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Human Rights in Public, Online Discourses

How Human Rights are Constructed, Perceived, and Discussed in European Liberal Democracies

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ABSTRACT

Despite an increased interest in modern threats to Human Rights (HRs), there is still a lack of knowledge about public support for HRs in European liberal democracies. In order to start bridging this academic gap, public discourses in German and Swedish online forums are analysed in the thesis at hand. By conducting grounded theory research with a poststructural approach, the author seeks to answer how HRs are constructed, perceived, and discussed in various public discourses. The data, which was collected from commentary sections to newspapers' Facebook posts that mentioned *human rights*, was coded and processed inductively. Thereafter, a Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) was conducted and a poststructural perspective was adopted to interpret the results. The thesis pays special attention to the contexts in which HRs discourses appear, the strong relation between Other-positioning and perceptions of HRs' universalism, and attitudes towards HRs. The research showed that dissatisfaction is ingrained in public HRs discourses, and that parts of the public are only exposed to HRs in contexts of bad news or disappointment. Further, numerous links between Othering-practices and claims of HRs' conditionality, as well as between victim constructions and HRs' universalism, are presented. Most importantly, the thesis emphasises the need to thoroughly examine and understand HRs discourses in order to strategically increase HRs awareness and support among the public.

Key words: Human rights, Online research, Discourse analysis, Public discourse, Human rights support, Public opinion

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1. INTRODUCTION

Scholars of Human Rights (HRs) have for the longest time been aware that support for the concept of HRs[1] is vital for the fulfilment of HRs in practice. Additionally, a wide range of research has confirmed that discourse analyses are vital for understanding the support for HRs.[2] Whereas earlier research on HRs discourses almost exclusively focused on so called non-Western[3] opposition, or non-European religious[4] resistance, the last decades have shown an increased interest in the state of HRs in for example the USA and a few European countries. This shift can be explained by the worldwide spread of phenomena like a declining state of democracy,[5] "war on terror",[6] nationalism[7] and populism,[8] which have forced HRs researchers to focus more on what could be called "the Western world". However, this shift has only been partial and most research is still limited to autocracies or illiberal democracies. Additionally, there is a lingering monotone focus on mass media, state actors and extremist discourses. Research with such focus has found that HRs discourses are very rare, and that HRs are often constructed as irrelevant in the own country and rather relevant for someone else than the self.[9] However, since public HRs discourses are still largely unexplored, it is unknown if these findings apply to such contexts as well. This gap is detrimental since the success of HRs

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[1] In this thesis, the concept of HRs refers to HRs in a broader sense, including legal, moral, and political agendas. At the bottom line, it proclaims that *every* human being is a rights holder. For an extensive definition, see: Sida, *The Concept of Human Rights: Background*. Stockholm: Sida, 2012

[2] See for example S. M. Brandle, "Media Coverage of Human Rights in the USA and UK: The Violations Still Will Not Be Televised (or Published)", *Human Rights Review*, 19, 2018, p. 168; B. L. Nacos & Y. Bloch-Elkon, "US Media and Post-9/11 Human Rights Violations in the Name of Counterterrorism", *Human Rights Review*, 19:2, 2018, p. 193–210; H. G. Ziebertz,"Human dignity – the Foundation of Political Human Rights? Empirical Research Among Youth in Germany", *Journal of Beliefs & Values*, 37:2, 2016, p. 151-171

[3] A. Føllesdal, "Human Rights and Relativism" in A. Føllesdal & T. W. Pogge (eds.) *Real World Justice. Grounds, Principles, Human Rights, and Social Institutions*. USA, New York: Springer, 2005, p. 265-283

[4] L. Langer, "Religion, Its Defamation and International Law", in L. Langer's *Religious Offence and Human Rights – The Implications of Defamation of Religion.* UK, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2014, p. 352-380

[5] S. Mapp & S. Gatenio Gabel, "Human Rights and the Declining State of Democracy", *Journal of Human Rights and Social Work*, 3, 2018, p. 53–54

[6] See for example H. Fenwick, "Recalibrating ECHR Rights, and the Role of the Human Rights Act Post 9/11: Reasserting International Human Rights Norms in the 'War on Terror'?", *Current Legal Problems*, 63:1, 2010, p. 153–234

[7] See for example E. Yazici, "Nationalism and Human Rights", *Political Research Quarterly*, 72:1, 2019, p. 147-161

[8] See for example K. Roth, "The Dangerous Rise of Populism: Global Attacks on Human Rights Values", in Human Rights Watch's (ed.) *Human Rights Watch World Report 2017*. USA, Minneapolis, 2017, p. 1-14

[9] See for example S. M. Brandle & G. Andreopoulos, "Introduction. Human Rights and the Media", *Human Rights Review*, 19, 2018, p. 144; International Council on Human Rights Policy (ICHRP), *Journalism, Media and the Challenge of Human Rights Reporting*. Switzerland, Versoix: ICHRP, 2002, p. 98; F. Krumbein, "The New York Times Coverage of the US-Related Human Rights*", Cogent Social Sciences*, 3:1, 2017, p. 1; M. Powers, "A New Era of Human Rights News? Contrasting Two Paradigms of Human Rights News-Making", *Journal of Human Rights*, 15:3, 2016, p. 318

depends on public engagement, support and obeyance.[10] Therefore, the aim of the thesis at hand is to start bridging this gap by asking the research question: How are Human Rights constructed, perceived, and discussed in public, online discourses?

The research question will be answered by an online analysis of public HRs discourses in Germany and Sweden; two countries in which the public rarely has been targeted in HRs examinations. By focusing on two consolidated European liberal democracies, the thesis contributes to an enhanced understanding of HRs discourses. Thus, this thesis does not only steer away from typical analytical perspectives by including the public, but also from the usual geographical study areas. Even though the previous research focus on states, politicians and media is vital for understanding HRs discourses and practices, a diagnosis is not complete without knowledge about how the public responds to what these actors are communicating.[11] As of today, one problem is that there is too little knowledge about the contexts in which HRs discourses are used by the public, how the concept of HRs' universalism is perceived, and about public attitudes towards HRs in general. Accordingly, since the deficits of HRs in contexts of public discourses are still largely unknown, it is also unknown how the main shortfalls of the concept can be countered. Therefore, research that examines HRs discourses does not only have an academic, but also a practical, value.

Social media was identified as the most suiting place to examine HRs discourses not only because it is a main contributor of news[12] and information about HRs violations,[13] but also because it enables unobtrusive observations of public discourses. Since no previous research has examined the concept of HRs in public online forums, a hybrid kind of methodology was developed to analyse the issue. More specifically, this thesis is a grounded theory research with a poststructural approach. The data consists of public comments to newspapers' Facebook posts that mentioned *human rights* in the title. 1'320 of the 23'806 extracted public comments mentioned *human rights* and were thereby analysed in depth. First off, the comments were inductively filtered, processed and coded according to grounded theory. However, the rarity of referrals to *human rights* favoured a qualitative, comprehensive analysis of public HRs discourses in European liberal democracies. Therefore, the data was subsequently subjected to

[10] B. Park, A. Murdie & D. R. Davis "The (Co)Evolution of Human Rights Advocacy: Understanding Human Rights Issue Emergence Over Time", *Cooperation and Conflict*, 54, 2019, p. 316

[11] N. D. Sharp, "Pragmatism and Multidimensionality in Human Rights Advocacy", *Human Rights Quarterly*, 40:3, 2018, p. 501

[12] B. Narayan, "From Everyday Information Behaviours to Clickable Solidarity in a Place Called Social Media", *Cosmopolitan Civil Societies Journal*, 5:3, 2013, p. 34

[13] ICHRP, *Journalism, Media and the Challenge of Human Rights Reporting*, 2002, p. 18

a Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA), as well as interpreted and discussed according to poststructural theory.

