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Agency and civic involvement in news production via Facebook commentary

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Research questions

- **The study examines whether users are:**
- **Setting** the news agenda, **Intervening** in the gatekeeping function by providing original, unreported information?
- **Participating** in the debate and sticking to the subject of the debate, and how the tone or the posts might influence the level of civic engagement, influencing how debaters acting as critical media-connectors (Kaun, 2012)?
- **Interpreting** the news in alternative ways by airing oppositional views on reported issues, i.e. providing criticism of elite or media/both?

Methods

- Quantitative content analysis
- The debates in week 46, 2012
- 7 Facebook-pages of different mainstream online news sites
- Real-time data collection to avoid moderation
- The debates comprised 149 post and 3800 comments on these posts
- Coding of both the posts AND the comments

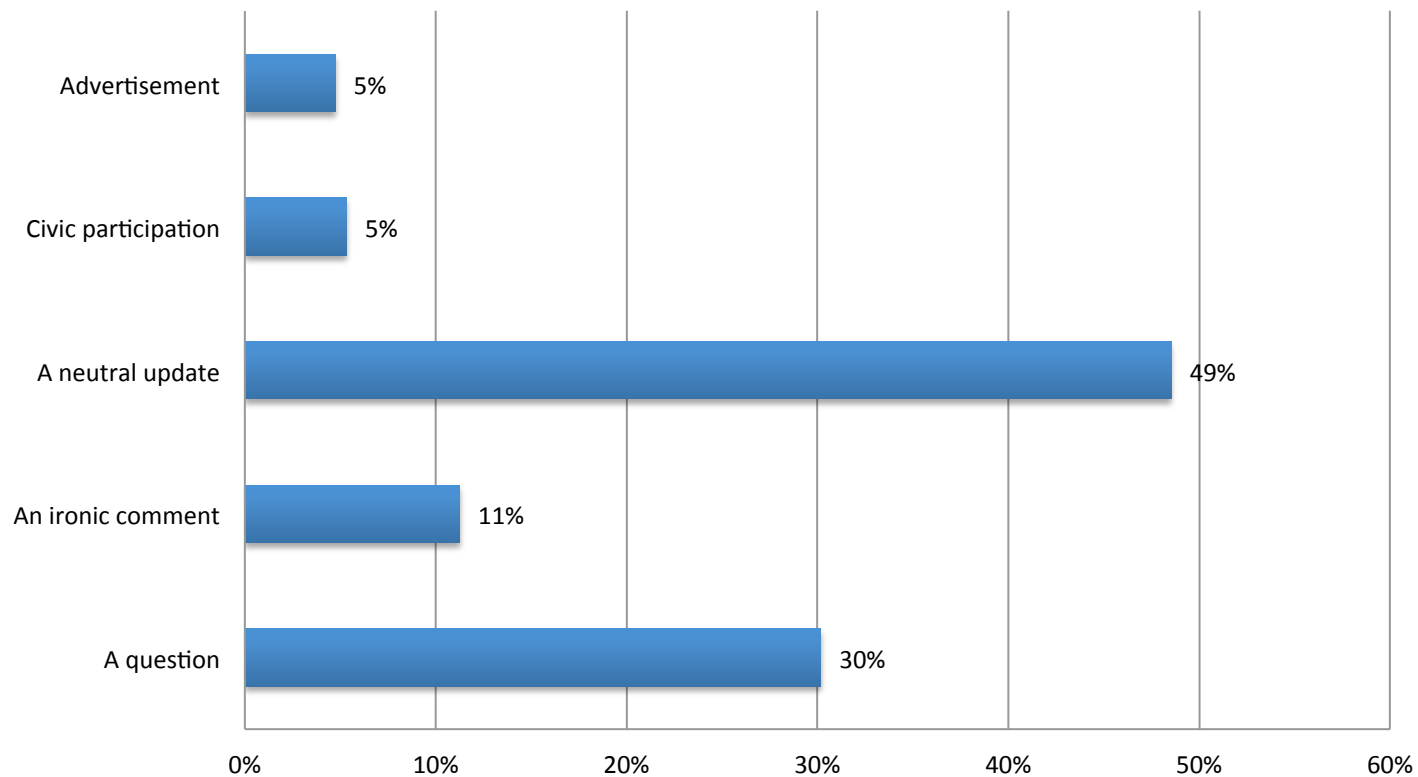
Coding framework

- Posts: Irony, neutral, encouragement to action, patos: anger or sympathy, a question
- News, advertising, debate, commentary
- The debate-comments (multiple choice):
Follows the theme, derogatory, new view point, Media criticism, power criticism, and the interaction value

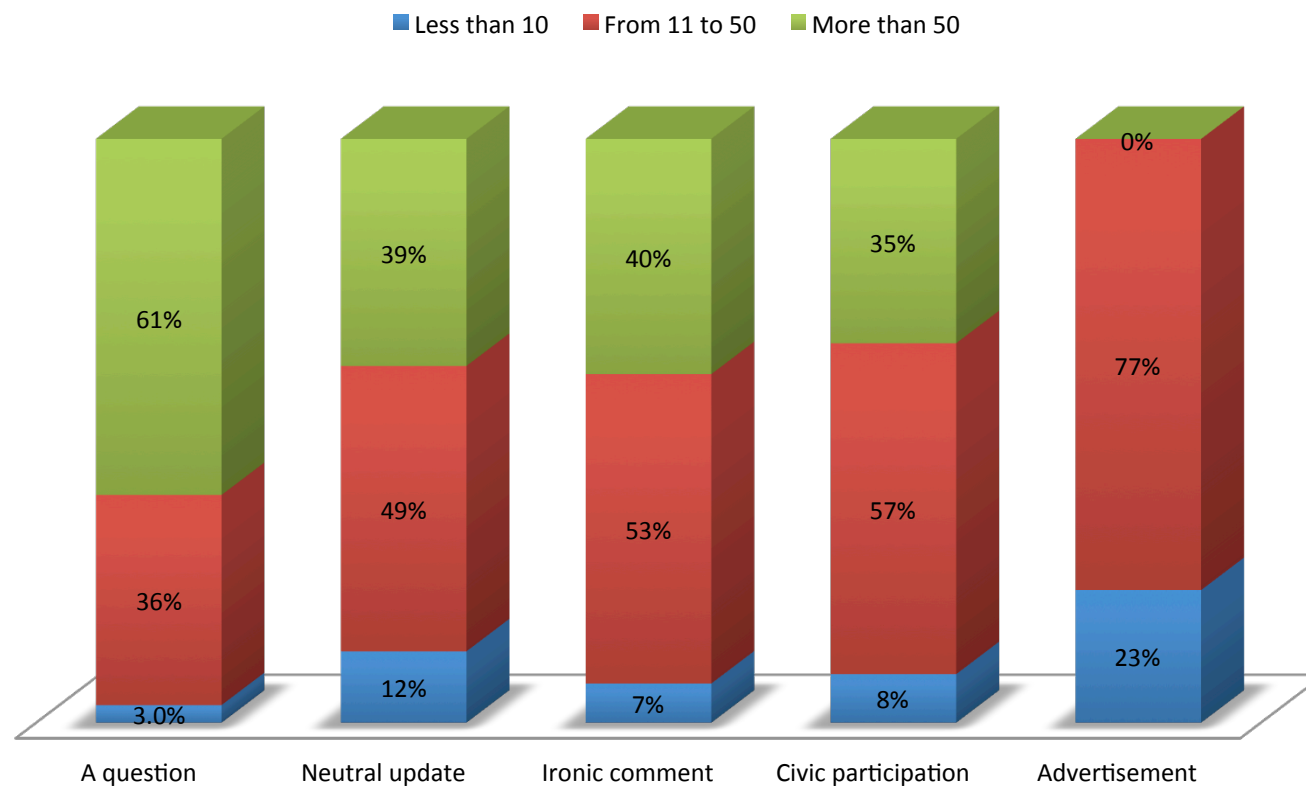
The posts

- Newspapers mostly post news items on their Facebook-pages. The news are most likely on domestic issues and on politics.
- Most articles are written by journalists and editors. News agencies also amount for some of the articles.
- On Weekdays there is more posts than weekends.
- There seems to be a divide in terms of the publishing rate of the online newspapers. Some use Facebook a lot, while others only post little and thus also limit the debate.

