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TONE-BASED INCIVILITY AND CONTENT-BASED INCIVILITY: A FRAMEWORK TO EXAMINE ONLINE UNCIVIL DISCOURSE

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FRAMEWORK TO EXAMINE ONLINE UNCIVIL DISCOURSE

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An Abstract of the Thesis by
Sreerupa Sanyal

This research study is an attempt to distinguish between two types of incivility; tone-based incivility and content-based incivility. Building upon and extending on the theoretical framework proposed by Muddiman (Muddiman, 2017) on political incivility, this paper attempts to construct a two-dimensional framework within which online incivility could be examined. A quantitative analysis of 624 comments was conducted on two news articles on the Facebook page of the *New York Times*. The study established that tone-based uncivil comments and content-based uncivil comments could be a two-dimensional framework, within which to examine extant online discourse. It also found that despite concerns of uncivil behaviour abounding on social media, especially Facebook, a majority of the comments were civil.

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Chapter I

INTRODUCTION

March 12, 2019, marked the 30th anniversary of the invention of the internet. Sir Tim

Berners-Lee (2019) wrote an open letter on his foundation website, *World Wide Web*

Foundation, appealing for a responsible web that could be utilized for the common good

(Lee, 2019). He pointed out three problems that websites across the world currently

faced. One of them was, "unintended negative consequences of benevolent design, such

as the outraged and polarised tone and quality of online discourse" (Lee, 2019) Online

discourse, especially with the rise of social media has been rife with uncivil, hateful

comments and opinions. In 2018, the United Kingdom's House of Commons ordered an

inquiry into the "disinformation" that was being disseminated through channels of online

social networking sites, particularly Facebook (Collins et al., 2019). Damian Collins

(2019), the Committee Chair, stated that "democracy is at risk from the malicious and

relentless targetting of citizens with disinformation and personalized 'dark adverts' from

unidentifiable sources, delivered through the major social media platforms we use every

day" (Collins et al., 2019). According to global social media research summary, as of

January 2019, the percentage of the urbanized population in the world was 56, out of that

56%, 45% of people are active social media users (Chaffey, 2019). It is therefore vital

that conversations online, especially on social media networks, be paid attention. The

online media has become a conduit of different thoughts, opinions and perspectives. Though this has led to a democratisation of views and opinions, some opinions convey ideas that threaten the democratic values held dear in most societies. Therefore, online conversation demands a thorough examination of its nature.

Online discourse, especially political discourse has been an emerging issue of interest amongst communication scholars and social scientists. A study in 2015 found that "levels of partisan discrimination are at par with levels of racial discrimination" (Stroud, Muddiman, & Scacco, 2016). Conversations online have been studied for diverse reasons, from examining anonymity on online spaces (Reader, 2012) to the discussion of intergroup factors within online communication (Rains, Kenski, Coe , & Harwood , 2017). Amongst communication scholars studying computer mediated communication, incivility has received widespread attention. There have been scores of research on this topic, and henceforth it is an important subject that needs to be revalued and reassessed as the scope of technology bulges and as conversations become increasingly mediated. With regard to research on incivility, there are three dimensions that have so far been analysed by researchers.

The first dimension that has been examined by scholars is the meaning of the term incivility itself. According to Sobieraj and Berry (2011), "the literature includes researchers who vary in the way they define negativity/incivility as well as the way they operationalize these concepts" (Sobieraj & Berry, 2011). According to Brooks and Geer (2007), "incivility is a term people invoke frequently, but often with somewhat different connotations in mind" (Brooks & Geer, 2007). Though a working definition of incivility remains elusive, researchers examine incivility as either being a broad concept or a

narrow one. As Papacharissi (2004) points out in one of the first studies on incivility in comment forums, "we know it when we see it" (Papacharissi, 2004).

The second dimension of incivility that has been examined by researchers relates to the direction of incivility (Seely, 2018; Su *et al*., 2018; Borah, 2012; Muddiman, 2017). Incivility in online discourse has been mapped into two categories of direction: interpersonally directed and other directed (Seely, 2018; Papacharissi, 2004; Su *et al*., 2018). Interpersonally directed incivility means when instances of uncivil behaviour are meted out in comment forums toward a participant in the comment forum, either in the form of a reply to one's comment or as a comment on the discussion thread (often tagging another commenter and adding a reply). Other directed incivility occurs when comments with uncivil elements are directed toward a nonparticipant in the comment forum. It may be directed at the author/journalist of the news story, at the principal participants in the news story or it even may be someone unmentioned in the story but related to the issue being discussed in the comment forum. It is not directed at a comment forum participant.

Political incivility, however, is not a recent phenomenon. Researchers have documented the presence of political incivility since the early days of democracy in the United States (Gerhart, 2009). However, the advent of Web 2.0 which brought forth user-generated content and the proliferation of social media networks has aggravated the issue. Thus, the third dimension of examining incivility has been the online medium over which most conversations are examined. The rise of digital media has brought in unprecedented avenues of expressing oneself. According to Gervais (2013), "the ability to do this opens up doors for a digital public sphere" (Gervais, Incivility in Online Political Discourse and

Anti-Deliberative Attitudes: An Experimental Analysis, 2013). Researchers examining

incivility in comment forums have examined political blogs (Borah, 2012; Seely, 2018);

readers comments on news' websites (Santana, 2015; Reader, 2012; Meltzer, 2015;

Seely, 2018) and Facebook pages of news organizations (Su et al., 2018).

Political incivility is thus a common denominator and often dominates the

political discourse online. According to Gervais (2013), "once incivility enters the

political conversation, the potential for effective deliberation declines significantly"

(Gervais, Incivility in Online Political Discourse and Anti-Deliberative Attitudes: An

Experimental Analysis, 2013). Seely (2018) posts, "the use of uncivil tone or expression

can decrease message credibility, decrease persuasive effects of the messages and cause

people to form negative attitudes about ideological issues" (Seely, 2018). Thus, research

has documented that the use of uncivil expression does have a negative influence on

online conversations on political issues.

However, online incivility does not limit itself to political discourse only. Santana

(2015) studied online discussions on immigration and found that uncivil discourse was

rampant (Santana, 2015). Thus, research on the online discourse that is not strictly

political is not only necessary but essential. This research paper, therefore, looked at the

issue of #MeToo and analyzed 624 comments from two news stories on the *New York

Times* page on Facebook. This study found that a majority of the conversation on

Facebook was civil. It also found that incivility online can be framed within a dual

framework: tone-based incivility and content-based incivility. Implications of the

findings are discussed in the paper.

Chapter II

LITERATURE REVIEW

The exact definition of incivility though is still absent, comment feed research on political incivility has taken two strands. Some researchers have taken a broad view of incivility and have emphasized on the politeness and vocabulary etiquette of commenters online (Brooks & Geer, 2007; Santana, 2015; Seely, 2018; Meltzer, 2015). Other researchers (Borah, 2012; Papacharissi, 2004; Reader, 2012) have taken a narrow view of the concept and have emphasized the political processes and deliberative theories. For them, an absence of etiquette and polite vocabulary presents the "robustness of human nature" and is thus "essential in a participatory democracy" (Papacharissi, 2004). These researchers often distinguish between the terms impolite and uncivil. However, the distinction is tenuous at best because concepts of uncivil behaviour often overlap with impolite ones. Others have categorized incivility based on scientific experiments as Gervais (2009) has done (Gervais, Incivility in Online Political Discourse and Anti-Deliberative Attitudes: An Experimental Analysis, 2013). However, a concrete working definition of the term is still elusive. According to Muddiman (2017), "incivility is a concept in dire need of a theoretical model" (Muddiman, 2017).

Nonetheless, certain common characteristics emerge. Natalee Seely (2018) posits that a comment can be said to be uncivil if it contains (1) insulting language (2)

vulgarities, (3) stereotyping of political party/ideology, (4) stereotyping using "isms"/discriminatory language, (5) other stereotyping language, (6) sarcasm, and (7) accusations of lying (Seely, 2018). Gervais (2014) categorizes uncivil comments as belonging to four categories. The first category features name-calling, mockery, and character assassinations; the inclusion of additional superfluous adverbs and adjectives which add no new information, but are purposefully insulting, belittling, and condescending. The second category includes claims that spin and exaggerate in a misrepresentative fashion the behaviour and views of individuals and organizations; use of much more extreme, inflammatory words or phrases which make such seem more radical, immoral, or corrupt but does not alter the central claim. The third category includes claims that feature emotional language and exaggeration, through the visual presentation; and the fourth category also includes visual elements specifically the purposeful use of upper-class letters and multiple exclamation points (Gervais, Following the News: Reception of Uncivil Partisan Media and the Use of Incivility in Political Expression, 2014). Santana (2015) describes incivility as containing "personal or inflammatory attacks, threats, vulgarities, abusive or foul language, xenophobic or other hateful language or expressions, epithets or ethnic slurs, sentiments that are racist or bigoted, disparaging on the basis of race/ethnicity or that assign stereotypes" (Santana, 2015).

