Hostile emotions: An exploratory study of far-right online commenters and their emotional connection to traditional and alternative news media

Abstract

In this article, we explore media use through the perspective of emotions. We specifically focus on a contested group of media users, namely those who engage in uncivil online behaviour and have had one or several comments deleted by moderators due to xenophobic and racist content. Our point of departure is that the informants represent a particularly engaged yet controversial audience. Based on theoretical perspectives on "hostile emotions" like anger and fear (Miceli and Castelfranchi, 2019) and how the news media function as "emotional regimes" (Wahl-Jorgensen, 2019), we explore how the informants talk about their worldview and how it affects their media choices. We argue that political fear constitutes a powerful part of the informants' narratives, which again influences their media use. Even though they are highly sceptical and suspicious, the participants in the study seek information from a wide selection of traditional and alternative sources where their worldview is both contested and confirmed. Furthermore, the strong fear expressed by informants constitute an important element of the anger they feel towards the established news media. This particular anger is structured around the notion of objective reporting that they consider highly provocative, both factually and emotionally, as it does not match how they experience the world around them.

Keywords: hostile emotions, emotional regimes, trust, far-right, immigration, news media, alternative media

Introduction

A consequence of the high-choice digital media environment in which we live is that audiences can choose to engage with a wide variety of news and information providers that compete for our attention. The kinds of news sources people consume, engage with and trust, should be of great concern in any democratic society that relies on the participation of well-informed citizens. In this article, we explore media use through the perspective of emotions. Recently, the role of emotions has become more pertinent within journalism studies, specifically from the perspective of journalism practice and production. However, as Lecheler (2020: 290) has pointed out, there is a need for more audience-centered research on the emotional turn within journalism studies because it informs the discussion on what audiences want, rather than what journalists think audiences want. Following this call, we explore how a controversial and contested group of media users, namely online commenters on the far-right, talk about their relationship to the news media. While this group of active yet distrustful media users have become the centre of attention in terms of the shortcomings of online debates, and specifically when it comes to challenges of uncivility, in-depth studies investigating their relation to the news media are relatively scarce. In this study, we ask what role emotions play when it comes to how far-right commenters talk about their media use and engagement? More specifically, we focus on how hostile emotions, like fear and anger, can be used to explore media use.

Methodologically, we rely on qualitative in-depth interviews with 15 people who have participated in comment sections of the established news media and who have had one or several of their comments deleted due to xenophobic or racist content. The study is theoretically inspired by literature on emotions, journalism and media use. Emotions represent an important area of interest in many academic disciplines, including political psychology (Plamper, 2012; Vasilopoulos, et al. 2017; Vasilopoulos, et al. 2019) and (online) political communication (Abdel-Fadil, 2019; Engesser et al., 2017; Papacharassi, 2015; Wollebæk et al., 2019). Recently there has also been increased attention directed at the role of emotion and affect in connection to journalism (Lünenborg and Maier, 2018; Peters, 2011). We approach the news media as "emotional regimes" (Wahl-Jorgensen, 2019). This points to how the news media function as areas for legitimate and illegitimate emotional responses to particular events. The news media can in other words be an arena for inclusion and solidarity based on mediated emotional connections, but they can also represent a space of conflict and exclusion (Orgeret, 2020). One

of the ways in which audiences can respond to journalism is by participating in comment sections (Ihlebæk and Krumsvik, 2015; Løvlie et al. 2018; Lünenborg and Maier, 2018; Toepfl and Piwoni, 2015). Several studies have indicated how such spaces have become arenas for incivility and hate (Coe et al., 2014; Erjavec and Kovacic, 2012; Quandt, 2018; Su et al. 2018; Waldron, 2012), how participation can be triggered by anger (Springer et al., 2015; Ziegele et al., 2017; Wollebæk et al., 2019) and how journalists have responded to this kind of audience participation (Frischlich et al., 2019; Lewis, 2012; Singer et al. 2011). In this article, we take a different approach, and focus on the relationship between controversial commenters and the news media, including established and alternative outlets (Holt et al., 2019).