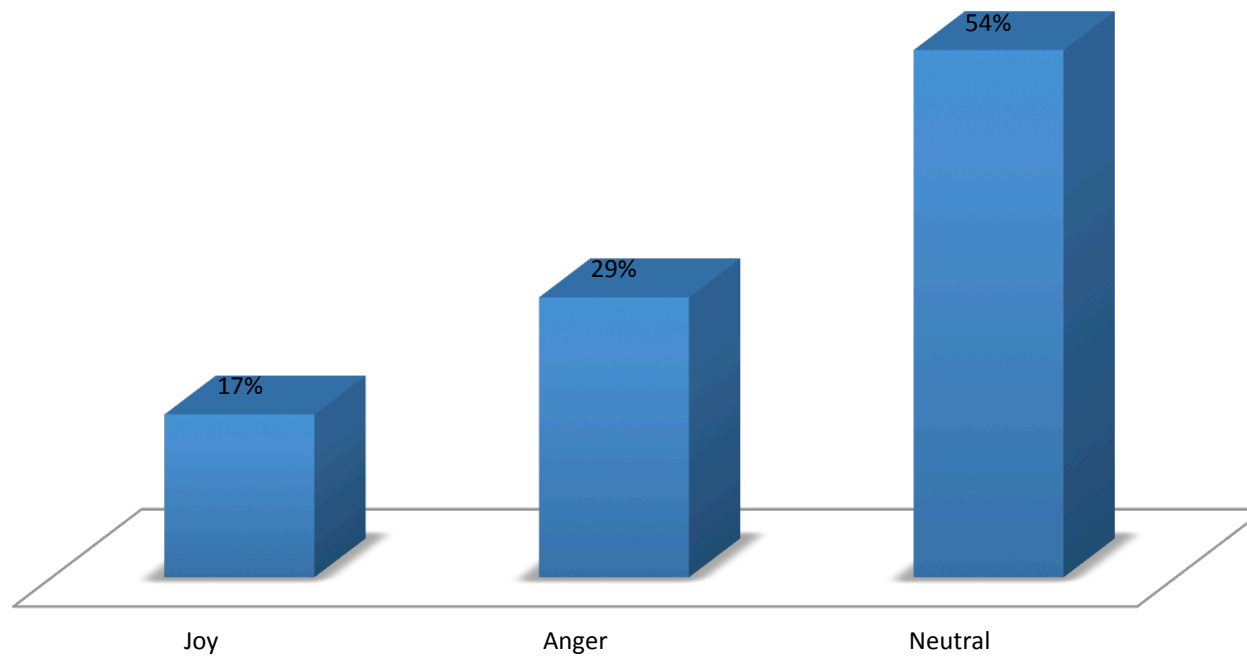
Post content (n=169)



Strategy for engaging users (n=3800)

