



## Women's emotion work on Facebook: Strategic use of emotions in public discourse

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### ABSTRACT

Debates on Facebook are frequently accused of being too emotional, and rational arguments give way to anger, outrage, and polarisation. Emotions are often juxtaposed against reasoning in public deliberation, as they are not considered rational but coercive in nature. However, others would argue that emotions have a specific function in public discussion, as, for example, they can make an argument more genuine or trigger empathy. Considering that social network sites, such as Facebook, are designed to favour emotional engagement, it becomes clear that more understanding is needed about the experience of emotions in such debates. Based on 30 in-depth interviews, this study explores how emotions in Facebook debates are experienced and negotiated by Norwegian women. The findings show that while some emotions are disliked and considered non-conductive, other emotions are employed strategically. Moreover, the analysis demonstrates how the use and negotiation of emotions can be understood as emotion work.

### Introduction

Social network sites, such as Facebook, are often discussed as spaces where public debate can take place, even if it is disputed how well such debates function from a democratic perspective (Neuman et al., 2011; Papacharissi, 2002; Rojas & Puig-i-Abril, 2009; Storsul, 2014; Van Dijck, 2012). Simultaneously, Facebook is an emotional landscape with an architecture and culture of sharing built on emotions (Wahl-Jorgensen, 2019, pp. 147–165), and contemporary popular discourse frequently connects Facebook to heated debates, amplified emotional outbursts, and emotional contagion (Hermida, 2014). It is a space that “challenges conventional divides between the private and the public, the individual and the collective, and the personal and the political” (Wahl-Jorgensen, 2019, p. 151). By extension, it is also a space where users need to negotiate more than one set of norms.

This study explores how female Facebook users experience this potentially challenging public space, emphasising the role of emotion. Two lines of enquiry were followed: how women experience emotions in public discourse on Facebook and how women negotiate and strategically employ emotions when posting or taking part in public discourse on Facebook.

The premise is based on the understanding of emotions as cognitive, intelligent (Nussbaum, 2001), social (Bericat, 2016; Burkitt, 2014; Stryker, 2004), as judgements of value and importance (Nussbaum,

2004), and as a backdrop that conditions assessments or expectations (Stryker, 2004; Turner & Stets, 2006). Furthermore, the current study draws on “emotion work”, a concept describing “the act of trying to change in degree or quality an emotion or feeling” (Hochschild, 1979, p. 561), and an “individuals work on inducing or inhibiting feelings so as to render them appropriate to a situation” (Hochschild, 1979, p. 551).

This study uses the case of women's user experience of a space where several different sets of conflicting norms come into play: the norm of public discourse, the norm of Facebook as pro-social, and gendered societal norms of displaying emotion. Facebook is an arena where women and men are equally present (Moe & Sakariassen, 2018), yet public participation has traditionally been viewed as a masculine arena (Coffé & Bolzendahl, 2010; Huckfeldt & Sprague, 1995; Norris, 1991; Miller et al., 1999) and studies suggest that traditionally gendered dynamics involved in civic engagement are replicated on Facebook (Brandtzaeg, 2015; Hayat et al., 2017; Krasnova et al., 2017; Wang et al., 2013), which also includes gendered discourse patterns (Brandtzaeg, 2015; Joiner et al., 2014, 2016). Simultaneously, gender socialisation theory states that women are generally socialised into having stronger feelings of connection to others than men, and therefore they have a greater concern for social harmony (Costa Jr et al., 2001; Gilligan, 1993; Leaper & Ayres, 2007). Women are also more sensitive to social cues than men (Croson & Gneezy, 2009), which is likely to make them particularly precarious when navigating several types of norms simultaneously. One

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such norm is the emotional architecture of Facebook, which encourages pro-social behaviour (Wahl-Jorgensen, 2019). Several studies have found that gender differences are replicated in online social network environments; compared to men, women are found to be more supportive (Joiner et al., 2014, 2016; Walton & Rice, 2013; Wang et al., 2013), more sensitive to others opinion and prefer a positive tone in the communication (Lin & Lu, 2011), more oriented towards being consensual (Joiner et al., 2014). How women experience and navigate the emotional public landscape of Facebook is, therefore, considered a particularly interesting case to study emotion work in public discourse.