We argue that political fear, meaning fear directed at the societal level, constitutes a powerful part of the informants' narratives and understanding of the world. This fear is specifically constructed around the perceived threats of immigration and Islam, topics informants are highly concerned about and engaged in, and at the same time feel is not covered correctly in the mainstream press. Political actors from the far-right that share their worldview are, it is argued, silenced and ridiculed in the news. The strong political fear the informants express for the future comprises an important element of the anger they feel towards the established media. This particular anger is structured around the notion of objective reporting, a principle they support but that they argue is not practiced. Consequently, news media coverage does not match how they experience the world around them either factually or emotionally, and alternative news sources that supports their worldview is sought.

Hostile emotions, media use, and political engagement

A well-functioning democracy depends on the participation of well-informed citizens. As such, the sources people choose to inform themselves about the world are of great concern. Factors such trust, habits, interests, political affiliation, personal experiences, and emotions can influence why we prefer some news providers over others (Carlson, 2017; Strömbeck et al., 2020). In this article we are particularly interested in audiences' relationships to news media from an emotional perspective, and specifically how negative emotions of anger and fear can be used to investigate people's relationship to the news media. From a psychological perspective, fear and anger have been characterised as "basic emotions;" that is, they have been developed through evolution and meet a set of standard empirical criteria (see Ekman, 1992; Sabini and Silver, 2005 for more thorough discussion). Fear and anger are part of what has been

placed in the family of "hostile emotions" together with resentment, indignation, contempt, and disgust (Miceli and Castelfranchi, 2019: 13-14). Fear is a feeling triggered by something or someone perceived as dangerous (Robin, 2004; Sabini and Silver, 2005). "Political fear," according to Corey (2004: 96) indicates people's "felt apprehension of some harm to their collective well-being—the fear of terrorism, panic over crime, anxiety about moral decay—or the intimidation wielded over men and women by governments or groups." Corey argues that this type of fear is distinguished by its societal dimension rather than a personal one, as it "arises from conflicts within and between societies". Studies on the far-right suggest that political fear is commonplace, and that far-right populist politicians who wish to gain support often do so by constructing ingroups or outgroups and by focusing on perceived threats arising from immigration, terrorism, moral decay, or economic crises (Engesser et al., 2017; Mudde and Kaltwasser, 2012; Wodak, 2015).

Anger can be characterised as a "strong feeling of annoyance and hostility elicited by a perceived wrong" (Miceli and Castelfranchi, 2019: 13-14). When we feel anger, it is because we experience the actions of others as "immoral, unfair, or unjust" (Fisher et al., 2018: 310). Miceli and Castelfranchi (2019: 16) argue that anger is characterized by a tendency to act, either verbally or physically, to change what is perceived as an unfair situation (see also van Doorn, 2018: 21). Indeed, the latter point is crucial when distinguishing between anger and hate; while an act of anger is motivated by a need to change the outcome and possibly forgive the target, the goal of hate is to hurt or eliminate the target. From the field of political communication and political psychology, fear and anger are understood as strong indicators for political action and political choices (see Jost, 2019; Vasilopoulos et al., 2017, 2019). Wahl-Jorgensen (2019: 11) furthermore points out that "individuals are motivated to act politically on the basis of what are often *negative* emotions, including anger, fear, hatred and disgust towards groups or ideas that are discursively marked out as different or 'Other.'" A study conducted by Wollebæk et al. (2019) points out similarly, that that angry people are more likely to engage in online debates and choose partisan information, while fear leads people to seeking opposing information.

So far, we have pointed out that fear and anger can be related to political and online participation. Less is known about how emotions affect media use (Matthes, 2011). In the following sections, we will first outline perspectives on journalism and emotions before we turn our attention towards how these contested users talk about their relationship to it.

News media as emotional regimes

According to Peters (2011), the role of emotions in journalism has historically been contested. He points out that emotions have been seen to conflict with the concept of "hard news" which is based on ideals like objectivity, neutrality, and factual detachment. Objectivity in journalism has been problematized by many scholars (Maras, 2013; Tuchman, 1972); however, it continues to be an important ideal for audiences, journalists and scholars. Lately, however, emotions have been given more attention as a way to understand journalistic production and consumption. Beckett and Deuze (2016: 2) argue that emotion is a crucial building block of "good journalism" and how people relate to the news, as it "drives people's increasingly intimate relationships with technology, fuels engagement with news and information, and inspires professionals to pursue careers in an industry that offers anything but reliable rewards for work well done." Furthermore, several scholars note that the news media constitute an important institution and site for negotiation of which emotions are perceived as legitimate and illegitimate (Lünenborg and Maier, 2018; Pantti, 2010). Wahl-Jorgensen (2019: 9) refers to this as "emotional regimes," and argues that news media are "particularly interesting as an object of study" due to the "distinctiveness of the articulation of emotion, which contributes to both establishing and challenging emotional regimes." The news media, she continues, represents a "moral compass" that guides us in a complex world and helps us make sense of how we should feel about dramatic and confusing events. Indeed, research on journalistic performance has shown how the news media often leave their role as critical reporters to take on a ceremonial one in the aftermath of radical events or terrorist attacks (Thorbjørnsrud and Figenschou, 2018). Therefore, journalism can reaffirm core values of the civil sphere in the aftermath of a specific crisis (Alexander, 2006; Luengo and Ihlebæk, 2019)

