. What works, is questions that trigger people, cf. Berger (2013). For instance, Waage thinks *Dagbladet* made a smart move by posing a question about Nav, as a lot of readers have personal experiences with the welfare system. On the other hand, *NRK*’s content question about vipers appeals to a very narrow segment of the audience, and ratings confirm that the viper story was “a flop”, as Waage puts it.

Like emojis, questions might violate traditional journalistic norms of balance and professional distance to the subject. In particular, rhetorical questions and open questions with disputable presuppositions challenge such norms. Waage believes this is one reason why *NRK* publishes less questions of this kind, compared to *Dagbladet*: “In our strategy, we say that we

will be the trustworthy alternative in people's feeds." However, even in *Dagbladet* promo questions seem to appear primarily in the softer news stories. The same dynamic applies as for the emojis: The more grave or controversial the story is, the less likely it is to be presented through a question, and certainly not a rhetorical one.

Strategy 3: Making a request

Closely related to the question strategy is the strategy of making requests. When *Dagbladet* and *NRK* encourage their readers to tag their friends, they may do it indirectly through questions, but also directly through requests like "Tag them!". Both are directive speech acts. Similarly, *Dagbladet* appeals to the word of mouth when selling in a story about the danger of throwing eggs at other cars, which has become a trend among some youth groups: "You may lose your driver's licence even if your passenger is the one throwing. Please tell friends who need to hear this."

In some cases, however, the journalists transform requests that originally stem from sources in news stories, into their own words. One story in *Dagbladet* tells about a German dog owner who found pieces of sausages with razorblades in them in a park, which triggered warnings in German media because dogs could eat them and die. *Dagbladet* connects this to a previous story where dog food with nails in it was found in Norway and warned against by a vet. On Facebook, the journalist comments: "Similar findings have been done in Norway. Watch out!" In another story, *NRK* reveals that poisonous ampullas from the war are found along the coast. Like *Dagbladet*, *NRK* takes over the sources' warnings: "If you see one of these at the beach, you need to stay away!" In the story, the warning is articulated in a passive voice – "people are asked to be aware" – and ascribed to several sources, the police amongst others. Thus, neither *NRK* nor *Dagbladet* uses the same kind of requesting speech act when presenting these stories on their news sites. It appears to be suitable for Facebook alone.

According to Eivind Waage, *NRK*'s journalists are not supposed to transform their sources' voices into their own whatsoever. The newsroom has strict guidelines to always mark a quote as a quote, whether on *NRK.no* or on Facebook. The above mentioned story about the poison ampullas is not a severe mistake, Waage admits, as it is quite uncontroversial to warn about but dangerous things. "However, by principle, you shall know that we do not have any opinion on these things." He agrees that *NRK*'s ethical knee-jerk reactions in this matter seem to be better on their own website *NRK.no* than in social media, and believes this is due to the organizational structure and priorities: "The milieu that runs the front page is a highly professional milieu that has had this expertise for a very long time, whereas we who run social media have been very much dependent on who has been to work. We may not have been able to glom on to the expertise we should from the front."

Dagbladet puts forward a more liberal attitude. As long as the topic is uncontroversial, it is OK to take on a "buddy-approach", according to Cornelia Kristiansen: "Here is something you need to watch out for, that can be dangerous for you and yours." She argues that *Dagbladet* sometimes does the same thing on their own platforms, for instance when warning against tics in the summertime. However, this is not true for the present material. The journalists are clearly more inclined to put their sources' words in their own mouths when publishing on Facebook.

Although both informants are able to deduce some ethical norms for this category, the interviews leave the impression that this kind of Facebook practice is rarely reflected upon, despite a strong awareness about how to cite sources in the online papers.

Strategy 4: Expressing an emotion

In the online papers, news journalists usually take care not to express their own emotions. On Facebook, they put their guards down, celebrate birthdays and mourn the deceased – at least

in the tabloid *Dagbladet*. A typical example is a story about a teacher who has been honoured with a prize, to which *Dagbladet* comments: “We congratulate! 😊” Likewise, when a headline reveals that “Former secretary of state dies after car crash”, *Dagbladet* offers “Our condolences” as a promo text. No such expressive speech acts are found in the corresponding news stories.

Kristiansen admits there has been discussions in the newsroom about whether they should congratulate the King and Queen on their birthdays, as *Dagbladet* is a republican newspaper. “My answer is: We like the people even though we criticise the institution. That is allowed! The most unifying things in Norway are the monarchy and skiing victories. Then it is not a problem.”