Women's user experience of Facebook encompasses "emotions, beliefs, preferences, perceptions, physical and psychological responses, behaviours and accomplishments that occur before, during and after use" (Mirmig et al., 2015). Since this study aims to further the understanding of women's experience of emotions in public discourse on Facebook, it is vital not to focus only on observable activity but also to include the experience, cognitive effort, or considerations of users who participate in a way that cannot be observed (Crawford, 2009). This is considered particularly important as women are known to be socially committed in ways that are not necessarily picked up on in conventional understandings of public or political participation (Coffé & Bolzendahl, 2010; Norris, 1991; Verba et al., 1995).

Public discourse includes various dimensions of public life such as political discussions, public exchange of opinion, debates of societal relevance, civic engagement, and other non-labelled activities. The term "public" describes "issues affecting how we live together that require common solutions" (Couldry et al., 2007, p. 6) and claims to "connote ideas of citizenship, commonality, and things not private, but accessible and observable by all" (Papacharissi, 2002, p. 10). This study was conducted in Norway, a democratic country characterised by gender equality and free speech (Reporters Without Borders, 2019). Simultaneously, Norwegians, like their Nordic neighbours, are generally not known for a communication style that is emotionally oriented (Corneliusen, 2012).

## Literature review

### Emotion

In Nussbaum's (2004) description of emotions as cognitive, opinions and emotions do not appear as opposites; instead, one learns the meaning of each emotion and chooses certain emotions over others (ibid.). Emotions can also function as messages for the self (Hochschild, 1983) as they carry out a signal function and are therefore adaptive and useful in interactions (Heise, 2007; Stryker, 2004). In addition, emotional experiences also leave a mark that can be both enduring and the conditions for the future disposition of a subject (Bericat, 2016, p. 493). According to expectation states theory, the assessment of an object or person will depend on prior expectations of the subject, thus affecting the resulting emotional experience (Turner & Stets, 2006) and the expectation that one has towards another in social interactions (Stryker, 2004). Intergroup emotion theory recognises that emotional experience is not only the result of what happens to oneself but what happens to the social group that they belong to or identify with (Mackie & Smith, 2002). In the current study, emotions are understood to function cognitively, socially, and as a backdrop that conditions assessments or expectations.

### Emotion work

Hochschild (1979) introduced the concept of "emotion work", which she later

distinguish between the concepts of *emotional labour* and *emotion work*. The former is understood as the management of emotions which is done for "a wage," while the latter is the same management "in private life" (Hovden & Moe, 2017, p. 118). Hochschild (1979, 1983) argued

that emotion is often subjected to acts of management where the individual "works on inducing or inhibiting feelings as to render them appropriate for the situation" (1979: 551). Thus, culture defines what, when, and how one should feel, which Hochschild (1983) contextualises as emotion work. Emotion work is about engaging in communication that results from either the expression of felt emotions or the decision to disguise or manage them (Fiebig & Kramer, 1998). Controlling emotions according to situations or conventions is central. However, emotion work also requires one to produce an emotional state in another person as a result of their interaction (Hochschild, 1983). Emotion work can happen at a surface level, where only outward appearances are changed, or can go deeper, where actors portray a role by genuinely altering how they feel and thus "become" the role (Hochschild, 1983). While many have connected the concept of emotional labour and emotion work to unfavourable consequences (Kruml & Geddes, 2000, p. 12), it has also been found to have positive aspects, such as an increased sense of community, self-efficacy, and psychological well-being (ibid., 13).

The current study applies emotion work to the setting of Facebook. Thus, the emotions in question are related to the work involved in experiencing and employing emotions in public discourse on Facebook. Such activity is also known as "immaterial labour" (Lazzarato, 1996, p. 137), a form of affective and cognitive labour constituted by activities involved in defining and fixing cultural standards, norms, and public opinions.