This paper takes the view that both strands of incivility, the broad as well as the narrow strand is crucial in understanding this concept. There are two prominent sets of characteristics that arise when examining incivility on online comments. The first is the tone of the comment itself. Research that emphasizes this aspect of incivility takes its cue

from the politeness theory. According to Murtz, "incivility is communication that violates the norms of politeness for a given culture" (Muddiman, 2017). Muddiman conceptualizes this incivility as "name calling, yelling or shouting, swearing and otherwise behaving impolitely" (Muddiman, 2017). The second strand emphasizes the content of the comment itself. Those who concentrate on the meaning of the content differentiate between notions of politeness and civility. According to Papacharissi (2004), "a sharply defined conceptual distinction between civility and politeness acknowledges the passion, unpredictability, and robustness of human nature and conversation, with the understanding that democracy can merit from heated disagreement" (Papacharissi, 2004). Muddiman in a 2017 study of political texts in the form of messages conceptualized these two strands as personal and public levels of political incivility. Personal level incivility contained offensive language/name-calling, obscene language or emotional language/displays. Public level incivility contained lack of compromise, misinformation, ideological extremity or comity and nonpublic acts (Muddiman, 2017).

Building upon the two dimensions of political incivility as defined by Muddiman, this paper proposes a two-dimensional framework within which to examine online uncivil political discourse. The paper, therefore, defines incivility as a concept with two prominent set of chracteristics, which have within themselves several elements of incivility, the use of which may pose a threat to or deter mutual respect, harmony and meaningful conversation. There are two strands of incivility that have been examined by researchers: the tone of the message and the content of the message.

Researchers who have taken a narrow view of incivility have often labelled tonal incivility as merely impolite (Papacharissi, 2004). However, according to Seely (2018),

"applying a more liberal definition to incivility is appropriate as social harmony can be disrupted by a range of behaviours- such as calling someone a name or using a vulgar word- which is considered offensive and disrespectful but does not necessarily threaten one's democratic rights" (Seely, 2018). Therefore, both liberal and conservative definitions of the term are necessary. However, it is crucial to distinguish which strand of incivility the comment message belongs to in order to thoroughly examine the scope of online incivility in political discourse.

Tone-based incivility and content-based incivility

Online comment messages can be of two types: positive and negative message. While positive messages would not contain any of the elements of incivility, negative messages can contain two strands of incivility: the tone of the message and the content of the message. Incivility could occur either in the tone that the message conveys or in the content that the message contains or the same message could contain both tone based and content based elements of incivility.

The concept of tone-based incivility stems from the concept of politeness theory and theories of the face. Brown and Levinson in their 1987 study built upon Goffman's theory of "face." Papacharissi (2004) echoing Goffman's notion of face describes the concept as "an image of self, delineated in terms of approved social attributes" (p. 261). Brown and Levinson (1987) defined a positive face to refer to polite behaviours while negative face implied the adoption of rude behaviours. According to Brooks and Geer (2007), incivility means adopting "superfluous and inflammatory claims that do little to change the central negative message" (Brooks & Geer, 2007). Thus, tone-based incivility

primarily assumes that the tone of the message conveyed would be uncivil rather than it's meaning or content. It is manifest in its characteristic.

Tonal incivility or tone-based incivility, therefore, includes the following subsets of incivility: 1) Use of profanities against an individual or a fellow commenter, against an idea or an institution; against a particular race, religion, gender, ethnicity, etc; 2) Yelling or shouting; 3) Use of personal insults against a person or a fellow commenter; 4) Use of superfluous information unrelated to the object of discussion.

Content incivility or content-based incivility, on the other hand, stems from theories of deliberation and political process. Papacharissi (2004), one of the most prominent adherents of content-based incivility argues that "there is a need to abstain from excessive politeness in the interest of discussion that is more robust, lively and generative of democratic capital" (Papacharissi, 2004). Thus, content incivility may not contain any of the subsets of tonal incivility, but the meaning of the message could be uncivil. It is latent in its characteristic as the incivility conveyed is not manifest. Papacharissi (2004) in her research comes across a comment that is a lengthy manifestation of white supremacy without a single instance of derogatory language, vulgarities, ridicule or use of racial epithets (Papacharissi, 2004). Santana (2015) in his study of incivility on immigration too comes across uncivil messages that are devoid of tonal incivility while containing content incivility. Thus, there is a need to separate tonal incivility from content incivility in order to examine these types of messages which both researchers claim to be the most dangerous among uncivil messages.

Content incivility thus contains these subsets of incivility: 1) Stereotyping a group using 'isms'/political ideology; 2) Stereotyping using racial epithets; 3)

Threatening a group's fundamental democratic rights; 4) Asserting notions of supremacy based on racial, ethnic, religious, geographic, sexual and gender orientation; 5) Propagating false information without providing facts; 7) Emotional appeal to harm a specific group or individual psychically, emotionally, financially or otherwise.

It is vital that tonal incivility is differentiated from content incivility as often content based incivility is misrepresented as rude or impolite sentiments rather than uncivil. However, according to Muddiman, personal level incivility, upon which tonal incivility is based is often seen in comment forums rather than content incivility. Thus, this difference gives rise to our first hypothesis:

H1: The frequency of tone based uncivil comments shall be more than the frequency of content based uncivil comments across news stories on news website pages of Facebook.

The second dimension that incivility research is based upon is the direction of the uncivil comments. Past research has documented that there are mainly two directions that online comments possess. Either the uncivil comment is directed at a participant commenter in the discussion thread, the journalist of the news story or the main actors of the news story being discussed. Comments that are directed at a fellow participant or fellow commenters, either as a reply or as a new post in the discussion thread have been termed interpersonally directed (Brooks & Geer, 2007; Su et al., 2018; Seely, 2018). Comments that are directed at the journalist or the columnist of the news story or toward the main actors in the news story have been categorized as other-directed (Su et al., 2018).

This study therefore considered all interpersonally directed comments such as those directed toward a fellow commenter or another participant within the comment forum as secondary comments. They were considered secondary comments as they ususaly required a comment to which to reply to. Those comments that were directed to the journalist/author of the news story, the main actors of the news story and the news story itself, were designated as primary comments. These comments did not require a previous comment to reply to and could be considered standalone comments. This second dimension of incivility, therefore, gives rise to our second hypothesis:

H2: Tone-based uncivil messages will have greater frequency of secondary level messages than content-based uncivil messages across news stories on news website pages of Facebook.

Significance of Facebook in the study of political incivility

The advent of the internet and consequently social media has revolutionized communicating with each other. Nowhere is this more prominent than the virtual comment forums of different news websites, applications, Facebook pages of news organizations and Twitter feeds. Thus, it becomes essential to examine the types of conversation taking place on the virtual medium, and a first place to begin would be the social media platforms. According to Sobeiraj and Berry (2011), "at no time has this taking stock been more critical, as changes in the nature of contemporary political, technological, and economic relations have created a media environment that is uniquely supportive of outrage-based political discourse" (Sobieraj & Berry, 2011).

According to a report of the Pew Research Center (2017), two-thirds (67%) of Americans get "at least some of their news through social media" (Shearer & Gottfried,

2017). Out of the 67%, 45%, i.e. just under half got their news from one website, Facebook (Shearer & Gottfried, 2017). Most news sites, whether television, print, radio or digital, have pages on Facebook and the site encourages user feeds as comments. In fact, according to a 2018 study, "Facebook pages and their associated user comments have become an inseparable part of online news-consumption experience in the United States" (Su *et al*., 2018). Another media that has attracted researchers examining incivility are news blogs or political blogs (Seely, 2018; Borah, 2012; Sobieraj & Berry, 2011). However, as most political blogs allow the opportunity of user self-selection (Seely, 2018) meaning, political blogs tend to attract like-minded readers rather than those ascribing to opposing viewpoints, news organizations' pages on Facebook reflect a more varied set of opinions and perspectives. This study, therefore, examines strands of incivility on Facebook pages of news organizations.