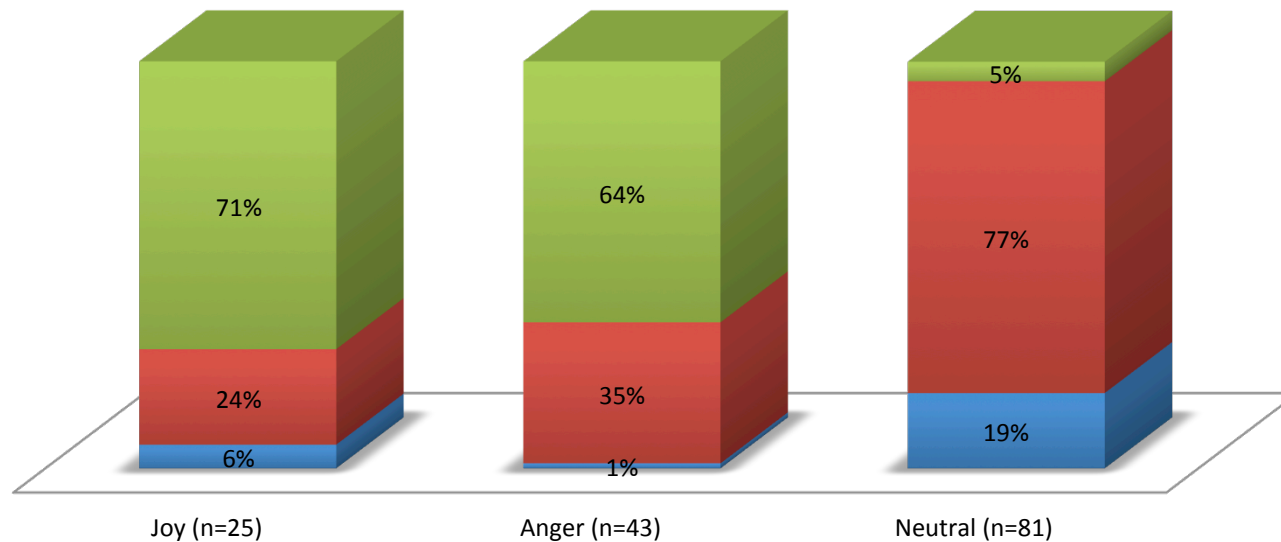


Tone of updates (n=149)

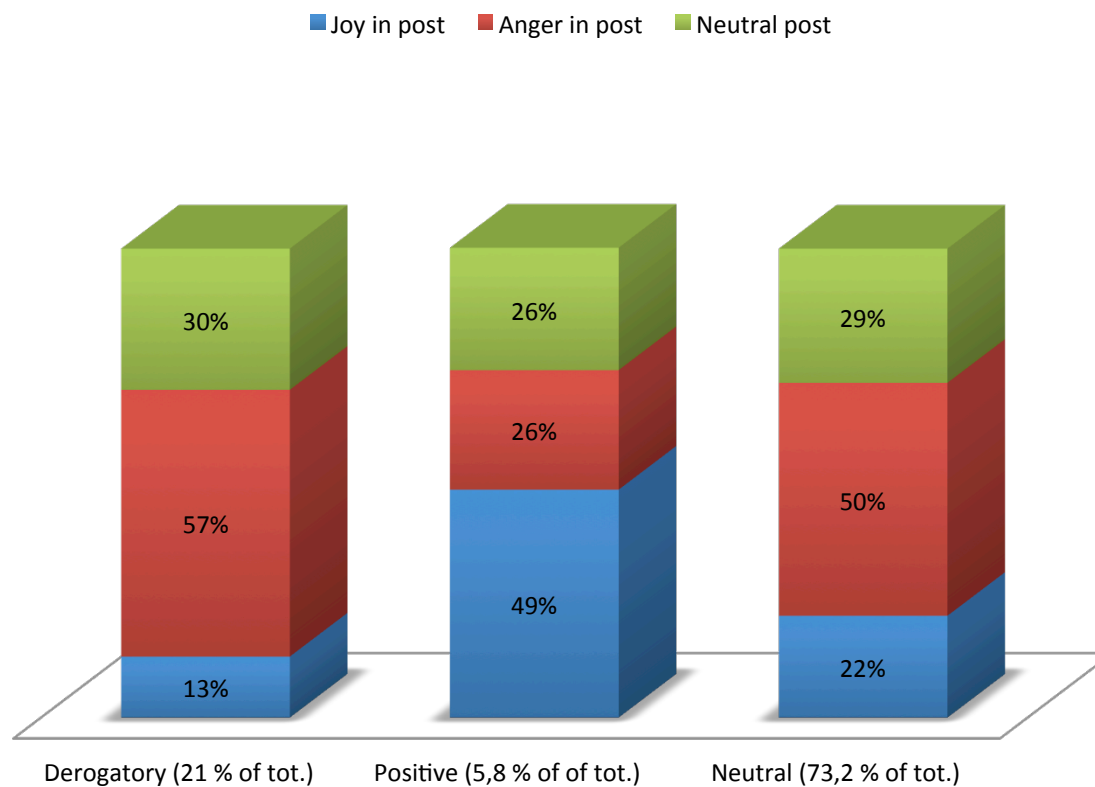


Tone of update is engaging users (n=3800)