### The role of emotions in public deliberation

The notion of authentic public deliberation has been restricted to rational arguments (Wahl-Jorgensen, 2019), and popular discourses about normative forms of civic engagement frequently set emotion against reasoning (Papacharissi, 2015, p. 134). While particular forms of civic engagement are considered inadequate by being too emotional and lacking a rational foundation, others are recognised as logical and are stripped of emotional engagement (Papacharissi, 2015, p. 134). Emotions have been positioned antagonistically to reason (Wessler, 2019, p. 144), and while reason is described as rational and non-coercive, emotions are described as coercive and manipulative (see Dowding, 2018; Young, 2001 for a further discussion of the role of emotion in deliberation). Wessler (2019: 144) argued that affective announcements and emotional expressions are not problematic or unproblematic per se, but they have a specific function in genuine public discussion. For example, one may foster cognitive empathy, involving understanding others' feelings and perspectives, which is key to deliberation (ibid.). One may also use moral emotions as justification or implicit judgement (Habermas, 1990, p. 50). In short, while the display of emotions can have certain functions in discussions, the debate itself must be rational. One study looked at emotion work in deliberation to investigate whether emotional expressions are not a way to overcome inequality in deliberation (Saam, 2018, p. 759). The author concluded that it was not, but more importantly, pointed to the lack of investigation of emotion work in the public sphere (Saam, 2018). The current study addresses such a research gap by exploring emotion work in the setting of Facebook as an arena for public discourse.

### Facebook as a particularly emotional environment for public discourse

The social dynamics of public spaces enable particular social, political, and cultural formations and forms of agency while discouraging others (Harvey, 2000). In short, the design of a space impacts the condition for public debate, and the architecture of virtual environments has wide-ranging consequences for the type of public interaction and participation possible (Wahl-Jorgensen, 2019, p. 148). The underlying architecture of sites such as Facebook has been found to both determine the tone of voice and to stimulate particular types of interactions (Papacharissi, 2009). While social network sites (SNS) vary in their functionality and focus, a central aspect of SNS is the possibility for users

to share material, opinions, and information (Boyd & Ellison, 2007; Kaplan, 2010) which are personal, social, and political (Hermida, 2014; Van Dijck, 2013). Public discourse on Facebook is often accused of being too emotional.

Emotions play an important role in sharing, and sharing is an essential part of Facebook. In general, one is more likely to share experiences that have an emotional effect both online and offline because emotions spark social transmission, and the increase in sharing is caused by physiological arousal (Hermida, 2014, p. 58). For example, research has shown that news stories that provoke positive and negative emotional reactions are more likely to be shared on SNS than neutral stories (Newman, 2011; New York Times, 2011). Moreover, certain emotions trigger more sharing behaviour than others; that is, stories that are both positive and inspiring and provoke anger and outrage are found to generate virality (New York Times, 2011), while factual stories devoid of emotion are less shared (Hermida, 2014, p. 61). The intensity of emotion also plays a significant role, and more intensely emotional stories are shared more (Berger, 2011; Berger & Milkman, 2012). Thus, SNS are described as affective news streams, which are a combination of “subjective experience, opinion, and emotion” (Papacharissi, 2015, p. 34).

Papacharissi (2015: 125) discussed affective publics as “networked public formations that are mobilised and connected and disconnected through expression of sentiment”. On Facebook, an emotional architecture and an emotional debate culture meet, and users must navigate this highly emotional landscape.

## Method and data

Thirty in-depth interviews with female Norwegian Facebook users formed the data for this study. Interviews were considered an appropriate method for obtaining detailed perspectives that include the context and capture the participant’s voice (Creswell, 2014, p. 5) to explore women’s experience and negotiation of emotions in public discourse on Facebook. Since such experience includes visible and non-visible participation, it could, for example, not be uncovered through non-reactive content analysis (Ruiz et al., 2011). This material stemmed from two waves of data collection,<sup>1</sup> and an overview of the participants from each wave can be found in Table 1.