Facebook as a social media network has emerged as one of the prime news gathering online tool; it thus becomes vital to examine the political conversations taking place on this medium. It also is uniquely situated to be the data set from which to gain insight about online incivility as it does not allow anonymity on the part of the commenter. Anonymity in the past has been one of the main themes that have been examined in online political discourse (Papacharissi, 2004; Reader, 2012; Seely, 2018; Santana, 2015). According to Reader (2012), it is also one of the "chief reasons that afford uncivil discussion over online comment forums" (Reader, 2012). Many mainstream news organizations too have done away with anonymous comments. Ariana Huffington in a 2013 statement said that "freedom of expression is given to people who stand up for what they say and are not hiding behind anonymity" (Geary, 2013). One

would assume that because anonymity is not allowed in the comment forums of Facebook, it could be free of incivility. However, a study done in May of 2018, by the University of Warick showed statistical co-relation between social media and hate crime (Muller & Schwarz, 2018). The study analyzed anti-refugee messages on a right wing political organization's page on Facebook and the rise of hate crimes against refugees in Germany and found that "anti-refugee hate crimes increased disproportionately in areas with higher Facebook usage during periods of high anti-refugee sentiments online" (Muller & Schwarz, 2018). In recent past, Facebook has also been in news constantly regarding Cambridge Analytica data sharing controversy (Collins, et al., 2019), Facebook's role in inciting violence against the Rohingya Muslim minorities in Myanmar (Mozur, 15) and Facebook's role in the Presidential elections of the United States in 2016. If instances of uncivil behaviour was absent on the platform due to the absence of anonymity, it begs the question as to why one single platform was implicated in the above three incidences. Therefore, in order to examine incivility, analyzing uncivil comments on pages of news organizations on Facebook might be a beginning.

Most commenters engage with a news story on Facebook through like and comments. It has been seen in past research that uncivil comments drew more response in forms of additional comments, both positive and negative (Borah, 2012; Papacharissi, 2004; Brooks & Geer, 2007). According to Weber (2014), "posting comments on news articles is currently one of the most popular forms of user participation in an online-content generation" (Weber, 2014). Thus, engagement with comment would mean more replies to a particular comment. According to the study by Muddiman in 2017, personal-level incivility type messages drew more response from the participants in the

experiments than public-level incivility type messages (Muddiman, 2017). This gives rise to our third hypothesis:

H3: Tone-based uncivil comments would give rise to more engagement in the discussion forum in the form of comments than content-based uncivil comments across news stories on pages of news organizations on Facebook.

This study aims to examine the frequency and the direction of incivility that occurs in comment forums of news organization's pages on Facebook. By proposing a two-dimensional framework within which to examine online political uncivil discourse, this study aspires to add to the current research a step forward in explicating a working definition of incivility.

Chapter III

METHODOLOGY

This research utilizes the methodology of quantitative content analysis to examine particular types of uncivil discourse that occurs online. Content analysis has been previously employed by scholars studying types of online comments on political discourse (Su et al., 2018; Seely, 2018), effects of political online incivility on the readers of political blogs (Borah, 2012), effects of political online discourse on the perceptions of news readers (Brooks & Geer, 2007) and perceptions of news producers and news consumers on online web pages (Meltzer, 2015). According to Riffe, Lacy, and Fico (2014), "content analysis is nonreactive, allows 'access' to inaccessible participants and lends itself to longitudinal studies" (Riffe, Lacy, & Fico, 2014). Thus, the use of quantitative content analysis in this study shall allow the researcher to delve into and examine the uncivil online discourse on political conversations.

Research Design

Sampling

This study limits itself to studying particular types of uncivil discourse on one specific medium of communication. The medium is that of social media. Among the platforms of social media, the study concentrates on Facebook as the social media platform of choice. It was chosen for four specific purposes:

1. According to a report from Pew Research Center (2017), "News Use Across Social Media Platforms, 2017", about 66%, almost two-thirds of Americans receive their news through Facebook (Shearer & Gottfried, 2017).

2. Facebook allows news organizations to have pages across its platform. These news organizations regularly update their pages with photos, posts, polls and other newsworthy materials.

3. The comment feed on news articles on Facebook is moderated through Facebook's content moderation forum. (For a detailed moderation policy, see *supplement A*). Content moderation is done by either the news organizations themselves or by a third-party content moderation company.

4. Readers of news on Facebook do not require individual subscriptions to news organizations. Readers only have to have an account on Facebook to get access to a vast number of news channels. Sometimes these organizations do block access to news items or have a paywall set up to for Facebook readers to access the news. Most, however, give access to their organization page through the Facebook post. Thus, news organizations have a substantial reach among news readers who consume news through Facebook. This helps news from a particular news organization to transcend its core readers or subscriber base and reach a far wider audience.

For selecting the news media organizations whose articles on Facebook were to be studied in this research study, a nonprobability purposive sampling was used. Riffe, Lacy, and Fico (2014) write that nonprobability purposive sampling should be used only when the research agenda seeks to answer a particular question that cannot be measured by other types of sampling (Riffe, Lacy, & Fico, 2014). The aim of this research study was

to introduce a framework within which online political incivility can be discerned and studied.Consequently, only discourse with high visibility on Facebook was selected for analysis. Building upon Su *et al. 's* 2018 study on Facebook pages of news outlets, there were three criteria for the selection of specific media organization. They were:

1. The media organization must report political news.

2. The media organization must have a page on Facebook.

3. The page on Facebook should have a minimum of 50,000 likes and a minimum of 50,000 followers (Su *et al.*, 2018).

Thus, keeping in mind the above criteria, and due to the paucity of time, this study restricted itself to only one news media organization: the *New York Times.* The *New York Times* was selected as the organization of choice because of its high visibility on the social media platform, Facebook. The *New York Times* page on Facebook has 16, 670, 658 likes and 16, 327, 269 followers. Also, the amount of discussion posts and comments on their news stories is prolific.

For this study, after locating the Facebook page of the *New York Times*, the author used the keywords #MeToo to generate stories on the platform which the *New York Times* had published there. Facebook automatically generated 36 news stories with the matching keyword. Stories generating the highest comments and which were shared the highest number of times on their platform came first, and the stories which were shared the least appeared at the bottom. From the list of stories generated by Facebook, the first two stories with the most amount of Likes, Comments and Shares were selected. The two news stories whose comment feeds were examined for this study were:

1. Sexual Abuse of Nuns: Longstanding Church Scandal Emerges from Shadows (Horowitz, 2019).

2. What Happens When Men Are Too Afraid to Mentor Women? (Salam, 2019)

The first story garnered 32K (32,000) Likes and 3.3K (3,300) comments. It was also shared 17, 867 times by readers visiting the *New York Times* page on Facebook at the time of writing this study. The original story appeared on February 6th, 2019 on the *New York Times* and was written by Jason Horowitz. The story delved into Pope Francis' acknowledgement of women being discriminated and harassed on sexual grounds by ordained Catholic priests for the first time. According to the article, there had been, "decades of persistent allegations of such abuses, and seeming Vatican inaction, which has now collided with the heightened awareness of the #MeToo era" (Horowitz, 2019).

The second story had 2.3K (2,300) Likes and 711 Comments. The story was shared 645 times. The story dealt with the issue of #MeToo, but in a different context. A news story appeared on Jan 27, 2019, in the *New York Times*, (Bennhold, 2019) about how male mentors speaking on the condition of anonymity had confided in reporter Katrin Bennhold, at the World Economic Forum in Davos, Switzerland, about the aftermath of #MeToo and their fear of mentoring women. The story "What Happens When Men Are Too Afraid to Mentor Women" (Salam, 2019) subsequently appeared as an opinion piece written by Maya Salam, in the *New York Times* on January 29, 2019, two days after the original piece. Though the original news story written by Bennhold did not appear on the organization's Facebook page, this opinion piece written by Salam, two days later, did appear and generated an intense discussion about the issue of #MeToo, women leaders and women in the corporate world.

The amount of Likes, Shares, and Comments on Facebook were taken into consideration for a particular story because Facebook uses an algorithm called EdgeRank (Crum, 2015) to classify the stories that appear on a person's newsfeed. The newsfeed is the original page that users of social media see when they login to their Facebook account. According to the website, Newswhip, "the general theory is that stories and posts shared on social media that attract more comments are more likely to resonate with a wider audience, as the comments indicate a higher degree of engagement on the part of the audience" (Corcoran, 2018). However, an article on the website, WebProNews, says that the number of shares on a given post is more important than likes and comments taken together (Crum, 2015). According to the public relations website, Big Foot Digital, Facebook Likes have the least weight with regard to the EdgeRank algorithm because they involve the least amount of human action (How Do Likes, Comments and Shares Affect the Visibility of your Posts on your Facebook Page? n.d.). The comments written on a post have the second rank because writing a comment involves more effort than mere liking a post. However, when a post is shared on a user's Facebook timeline or newsfeed, it is considered the highest form of participation because it requires the most effort (How Do Likes, Comments and Shares Affect the Visibility of your Posts on your Facebook Page? n.d.). Therefore, the number of shares a Facebook post receives is an indicator of the post's significance. Thus, this study considered the two stories with the most amount of shares that appeared on the *New York Times'* Facebook page with the keyword #MeToo. However, as this study utilized quantitative content analysis, comment feed conversations were given primary importance by the author. Thus, conversations on the comment feed were analyzed for the presence or absence of incivility.