In what follows, a literature review will examine previous research on HRs discourses. It will be shown how there is a lack of diverse study subjects and approaches in discourse analyses, and that a crucial piece of the puzzle is still missing. Additionally, various theoretical as well as methodological perspectives will be presented. Since much European academic focus currently is on nationalism and populism, it will also be discussed how such phenomena might influence online HRs discourses. In the subsequent method section, the necessity and benefits of the combination of a grounded theory research with a poststructural analysis are outlined. Here, it will also be explained how the data was collected, coded and processed, as well as how the results were analysed. Thereafter, the research results are presented and, followingly, the findings will be discussed in the chapter "Discussion: What Do the Results Imply?". In this last part of the thesis, several answers to how HRs are constructed, perceived, and discussed in public, online discourses will be provided. Lastly, a few suggestions for how to take advantage of these findings, and suggestions for future research, will be presented in the concluding part of the thesis.

2. ONLINE DISCOURSES &
   THE CURRENT STATE OF HUMAN RIGHTS

It is not hard to find pessimistic outlooks on Human Rights (HRs) these days. A vast amount of literature exemplifies how HRs are under attack by nationalism,[14] populism,[15] right-wing extremism,[16] misogynism[17] and explicit anti-HRs agendas.[18] Numerous scholars claim that these movements are growing and seek to answer how that affects HRs. However, HRs resistance and backlashes are nothing new. For a long time, most fingers have been pointed at non-European movements rejecting HRs as "Western norms" or as incompatible with their religious beliefs.[19] Even though there is an increasing interest in HRs violations in liberal, so called Western, democracies as well,[20] the main scholarly focus is still on illiberal democracies or authoritarian societies.[21] Recent focus has dominantly been on the declining state of democracy in South America or the "illiberal" European countries Poland and Hungary.[22] Consequently, by examining public discourses in two European liberal democracies, the thesis at hand turns the spotlight in the opposite direction. With a poststructural approach in mind, such a shift is important for three reasons. Firstly, it is essential because HRs discourses in consolidated liberal democracies are still largely unexplored. Secondly, by turning the spotlight

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[14] D. Dăianu, "Can Democracies Tackle Illiberal and 'Inward Looking' Drives?", *Romanian Journal of European Affairs* 19:1, 2019, p. 5-22; E. Yazici, "Nationalism and Human Rights", 2019, p. 147-161

[15] M. Hameleers, "Putting Our Own People First: The Content and Effects of Online Right-wing Populist Discourse Surrounding the European Refugee Crisis", *Mass Communication and Society*, 22:6, 2019, p. 804-826; K. Roth, "The Dangerous Rise of Populism", 2017; p. 1-14

[16] See for example N. Baumgarten, "Othering Practice in a Right-Wing Extremist Online Forum", *Language@Internet*, 14, 2017, p. 1-18

[17] A. Slootweg, R. van Reekum & W. Schinkel, "The Raced Constitution of Europe: The Eurobarometer and the Statistical Imagination of European Racism", *European Journal of Cultural Studies*, 22:2, 2019, p. 144-163; J. Whitten-Woodring, "News About Her: The Effects of Media Freedom and Internet Access on Women's Rights", *Journal of Human Rights*, 15:3, 2016, p. 383-407

[18] R. Falk, "The Power of Rights and the Rights of Power: What Future for Human Rights?" Ethics & Global Politics, 1:1, 2008, p. 81-96; N. D. Sharp, "Pragmatism and Multidimensionality", 2018, p. 499-520

[19] For an overview, see M. B. Dembour, *Who Believes in Human Rights?: Reflections on the European Convention (Law in Context)*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006

[20] See for example M. F. Davis & N. Ryan, "Inconvenient Human Rights: Water and Sanitation in Sweden's Informal Roma Settlements", *Health and Human Rights Journal*, 19:2, 2017, p. 61-72; N. D. Sharp, "Pragmatism and Multidimensionality", 2018, p. 500; M. Zalnieriute, "Digital Rights of LGBTI Communities: A Roadmap For A Dual Human Rights Framework", in B. Wagner et al.'s (eds.) *Research Handbook on Human Rights and Digital Technologies*, Australia, Sydney: Edward Elgar, 2019, p. 411-434

[21] See for example S. Gregory, "Cameras Everywhere Revisited: How Digital Technologies and Social Media Aid and Inhibit Human Rights Documentation and Advocacy", *Journal of Human Rights Practice*, 11:2, 2019, p. 373–392.; D. Dăianu, "Can Democracies Tackle Illiberal and 'Inward Looking' Drives", 2019, p. 5-22; C. Rodríguez-Garavito & K. Gomez, "Responding to the Populist Challenge: A New Playbook for the Human Rights Field", in C. Rodríguez-Garavito & K. Gomez's (eds.) *Rising to the Populist Challenge: A New Playbook for Human Rights Actors*, Colombia, Bogota: Dejusticia, 2018, p. 11-53; E. Yazici, "Nationalism and Human Rights", 2019, p. 147-161

[22] See for example S. Mapp & S. Gatenio Gabel, "Human Rights and the Declining State of Democracy", 2018, p. 53–54

onto European liberal democracies, this thesis questions certain discursive constructions which convey that HRs are immune and constant in specific countries. Indeed, this is unfortunately a perception promoted by some scholars, for example Yazici.[23] Thirdly, by focusing on Sweden and Germany, this thesis challenges frames that portray HRs as relevant *somewhere else*, as something that the *Other* needs, whereas the *Us* does not.[24] By merely addressing HRs in external contexts, European HRs academia has contributed to a perception that HRs are irrelevant in their own societies. In extension, this might undermine the universal essence of HRs by conveying that HRs only are applicable in certain kinds of societies and only relevant for some people, foremost in autocratic or illiberal countries. This harmful discourse has also been revived by mass media's tendency to only frame HRs as foreign or international news, as will be explained under the heading "Human Rights Discourses in Media".

In the relatively rare cases that HRs have been scrutinised in European liberal democracies, researchers have usually zoomed in on the threats posed by nationalism or populism; two ideologies often combined due to their shared main trait of constructing "the people".[25] This has been a common focus for studies involving the two countries examined in this thesis too, namely Germany and Sweden. Previous research has explained how nationalism threatens HRs because it leads national leaders to repress minorities and violate empowerment rights.[26] Further, it has been reported that populism endangers HRs because it depends on a constructed, homogenous Us versus a homogenous Other. Just like nationalism, populism does thereby feed social hierarchies and power struggles.[27] In other words, the "us versus them" anti-pluralism of these ideologies directly challenges the fundaments of HRs.[28] Moreover, according to Rodríguez-Garavito and Gomez, populist movements have constructed a growing perception that HRs, rather than protecting people, are undermining governmental efforts that are supposed to defend the people. In Europe, the greatest danger is, according to these scholars, seen as coming from migration because it threatens "the own" culture, economy, and security.[29] Numerous examples of this constructed danger are found in research on current migration