### Data collection 1

The first wave was part of the MeCIn public connection study (Hovden & Moe, 2017; Ytre-Arne & Moe, 2018), where the participants were recruited through networks to “mirror” the Norwegian population according to demographic criteria such as gender, age, and type of work (Ytre-Arne and Moe, 2018). In total, fifty Norwegians were interviewed twice in the fall of 2017, but only a sub-sample of twenty female re-

**Table 1**  
Description of data set.

	Data collection 1	Data collection 2
Number of participants	20	10
Gender	Women	Women
Inclusion criteria	Daily users of Facebook	Daily users of Facebook
Description	Subsample of a larger interview material	Additional follow-up interviews

<sup>1</sup> Both waves were assessed and pre-approved by the Norwegian Centre for Research Data, and all participants gave their written informed consent to participate in the study. Participant information was kept anonymous, using pseudonyms for reference.

spondents, who were regular Facebook users, were included in this analysis. The semi-structured interviews comprised a broad range of questions, including social media use, and indicated that women were attuned to the emotional aspects of social media, as public environments, in a way that men were not. While the first round of interviews presented rich material covering an extensive range of media use in an everyday setting, the material did not provide thick enough descriptions of emotions, and Facebook use. Therefore, the key tendencies found in the first wave was followed up in the second wave of interviews, which focused exclusively on women’s user experience with Facebook to enhance the first round of interviews.

### Data collection 2

The second wave of data collection was interviews with ten additional women of different ages who used Facebook in their daily lives. To gain rich data and discover variations and gaps within this group, theoretical sampling was selected (Gubrium et al., 2012, p. 359). This wave’s recruitment also occurred through social networks and snowballing. The data were considered to reach sufficient saturation (Guest et al., 2006) after ten in-depth interviews, bearing in mind that these were an addition to the twenty interviews from the first wave of data collection. Age diversity was included to explore age-related differences (Brandtzæg et al., 2011; Gardner & Davis, 2013; Palfrey & Gasser, 2010). Two additional characteristics (profession and educational background) were used as sampling criteria throughout the second wave’s recruitment for further variation. It was expected that both educational background (Bovens, 2017; Spruyt et al., 2018) and work environment (Emler & Frazer, 1999) would influence the experiences of public environments. Background information for the participants can be found in the appendix.

### Interview questions and analysis

The first round of interviews was collected in the MeCIn public connection study (Ytre-Arne and Moe, 2018) by members of the project, including the author. Interviewing and transcribing several interviews in this round and conducting all the interviews in the second round allowed the author to profoundly engage with the material, as Gray (2003, p. 149) recommends. Through transcribing, notes on potential codes and theoretical reflections were made and added to when analysing the material that other members of the project had collected and transcribed. These notes also informed the interview guide in the second wave.

The interview data from both waves contained information on the use of Facebook. The first round of interviews focused on daily life and media use and included questions on citizenship ideals and democratic participation. The interviews started with the day in a life method (del Rio Carral, 2014) and focused on general media use. This material was used in the analysis, and in addition, informed some of the questions in the second wave of interviews, which focused on the use of social media. The second wave of interviews also started with the day in a life method (del Rio Carral, 2014), yet centred around social media use. The appendix shows the interview guide from both data collections.

The interview transcripts were analysed thematically, focusing on emotions in the descriptions of Facebook as a place for public discourse. The analysis started with strategies of meaning condensing (Kvale & Brinkmann, 2009), followed by a deeper interpretation using sensitised concepts (Patton, 2005) of emotion work as analytical categorisation. Through an inductive approach, both descriptions of emotions and emotional descriptions were condensed in the search for types of emotion work and later grouped according to the particular function the emotion was considered to serve. The analysis was done in two stages, first by analysing the first wave of interviews, and secondly in a process that involved searching for themes in the second wave and refining the themes from the first round of analysis simultaneously. First, all use of

emotions and emotional expressions were identified. It became clear that the participants mainly described emotions that respond to or negotiate others' emotions. The emotions were then divided into different themes according to function. These themes were emotions that pacify, emotions that protect, and the emotion work of not getting involved, which are further discussed in the findings.