For each story, the first comment was taken into consideration. Thereafter, random sampling was utilized, and every 25th comment was considered for coding decisions. If the comment had replies associated with it, all replies were coded. However, it is to be kept in mind that Facebook gives users the choice of seeing "new," "oldest, "relevant," and "all comments" within the comments. If the user chooses "new," all the comments are shown with the most recent ones that have been posted (What does Most Relevant Mean on a Page post?). The selection of "oldest" show all comments in chronological order (What does Most Relevant Mean on a Page post?). Most relevant comments are those which prior readers of that post have engaged most within the form of replies and likes (What does Most Relevant Mean on a Page post?). "All comments" show all the comments in a chronological manner (What does Most Relevant Mean on a Page post?). For this study, the option "all comments" was selected for both the news stories out of which sampling of the comments was done.

#MeToo

The stories were selected with the keyword, #MeToo. #MeToo was used for this research as this phenomenon was primarily powered by social media. The use of '#' before the words MeToo, shows how the movement became synonymous with the social media platform Twitter and then spread to other platforms of social media such as Facebook, What's App, Instagram, Pinterest and so on.

The phrase 'Me too' (without the #) was first utilized in 2006 by social worker Tarana Burke in support of sexual harassment victims of colour. Burke has been a long time champion of women of colour who faced sexual harassments and assaults. She used

the phase the first time during a healing center meeting of women who faced sexual abuses in Alabama. But the phase did not catch on the public imagination until 2017.

#MeToo reached a wide number of social media users when a story appeared in the *New York Times* on October 5th, 2017 titled, "Harvey Weinstein Paid Off Sexual Harassment Accusers for Decades" written by Jodi Kantor and Megan Twohey (Kantor & Twohey, 2017). The story was based on the personal narrative of the American actress Ashley Judd. The report also included several narratives by women who were sexually harassed by Weinstein. Seven days later, on October 12, 2017, a report by The Hollywood Reporter, implicated Roy Price, then head of the Amazon Studios of sexually harassing producer Isa Hackett (Johnson & Hawbaker, 2019). Just days later, on October 15th, the American actress, Alyssa Milano tweeted on her personal Twitter account, "if you have been sexually harassed or assaulted write 'me too' as a reply to this tweet" (Johnson & Hawbaker, 2019) and used #MeToo for the first time. At first, she did not credit Burke for coining the phrase, but later she acknowledged the previous use of the phase and credited Burke for beginning the "Me Too" movement (Johnson & Hawbaker, 2019). Since the time the phase #MeToo was used on Twitter, it spread virally on Twitter and then to other social media platforms. According to the website, The Social Element, the hashtag phrase was "used more than 12 million times within the first 24 hours of Alyssa's initial post" (Holder, 2018).

#MeToo was the first social movement that spread primarily through social media, and then other platforms of media such as television, newspapers, radio and news websites adapted it. The movement had significant ramifications ranging from imprisonment to resignations of several high profile men in fields as diverse as

entertainment, media, sports, medicine, lifestyle, academia, and of course politics.

#MeToo brought out the diversity and range of sexual harassment and sexual abuse that

women from all walks of life faced. The fact that it was a social movement powered by

social media made this subject apt to study in this research.

Variables

A total of 624 comments were considered for this study. Comments were classified as

primary comments and secondary comments. Primary comments were those which

Facebook readers of the news item posted as a response to the news story. Secondary

comments were those comments which were replies to the original comment. The

direction of all the comments was also coded.

Four categories were drawn up to categorize the comments. They were: Tone-

based incivility (use of profanities, yelling or shouting, use of personal insults, use of

superfluous information and use of sarcasm with verbally abusive language and

profanities, content-based incivility (use of stereotypes using 'isms' or political ideology,

threatening a group to take away their fundamental democratic rights, claiming the notion

of superiority for a particular group, disparaging a group without using profanities or

verbally abusive language and use of sarcasm without use of profanities or verbally

abusive language), civil (comments not containing either of the characteristics of the

above two categories were coded as civil) and other (comments which did not belong to

any of the categories above were characterized as other).

A coding sheet was drawn up by the principal researcher. One co-coder along

with the principal researcher underwent three hours of training with the coding sheet. The

coding sheet was then fine-tuned to make the categories of tone-based incivility, content-

based incivility and civility lucid. Comments including only memes (graphic animated videos or pictures with one or more messages) were wholly excluded from the study (See *Appendix*). This was done because the type of incivility that memes communicate has not been examined by researchers on incivility.

The co-coder and the principal researcher coded 10 per cent of the comments on each news story. Random sampling was used to consider comments to be coded for inter-rater reliability. Every fifth comment from each of the news stories was considered for coding. Cohen's *kappa* was run to determine inter-rater reliability. Acceptable reliability was reached among the coders with kappa = .636 (p< .000). The principal researcher thereafter coded all the other comments.

Chapter IV

RESULTS

The content analysis revealed that a majority of comments were civil in nature. Out of

624 comments analyzed, 80.1% or 500 of the 624 comments were coded as civil. 19.4%

or 121 comments out of 624 comments analyzed were coded as uncivil comments, and

0.5% or 3 of the 624 comments were coded as other. It is imperative at this stage that an

exploration of the type of comments that were coded into different categories be

conducted. The Table 1.1 below illustrates the coding process.

Comment Characteristic	Coded as	Comments
Use of profanities/verbal abuse toward an idea or institution	Tone based incivility	A. "**** Catholic Church" B. "Now what they're gonna do?SMDH"
Yelling or shouting, use of words in all capital followed by profanities or multiple exclamation marks.	Tone based incivility	A. "Ladies we may really have gone too far!OOHHH THE REGRET!!!!" B. "AARRRGGGHHHHHH!!!!! NOT SURPRISED"
Use of personal insults/verbally abusive language against a fellow commenter	Tone based incivility	A. "Carlene Gorence, You are a supine idiot." B. "Alrighty go calm your tits." C. "Darryl LeJune, we are not devout to sinners, you idiot."
Use of superfluous information such as placing advertisements about one's business or personal website	Tone based incivility	None found
Use of sarcasm with verbally abusive language or profanities	Tone based incivility	A. "OH SHUT UP about your Allah crap; This post is not about him, go troll on some other site."
Use of stereotype against a group of people using "ism" or political ideology	Content based incivility	A. "Lmao, liberals caused this with their metoo movement. Now they can deal with the consequences." B. "Most Christians are hypocrites, and the Catholic Church is filed with paedophiles and rapists."
The threat to a particular group regarding fundamental democratic rights	Content based incivility	A. "This had to happen, this isn't fear, this is retribution."
Asserting notions of superiority about a particular group based on certain common characteristics	Content based incivility	A. "The only religion is Islam, prophet Jesus asked people to worship only one god, Allah. The real Christianity disappeared after ca 200 years after Jesus. No God but Allah, God is one and has no son." B. "Who among the Churches today can trace back their roots to Jesus in 33 A.D.? It is only the ONE, HOLY, CATHOLIC AND APOSTOLIC CHURCH."
Disparaging a particular group without using verbally abusive language	Content based incivility	A. "The only true dangerous religion is what mosques worship because 15 to 25% become extreme terrorists In the world."
Use of sarcasm without verbally abusive language or profanities	Content based incivility	A. "Yeah, some 'religious organization' KILL for their god..boom." B. "Why don't you go ahead then and let your children go behind the altar with a priest!"

Use of reasoned sentiments without any of the above characteristics. Can agree or disagree to a fellow commenter	Civil message	A. "I am really sorry, but your blind devotion is why evil continues to flourish." B. "The Catholic Church has been around for more than 2000 years and has been persecuted for many years, as we catholic are hated by so many others religion, why I ask?... it's so sad; I hate what has happened in the church. But that will never change my beliefs in my Catholic faith. There are many good priest and nuns. I respect all religions, so please respect mine."

Table 1.1. Types of coded comments

As Table 1.2 shows, civil comments greatly outnumbered uncivil comments (both tone-based uncivil comments and content-based uncivil comments) and comments which were coded as other.

All Comment Types

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Uncivil	121	19.4	19.4	19.4
	Civil	500	80.1	80.1	99.5
	Other	3	.5	.5	100.0
	Total	624	100.0	100.0	

Table 1.2. Total frequencies of civil, uncivil and other comments

Table 1.3. shows the percentage of only civil comments from both stories.

Only Civil Comments

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Abuse of nuns	502	80.4	80.4	80.4
	Dispatch from Davos	122	19.6	19.6	100.0
	Total	624	100.0	100.0	

Table 1.3. Civil comments only from the two stories out of the population of all the comments.