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[23] E. Yazici, "Nationalism and Human Rights", 2019, p. 17
[24] See for example S. M. Brandle "Media Coverage of Human Rights in the USA and UK", 2018, p. 168; ICHRP, *Journalism, Media and the Challenge*, 2002, p. 99
[25] A. Schneiker, "The New Defenders of Human Rights? How Radical Right-Wing TNGOs are Using the Human Rights Discourse to Promote their Ideas", *Global Society*, 33:2, 2019, p. 158; E. Yazici, "Nationalism and Human Rights", 2019, p. 8
[26] E. Yazici, "Nationalism and Human Rights", 2019, p. 8
[27] M. Hameleers, "Putting Our Own People First", 2019, p. 3
[28] C. Rodríguez-Garavito & K. Gomez, "Responding to the Populist Challenge", 2018, p. 22
[29] K. Roth, "The Dangerous Rise of Populism", 2017, p. 2

discourses, in which discrimination and hostilities towards immigrants, especially Muslims,[30] often are justified.[31] Accordingly, Yilmaz has claimed that the divide between a constructed Us and the Other has grown in Europe the last years, and that people have come together to defend itself from this "other".[32] Such reported discrimination has not only been observed among the public or in media, but also in state practices. For example, scholars have shown how German legislation reinforces stereotypes and contributes to a criminalization of Romani migration.[33] Similarly, McEachrane has accused Sweden of reinforcing structural, racial discrimination of both immigrants and groups of the indigenous Saami people.[34]

Even though there is an awareness of threats towards HRs in liberal democracies, this area is quite unexplored and dominantly concentrated on states' actions, elite-perspectives, or the USA. The interest in the USA and states' actions can be traced to the overwhelming focus on the tension between HRs, torture, and counterterrorism since the 9/11 terror attack in the USA. Indeed, the fact that states are HRs stakeholders justifies the state-centrism in HRs academia, which has contributed to a great amount of interesting and important research. For example, state-centred research has shown how politicians and states, in the name of counterterrorism, have downgraded HRs in respect of preventive and criminal justice measures, and openly departed from HRs standards and regulations.[35] However, the importance of understanding grassroot, or public, perspectives must not be forgotten. A few scholars have tried to remind of this fact, for example by examining HRs opinions in the context of the "war on terror", or by examining opinions on particular HRs.[36] Nacos and Bloch-Elkon did for example show how public support for torture, an absolute violation of HRs, has grown significantly in the USA since 2004.[37] However, when researching for this thesis, no academic examination of public HRs discourses, or of public opinions on HRs as such, was found. Consequently, previous HRs research lacks public perspectives and analyses of public attitudes towards the concept of HRs.

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[30] D. Abadi et al, "Leitkultur and Discourse Hegemonies: German Mainstream Media Coverage on the Integration Debate Between 2009 and 2014", *The International Communication Gazette*, 78:6, 2016, p. 559 ; F. Yılmaz, "Analyzing Variations and Stability in Discourse Hegemony, Nation and Muslim immigrants", *Journal of Language and Politics,* 14:6, 2015, p. 830-851
[31] K. Roth, "The Dangerous Rise of Populism", 2017, p. 7
[32] F. Yılmaz, "Analyzing Variations and Stability in Discourse", 2015, p. 831
[33] J. Leko, "Migration Regimes and the Translation of Human Rights: On the Struggles for Recognition of Romani Migrants in Germany", *Social Inclusion*, 5:3, 2017, p. 81
[34] M. McEachrane, "Universal Human Rights and the Coloniality of Race in Sweden", *Human Rights Review*, 19, 2018, p. 484, 487
[35] H. Fenwick, "Recalibrating ECHR Rights", 2010, p.153
[36] See for example H.G. Ziebertz,"Human dignity – the foundation of political human rights?", 2016, p. 157; M. Zalnieriute, "Digital Rights of LGBTI Communities", 2019, p. 411-434
[37] B. L. Nacos & Y. Bloch-Elkon, "US Media and Post-9/11 Human Rights Violations", 2018, p. 199

The thesis at hand aims to fill this gap and will consistently remind of the importance of doing so.

Before reviewing more specific research on HRs discourses, a few conceptual clarifications about discourses and framing are needed. These will be provided under the following heading, where this thesis' poststructural approach will be explained.

2.1   Discourses & Frames According to Poststructuralism

In the next few chapters, it will be reviewed what previous research has written about how HRs have been constructed and framed in media. Since there is always an element of confusion when incorporating concepts like *discourse* and *framing*, it seems necessary to first provide some clarifications for how these concepts are understood in this thesis.

The method of this thesis has been described as based on grounded theory with a poststructural approach. The grounded theory dictates an inductive collection, organisation, and processing of the data. This inductive method will however be complemented with a poststructural lens when the processed data is subjected to a Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA), discussed, and interpreted later in the thesis. Furthermore, the thesis at hand will adopt a poststructural approach to understand the concept of discourse and frames, which will be referred to throughout the thesis. Most importantly, poststructuralism explains that discourse is not something exclusively theoretical, but that it produces the world we live in.[38] Hence, public perceptions of HRs generate HRs discourses, and HRs discourses affect perceptions of HRs. This is so because of the "constructive effect discourse has upon social identities, social relations and systems of knowledge and beliefs".[39] This means, that frames and discourses that contribute to skewed understandings of HRs endanger HRs in practice. This connection between discourse and action has often been exemplified in previous research. It has for example been shown that misinformation triggers hostile actions towards HRs, journalists, and civil society,[40] and that misrepresentations and racist stereotypes in online media fuel hate crimes and police brutality.[41] Further, Baker and McEnery observed, that if the words *illegal* and *immigrant* are frequently combined, it may lead to impressions that all immigrants are

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[38] L. Hansen, "Poststructuralism and Security", in R. A. Denemark's (ed.) *The International Encyclopedia*. USA, Malden: Wiley-Blackwell, 2010, p. 5876–5892

[39] N. Fairclough, *Discourse and Social Change*. UK, Cambridge: Polity Press, 1992, p. 12

[40] S. Gregory, "Cameras Everywhere Revisited", 2019, p. 375

[41] Y. Bonilla & J. Rosa, "Ferguson: Digital Protest, Hashtag Ethnography, and the Racial Politics of Social Media in the United States", *American Ethnologist*, 42:1, 2015, p. 4–17

illegal.[42] In short, discourses and frames "can undermine public support, steer public opinion, and influence reactions".[43]

In discourse, people construct and reconstruct identities of themselves and others; the *Us* and *Them*. Hence, discourses show how speakers view themselves in relation to others, and "which attributes, roles, and characteristics they claim for themselves and assign to others".[44] Hypothetically, these constructed attributes, roles and characteristics might explain, and affect, how the public views HRs' relevance and universalism.   To examine such constructions and their implications, previous poststructural research has demonstrated the usability of conducting CDAs. Correspondingly, a CDA will be carried out to interpret the inductively coded data later in this thesis. However, the usability of CDAs must not be overstated. Indeed, it has been rightfully argued that it is hard to demonstrate any relationship between specific texts and macro-structures assumed to be there. For example, Yilmaz wrote that "[w]hat looks like patterned ways of speaking may actually be the result of the researchers' own attempt to create analytical categories of attitude patterns".[45] This highlights two important standpoints of this thesis, namely that CDA does not provide any answers, but rather is a lens through which the researcher can analyse an issue. Secondly, Yilmaz's quote highlights the advantages of adopting an inductive methodology for collecting and processing the data. By implementing grounded theory, the researcher's pre-existing biases and expectations will be kept to a minimum in the coding and analysis process. Therefore, such a method will be adopted for the initial research steps, and the poststructural approach will not be applied until the, already filtered and coded, data is to be interpreted and discussed.