One coder conducted the analysis for this article. However, peer debriefing (Nowell et al., 2017) by the other members of the research project happened at several stages; by reading and commenting on the analysis for the article and by discussing the material in-depth as part of a joint book project (Moe et al., 2019). Quotations and interpretations from the two interview rounds were mixed in the analysis.

## Findings and discussion

### *The ambivalence of emotions*

These findings, set in a Norwegian and gendered context, revealed emotion as a double-edged sword in Facebook debates. Such debates were recognised as too emotional and were considered non-conductive and challenging to enter. Emotionally driven debates were described in mostly negative terms.

I want to know different sides to the story, the kind of arguments those who have different opinions than me use. But they (Facebook debates) get too emotional and are not based on facts. (...) I read and I get shocked. What on earth are people saying? I get disappointed over the Norwegian population actually. So much anger. So much shouting at each other. (Eva, 47, HR employee)

I question if what I say will have the ability to influence or not, or if I just do it for my own sake [...] releasing some anger. I notice that is what most people do, and that is why we end up with these heated and hostile discussions. (Yasmin, 25, Fine art graduate)

This general negative outlook these participants have on emotions is not surprising since the communication that is being referred to is mostly anger. In this material discourse about "emotions", frequently equals types of hostile or angry emotions, and other emotions are less discussed. Negative evaluations can be conditioned by prior emotional experiences (Bericat, 2016, p. 493). However, the particular focus on the negative aspect of emotions, in this case, stems from popular views on Facebook, also described by Wahl-Jorgensen (2019).

Despite their emphasis on negative aspects of emotions on a general level, the participants frequently engaged in the strategic use of emotional communication in situations where they considered or chose to post on Facebook. The following sections address three kinds of emotion work in the setting of public discourse on Facebook and describe the considerations and strategies involved.

### *Emotion work that pacifies or moderates stronger emotions*

For these female participants, emotions become central in the descriptions of situations where observable participation was chosen or considered. The interviews revealed the need to protect oneself due to "harsh and polarised tones", and the participants frequently used certain emotions that were considered emphatic and acceptable as a protected way to participate.

[Debates about] immigration are impossible to follow on Facebook because there are so many emotions. Anger. People are so angry! [...] I never comment. But I might put on a sad face [post a crying emoticon] to say how I feel about the fate of immigrants. I am sad about how people talk about them. (Birgitte, 50, Unemployed)

Expressing sadness or happiness was the most frequent emotional language used by these participants. Employing such specific emotional language can function as an opposition to the types of discourse that the

participants denounced. Considering that the expression of emotions can be cognitive (Nussbaum, 2004), employing sad emotions could be understood as pacifying or moderating stronger emotions such as frustration, hate and anger. These participants did not, however, express anger or other strong emotions on Facebook.

I don't jump on that wagon. I am not that emotionally engaged. So, it is about juxtaposing ... or at least not adding to it [anger]. (Elin, 38, Nurse)

As such, the emotional language they employed could be recognised as both a calm way of meeting these more heated emotions and an indirect comment on—or an attempt to adjust towards—the kind of preferred debate, which is less harsh and polarised.

To fully understand the function of such emotional language, it is essential not to reduce it to a coping mechanism. It can be understood as a counterstrategy, reluctance, or display of the exemplary that is considered useful in a situation. Although emotions are frequently positioned antagonistically against reason and rationality (Wessler, 2019, p. 144), these findings suggest that emotions can also be used as an attempt to stimulate a debate to take a more rational direction. These findings suggest that emotion work goes into pacifying or moderating strong emotions as a part of the participant's concern and need for social harmony (Costa Jr et al., 2001; Gilligan, 1993).