Figure 1.1. shows a pie chart of uncivil, civil and other comments. Once more, we see that a large number of messages were civil in nature.
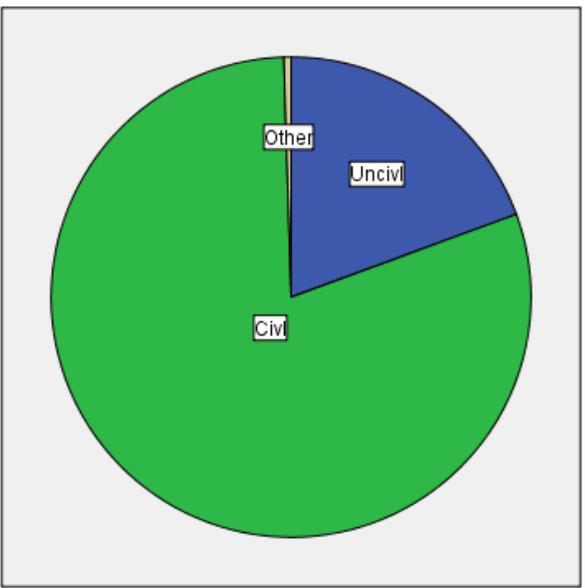

Figure 1.1. Pie Chart showing uncivil and civil comments from both stories

Table 1.4. shows the frequencies of civil, tone-based uncivil comments and content-based uncivil comments. As we can see from the table, the frequency of civil comments is the most substantial (80.6 per cent). However, the frequency of content-based uncivil messages is greater than the frequency of tone-based uncivil messages. Content-based uncivil messages comprise 12.7% or 79 comments whereas tone-based uncivil messages comprise of only 6.3% or 39 of the 624 comments examined.

Civil, tone-based uncivil and content-based uncivil comments

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Civil	503	80.6	80.6	80.6
	Tonal	39	6.3	6.3	86.9
	Content	79	12.7	12.7	99.5
	Other	3	.5	.5	100.0
	Total	624	100.0	100.0	

Table 1.4. Frequencies of civil, tone-based uncivil and content-based uncivil comments

Figure 1.2 is a pie chart representation of the civil comments, tone-based uncivil comments and content-based uncivil comments. As we can see, the civil comments are the greatest in number but among uncivil messages, content-based uncivil messages are greater than tone-based uncivil messages.
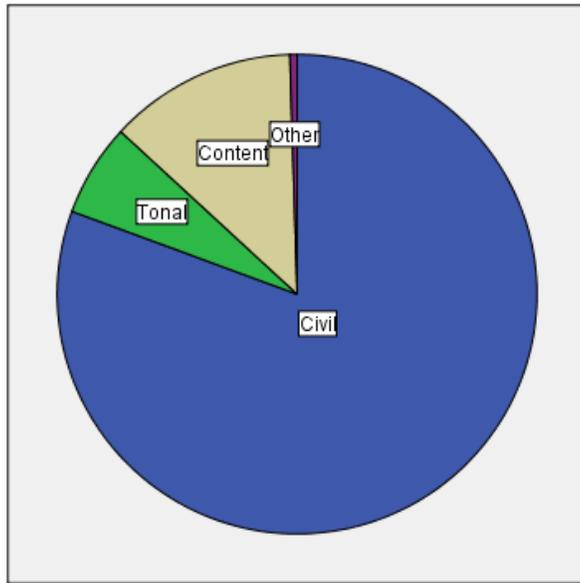
Figure 1.2. Pie chart showing civil, content based uncivil and tone based uncivil messages

Table 1.5. shows the frequency and the percentages of the different types of comment across the two stories. Story 1, Sexual Abuse of Nuns: Longstanding Church Scandal Emerges from Shadows (Horowitz, 2019) garnered 411 civil comments, 56 content-based uncivil comments, 32 tone-based uncivil comments and 3 comments were coded as other. Story 2, What Happens When Men Are Too Afraid to Mentor Women? (Salam, 2019), garnered 89 civil comments, 24 content-based uncivil comments, nine tone-based uncivil comments and no comments in this story were coded as other. Thus, in both cases, the frequency of content-based uncivil messages were greater than tone-based uncivil messages.

Civil, tone based uncivil and content based uncivil comments across story types

| | | Story | |
		1. Abuse of nuns Count	2. What Happens When Men Are Too Afraid Count
Discourse Type	Tone based	32	9
	Content based	56	24
	Civil	411	89
	Other	3	0

Table 1.5. Count of comment categories across two stories

Hypotheses testing

H1: The frequency of tone-based uncivil comments shall be more than content-based uncivil comments across news stories on news website pages of Facebook.

A chi-square test of difference was conducted to assess whether the frequency of tone-based uncivil comments would be more than the frequency of content-based uncivil comments. The hypothesis as stated above was rejected. However, the results revealed that there was a significant difference between the frequency of civil comments, tone-based uncivil comments and content-based uncivil comments. The results also showed that civil comments were statistically greater than both tone-based uncivil comments and content-based uncivil comments and that the frequency of content-based uncivil comments were statistically greater than the frequency of tone-based uncivil comments. The results showed that $x^2(3, N=624) = 8.030$, $p<.05$ that there is a statistical difference among the concepts of civil, tone-based uncivil and content-based uncivil comments. Table 1.6. shows the result of the chi-square test of independence.

Crosstabulation of the comment type

			Civil	Tonal	Content	Other	Total
Story num	Abuse of nuns	Count	414	30	55	3	502
		Expected Count	404.7	31.4	63.6	2.4	502.0
	Dispatch from Davos	Count	89	9	24	0	122
		Expected Count	98.3	7.6	15.4	.6	122.0
Total		Count	503	39	79	3	624
		Expected Count	503.0	39.0	79.0	3.0	624.0

Table 1.6. Crosstabulation of comment type across two stories

Chi-Square Tests

	Value	df	Asymptotic Significance (2-sided)
Pearson Chi-Square	8.030[a]	3	.045
Likelihood Ratio	7.985	3	.046
Linear-by-Linear Association	4.964	1	.026
N of Valid Cases	624		

a. 2 cells (25.0%) have expected count less than 5. The minimum
expected count is .59.

Table 1.7. Pearson's chi-square test of difference

Table 1.8. shows the value of Cramer's phi. The Cramer's phi value is .113 which shows

the variance that the dependent variable has over the independent variable. In this case,

the independent variable was the story number, and the dependent variable was the

comment type.

Symmetric Measures

		Value	Approximate Significance
Nominal by Nominal	Phi	.113	.045
	Cramer's V	.113	.045
N of Valid Cases		624	

Table 1.8. Cramer's phi value. The result shows a significant difference.

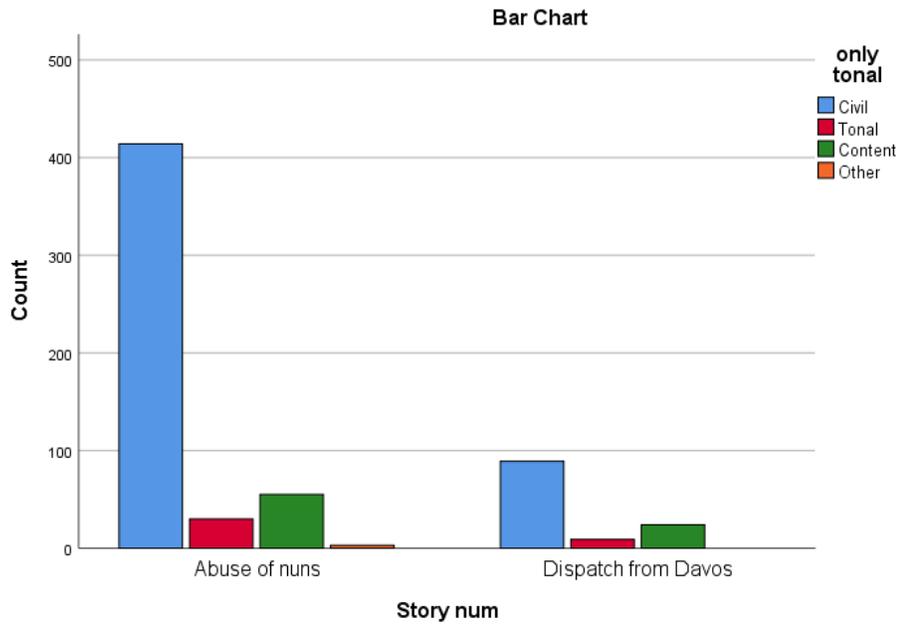Figure 1.3. shows a bar diagram of comment types across the two stories.

Figure 1.3. Bar diagram showing different comment types across the two stories

H2: Tone-based uncivil messages will have greater frequency of secondary level messages than content-based uncivil messages across news stories on news website pages of Facebook.