If journalism as an institution can function as a space of solidarity and belonging, it can also do the opposite. As Orgeret (2020), Lecheler (2020), and Wahl-Jorgensen (2019) have pointed out, any examination of emotions in journalism also raises questions about power, exclusion and conflict. From the perspective of the audience, it is important to ask how it feels when the mediated emotional compass of the news media is not shared or trusted but rather resisted and rejected, and why this is the case. Research on media trust suggests that distrust is related to political positioning and that far-right audiences that are critical towards immigration, show a higher level of distrust towards the established news media than those placed at the centre or to the left, and view journalism as biased (Moe et al., 2018). Perceptions of bias have also been linked to "the hostile media effect" (Gunther and Schmitt, 2004; Vallone et al. 1985), which suggests that audiences view news media coverage as more or less biased based on their cognitive and more importantly affective involvement with specific issues (Matthes, 2011). In

other words, if people are very concerned or emotionally engaged with a particular issue, they are more likely to view news that contradicts their experience as biased.

Given our focus on media users that express far-right attitudes, it is relevant to point out how immigration and Islam traditionally has been core issues of concern for the far-right (Mudde and Kaltwasser, 2012; Rydgren, 2018). Also, debates about these topics are often heated and lead to strong emotions. A study of online commenters and their experiences of repercussions from participating in the debate, showed that the most common reason for reporting negative incidents was related to debating immigration. Many of the problematic experiences described by the online commenters revealed a feeling of being a marginalized group in a society dominated by a "politically correct" and liberal elite (Løvlie et al., 2018). Another study has also highlighted how those supporting stricter policies on immigration in Norway feel stigmatized as "evil" by the "moral left-wing" and that sharing such views has consequences for their social life (Thorbjørnsrud, 2017).

Furthermore, people who express a high level of media distrust tend to use alternative sources more often (Fletcher and Park, 2017; Strömbäck et al., 2020; Tsfati, 2003, 2010). A core issue for right-wing alternative media has been to counter what is perceived as the biased "mainstream media," particularly its coverage of immigration and Islam (Atkinson and Berg, 2011; Figenschou and Ihlebæk; Heft et al., 2019; Holt, 2020; Ihlebæk and Nygaard, 2020; Nygaard, 2019). Recent research has documented how right-wing sites, even though they may not have high readership, have managed to set a social media agenda through a loyal follower base eager to engage with their content (Benkler et al., 2018; Heft et al., 2019; Sandberg and Ihlebæk, 2019). Rauch (2007) has suggested that alternative media can be understood as interpretative communities for those that consume them, and a recent study on audiences of right-wing alternative media shows that they tended to be much more concerned with "moral behaviours, family values and American traditions" than left-wing users (Rauch, 2019: 31). A study by Schulze (2020) based on data from the Reuters Digital News Survey (2019) furthermore showed that the strongest predictor of right-wing alternative media use are political interests and attitudes towards immigration. In yet another study, Noppari et al. (2019: 29) conducted qualitative interviews with people who engage with right-wing alternative media in Finland, and classified them as system sceptics, agenda critics, and the casually discontent. The first group is characterized by its broad suspicion of the oppressive "system" of which journalists are a part, and tended to express strong scepticism and distrust towards the mainstream media. Agenda critics placed less emphasis on journalism as part of "the system", but were in general highly distrustful towards media elites that are perceived to have a political

agenda that leads to biased reporting. Alternative media sources, for this group, are actively sought for diversity and a wider dialogue, and they want to gain a more legitimate position in public discussions. The group characterized as casually discontent believe individual journalists are biased, and they consume alternative news mostly for additional information or entertainment purposes. In sum, their study showed that users engage with right-wing alternative media for a variety of reasons and from more or less radical positions.