A popular way to conduct discourse analyses has been to examine discourses through *frames*. Even though the concept of framing is much debated and quite vague,[46] it has had a prominent role in research on HRs discourses. *Frames* are patterns of selection, emphasis, and exclusion[47] that "fashion shared understandings of the world and of [ourselves] that legitimate and motivate collective action".[48] HRs can be framed in different ways depending on the speakers'

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[42] P. Baker & T. McEnery, "A Corpus-Based Approach to Discourses of Refugees and Asylum Seekers in UN and Newspaper Texts", *Journal of Language and Politics*, 4:2, 2005, p. 218

[43] J. S. Lee & A. Nerghes, "Refugee or Migrant Crisis?", 2018, p. 1, 11

[44] N. Baumgarten, "Othering Practice", 2018, p. 4

[45] F. Yılmaz, "Analyzing Variations and Stability in Discourse", 2015, p.839

[46] M. A Cacciatore, D. A. Scheufele & S. Iyengar "The End of Framing as We Know It . . . And the Future of Media Effects", *Mass Communication and Society*, 19:1, 2016, p. 9

[47] F. Krumbein, "The New York Times Coverage", 2017, p.3

[48] A. Schneiker, "The New Defenders of Human Rights?", 2019, p. 154

"knowledge about human rights in general or in a specific country or context". [49] The power of frames is highlighted by the fact that different frames provoke different evaluations of the same event among the discourse receivers.[50] This is so because different frames provoke different associations to labels and sentiments, previous experiences and contexts. Therefore, frames and labels are of main importance when analysing power relations and construction of Us and Them, i.e. practices of Othering.[51] How the Other is framed affects how the discourse receiver evaluates the event. Since Othering-practices are vital in discourses on HRs' exclusivity, this will be discussed throughout the thesis. Additionally, HRs can also be a frame in itself, as people decide to frame certain topics as HRs issues or not. In fact, it has been reported that HRs issues are more likely to be covered when they are not framed as HRs.[52] For example, as CBS reported about HRs violations and torture incidents in Abu Ghraib in the name of counterterrorism, HRs were not mentioned a single time.[53]

Even though this thesis' methodology has been designed based on grounded theory, the poststructural approach explained above has undeniably been useful for the generation of a more advanced understanding of discourses and frames. In summary, discourse analyses are not only useful for understanding how HRs discourses online are constructed, but also for exposing what they construct themselves, which is a question this thesis will attempt to answer. Thereby, this thesis will contribute to an understanding of how various HRs discourses construct certain understandings that are viewed as "facts" or "common sense".[54] It will be exemplified how these hegemonic discourses[55] contribute to perceptions of HRs and their scope, and hence influence the fulfilment of HRs in practice.

As this poststructural understanding now has been explained, a literature review on research that analysed HRs discourses in media will follow. The review will start on a broader note with HRs discourses in mass media and then be narrowed down to literature on social media and

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[49] F. Krumbein, "The New York Times Coverage", 2017, p.3

[50] J. S. Lee & A. Nerghes, "Refugee or Migrant Crisis?", 2018, p. 2

[51] For a deeper understanding of Othering in practice, see for example I. Gagliardone, "Defining Online Hate and Its 'Public Lives': What is the Place for 'Extreme Speech'?", *International Journal of Communication*, 13, 2019, p. 3068-3087; A. Schneiker, "The New Defenders of Human Rights?", 2019, p. 149-162

[52] S. M. Brandle "Media Coverage of Human Rights in the USA and UK", 2018, p. 167

[53] B. L. Nacos & Y. Bloch-Elkon, "US Media and Post-9/11 Human Rights Violations", 2018, p. 198

[54] R. Crilley & P. Chatterje-Doody, "Security Studies in the Age of 'Post-Truth' Politics: In Defence of Poststructuralism", Critical Studies on Security, 7:2, 2019, p. 167

[55] For a deeper understanding of hegemonic discourses, see D. Abadi et al, "Leitkultur and Discourse Hegemonies: German Mainstream Media Coverage on the Integration Debate Between 2009 and 2014", *The International Communication Gazette*, 78:6, 2016, p. 558; J. Androvičová, "Human Rights Discourse on Migration", 2017, p. 200; F. Yılmaz, "Analyzing Variations and Stability in Discourse", 2015, p. 836

public discourses. Indeed, even though research on social media, HRs discourses and public perceptions rarely have been combined, there are studies that incorporated them individually.

2.2   Human Rights Discourses in Media

As just mentioned, even though there is a lack of grassroot perspectives and analyses of public discourses, this does not mean that previous research has not been interested in HRs discourses at all. It has already been exemplified how numerous studies have examined discourses in mass media, among specific groups or state actors. It will now be shown how most of these studies have three findings in common, namely that HRs discourses were either absent, or that HRs were constructed as irrelevant for some groups, or that some people were framed as undeserving of HRs. For example, even though mass media is the most important source of information about HRs violations,[56] Brandle showed that HRs rarely were mentioned in newspapers or television broadcasting.[57] This indicates that most people hardly are exposed to HRs themes and are unaware of occurring HRs violations. In the rare cases where HRs were covered in mass media, previous research showed that it was mainly in the domain of foreign affairs. According to for example Brandle and Andreopoulos,[58] Krumbein,[59] Powers,[60] and ICHPR,[61] who found the same pattern, such coverage contributes to a perception that HRs foremost are relevant when dealing with foreign populations and as irrelevant in domestic contexts.

The lack of HRs in media coverage is partly explained by the trivial fact that journalists have no duty to prioritize HRs over other newsworthy issues.[62] Since news attention is not payed to those issues that are important per se, but to those that are newsworthy,[63] the competition for attention is a huge challenge for HRs organisations. This has been confirmed in studies that explored how human rights non-governmental organisations (HRNGOs) were covered in news and how the HRNGOs themselves used media to promote HRs. According to Powers and Thrall et al., HRNGOs seldom got any attention and were, like HRs in general, largely absent in mass media. In the cases where HRNGOs were mentioned in the news, it was according to Brandle "heavily skewed toward a few large and well-funded NGOs" as well as towards a few

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[56] ICHRP, *Journalism, Media and the Challenge*, 2002, p. 18
[57] S. M. Brandle, *Television News and Human Rights in the US & UK: The Violations Will Not Be Televised*. USA, New York: Routledge, 2015, p. 130-137
[58] S. M. Brandle & G. Andreopoulos, "Introduction. Human Rights and the Media", *Human Rights Review*, 19, 2018, p. 144
[59] F. Krumbein, "The New York Times Coverage*",* 2017, p. 1
[60] M. Powers, "A New Era of Human Rights News?", 2016, p. 318
[61] ICHPR, *"Journalism, Media ",* 2002, p. 99
[62] ICHRP, *"Journalism, Media ",* 2002, p. 17
[63] M. Powers, "A New Era of Human Rights News?", 2016, p. 317

countries.[64] Powers also found, that when HRNGOs were mentioned, they did not drive any coverage but rather supplied information to cases that were already known by media.[65]

The insight that media rarely covers HRs issues is indeed a problem from a HRs perspective. However, it seems like media sources are not the only ones to blame for an absence of HRs discourses. Instead, Kingston and Stam's examination of how 100 HRNGOs used technological online tools showed that the HRNGOs themselves also did not utilise the potential of new technologies.[66] This claim shifts the responsibility from journalists and media sources to the organisations themselves. HRs do not evolve alone but must, as Park et al. put it, be strategically promoted by organisations and other norm entrepreneurs. According to them, HRs advocates must use their scarce resources in the most effective way, for example by promoting the right HRs issue at the right time, and by constantly developing new strategies to promote HRs.[67] Therefore, HRs advocates cannot only blame others for not covering their HRs topics. Instead, HRs advocates must themselves find ways to develop strategies and utilise technological developments in favour of HRs. In order to do so, it is of vital importance to know what prerequisites they have to work with. Without sufficient knowledge about public HRs discourses, it is simply impossible to know how to best promote HRs to the public.