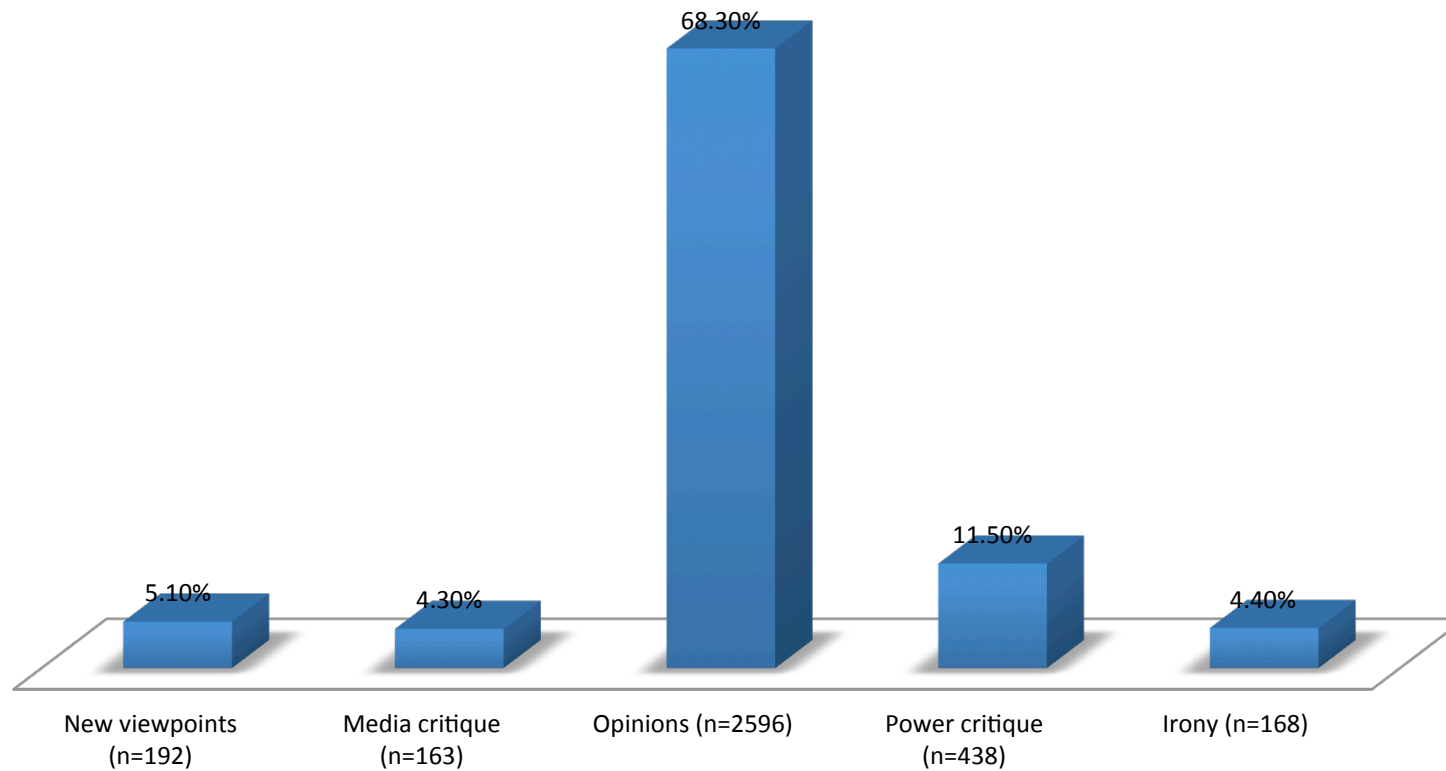
■ Less than 10 ■ From 11 to 50 ■ More than 50