So far, we have indicated that far-right audiences tend to be express a higher degree of distrust towards the mainstream media, and that they seek alternative media sources more often. Furthermore, we have pointed out that immigration and Islam tend to be areas of interest for the far-right in general, and that right-wing alternative media often focus on such topics. In the following section, we will explore in more detail how far-right media users talk about their relationship to the news media by focusing on both the topics that concern them and how emotions are expressed.

Methodology

The data material consists of 15 in-depth interviews: 11 face-to-face, three by telephone, and one via email. The Norwegian Data Security Service approved the project on July 1, 2016. Because of the sensitivity of the topic, the informants were given the possibility to choose how they wanted to be interviewed. Though such variation in form was not ideal, the data still provides important in-depth insights into the worldview of a contested and largely unexplored group of media users. The informants were selected on the basis of their participation in the comment section in one of the two Norwegian legacy newspapers *Dagbladet.no* or *Nettavisen.no,[i]* from which they had one or more comments deleted by moderators for violating the guidelines of the newspaper. More specifically the comment stigmatised, harassed, or labelled a social group based on ethnic, religious, or cultural belonging. The comments were written between January and September 2016, in the aftermath of the migrant and refugee crisis and questions of immigration received significant media attention that year (Hovden et al., 2018). The newspapers gave the authors of this article the opportunity to view a list of 4000 deleted comments. The data material was not publicly available, and access to these comments needed explicit consent from the media houses. One of the researchers read all the comments (which had been forwarded with encrypted IDs) and chose a selection of texts with xenophobic or derogatory wording. Contacts at *Nettavisen* or *Dagbladet* were presented with the selected comments and forwarded a list of 135 commenters with contact information from their profiles. The commenter was contacted and given the opportunity to either approve or reject the request.

Of the 135 requests, 15 agreed to participate in the study and were subsequently contacted by a researcher. Each informant was given the necessary information on ethical considerations. All the informants turned out to be men, which was a coincidence since we did not know gender when we selected the comments. Previous studies have indicated that men participate in online debates through comment sections to a higher degree than women, which might explain this skew. It has also been suggested that more men engage in uncivil online behaviour (Nadim and Fladmoe, 2016). Why this might be the case is interesting and important but outside of the scope of our study. Respondent ages ranged between 30 and 60. A majority of the respondents were employed at the time of the interview; however, we did not probe further into their job situations out of respect for their anonymity.

The interviews were conducted using an explorative and phenomenological approach, wishing to capture the informants' lifeworld and how they constructed their narratives before they were invited to explain the comments they had written, as well as their relation to the wider society, including the news media. In a previous study the informants' view on their online commenting practices was explored in more detail (Fangen and Holter, 2020). The interviews lasted three hours on average, as the informants felt the need to talk "their hearts out" and appreciated someone who would listen. The transcribed interviews were coded through the qualitative data analysis program NVivo. The transcripts were written verbatim as much as possible and coded using particular categories relevant to the research questions. In the context of this article, we looked at how they talked about their relationship to the established and alternative media and the presence of emotional language. We were particularly interested in how fear and anger was expressed in the context of journalism.

Analysis: Hostile emotions and media use

In the following section, we outline how fear and anger constitute core elements of the distrust informants express towards established news media as sources of facts and as emotional regimes, and how they seek alternative news sources.

Fearing the future

Fear is expressed by the informants with reference to threats of increased migration, particularly from Muslims. A common tendency is to refer to this threat as something that will happen in the future based on previous negative events that have taken place. Notably, fear is connected to specific incidents they have read about, not experienced personally. Also, the perceived threat of Muslim immigration is discussed in the context of the risk it poses to others

(namely women), future generations, and Norwegian society as a whole. In other words, it can best be described as form of "political fear," as coined by Corey (2004) on a societal rather than personal level. This kind of fear is illustrated in the following quotes:

> Islam is the greatest threat to freedom and democracy. Islam is blind obedience to the will of Allah, Sharia Law. Islam is a totalitarian ideology. I am not a totalitarian. I am all for responsible freedom and for allowing individuals to be enabled to decide their own destiny. However, uncontrolled immigration into any country deprives the native population of its rights and causes ethnic conflict where there was none. Giving freedom to some should not entail depriving others of their freedom such as owning a homeland and having a unique homogeneous culture that fulfils that nations' needs. (4)