Almost all the studies mentioned so far focused on HRs organisations, media sources, states, politicians, or journalists. However, since HRs cannot "survive without a broader and more diverse base of support",[68] it is crucial that perspectives from broad and diverse groups are included in scholarly HRs analyses. Therefore, what HRs academia needs, is studies that scrutinises how the public, broad masses, discuss and perceive HRs. As Bruna Seu clarifies, the success of HRs campaigns, for example, cannot be deemed successful if they do not elicit an effective response from the public.[69] Without public perspectives, HRs scholars are unable to accurately analyse how effective responses from the public are elicited, and hence unaware of how to best improve and promote HRs. Indeed, previous scholars' analyses of media coverage

[64] A. T. Thrall et al., "May We Have Your Attention Please? Human-Rights NGOs and the Problem of Global Communication", *The International Journal of Press/Politics*, 19:2, 2014, p. 148

[65] M. Powers, "A New Era of Human Rights News?", 2016, p. 327

[66] L. N. Kingston & K. R. Stam, "Online Advocacy: Analysis of Human Rights NGO Websites", *Journal of Human Rights Practice*, 5:1, 2013, p. 75

[67] B. Park, A. Murdie & D. R. Davis "The (Co)Evolution of Human Rights Advocacy" 2019, p. 315

[68] N. D. Sharp, "Pragmatism and Multidimensionality", 2018, p. 511

[69] I. Bruna Seu, "'In Countries Like That…' Moral Boundaries and Implicatory Denial in Response to Human Rights Appeals", *The International Journal of Human Rights*, 16:8, 2012, p. 1171

are crucial for understanding how HRs discourses are communicated, but it is equally important to understand how such discourses are received by the public.

So far, this literature review has discussed current threats against HRs and mass media's coverage of HRs. It has been claimed that nationalism, populism, and violations of minority rights are the most reported threats against HRs in European liberal democracies. Further, it has been explained how previous research perpetually concluded that HRs topics were largely absent in mass media, and even when HRs issues were covered, they were often not framed as HRs. According to Brandle, this can be explained by a cyclical logic of politicians and media; neither of them frame issues in terms of HRs because the other does not do so.[70] Hypothetically, this thesis will accordingly show that the public also rarely frames issues in terms of HRs in online discourses. The fact that this is still an unexplored hypothesis highlights the importance of examining public HRs discourses, or the absence of such.

In what follows, the literature review will move on to previous research on public HRs discourses. Even though there is a lack of research on this topic, some relevant studies did include grassroot-perspectives in examinations of certain HRs aspects, or of related contexts. These studies will now be presented, and it will be explained how they are relevant for the research at hand. Moreover, the relevance of social media in discourse analyses, and for HRs discourses in particular, will be discussed.

2.3 Public Human Rights Discourses & Frames

One vital insight from earlier research is that there seems to be a gap between how HRs advocates want HRs to be perceived, and how they are actually perceived, by various groups of the public. Even though there is a lack of research on this, we do for example know that some frame HRs as a threat instead of as a protection. As stated earlier, Tumber and Waisbord did accordingly claim that specific public discourses are shaped by populist rhetoric, which portrays HRs as a threat towards social order and national security.[71] Further, instead of being understood as universal and inherent, research has shown that HRs in populistic discourses are framed as exclusive or as something that must be deserved. Such frames encourage a belief that the discourse participants themselves will never need to assert HRs. Instead, as Roth explained, HRs are then perceived to only protect "the terrorist suspect or the asylum seeker at the expense

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[70] S. M. Brandle "Media Coverage of Human Rights", 2018, p. 167
[71] H. Tumber & S. Waisbord, "The Media and Human Rights: Mapping the Field", in H. Tumber & S. Waisbord's (eds.) *The Routledge Companion to Media and Human Rights*. UK, London: Routledge, 2017, p. 20

of the safety, economic welfare, and cultural preferences of the presumed majority". Consequently, such discourses "scapegoat refugees, immigrant communities, and minorities".[72]

That HRs are framed as something that must be deserved was also observed by Holmes and Castañeda, who reported that notions of deservingness are inherent to migration discourses in Germany and beyond. They argued that such discourses exonerate powerful actors from the responsibility to ensure HRs by placing a responsibility on individual rightsholders to earn HRs.[73] This sense of reversed responsibility was also found in discourses inspired by populism or nationalism, in which HRs often must be earned and it is proclaimed that only the "real people" deserve to be full rights holders.[74] Within these discourses, people and groups are divided into deserving and less deserving. According to Lee and Nerghes, discourses that contain this kind of grading of HRs deservingness prioritize the HRs of "specifically identified victims". They reported that individuals or groups that were constructed as victims were perceived to be more deserving of HRs than others. For example, "refugees" were often framed as victims and therefore deserving, whereas "migrants" were not framed as victims and hence considered to be less deserving.[75]

The abovementioned finding by Lee and Nerghes indicates that there is a value in exploring the connection between Othering, victim construction, deservingness, and HRs. It raises questions like: How are various people constructed as deserving of HRs in different discourses? Is there a general perception that the Other deserves HRs if that Other is seen as a victim rather than as an actor with strong agency? These questions matter because any sort of grading of HRs deservingness is a direct threat against the universalism of HRs. Therefore, results related to discourses on deservingness, Othering and HRs' universalism will be thoroughly discussed later in the thesis. At the bottom line, the purpose of such focus is to answer who is considered to deserve HRs in various discourses, and who decides who deserves HRs and not.

[72] K. Roth, "The Dangerous Rise of Populism", 2017, p. 1
[73] S. M. Holmes & H. Castañeda, "Representing the 'European Refugee Crisis' in Germany and Beyond: Deservingness and Difference, Life and Death", *American Ethnologist*, 43:1, 2016, p. 13
[74] C. Rodríguez-Garavito & K. Gomez, "Responding to the Populist Challenge", 2018, p. 20
[75] J. S. Lee & A. Nerghes, "Refugee or Migrant Crisis?", 2018, p. 12

2.3.1 Researching Public Human Rights Discourses in Online Forums

Many of the scholars that have been referred to so far have utilised the fruitfulness of online research. Baumgarten did for example analyse Othering-practices in a right-wing extremist online forum. By identifying third party tokens through nominal expressions and pronoun reference, Baumgarten categorised certain groups that were targets of Othering.[76] Further, Powers identified the prevalence, prominence, and story location of HRNGOs in online forums.[77] The appropriateness of examining public HRs discourses, including questions of victim constructions and deservingness, in online forums is further stressed by the fact that we live in a time of mediatization[78] in which what we do, see, feel, and hear online is part of our reality. Social media has not only enabled a global debate,[79] but it has made that debate part of our everyday life and reality. This means, that public HRs discourses online both mirror and guide offline HRs discourses and actions. As already mentioned, what we do online is interrelated with what we do offline, and the insight that there is no longer a division between the two[80] highlights the suitability of studying HRs discourses online. Furthermore, online forums enable unprecedentedly unobtrusive examinations of how the public perceives, discusses, and supports HRs. Based on all of this, this thesis' examination of online discourses will contribute to a deeper understanding of HRs discourses.