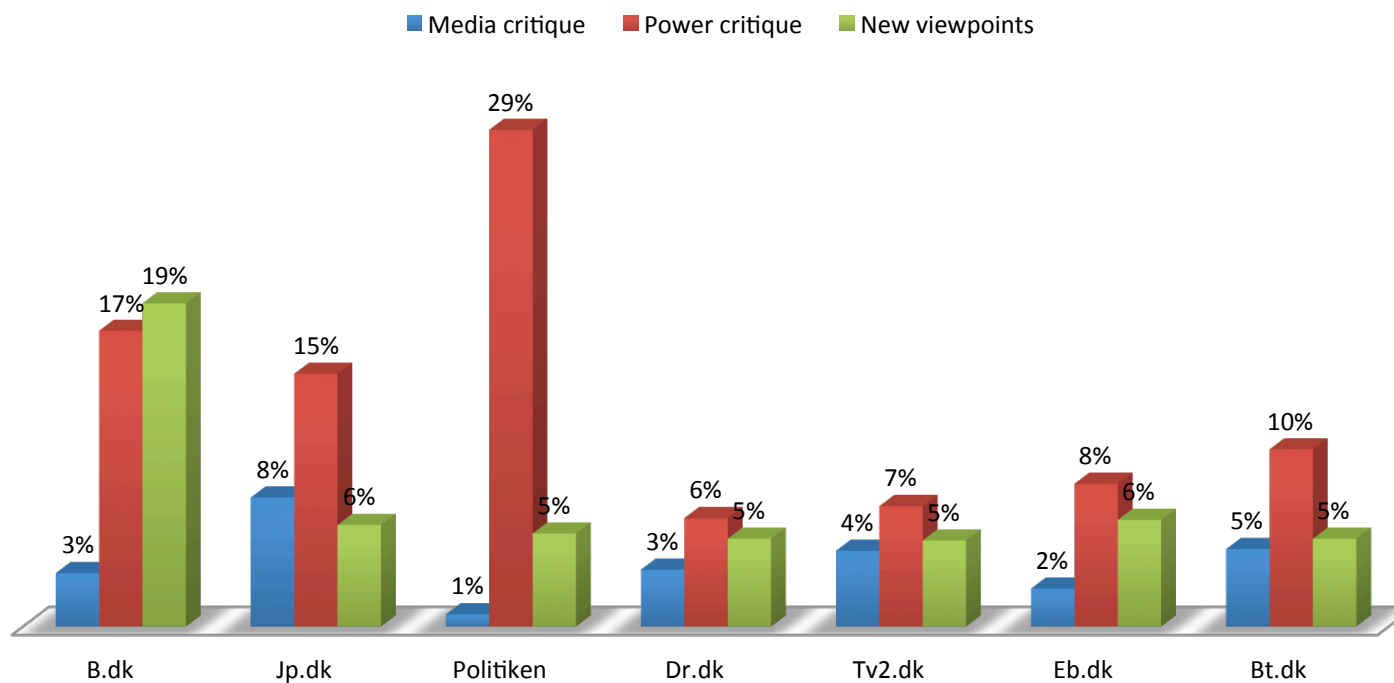
Tone of update affects tone of debate (n=3800)



Content of debate (n=3800)



Media- & power critique in comments within media (n=3800)



Some conclusions ...

- Most posts are neutral, but asking users a question is also a popular strategy.
- Posts accompanied by a question get more comments than those with a simple neutral update or any other strategy for engaging users.
- Posts using joy or anger as tone get more comments than those that are neutral.
- Joy or anger in updates is adopted in the subsequent debate.
- Most comments are neutral, but if looking at the rest there is an emotional taint towards the negative (degrading) comments.
- Most comments stick to the subject of the debate.
- In general very little power- or media critique is uttered.