> It is the attack on the Norwegian society, democracy and equality between men and women I resist. (5)

> That's the kind of things that will happen, more and more terror. We have to follow our women when they go to the doctor and that kind of thing. They can't go by themselves anymore soon… It is not a doomsday prophecy; it is the way it is… and it is you, the girls that will pay the price. (9)

> We are the most naïve country in the world. I do not know if that is negative or if it is a compliment. But it means that we are a society based on trust… but the most important thing is that we are not Muslims. We do not whip our women. We do not beat our children. We don't have detailed rules for how to behave. We have equality. Maybe also unreasonable quality. (10)

While the informants generally do not defend violence as a way to act against the perceived threats of immigration, one argues that he would consider it: "I am the most peaceful man, but I am willing to use weapons if necessary. Not because of my political convictions but maybe to protect your children" (6). Another common tendency among the informants is a passionate concern with "facts," "the truth," and the conditions for "telling it as it is" when it comes to topics in which they are emotionally engaged. The search for the truth represents an important motivation in how they inform themselves and engage with the news media. The informants express an interest in a wide selection of national and international sources and can be characterised as very active and engaged media users:

> I follow everything. I like to follow both left-wing and right-wing media. (9)

> You become your own news agency and make up your own mind. The newspapers have for long preached that they want to teach us what we should think. They do not manage to exclude their own opinion in something that should be objective. No matter what you

describe, you are told what to think. That is not good, and those that are smart, they see it. (10)

While the informants seek information from a wide selection of sources, they also express a high degree of anger and suspicion towards the established news media. Referring to the study by Noppari et al. (2019), many of the informants can be described as "system-critics," meaning that they tend to view the established news media as part of a socialist and politically correct leftist elite that set the boundaries for what is acceptable to think, feel and express. For instance, some allude to the 'LabourPartyfication of society' (6). Following this line of thought, the media is either understood as a tool politician use to influence people with "ideological propaganda" (6) or the political agenda of journalists that coincides with the leftist elite. When probed about how politicians can influence the media in this way, one informant claims it can happen through media support systems or the strategic placement of politicians in leading positions: "The Labour Party has managed to position itself by pushing in leaders everywhere, in the labour union, the media, everywhere, so all leaders are Labour Party idiots. It is a disaster. I think it is very peculiar" (10). Not all informants share this kind of conspiracy thought, however, and those that can be described as "agenda-critics" instead emphasise how journalism fails because journalists tend to be on the left of the political spectrum.

Angrily consuming the news

There are two forms of media criticism repeated by the informants and which fuels anger. First, they argue that the coverage of specific issues, particularly immigration and politics, is biased and false. Bias in the news is felt as a provocation and expressions of anger are often related to specific programs or events featured: "It is not very often that I watch debates about immigration on TV, because actually, I get a high blood pressure" (7). Several of the informants also point to how the news media cover far-right politicians in a negative and unfavourable light, which they experience as highly unjust. Many of the informants give examples of when their political heroes were ridiculed in the established media, which is understood as a way to keep them from executing real power. They commonly refer to the one-sided coverage of Donald Trump and the situation in the United States: "The campaigning media lose all their trustworthiness because they campaign either for Palestine, for Clinton or for immigrants" (10). Another informant: "I don't know if you followed the debates on the election. I watched it on Urix (a debate program on the Norwegian public service broadcaster) and I almost threw the TV out of the window. Four white people cursing 'the white angry man.' It was horrible" (9). Anger towards the perceived bias is further triggered by the promise that

the news media *should* be objective, as this informant points out: "The mainstream media have a clear political bias. It is therefore propaganda, not an attempt to arrive at an objective conclusion. The conclusion is given before the article is written" (4). A failure to meet objective ideals fuels the anger, suspicion, and hostility of the respondents.

Secondly, anger towards the mainstream media is closely connected to the concept of morality and what is perceived as a legitimate feeling. Our study shows that the informants vehemently resist what they experience as the dominant emotional regime pushed by left-wing politicians and the media. This includes suggestions that immigration and multiculturalism is a positive thing, Islam is a peaceful religion, and that we should feel sorry for suffering migrants.