I want to sometimes (write angry responses). People are so full of it. But I can't start behaving like that ... end up on their level. (Mia, 30s, Lawyer)

Despite participants expressing a general dislike of emotional debates, it seems more accurate to say that some emotions are disliked while others are strategically employed. Such a deliberate display of emotion also feeds into self-presentation, which is reminiscent of Goffman's (1959) process of "dramatic realisation". He claimed that interactions could be viewed as a performance where individuals are forced to communicate the activities and characteristics of the role to other people in a consistent manner to present a compelling front (Goffman, 1959, p. 30). In this study, the emotions that these women displayed were moderate and ambiguous, which allowed them to distance themselves rather than display strong emotions that might be considered more revealing. The performance of emotions is in this study considered a part of self-presentation and functions as a protective layer, as discussed in the next section.

### *Emotion work as a rhetorical protective strategy*

Emotions are considered to function as protection by the women in this study. Emotional language is frequently used to vaguely indicate a point of view instead of expressing opinions clearly or using facts or rational arguments. Compared to the previous section, which showed emotion work functioning as a way of influencing the tone of a debate, this section's form of emotional work concerns employing emotions as a form of rhetorical protection from potential hostile responses. Posting opinions or facts is, by these participants, considered risky as it may cause uncomfortable confrontations, and opinions may become intertwined with the poster's identity and affect how others see them. Using emotions or emotional language is a way of taking charge of the narrative, as emotional debate culture might punish opinion-based arguments. However, emotional statements can also be understood as more irreproachable, and by using emotional language, other people's reactions are kept in check. Therefore, letting an opinion lurk beneath an expressed emotion appears to be a chosen protective strategy. For example, research has found that an online debate over the way someone feels about a subject can be considered as subjective truth (Andersen, 2020). The following are three examples from the interviews, showing work that employs emotions as a rhetoric protection strategy. Some examples encourage debate while others do not.

“Thea” is interested in animal welfare, although she does not have any pets herself. When it comes to sharing, she will only “share animal welfare stories hard to disagree with” and avoids topics that are “more heavily debated”. A typical post for her concerns “emotional stories on abused dogs, with comments such as this should not happen or feeling sad”. However, she will “not debate the status of wolves in Norway<sup>2</sup>”, even if she considers the topic particularly “close to her heart”. The debate about wolves, in her perspective, is “more political and opinion-driven”, and she is concerned about having to “defend” her opinion “or become involved in a debate”, which she refers to as a conflict. Her comments can, therefore, be understood as part of her identity project. She wants to inform others about an issue close to her heart while simultaneously showing others what she stands for through the use of emotions. However, she does not wish to encourage a debate that she would be a part of.

“Rakel” is passionate about welfare and rights for people with substance addiction, a passion that originates from personal experience involving a family member. Rakel claims to be “confident and sure of her own opinions”, but she is still careful about expressing them on Facebook because she “knows that they are controversial”. “Moderating her opinion” is also about having a central role in several organisations and “representing them, not just herself”. “Instead of writing an opinion, I recount my own experiences, stressing that they are my experiences, and use emotional language when conveying them”. She consciously uses her emotional recollections as “an indirect way of stating an opinion or adding nuance to ongoing debates”, knowing that she can get her “point across without opening up, being attacked, or appearing controversial”. For her, this is a practical and efficient way of entering a debate and is a strategy that has clear deliberational qualities.

“Anna” regularly comments on news stories and posts on Facebook almost daily. For the most part, her comments are described to express her instant emotional reaction more than her point of view. She describes her posts using purely emotional language, clearly for or against different things, but it is hard to pinpoint why. Her opinions remain somewhat unclear or hidden behind her emotional language. “I share if something interests me, if it is sad, if it is funny, or makes me happy.” Anna stands out from the other respondents by being very active and claiming not to “worry about, or even read, others’ responses” to what she posted. As such, her comments contain more emotional outbursts, and she has little interest in others’ responses. Anna frequently expresses emotions, yet her way of participating does not seem to involve emotion work in the ways described in this analysis, and her intentions are not related to taking part in debates.