Just as there are several good reasons for examining HRs discourses online, there are good ones for examining the research question (How are Human Rights constructed, perceived, and discussed in public, online discourses?) in social media specifically. Several of these are visible in Bonilla and Rosa's examination of racism in social media through hashtag ethnography. For example, they suggested new ways of expressing HRs activism based on what social media enables.[81] Additionally, their research emphasised the usefulness of quantitative methods for coding data in order to detect frequencies of certain words, phrases, frames or labels. Furthermore, several of the justifications for examining HRs discourses on social media platforms are based on traits inherent to social media. For example, social media has been proven to be a vital source of information, influencer of emotions, and a source for the

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[76] N. Baumgarten, "Othering Practice", 2018, p. 6

[77] M. Powers, "Opening the news gates? Humanitarian and human rights NGOs in the US news media, 1990–2010", *Media, Culture & Society*, 38:3, 2015, p. 1-17

[78] S. Hjarvard, "The Mediatization of Society: A Theory of the Media as Agents of Social and Cultural Change", *Nordicom Review*, 29:2, 2008, p. 113

[79] B, Narayan, "From Everyday Information Behaviours to Clickable Solidarity in a Place Called Social Media", *Cosmopolitan Civil Societies Journal*, 5:3, 2013, p. 35

[80] N. Suzor et al., "Human Rights by Design: The Responsibilities of Social Media Platforms to Address Gender-Based Violence Online", *Policy and Internet*, 11:1, 2018, p. 86; Y. Bonilla & J. Rosa, "Ferguson", 2015, p. 4–17

[81] Y. Bonilla & J. Rosa, "Ferguson: Digital Protest, Hashtag Ethnography", 2015, p. 8

construction of Us and Them.[82] Additionally, social media is the platform where mass media's information about HRs violations reaches most people.[83] Also, social media is one of few platforms (if not the only) where the broader public engages in discussions about HRs, and hence where such discourses can be analysed without a researcher's interference. Accordingly, social media platforms enable analyses of public debates that are only marginally moderated and censored.[84] Thereby, observations of HRs discourses in social media circumvents certain drawbacks inherent in methods involving surveys or interviews,[85] such as biased questions, respondents' skewed self-awareness or urge to satisfy the interviewer.

The sincerity of public discourses on social media platforms is also fuelled by the fact that, in contrast to the reason-centred discourses in old media, social media empowers emotion-centred discourses.[86] Indeed, social media forums are known for encouraging honest opinions and even removing censoring mechanisms. According to previous research, this can to a certain extent be explained by so called echo-chambers, which form groups of like-minded people by constructing groups based on users' liking, commenting, tagging etc.[87] According to Niklewicz, echo-chambers are the groups of users who, because of programmed algorithms, are offered and consume the same content. As long as the content reaffirms the view of the echo-chamber public, users rarely contest incoming information.[88] Hence, echo-chambers filter out content, segregate online social platforms and gradually eradicate common grounds. Thereby, it strengthens Us against Them sentiments, and empowers alternative discourses which previously might have been understood as incorrect or inappropriate.

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[82] J. S. Lee & A. Nerghes, "Refugee or Migrant Crisis?", 2018, p. 3

[83] ICHPR, "*Journalism, Media",* 2002, p. 18

[84] In the data collected for this thesis, interventions in public commentary sections were only noted a few times. In these instances, it was claimed that a certain comment violated the community rules of the newspapers' Facebook page. Comments had been removed in a few cases; it is unknown if the author had themselves deleted their comment or Facebook profile, or if the comment had been deleted by the newspapers. Indeed, these rules and moderation might have affected what people wrote and what they thought they were supposed to write, but since the moderation was limited, so was this effect.

[85] Used by for example I. Bruna Seu, "In Countries Like That", 2012, p. 1170-1182; T. J. Kubal, "The Presentation of Political Self", 1998, p. 539-554; H.G. Ziebertz, "Human Dignity – the Foundation of Political Human Rights?", 2016, p. 151-171

[86] K. Niklewicz, "How the Social Media Mechanisms Push its Users to Populism", *Konrad Niklewicz*, 13, 2017, p. 15

[87] M. Khosravinik, "Right Wing Populism in the West", 2017, p. 63-64

[88] K. Niklewicz, "How the Social Media Mechanisms Push", 2017, p. 17

2.4   Summary of Literature Review & Research Focus

Even though the method for collecting and processing the data will be inductive in this thesis, this literature review has helped to identify certain gaps in HRs research that need to be filled. Before continuing to a detailed description of the research method, the most detrimental gaps in previous literature that this thesis seeks to fill will now be repeated. First, this thesis will steer away from elite-perspectives and instead contribute to a deeper understanding of public HRs discourses. Public perspectives have been explored by, for example Lee and Nerghes,[89] Bruna Seu,[90] and Hameleers,[91] but they are still unproportionally unexplored. Secondly, instead of examining how HRs are threatened in illiberal democracies or authoritarian societies, the spotlight is on two consolidated European liberal democracies. This denounces perceptions that HRs are only relevant for someone else and that they are automatically safe in "Western", democratic societies. Thirdly, instead of analysing discourses on certain HRs related topics, like migration or LGBTQI rights, the focus in this thesis will be on the concept of HRs as such. Fourthly, to incorporate diverse and more genuine discourses, the HRs discourses will be analysed on the social media platform Facebook. The assumption is that online HRs discourses are inseparable from offline discourses, and that they therefore affect HRs in practice.

Despite a demonstrated usefulness of quantitative methods, both online and offline research on HRs discourses have revealed that qualitative methods are necessary to produce insightful research findings. Hence, Park et al. argue that a combination of quantitative and qualitative research approaches is essential for understanding HRs issues' emergence.[92] Accordingly, HRs scholars have often conducted content analyses, in which both qualitative and quantitative elements are integrated. In content analyses, several distinct categories are created, and then separate fractions of texts are divided into these categories based on the absence or presence of certain characteristics. This is a method used by for example Mello,[93] Krumbein,[94] and Tkaczyk[95] to identify reoccurring patterns in HRs discourses. Further, Brandle conducted a content analysis to examine how the phrase "human rights" is used in mass media.[96] This

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[89] J. S. Lee & A. Nerghes, "Refugee or Migrant Crisis?", 2018, p. 1-22
[90] I. Bruna Seu, "In Countries Like That", 2012. p. 1170-1182
[91] M. Hameleers, "Putting Our Own People First", 2019, p. 804-826
[92] B. Park, A. Murdie & D. R. Davis "The (Co)Evolution of Human Rights Advocacy", 2019, p. 314
[93] J. Mello, "The Right Stuff? Assessing the Use of Rights Discourse in Same-Sex Marriage Ballot Measure Campaigns", *Polity*, 51:4, 2019, p. 11
[94] F. Krumbein, "The New York Times Coverage", 2017, p. 2
[95] M. Tkaczyk, "Between Politization and Securitization: Coverage of the European Migration Crisis in Czech Online News Media", *Communication Today*, 2017, 8:2, p. 96
[96] S. M. Brandle "Media Coverage of Human Rights", 2018, p. 167

method will be used in the first step of this research to filter, process, and code the collected data.

Under the next heading, the research method for this thesis will be thoroughly explained. As already mentioned, the filtering, categorisation and coding of the data will be inductive. However, the literature review has called attention to certain aspects of HRs discourses that deserve special attention. Therefore, there are three aspects that will be in the centre of attention when the collected and processed data is to be interpreted and discussed. In particular, media studies have shown that HR are only mentioned in certain contexts, for example in coverage of foreign news. Thus, it will in this thesis be discussed in which contexts HRs appear in public, online discourses. Secondly, previous researchers' claims about deservingness contributed to an interest in examining various perceptions of HRs' universalism, deservingness, and practices of Othering in the collected data. Thirdly, as many scholars have reported that HRs are under threat, the general support and attitudes towards HRs will be explored and exemplified throughout the analysis. How these aspects will be analysed, and how the combination of grounded theory and poststructuralism is managed, will be further explained in the following chapter.