> The media represent a false picture. The media, politicians and the whole gang claim that we should feel sorry for them…How can a child travel across the world without any problems, and then when he is here it is like "Oh, I can't do anything and need help with everything." Something is not right with that story (2).

> They represent themselves as kind and good, and say that we should open the borders for everybody that needs help. But are you really kind and good if you do so? Do you do the Norwegian people a favor? Have you thought I through? I don't think so. (5)

> We are not presented the right picture. I do not believe anything that comes from the media when it comes to immigration…they are part of the "morally good" and it is sickening. (6)

> It is a form of disguised pressure from the left to demonize and stigmatize other views. (10)

As these quotes illustrate, the informants do not share the sentiments that are portrayed in the mainstream media, and feel frustrated that their perspective on the matter is stigmatized as evil. This is particularly pertinent because of the fear they feel for the future. This fear is not, according to them, taken seriously or covered in a satisfactorily way. Consequently, people are unaware of the serious threat that they believe our society is facing. The anger and detachment the informants feel furthermore fuels the need to seek out alternative sources of information.

Seeking alternative media

So far, we have argued that the participants in our study can be characterised as active, engaged, and distrustful media users who express a high degree of political fear towards the future, as well as anger towards the news media – both in terms of how issues are covered and how audiences are meant to feel about particular topics. We have previously acknowledged a correlation between media distrust and the use of alternative media sources (Tsfati, 2010), and

suggested that right-wing alternative media are characterised by their ability to challenge the power and authority of the mainstream media by covering topics like immigration and Islam in a different way (Figenschou and Ihlebæk, 2019; Holt, 2020). As expected, the majority of the informants said that they read alternative news media on a regular basis, and also referred to particular books and videos on YouTube that they trusted and enjoyed. During the interviews, many took out their mobile phones or iPads to put forth a number of different alternative media sites. They explicitly expressed enthusiasm for these sites, and it was clear that they provided a point of departure for them in their daily lives. This was specifically the case for systems sceptics that portrayed the most extreme ideological views and anger towards the mainstream news. The alternative media sites mentioned varied from conservative newspapers such as *The Daily Mail* in the UK, to Nazi-inspired sites such as *NordFront* and Islamophobic blogs such as *Nabokjerringa*. Other common sources were the Norwegian alternative right-wing news sites *Dokument.no*, *Rights.no*, and *Frieord.no*; the US right-wing site *Breitbart.no*; Russian sites like *Russia Today* or *Russia Insider*; and Swedish sites *NyaTider* and *Frihetskamp*. When asked why they consume such media, it was often claimed that the sites are more objective and detailed and that they enjoy the extensive event descriptions provided by alternative media, as these quotes illustrate:

> You are presented truths and facts instead of views. You have an objective angle on the news. (1)

> You see, they are not only more accurate, but they also contain more information. (3)

Another informant says he values the "creative style of writing." which is described as colourful, entertaining, and relatable to the lives of "the real people." He adds: "Actually, I don't really trust anything. But they (alternative media) are good at telling stories. If the stories are interesting, then I look into it. But I like radio, podcast, that kind of thing, a lot. If they are good at telling stories, in a way that I can really relate to, then I look more closely at it." An important point related to the informants' positions as system sceptics is that they emphasised that the news produced by actors *outside* the establishment is more trustworthy even though they understand the information provided on these sites is not always perfect. While it is clear that the informants enjoy and seek alternative news sources and describe them as less biased, more informative, and enjoyable, many of the informants do not necessarily automatically accept everything that they read in alternative news sources either, as one informant argues "there are

so many channels and fake news on both sides. On the right side, you have some loose cannons. But the left also definitely has theirs, and that is dramatic" (10).

Interestingly, the participants in the study do not talk about their relation to the alternative media sphere by using strong emotional expressions. However, we can surmise that right-wing alternative media provides an alternative emotional regime because they recognise, confirm and possibly enhance the fear that constitute an important part of the informants' worldviews. Furthermore, they share their anger by confronting and opposing the mainstream.

Discussion: Angry truth-seekers fearing for the future

As Lecheler (2020: 290) has pointed out, there is a need for more research that takes into account the emotional aspect of media use. Following this call, we have in this article, explored how a specific group of far-right commenters talk about their engagement with the news media and how hostile emotions like fear and anger constitute an important part of the participants' distrust towards the established media. We argue that exploring emotions is important because it informs the wider discussion about why, when and how journalists and audiences connect or disconnect.