Emotion work is typically employed when these participants post or when they consider posting. For many of the women in this study, the use of emotions is a conscious strategy that enables them to express themselves with a reduced risk of being attacked or having to defend themselves. This emotional strategy might function as protection and make the input more effective because there is a reduced risk of having to defend oneself. Simultaneously, some participants describe employing emotions in a way that disengages from or distorts the debate and lacks deliberate qualities, such as the example of Anna.

Employing emotions as a shield is also used by those who react but rarely post themselves, since choosing to use emoticons or showing support by “liking” is considered less “attackable” than either writing an opinion or showing support through a written response.

<sup>2</sup> The hunting of wolf is heavily debated in Norway. There are so few wolves that they are considered endangered, yet when they stray out of the zone where they are supposed to live, hunting permits are given. In general the debate is between people living in urban areas that do not want the wolves to be hunted, and those who live in the rural areas in closer proximity to the wolves.

### *The emotion work of not getting involved*

Last, the results revealed that others’ harsh emotional language was considered by these participants as a reason not to comment on heated debates since engagement in such debates was considered an emotionally draining and energy-consuming experience.

I think the tone is so aggressive [in Facebook debates]. And that requires too much energy. So, it is a priority. What I want to use my energy on. And it is not that! (Sara, 46, Priest)

It was considered difficult to enter a debate under these terms. When emotions run high, the respondents described the worry about getting involved and becoming too emotional as a result. Such worry concerned employing unwanted emotional language, the same language that the participants had denounced. Therefore, the attempt to maintain some emotional distance, moderation, or even self-censoring was portrayed by these women as beneficial counterstrategies. This can be described as the emotional work of not getting involved.

I know that once I get into defending it [her opinion]. When I get agitated, I do get agitated [...] and then I might be the one who is off-topic. (Thea, 25, Nurse)

Keeping emotions in check and not adding to aggression or becoming off-topic is part of the motivation for this type of emotion work. Such work involves strategies for both moderating stronger emotions and using emotions as protection. However, in some cases where emotions run too high, these women considered not feed the “emotional flame” to be the best strategy. There are efforts and considerations between the lines of such descriptions, which, again, returns to the notion that the participants only found certain emotions to be acceptable.

When entering debates, experiencing hesitation can also be understood as taking responsibility for one’s SNS participation, indicating a moral dimension (Silverstone, 2013) of Facebook participation.

I am unsure what kind of counterargument I would give. I do not want to make it a personal attack; I feel that it ought to be based on knowledge and not just emotions. [...] [If I comment] it becomes a moderated version. I might try to base it less on emotions than what is actually the case. Try to be more to the point. But emojis are useful, right? (Eva, 43, HR advisor)

A high degree of self-monitoring involves work. Individuals who self-monitor understand themselves as flexible and pragmatic, adjusting their behaviour to what they deem appropriate (Brown, 1998, pp. 166–168). Such monitoring implies a particular sensitivity in interpreting social and interpersonal cues for correct behaviour (Snyder & Gangestad, 1986, p. 126). When the participants in this study strongly disagreed with things that were posted, their typical reactions were either to self-censor and say nothing (Hayes et al., 2006) or to contact the person who posted through a private chat or phone call, depending on the closeness of the relationship. Disagreements were thus kept out of the public arena of Facebook, which can be understood as strategically not wanting to display disagreements in this setting.

I am not open for disagreeing [on Facebook]. Just forget it! [...] I do not think it is appropriate on Facebook. I would contact people privately. (Lene, 40, Pre-school teacher)

The notion that disagreements do not belong in the public arena of Facebook is also about not wanting to feed the negativity in this space or appear aggressive and instead wish to address disagreements in a more neutral environment without spectators. This shows sensitivity to pro-social emotional cues on Facebook (Wahl-Jorgensen, 2019), which clash with the notion of disagreement, debate, and the display of anger.