Direction of story

			Civil	Tonal	Content	Other	Total
Direction of story	0	Count	1	0	0	0	1
		Expected Count	.8	.1	.1	.0	1.0
	To the original news post	Count	174	8	18	0	200
		Expected Count	161.2	12.5	25.3	1.0	200.0
	To a fellow commentator's post	Count	328	31	61	3	423
		Expected Count	341.0	26.4	53.6	2.0	423.0
Total		Count	503	39	79	3	624
		Expected Count	503.0	39.0	79.0	3.0	624.0

Table 1.9. Direction of the comments across story types

For the second hypothesis too a chi-square test of difference was conducted. The
results showed that there was no significant difference between the direction of the
messages and the type of discourse that occurred. The x^2 (6, $N = 624$)= 8.728, p> 0.5.
Table 1.9. above shows the crosstabulation between the direction of the comments and
the discourse type.

Chi-Square Tests

	Value	df	Asymptotic Significance (2-sided)
Pearson Chi-Square	8.728[a]	6	.189
Likelihood Ratio	10.194	6	.117
Linear-by-Linear Association	7.554	1	.006
N of Valid Cases	624		

a. 6 cells (50.0%) have expected count less than 5. The minimum
expected count is .00

*Table 2.0. Pearson's chi-square test of difference. Results show
that there no significant difference*

Symmetric Measures

		Value	Approximate Significance
Nominal by Nominal	Phi	.118	.189
	Cramer's V	.084	.189
N of Valid Cases		624	

Table 2.1. Cramer's phi values. Results show no significant difference

Figure 1.4. shows a bar diagram showing the direction of the comments and the comment type. We can see that civil comments garnered most engagement in the form of replies whereas the tone-based uncivil comments garnered the least amount of engagement in the form of replies. However, the results were not significant. Thus, the null hypothesis is accepted, and the hypothesis as stated is rejected. There was no statistical difference between the direction of comments across comment types on both stories.
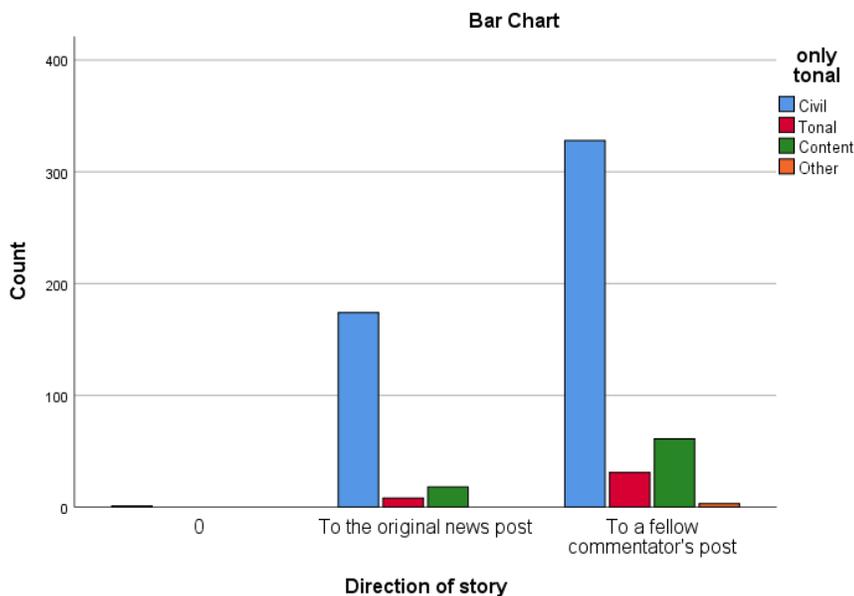
Figure 1.4. Bar diagram of the direction of comments across comment types

H3: Tone-based uncivil comments would give rise to more engagement in the discussion forum in the form of comments than content-based uncivil comments.

A chi-square test of difference was conducted to see which types of comments gave rise to more engagement in the form of replies. This hypothesis, as stated too was rejected. However, the test of this hypothesis was statistically significant showing that different comment types did garner engagement in the form of replies. The test showed $x2$ (3, N= 624)= 12.343, p<.05 a significant difference among engagement that different types of comments encountered. Table 2.1. below shows the crosstabulation between whether a reply was present after a comment or not across comment types.

Reply present Crosstabulation

			only tonal				Total
			Civil	Tonal	Content	Other	Total
reply present	No	Count	459	34	62	3	558
		Expected Count	449.8	34.9	70.6	2.7	558.0
	Yes	Count	44	5	17	0	66
		Expected Count	53.2	4.1	8.4	.3	66.0
Total		Count	503	39	79	3	624
		Expected Count	503.0	39.0	79.0	3.0	624.0

Table 2.2. Crosstabulation of replies across comment types

Chi-Square Tests

	Value	df	Asymptotic Significance (2-sided)
Pearson Chi-Square	12.343[a]	3	.006
Likelihood Ratio	10.710	3	.013
Linear-by-Linear Association	9.048	1	.003
N of Valid Cases	624		

a. 3 cells (37.5%) have expected count less than 5. The minimum expected count is .32.

Table 2.3. Pearson's chi-square of replies across comment types

Symmetric Measures

		Value	Approximate Significance
Nominal by Nominal	Phi	.141	.006
	Cramer's V	.141	.006
N of Valid Cases		624	

Table 2.4. Cramer's phi value

Cramer's phi value showed the variance between the dependent and independent variable to be .141. The dependent variable here was the comment type whereas the independent variable here was whether replies were present after a comment. As we see from the table above, there was a statistically significant difference between replies present and replies not present across comment types.

Figure 1.5. shows a bar diagram of replies present across comment types.
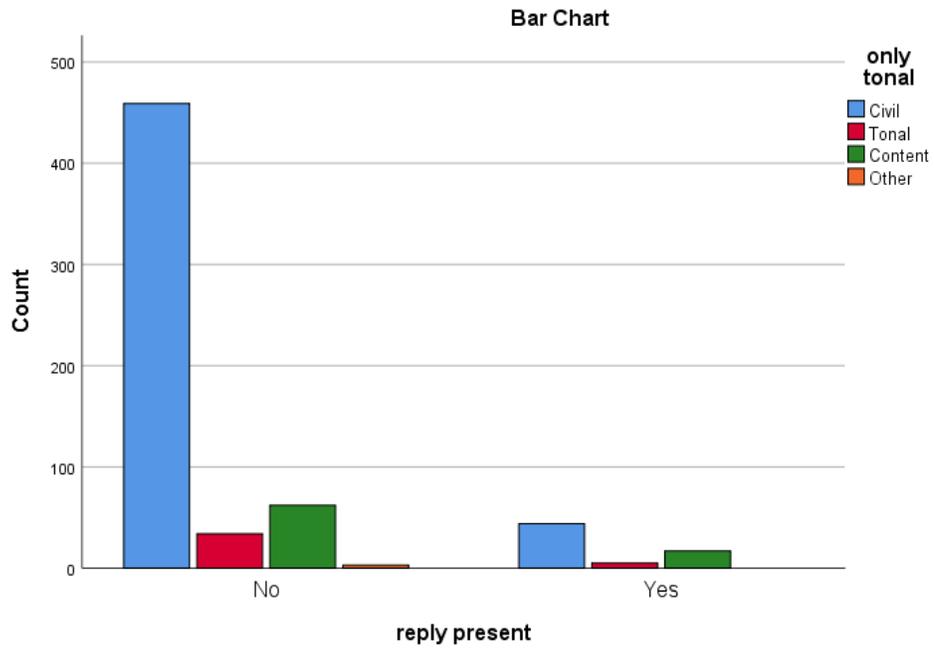

Figure 1.5. Bar diagram showing whether replies were present or not across comment types

As seen from the bar diagram above, the majority of comments, civil and uncivil did not receive a reply. However, among the comments which did receive a reply, civil comments received the highest number of replies followed by content-based uncivil comments and tone-based uncivil comments received the least amount of engagement in the form of replies. Therefore, it could be said that among uncivil comments, content-based comments show more engagement than tone-based uncivil comments. The implications of the findings are further examined in the discussion section.

Chapter V

DISCUSSION

The findings reveal that a majority of the conversation on Facebook is civil. However, 20% of messages were found to be uncivil. Though all hypotheses as stated in the study were rejected, the study found statistical significance for two of the three hypotheses. Therefore, it is crucial, that we explore the results.

First, the results of this study are in line with Su *et al. 's* 2018 study where 60% of all comments on Facebook pages of news organizations were found to be civil (Su et al., 2018). This study also reflects the findings of the 2018 study which found that a majority of the comments on pages of national news organizations were civil (Su et al., 2018). As the primary data set for this study came from the *New York Times*, which is representative of a news organization at the national level, the findings are consistent with the previous study.

The analysis produced several points of interest. First, sarcasm appeared as both tone-based and as content-based incivility.