In line with this, also national-romantic emotions seems legitimate. When publishing a spectacular video of a sea eagle catching a fish in mid-air, *Dagbladet*’s promo goes: “Oh, Norway! 😲❤️”

Even though expressive promo texts are virtually absent in the *NRK*-material, Eivind Waage approves of these expressives by *Dagbladet*. He thinks they are good examples of how you can strengthen the informal tone of voice and achieve the desired eye-level contact with the audience, in a way that he admits would be more difficult on *NRK.no*.

However, also for this strategy there is a question of where to draw the line. Often, the promo texts express high-arousal emotions. One *Dagbladet* story tells about an Irish beach that lost its sand to the waves 33 years ago – but suddenly, the sand has been washed back ashore. The promo text reads: “INCREDIBLE difference! 😊 - It is rarely this extreme.” Another story about an unlucky woman who ended up on the wrong plane, is promoted by the baffled reaction “Some detour! 😲”. Promo texts like these are not about congratulating politely or sharing national values. Rather, they are genre-wise quite similar to subjective comments the readers could be inclined to post on their own Facebook walls if they were to share the stories. According to Waage, *NRK* has to be more restrictive than *Dagbladet* in this matter. For instance, *NRK* would not pick capital letters, which appears too much of a clickbait, he claims, and such expressives should be limited to sports or soft and happy news. Both informants, though, agree that Facebook opens for more expressive speech acts, however only for certain stories.

Strategy 5: Stating a subjective point of view

The four previous strategies offer the journalist an indirect opportunity to tell the readers how to feel about the story, or how to interpret it. The fifth strategy takes this to the explicit level: The journalist utilizes the promo text to pose explicitly normative judgements over the reported events. *Dagbladet* has nine examples of this among the Facebook-unique updates; *NRK* has none.

In the news, *Dagbladet* tells the story of a group of men who dedicated Norway’s liberation day to polish a number of memorial plaques in remembrance of Holocaust victims. The promo text concludes: “Great initiative!” A similar promo is made for a story about an American girl who was surprisedly honoured by her late father’s police colleagues when visiting his grave: “Incredibly nicely done! ❤️” A number of other examples come from the sports: “Despite all she has been through, Heidi Weng pulled off a fantastic season. That is incredibly strong. 💪”

The opinions that are put forward in such cases are quite uncontroversial. Very few people would object to respecting deported Jews or honouring domestic sports heroes. More disputed opinions are rather presented through one of the other strategies, for instance as rhetorical or open questions: “About time?” (a politician has breastfed her baby in the Australian senate for the first time), “A suitable punishment?” (a man who cut his neighbour’s shed in half, got his own property expropriated). Nevertheless, the established text norms

seem to open for a larger degree of journalistic subjectivity on Facebook than in the online papers.

According to Cornelia Kristiansen, being subjective is a way of transferring *Dagbladet*'s brand identity as a tabloid newspaper onto the social media channels: "And that is indeed what works best. The more subjective you are, the better the story goes." Again, the question is where to draw the ethical line. Kristiansen keeps running discussions with her co-workers and distribute weekly examples of both successful and more problematic updates. She cannot recall any complaints about *Dagbladet* being too subjective on Facebook. When readers complain about subjective journalism, they are usually referring to explicitly opinionated genres, like editorials, or traditional news stories with a critical perspective.

Discussion

Journalists in both *Dagbladet* and *NRK* clearly enjoy a greater rhetorical scope when presenting their stories on Facebook, compared to the text norms on their own news sites. The journalists are allowed to be more subjective, to address the readers more directly, and to a larger extent interpret the stories for their readers and suggest reasonable emotional responses. Often, this is done by applying different speech acts than in ordinary news stories. While the news sites are dominated by assertives, even in the front titles, the journalists feel more free to express themselves through directives, expressives and evaluatives on Facebook.

The tabloid newspaper *Dagbladet* deviates considerable more from the traditional journalistic text norms when publishing on Facebook, compared to the public service broadcaster *NRK*. The difference can to a large extent be explained by the two media houses' respective legacies, financial models and commercial strategies. Both interviewees repeatedly refer to their brands' official ethos when explaining their distinct behaviour in social media. Organizational features come into play as well. In particular for *NRK*, resources to run social media have been scarce, leading to both less innovative and less professional updates than their head Eivind Waage would have wanted.