These participants express a general dislike of emotional debates on Facebook, yet emotional language is typical when posting. Some emotions were considered acceptable while others were deemed less

emphatic, and the emotions that were favoured as protection against hostile responses could also function as an indirect attempt to calm or adjust the tone to one that the respondents preferred. However, when the emotion ran too high, the respondents' strategy was to say nothing or address disagreements elsewhere, preferably "in private".

### Limitations

In-depth interviews provided information about the participants' reflections of their strategic use of emotions in public discourse on SNS. Thus, the emotion work described is often related to situations that are considered difficult or demanding. However, the potential emotion work that is "automated" or comes more naturally receive less attention and is not included in this analysis. To grasp these finer nuances of emotion work on SNS, future studies may need to combine interviews with looking at -and discussing Facebook posts.

There is the potential issue of participants providing a rationalisation of their activity in online public discourse on Facebook to reduce cognitive dissonance regarding why they are not engaging even though society might expect them to do so.

This study uses the case of women's emotion work in public discourse on Facebook and argues why it is particularly interesting to study women in this setting. However, it is likely that the navigation of the emotional landscape of Facebook and the use of emotion work is equally complex, although perhaps different for men. This study does not provide any such insights in the case of men, and further research is needed.

Another limitation to this study is that without a cross-national comparison, it is unclear whether such experiences are particularly Norwegian, Scandinavian, or apply to women elsewhere.

### Conclusion

This study followed two lines of enquiry based on the assumption that women have a particular relationship with the emotional expressions that are part of public discourse on Facebook. The first enquiry concerned Norwegian women's experience of emotions; the second concerned how they strategically employed emotion when taking part.

The presence of strong emotions, such as anger, mostly shaped these women's experiences. Focusing on angry expressions in public discourse on Facebook and worrying about getting involved would frequently inhibit them from posting and instead self-censor. While much of the focus was centred around anger, other emotions that initially received far less focus were frequently employed.

The participants use of emotions in public discourse on Facebook involves emotion work as a central theme. Work is a fitting description. Its laborious qualities are described and involves a sense of responsibility. Still, the emotion work of taking responsibility can be non-observable to others and might therefore be ignored in terms of participation. However, these results suggest that Facebook participation is not easily dichotomised into participation and non-participation based only on observable participation. This is in line with other studies that have argued that non-observable participation is best described as 'listening in' (Crawford, 2009), may involve considerable cognitive and emotional efforts (Ewing, 2008) and may be the result of an active choice (Casemajor et al., 2015).

The use of emotion is in this study described as beneficial for observable participation. The angry debates the participants refer to seem to clash with pro-social cues on Facebook and deliberational ideals (Wahl-Jorgensen, 2019). Entering these debates may also clash with the roles that women traditionally take upon themselves (Costa Jr et al., 2001; Gilligan, 1993).

It is a paradox that the participants in this study generally describe Facebook to be a public arena, yet not a "correct" place to express disagreement, yet also an example of how Facebook merges the personal and political (Wahl-Jorgensen, 2019).

Still, the strategic use of emotion allows these women to participate in situations that are otherwise challenging. Emotional language is described as a protective layer that enables them to get their message across. Additionally, the use of emotion can, for these participants, be understood as a cognitive tool for taking responsibility for a debate and posting in a way that is deemed acceptable. This type of participation may not always foster deliberation, but it depends on how it is used.

This study shows the multifaceted employment of emotion by women in Norway, which contributes to nuances and furthers the understanding of the role of emotion in public discourse in the setting of Facebook. Paradoxically, emotions are evaluated negatively in this study, yet they appear to be central in strategies for taking part in public discourse on Facebook in what is considered a safe and appropriate way.

### Declaration of competing interest

The Author declares that there is no conflict of interest.

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### Appendix A. Supplementary data

Supplementary data to this article can be found online at <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.chbr.2021.100148>.

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