3. METHODOLOGY: OUT WITH THE OLD, IN WITH THE NEW (PERSPECTIVES)

The aim of this thesis is to answer how Human Rights (HRs) are constructed, perceived, and discussed in public, online discourses. By analysing HRs discourses at the grassroot level in European consolidated democracies, the thesis contributes with new perspectives in HRs academia. It emphasises the importance of understanding how the public constructs and reproduces various "truths" about HRs. Such understanding is important because knowledge about these constructions and "truths" generates awareness of public attitudes towards HRs, and hence contributes to a greater understanding of HRs discourses. Further, the focus on public discourses enabled an analysis of how these correspond or deviate from previously well-explored discourses, for example in mass media or among specific groups.

Even though previous research has shown an interest in HRs discourses, it has only covered a very limited quota of relevant discourse producers and receivers. Additionally, few have shown a genuine interest in the complexity and productivity of HRs discourses, and rather sought quantitative results to justify finger pointing at media or politicians. Few research methods have therefore been developed with the aim of encouraging self-reflection among HRs advocates. However, one aspiration in this thesis is to provoke reflections on how HRs could be better advocated for. Thus, it seeks to contribute to a deeper understanding of HRs discourses by providing new, useful perspectives.

Even though the data collection method was based on grounded theory and hence inductive, the aforementioned research called attention to certain aspects of HRs discourses that will be the centre of discussion in this thesis. As already mentioned, these aspects are the contexts in which HRs discourses appear, HRs' universalism and the usage of Othering in HRs discourses, as well as general attitudes towards the concept of HRs. That this pre-existing knowledge contributed to the formulation of a research focus would most likely make some grounded theory scholars uncomfortable. However, the conviction in this thesis is that no relevant research question could be formulated without pre-existing knowledge. Since there is a limit to how strictly inductive a valuable piece of research can be without losing context, previous research did admittedly aid in the formulation of a research focus. However, a grounded theory methodology was necessary because previous research did not provide any suitable methodologies for this thesis' specific research question, even though it provided useful knowledge about the topic. Therefore, the

collection and coding of the extracted comments were inductively executed. The inductive methodology was also beneficial because it allowed for unexpected and unbiased findings.

After the inductive research steps had been carried out, a poststructural lens was applied to analyse and interpret the results. The outcome of this is presented under the heading "Discussion: What Do the Results Imply?". This combination of an inductive collection method and a poststructural interpretation of the results is how this thesis dealt with the impossibility of conducting research that is exclusively inductive, as suggested by grounded theory. In what follows, the research steps will be justified and thoroughly explained.

3.1 Locating and Collecting Human Rights Discourses Online

To analyse public discourses, data for this thesis was collected from the social media platform Facebook. As mentioned earlier, social media is an excellent forum to analyse public, diverse, and unfiltered discussions. Accordingly, the method was developed to generate genuine results that were not influenced by respondents' skewed self-awareness or researchers' presence, something unavoidable in for example surveys or interviews.[97] Since Facebook is the most popular social media platform,[98] it was identified as the most suitable source for the collection of diverse and relevant data. In order to find discursive contexts in which HRs were explicitly discussed, the first step of the research was to locate selected news papers' Facebook posts that mentioned HRs in the title. Thereafter, the public's comments to these posts were extracted, processed, and analysed.

That the thesis was limited to online comments to a selection of newspapers' Facebook posts logically impacted the representativeness of the studied HRs discourses. Admittedly, the thesis only examined certain segments of what could be studied. However, since the thesis had to be limited somehow, all methodological decisions were thoroughly well-reasoned. As mentioned earlier, by studying already existing HRs discourses on social media, the researcher had no possibility to influence the study subjects. Thus, the risk of bias and manipulation was minimized. Secondly, as we live in a time of mediatization, discourses online and offline are interdependent. Therefore, online discourses are not only representing a virtual reality, but also

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[97] These methods have been used to explore public attitudes towards HRs in various contexts. See for example I. Bruna Seu, "'In countries like that…'", 2012, p. 1170-1182; B. L. Nacos & Y. Bloch-Elkon, "US Media and Post-9/11 Human Rights Violations", 2018, p. 200-201

[98] Statista, *Most popular social networks worldwide as of January 2020, ranked by number of active users* [website], https://www.statista.com/statistics/272014/global-social-networks-ranked-by-number-of-users/, accessed 11/07/2020

the real world. It was thereby possible to draw more general conclusions about the studied discourses even if they were exclusively extracted online. Thirdly, even though the findings cannot be claimed to be totally generalisable, this method seemed as effective and generalisable as possible when considering the available resources. It would not have been possible to include the same amount of data or number of study subjects in an offline setting. It would also not have been possible to create such a diverse pool of study subjects. The range of ages, origins, genders, occupations, residence places, opinions etc. found in social media discussions is simply not found anywhere else. Indeed, with this in mind, the thesis at hand incorporates more diversity and generalisability than most previous studies, which included less diverse data and fewer study subjects.

The aspect of diversity was also one of the main criteria when choosing which newspapers' Facebook sites to extract comments from. The selection process ensured that all newspapers were 1) German or Swedish 2) among the most read newspapers in their respective countries 3) mentioning HRs in any of their Facebook posts and 4) contributing to a somewhat balanced political representation of newspapers. Based on these criteria, the following Swedish daily and weekly newspapers were chosen: Expressen, Aftonbladet, Svenska Dagbladet, Dagens Nyheter, Dagens Industri and Göteborgsposten. Accordingly, the following six German daily and weekly newspapers were chosen: Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung, Die Welt, Bild, Stern, Focus and Der Spiegel. The focus on Germany and Sweden was decided because, firstly, both these countries are usually considered consolidated liberal democracies that rarely attract any international attention to the state of HRs. Hence, HRs discourses are largely unexplored in these countries. Secondly, I, as the researcher, possess sufficient language skills to conduct discourse analyses in Swedish and German. Thereby, the risk of losing underlying meanings or implications in translation was diminished.

In order to find these newspapers' posts that mentioned HRs, the words *human rights* (translated into *Menschenrechte* and *mänskliga rättigheter*) were entered into the search field on the newspapers' respective Facebook pages. To reduce the amount of data and ensure that the discourses were still somewhat relevant, Facebook posts published before 2016 were excluded and posts from January 2017 until May 2020 were extracted with their accompanying comments. Finally, 289 Facebook posts from 12 newspapers were collected between March 5 and April 29, 2020. The number of comments to each post ranged from 0 to 1250. In total, 23806 publicly available comments and replies to comments (both referred to here as "comments") were extracted.

Since data protection regulations have made it increasingly hard to access social media data,[99] there is no computer program that automatically extracts Facebook comments. Thus, all the comments had to be extracted manually. Even though some scholars argue that Facebook observations are comparable to observational research in public spaces,[100] and that authors simply cannot expect any confidentiality when engaging in public online forums,[101] it is impossible to escape the ethical issues of research in online forums. Therefore, it is important to explain how this issue was approached in this thesis. Because all information used in this thesis was manually extracted, it was possible to exclude all private information except comments authors' usernames and minimized profile pictures. Notably, none of these names or pictures are included in the thesis. Moreover, all comments that are quoted in the thesis were translated from either German or Swedish into English. Because of this anonymisation, and the huge amount of extracted data, and the diverse sources from where it was extracted, it would be nearly unmanageable to identify specific users. Thus, this thesis keeps data anonymous and protects the users' privacy.