The concept of sarcasm

Seely (2018) found that sarcasm was the most challenging construct to define; similarly this study found that the concept of sarcasm could be categorized into two different categories of incivility. Sarcasm that was accompanied by profanities or

verbally abusive language was categorized as tone-based incivility, and sarcasm which did not contain any profanities or verbally abusive language was categorized as content-based incivility. However, coding of sarcasm as content-based incivility posed an additional challenge in the case of the three comments given below.

"I hope you have other interests apart from going to church & studying your Bible, just to balance life out a bit… ☺"

"Priests are insisting nuns that they impregnate get abortions… while preaching pro-life rhetoric. Just 'wow.'"

"Ok, so men can't control themselves, and they are cowards, and somehow that's the fault of women? Sure."

Because previous scholars (Seely, 2018; Santana, 2015; Borah, 2012; Sobieraj and Berry, 2011) treated all instances of sarcasm as uncivil by definition, this study too coded the concept as uncivil. As shown in Table 1.1. in the previous section, many of comments coded as content-based incivility included verbal features such as extreme negative stereotyping of entire groups (Catholiocs, Muslims etc.) or imputing untrue and harshly negative motivations to individuals or groups. However, the three comments shown above included none of those features neither did they contain any of the features of tone-based incivility or civility. Thus, researchers need to rethink the concept of sarcasm and to which extent sarcasm should be treated an an uncivil element.

The second point of interest that arose was the social media platform that was examined here.

Social media platform- Facebook

Based on the results, the first hypothesis that the frequency of tone-based uncivil comments were to be greater than the frequency of content-based uncivil comments was rejected. In fact, this study found that the frequency of content-based uncivil comments were greater than the frequency of tone-based uncivil comments. Also, civil comments were found to be the greatest in frequency. This result is again in line with Su *et al. 's* 2018 study which found 'extremely uncivil comments' to be the lowest in percentage among all comment types (Su et al., 2018). This brings our attention to the third dimension of incivility which has been discussed earlier, the platform where the conversation takes place. According to Santana (2015), "the arrival of a new era of participatory journalism, however, has spelt a profound transformation in the way members of the public express themselves" (Santana, 2015). Santana maintains that public forums such as the comment section on Facebook have brought unparalleled parity in the ways that ideas could be expressed. He calls comment forums, the "new public sphere" (Santana, 2015). However, online platforms vary greatly in their scope. Facebook, for instance, has a clear moderation policy toward hate speech (see supplement). The content moderation policy of Facebook states, "we remove hate speech which includes content that directly attack people based on their race, ethnicity, national origin, religious affiliation, sexual orientation, sex, gender or gender identity, or serious disabilities or diseases" (Supplement). And indeed, this study found low levels of tone-based uncivil comments in contrast to what other researchers have found on different platforms (Borah, 2012; Santana, 2015; Seely, 2018).

However, content-based uncivil messages like those that were categorized as stereotyping, asserting notions of supremacy, disparaging a particular group, or sarcasm

without the use of profanities or verbally abusive language were found to be in the greatest frequency following civil messages. Content-based messages, as stated earlier are built upon what Papacharissi (2004) called "strongly held attitudes" (p. 277). Content-based messages are not manifestly uncivil like tone-based uncivil messages; however, the latent meaning conveyed is obnioxious and thus, detrimental to a harmonious, plural society. Therefore, this type of incivility may be the more dangerous of the two.

If the recent incidences of violence are to be taken into consideration, one could find an underlying manifestation of hatred on social media responsible for it. In the recent incident of the public shootout in a mosque in New Zealand, the shooter had posted a manifesto called, "The Great Displacement" on social media websites such as 8chan and Twitter (Bogost, 2019). The shooter posted one of the videos of the killing on Facebook too until Facebook took it down upon the request of the New Zealand police (Bogost, 2019). According to a *New York Times* article, the genocide of the Rohingya Muslim population in Myanmar happened as a strategic campaign of hateful messages on Facebook (Mozur, 15). According to the report on the disinformation by the U.K. House of Commons, mentioned in the first part of the study, Facebook advertisements posing as news stories, aided and abetted by Facebook's internal software which practices precision targetting of audience members, was one of the most significant contributor to the outcome of the Brexit vote (Collins, et al., 2019).

From Pittsburgh to Colombo, it is as if an agenda of hatred is let loose on the social media network, and horrendous consequences follow. In the 2018 paper from the University of Warick, mentioned earlier in the study, researchers termed Facebook a "propagation machinery" (Muller & Schwarz, 2018). In an article in the *New York Times*

in the aftermath of the Pittsburg shooting in October, 2018, journalist Kevin Roose wrote that, "the popularity of mainstream mega-platforms like Twitter, Facebook and YouTube has created environments in which misinformation and hate can multiply and where extremists can attempt to convert" (Roose, 2018)

Thus, as Papacharissi (2004) had found "The White Manifesto" on Usenet sites, there continue to be proclamations of ideas that pose precarious risks to values of humanity. The passage of time from 2004 to 2019 has done little to curb these vicious ideas, if anything, the channels of digital media has helped fan the fires of hatred and bring them into mainstream thought process. These type of ideas which used to be an enclave into their own, has now permeated into the daily lives of people and if left unchecked, they shall wrought havoc on the extant society. No matter, even if a majority of the conversations on social media such as Facebook are found to be civil, as this study found, the minority of the content-based uncivil messages, are enough cause substantial damage. Therefore, research must focus on various platforms where conversations occur as the spread of disingenuous ideas which harm the moral fabric of a society must be curtailed and restricted at all costs.

Engagement on social media

The second and third hypotheses touched upon the subject of engagement on social media. Engagement on social media, particularly Facebook as mentioned in the methods section has three dimensions: Like, Comment and Share. For the purposes of this study, engagement was seen as writing a comment to another comment. This study categorized the comments as primary and secondary comments. Primary comments were those that were written by the commenter with respect to the news story posted by the

news organization. Secondary comments were those that were written by the commenters in reply to a primary comment.

Comments were also coded by their direction. Comments were coded as replies to the news post or as replies to a fellow commenter's post. However, the results showed no statistically significant difference in the direction of the comment. Though 174 civil comments were directed at the main news story, 328 civil comments were directed to a fellow commenter's post. It was interesting to see that none of the tone-based or content-based uncivil comments were directed to the original news post. 31 tone-based uncivil comments and 68 content-based uncivil comments were directed toward a fellow commenter's posts that is, all tone-based and content-based uncivil messages were posted as replies to someone else's comment. Therefore all uncivil messages could be categorized as secondary comments. As seen from the table 2.6 below, a majority of the comments, 423 of them were assigned as secondary comments, that is they were replies to another person's post.

Primary Vs. Secondary comments

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	0	1	.2	.2	.2
	To the original news post	200	32.1	32.1	32.2
	To a fellow commentator's post	423	67.8	67.8	100.0
	Total	624	100.0	100.0	

Table 2.5. Frequency showing the direction of the comment

The figure 1.6. below shows that the majority of the comments were secondary comments.

Direction of story

- 0
- To the original news post
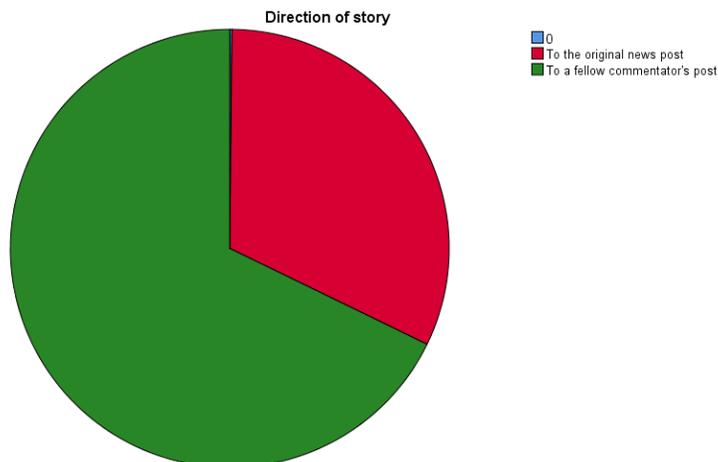- To a fellow commentator's post

Figure 1.6. Pie-chart showing the direction of the comments

Also, it was most interesting to note that almost half of the secondary comments were uncivil. Tone-based uncivil comment comprised 9.4 per cent of the comments and content-based uncivil comments comprised of 40.6 per cent of the total comments. This finding implies that whereas most commenters would not post an uncivil comment in response to a news story, that is as a primary comment, commenters saw no problem in posting uncivil comments as replies to another commenter's post, that is as a secondary comment. This begets the question as to why should a commenter be inclined to respond uncivilly to another commenter when he/she is not ready to engage in such comments as a primary commenter. However, the results showed that there was no statistically significant difference between the direction of the comments.