Furthermore, the departure from the traditional text norms is most apparent in the presentation of soft news, often sports, viral stories or entertaining trivia. There seems to be two parallel continuums here: The rhetorical topos of any story – the subject – is located somewhere between the extreme points "very controversial" and "not at all controversial". The less controversial the story is, the greater number of rhetorical tools are available for the promo text. We can therefore imagine a corresponding continuum of rhetorical features, from traditional news rhetoric as the one extreme point, via e.g. emojis, open questions, rhetorical questions, requests and emotions, until we reach explicit opinions as the opposite extreme point, in which the rhetoric is very much adjusted to social media and clearly more subjective (figure 6). Obviously, the ordering of the features are not absolute – there is a rhetorical difference between adding an emoji showing a parcel of bank notes and adding an emoji of an angry face. Likewise, certain sports and viral stories can clearly be more controversial than a given example of general hard news, even though they are ordered the other way around in figure 6. The present model, therefore, must be seen as a broad and highly general attempt to illustrate how journalists actually, and often unconsciously, identify the story on the controversy scale before picking the proper rhetorical tools. Thereby, they create and relate to implicit text norms of how to link controversy and rhetorical features in the promo text.

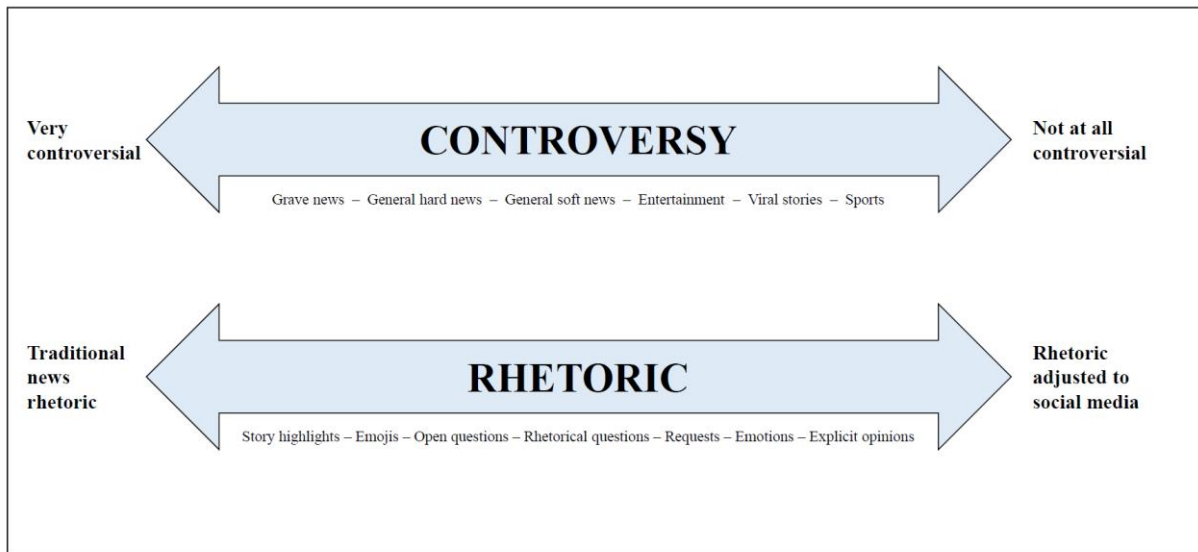


Figure 6. The connection between the degree of controversy and the choice of promo rhetoric on Facebook.

From previous studies we know that stories belonging to the right half of the controversy continuum – that is, soft news – are more likely to be shared (e.g. Kalsnes and Larsson 2017). We also know that promo texts that belong to the right half of the rhetoric continuum – updates that evoke high-arousal emotions – are more likely to generate shares and responses (e.g. Eberholst and Hartley 2014). Figure 6 links these observations together.

Now, it would be easy to jump to the conclusion that journalistic rhetoric in social media are weakening the professional norms of quality news journalism, by telling the readers how to react and explicitly flag the newsroom’s point of view. One can indeed develop a sound argument in this direction based on the findings in this study. However, we might also argue that the opposite is true: By being open about their intentions, journalists appear more transparent in social media, thus strengthening their ethos. In the examples put forward in this article, journalists are basically turning implicit arguments explicit, without hiding behind a shield of apparent objectivity – and the audience might perceive that as a good thing. Which of these two points of view one approves of, will likely be dependent on how far the journalists decide to go in applying subjective and interpretative rhetoric on controversial stories.

With few exceptions, the newsrooms have no explicit guidelines for when a given story is too controversial to open for a certain kind of promotional rhetoric. These are constantly ongoing negotiations between the editorial staff, guided by the readers’ explicit or implicit responses. Scholars need to monitor this development closely, as it generates new text norms that affect the general journalistic rhetoric. Both of my interviewees are open for experimenting in their online papers with rhetorical features that at the present are limited to social media. Moreover, as the newsrooms tend to take a more interpretative stance in social media, we need to keep a running discussion of where to draw the line between news and views, and whether interpretative news updates should be considered a decline of journalistic neutrality, or a more honest, open and dialogical kind of journalism.

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