Referring to the conceptual terms suggested by Noppari et al. (2019), most of the informants in this study can be described as system sceptics or agenda critics portraying radical far-right ideological worldviews. As expected, the participants in the study express a high degree of political fear when they speak about the future due to increased immigration and Islam. The fear is expressed on a societal level rather than based on personal experiences, and is often centred around the possible regression of liberal rights like gender equality and free speech. Our study shows how the established news media as an "emotional regime" (Wahl-Jorgensen, 2019), is highly contested by the informants. As Orgeret (2020) has pointed the emotional turn in journalism encompass power and conflict as core features. This study supports this claim and shows that the established news media, rather than proving a space for inclusion, become a space for exclusion and constant conflict for the marginal group at hand. The informants, who strongly believe in facts and support objectivity as a journalistic principle, give plenty of examples of incidents where they think the mainstream media have failed both factually and as a moral compass. The perceived media bias in relation to issues they care about is felt as highly unjust, and the experience of being stigmatized as "evil" when the emotional interpretation is not shared, provokes strong responses. The analysis furthermore shows that the informants are drawn to alternative spheres because they experience them as closer to the truth and that they challenge the system. Right-wing alternative media, heavily concerned by the

negative impact of immigration and Islam, confirm the fear, share the anger and provide an alternative emotional framework for this audience group. Further research is needed to investigate in more depth how competing emotional regimes are constructed among different news providers and how they are experienced by different audience groups. Also, it is important to follow the alternative right-wing media scene closely to identify how such actors may prey on hostile emotions to create loyalty and engagement, and to detect potential signs of radicalization. The informants, however, use less emotional expressions when they talk about why they consume alternative media. This might partly be explained by the fact that they were more eager to speak about their frustration with the established news media then sharing positive experiences with alternative sources. It could also be a sign of how hostile emotions are stronger triggers when it comes to how people talk about their media use.

The strong tendency of viewing the established media as more biased then partisan alternative sources, can be explained by the "the hostile media effect" (Matthes, 2011), which refers to how people who are highly engaged in particular topics, emotionally or cognitively, are more prone to experiencing particular news as more biased. This points to a dilemma for professional journalism: How should this kind of scepticism be met, if at all? Objectivity represent a particularly difficult and paradoxical matter in this context, because while it continues to be a central dimension of journalistic professionalism and also an important ideal amongst the user group in question – in other words they *want* objective reporting, it also triggers anger when facts are contested and the interpretative context is not shared. Due to the deep mistrust that exists on a system level, it seems unlikely that journalist can do much to convince this particular audience group that journalistic professionalism ensures trustworthy, balanced and neutral reporting. Importantly, the intrinsic suspicion towards the established media expressed by the informants does not necessarily mean that they stop reading or engaging with legacy newspapers. Hostile emotions like fear, at least for some people, seem to boost the need for information, even information that they oppose. Anger, it can be argued, becomes part of the informants' identity as oppositional truth-seekers who see it as it really is, an anger that is fuelled by confronting established sources and confirmed by visiting alternative ones. Anger can also partly explain why they engage in the comment sections of the established news media: they want to warn other people about the dangers they see and feel. Pursuing these goals, negative emotions are mixed with more positive sentiments of persistence and resilience, pointing to the need for identifying how a mix of emotions can be at play when it comes to media use and engagement.

Finally, the present study has some weaknesses. It is based on a limited group of people interviewed at a particular moment of time in a particular national context. The study cannot say anything about whether, how, or why these participants might change their attitudes towards the news media. The study also has limitations identifying how specific elements of the news, in established and alternative sites, trigger a wider set of emotional responses (not only hostile ones). We suggest that future studies should dig deeper into the construction of emotional regimes in different kinds of news media, how it is experienced by specific audience groups and how it affects user behaviour and attitudes.

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[i]*Both newspapers can be characterized as digitally advanced. They adhere to the editorial and journalistic professional norms as outlined in the code of ethics for editors and journalists. Nettavisen is a liberal to right-wing digital tabloid newspaper. Dagbladet is a left-wing tabloid with long roots as a printed newspaper, but was one of the first online newspapers in Norway. Both newspapers long defended a liberal take on the moderation of comment sections based on free speech and the importance of including new and marginalized voices and opinions.*