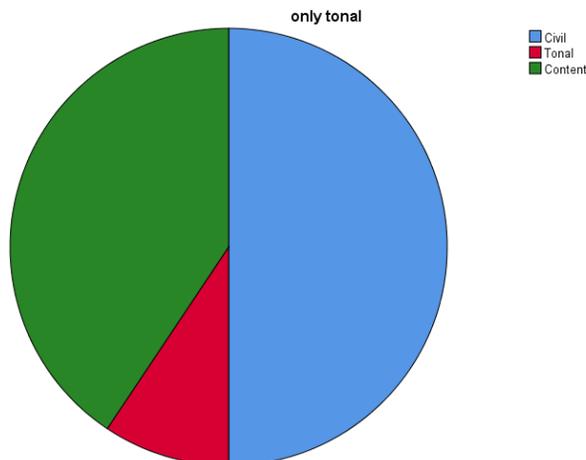Figure 1.7. shows this in a pie chart:

Figure1.7. Pie chart showing civil, tone-based uncivil and content-based uncivil messages with regards to the direction of the story.

The third hypothesis postulated that there would be more engagement in the form of replies to the tone-based uncivil comments than to content-based uncivil comments. The results, however, showed that a vast majority of comments, both civil and uncivil did not receive any replies. However, where replies were present, civil comments received the most replies, and among uncivil comments, content-based uncivil comments received the most engagement in the form of replies. This was quite different from the previous studies as previous studies have shown that uncivil comments do engender engagement (Borah, 2012; Brooks & Geer, 2007). The results were also statistically significant in the difference it yielded. Thus, the difference in the result in this study could be put down to the choice of news stories and the platform of the conversation. Since the two news stories dealt with matters of which could be regarded as of social import, engagement was probably seen as unlikely to change the mindset of the original commenter. It could also be put down to the platform that the study examined. The primary data set was taken

from the page of the *New York Times*. As stated before, the *New York Times* is representative of a national level news organization. It may be that the people who see or read the news on this page do not engage in profane or vulgarly abusive language. Also, Su *et al. 's* 2018 study showed that levels of 'extremely uncivil' messages on national level news organization page on Facebook were found to be the lowest (Su *et al*., 2018).

Limitations

There were several limitations to this study. The first limitation was that only one news organization page was studied. Research needs to be conducted on multiple pages of news organizations on Facebook for results to have generalization. A second limitation was only one platform of social media was selected for the analysis of comments. Perhaps, if other social media platforms are examined for comments, such as Gab, Reddit, 4chan, 8chan etc., where content moderation policies are not rigid, and anonymity is allowed, the research could find much more layered meanings in both constructs of incivility. A third limitation was the treatment of sarcasm. As explained above, sarcasm has been quite a problematic construct for researchers and researchers are still grappling with this construct. Research needs to be carried on with degrees within sarcasm that pertain to civil or uncivil behaviour. A fourth limitation pertains to the methodology of quantitative content analysis. The hypotheses posed in the study required a simple count of frequencies. However, quantitative content analysis is a productive, varied method of observation of data, and there could be other quantitative or qualitative methodologies used along with content analysis to find far more precious data, and thus far greater interpretation could be gleaned.

Conclusion

The aim of this study was to introduce a dual framework within which online incivility could be examined. The idea of tone-based incivility and content-based incivility is vital as all messages could be categorized into civil messages, tone-based uncivil messages and content-based uncivil messages on online forums. As more and more conversations take place on the digital frontier, it is crucial to devise a categorization by which a distinction could be made of civil and uncivil comments. As pointed out in the early part of the study, researchers have been grappling with the concept of incivility and how to define it. If we can measure incivility as two constructs and not as one, researchers could then study this concept at a deeper level. This study also showed the necessity of delineating messages as tone-based and content-based. Tone-based uncivil messages could be restrained by technological interventions such as automated killfiles that many social media companies, news organizations and media houses use currently, but when it comes to content-based uncivil messages containing them seems to be most difficult and as yet necessary. However, the conundrum that most social media companies face is how to manage these type of messages which convey uncivil ideas rather than uncivil words or phrases. This study therefore provides a beginning to distinguish between two types of incivility and aims to provide a framework wherein incivility is not treated as a single concept but as an umbrella concept which assumes several elements of incivility within it.

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APPENDIX

Coding Book: Three types of discourse on online social media network Facebook.

Introduction: The aim of this research is to categorize online comments on Facebook page of The New York Times in three categories: Tone based incivility, content-based incivility and civility. Two news stories from The New York Times were selected and comments the organization's Facebook page were examined.

Unit of Coding: The unit of coding in this study is the individual comment by readers of the New York Times page on Facebook.

Condition of coding: All comments are to be coded. If a comment has one or more replies, each reply is to be coded as a new comment. To be eligible for coding a comment must include words, sentences and/or emoticons that convey meaning.

For a list of emoticons please refer to https://emojipedia.org/.

Comments containing only memes (graphic images or very short videos with a message/messages) are to be excluded entirely. They are not to be coded into any category.

To begin coding, first read the two stories completely. The stories should be read in the following order:

Story 1: Sexual Abuse of Nuns

Story 2: What Happens When Men Are Too Afraid to Mentor Women

Then code the following:

Coding for stories:

All comments from Story 1 (see above for reference) are to be coded 1.

All comments from Story 2 (see above for reference) are to be coded 2.

Primary or Secondary comments:

Mark 1 for primary comment.

Primary comments are those which the reader posts after reading the story. They do not include comments that are given to another person's post.

Mark 2 for secondary comments.

Secondary comments are replies to a fellow commenter. It is necessarily a post, posted following a primary comment.

Direction of the comment:

If a comment is a response to the story posted, and it is directed at anyone other than a fellow commenter, **mark 1**.

If a comment is a response directed toward a fellow commenter, **mark 2**.

Tone based incivility:

Comments are to be coded **1** (Tone based incivility) if one or more of the below categories are marked Yes (1). For each category mark Yes (1); No (0).

Categories (Tone based incivility) **Mark 1: Yes; 0: No** for each comment.

1. Use of profanities:

If the comment uses one or more profanities or verbal abuse in the comment, against a fellow commenter or against an institution or an idea. Usage of words such as Fuck, F***, Jackass, idiot etc.

E.g. ***** *CATHOLIC Church.* This comment was expressed following a news story of the sexual abuse of nuns in the Catholic church.

2. Yelling or Shouting:

If the comment contains multiple exclamation marks following profanities or verbally abusive language. Use of verbally abusive words or profanities or swear words

containing all upper-case letters, either followed by multiple exclamation marks or followed by an icon.

E.g. ****CATHOLIC Church.* This comment was expressed following a news story of the sexual abuse of nuns in the Catholic church.

3. Use of personal insults:

If a comment calls out an individual or a fellow commenter using abusive verbal language or a profanity.

E.g. *You are a supine idiot*. This comment was expressed as a follow up comment on another commenter in the story of the sexual abuse of nuns in the Catholic church.

4. Use of superfluous information:

If the comment only contains superfluous information such as advertisements for personal business, personal websites or blogs or external links thereof.

5. Use of sarcasm with verbally abusive language or profanities.

When a comment uses sarcasm along with the use of verbally abusive language or profanities.

6. Does the comment contain a reply?

When the comment attracts a reply from one or more commenters.

<u>Content-based Incivility:</u>

Comments are to be coded **2** (Content based incivility) if one or more of the below categories are marked Yes **(1)**. For each category mark Yes **(1)**; No **(0)**

Categories (Content based incivility) **Mark 1: Yes or No: 0**: No for each comment:

1. Use of stereotypes:

When a comment stereotypes a group using "isms" or political ideology.

2. Threat to a group

When a comment threatens a particular group (race, religion, region, sex, sexual orientation, language, mental health, educational qualification etc.) with threats that take away their basic democratic rights. Democratic rights include the right to vote, the right to work etc.

3. Claims superiority of a particular group

When a comment claims superiority of a particular race, religion, sex, sexual orientation, language, educational qualification etc. without using verbally abusive language or profanities. Comments that appear to be stating ideas that claim superiority of a particular region, religion, ethnicity, sex, sexual orientation etc. belong to this category.

4. Disparages a particular group

When a comment disparages a particular group based upon racial, sexual, regional or religious considerations without using verbally abusive language or profanities.

5. Use of sarcasm without the use of verbally abusive language or profanities

When a comment uses sarcasm in a comment to ridicule a person, a fellow commenter, a political thought or ideology.

E.g. *"This is not fear, this is retribution."* This statement is from the comments to Story 2, *"What Happens When Men Are Too Afraid to Mentor Women"*

6. Does the comment contain a reply?

When the comment attracts a reply from one or more commenters.

Civil Comments:

If none of the above categories occur, code the comment as Civil (3).

Other comments:

If the coder cannot code the comment into any of the three categories, or if the comment is in a foreign language unknown to the coder, then mark the comment Other (4).

Comments with only memes are to be excluded entirely. They are not to be coded in any category