3.2   Processing and Analysing Online Discourses

Just like in Gualda and Rebollo's study,[102] different strategies were used for filtering, processing, and coding the extracted data in this thesis. The method used for the initial research could be described as inductive, whereas the subsequent CDA and interpretation of the results, which is found under the heading "Discussion: What Do the Results Imply?", is based on a poststructuralist approach. With the help of MAXQDA, the extracted data was subjected to a content analysis, which combined quantitative and qualitative elements.

After the comments had been extracted, they were filtered and coded in a content analysis. To ensure an explicit focus on HRs discourses, only comments that mentioned *human right* or *human rights* (*Menschenrecht(e)* or *mänsklig(a) rättighet(er)*, hereafter referred to as *human rights*) were coded and subjected to an in-depth analysis. This initial filtering revealed the prevalence of human rights discourses in the collected data, which was of interest to compare with previous studies' findings.[103] In the second research step, concordances were carried out.

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[99] G. Samuel & E. Buchanan, "Guest Editorial: Ethical Issues in Social Media Research*", Journal of Empirical Research on Human Research Ethics*, 15: 1, 2020, p. 4
[100] G. Samuel & E. Buchanan, "Guest Editorial: Ethical Issues", 2020, p. 6
[101] J. S. Lee & A. Nerghes, "Refugee or Migrant Crisis?", 2018, p. 4
[102] E. Gualda, Estrella & C. Rebollo, "The Refugee Crisis on Twitter: A Diversity of Discourses at a European Crossroad", *Journal of Spatial and Organizational Dynamics*, 4:3, 2017, p. 204
[103] See for example M. Powers, "Opening the news gates?", 2015, p. 7; S. M. Brandle "Media Coverage of Human Rights", 2018, p. 167

Just like for Baker and McEnery, the purpose of carrying out concordances was to create tables of all examples of a search term in the context in which it appeared.[104] The search term was in this case *human rights*, and the tables exhibited the entire comments in which it was mentioned.

In the third step, various codes were assigned to the tables of concordances, i.e. to all comments that mentioned *human rights*. The codes were inductively developed in a text-mining process, in which all extracted comments that mentioned *human rights* were scrutinized manually. As already mentioned, three aspects mentioned in previous research had beforehand been identified as especially interesting to examine in this thesis. However, it was impossible to create codes based on previous research because no reviewed method translated well into the research focus of this thesis. Indeed, no reviewed research had focused on public HRs discourses online, or on public attitudes towards HRs per se. Therefore, a manual, open-coding approach had to be adopted. This process enabled an organisation of the data into two systems of codes, which later allowed a structured analysis of the discourses. Firstly, to examine the contexts in which HRs were mentioned, various "theme codes" were developed and assigned to the comments. The assignment of these theme codes was based on the overall theme, emphasis, and purpose of the comment. Secondly, as certain recurring patterns, phenomena and components were detected in the extracted discourses, the comments were assigned with various "component codes". The distribution of these codes was based on recurring characteristics, labels, word co-occurrences, and attitudes that reappeared throughout the data mining process.

The coding process was an efficient way to systematise and categorise the data in order to detect patterns in the extracted discourses. Baker and McEnery have previously claimed that an observation of words' continual pairing with other words makes it possible to expose hidden bias and get an objective sense of themes and associations embedded in words.[105] Due to a lack of suitable software, it was not possible to observe words' continual pairing in this thesis. However, the same effect was achieved by observing combinations of various codes in the same comment. For example, a high frequency of "other-positioning through negative appraisal"[106] (hereafter referred to as Othering) was detected early in the coding process. This discursive phenomenon was coded as *Othering*, and it turned out to be frequently combined with codes related to HRs' universalism or HRs criticism, which are central themes in this thesis. These findings will be presented and discussed later in the thesis.

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[104] P. Baker & T. McEnery, "A Corpus-Based Approach to Discourses", 2005, p. 202
[105] This is explained by P. Baker & T. McEnery in "A corpus-based approach to discourses", 2005, p.223
[106] N. Baumgarten, "Othering Practice", 2018, p. 6

Another main interest in this thesis is general attitudes towards the concept of HRs in public discourses. Therefore, it did initially seem tempting to measure feelings of negativity and positivity as some others have done.[107] However, such a method was avoided for several reasons. One reason was the lack of access to computer programs like Thelwall's SentiStrength. Another reason was that the very frequent use of irony and sarcasm in online forums makes such methods highly unreliable. Therefore, instead of measuring ambiguous and subjective phenomena like feelings, the analysis of attitudes was based on expressions and discursive patterns that explicitly mediated the author's standpoint. Opinions and attitudes in the extracted comments that mentioned *human rights* were also filtered and systematised with codes. Comments with the main purpose to encourage or support HRs were coded with the theme code *HRs Encouragement*, and comments that incidentally expressed something positive or good about HRs were coded with the component code *HRs=Positive*. Accordingly, comments with the opposite purpose were coded with the theme code *HRs Criticism*, and comments that incidentally expressed something negative about, or criticised, HRs were coded with the component code *HRs=Negative*.

Apart from the codes that captured attitudes towards HRs as such, two component codes were developed to distinguish authors' attitudes towards the contexts that they referred to in their comments. These codes were allocated to comments depending on if the authors mentioned *human rights* in a negative or positive context. Basically, segments were coded with *Negative Phenomena/Dissatisfaction* if the author expressed dissatisfaction with the context in question, or referred to any phenomenon as negative. Segments were coded with *Positive Phenomena/Satisfaction* when comment authors expressed satisfaction with the context in question, or referred to a phenomenon as positive. Note, that this code differed from the codes that organised authors' attitudes towards HRs. Even if a comment was coded with *HRs=Positive*, because the author expressed something positive about HRs, could the comment also be coded with *Negative Phenomena/Dissatisfaction* because the author expressed dissatisfaction, for example concerning a HRs violation.

In the end, all the extracted comments that mentioned *human rights* were divided into 5 theme codes with 16 sub-themes (see Table 1), and 11 component codes (Table 2). For the purpose of a greater intercoder agreement, both the allocation of codes, and the codes themselves, were controlled and modified a second time. The purpose of allocating codes to segments of

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[107] See for example N. Baumgarten, "Othering Practice", 2017, p. 5; J. S. Lee & A. Nerghes, "Refugee or Migrant Crisis?", 2018, p. 5

comments was to systematically map out how HRs were constructed, perceived, and discussed in the extracted discourses. The codes did not only reveal general themes, attitudes, and opinions in comments, but they also revealed discursive patterns that called for an in-depth qualitative analysis. In these cases, the comments in question were subjected to a CDA. However, the allocated codes were not only used to locate discourses that were relevant for a CDA. Instead, the frequency of certain codes could also be used to confirm, support, and legitimise the arguments produced in the CDA.

Table 1: Themes of HRs discourses

Theme	Subtheme
The Concept of HRs	HRs Encouragement HRs Explanations HRs Criticism
Politics	International Politics National Politics
Non-state Actors	Criticising Individuals/NSA Supporting Individuals/NSA EU/European Institutions UN/UN Institutions
States	Criticising State(s) Supporting State(s)
Other	Migration/Asylum/Foreigners Security/Criminality/Terrorism Religion/Ideology Women's Rights Climate

Table 2: Components in HRs discourses

Component Codes
HRs= Exclusive HRs= Universal
Whataboutism: Them/That Whataboutism: Us/Our Own
Nationalism
Negative Phenomena/Dissatisfaction Positive Phenomena/Satisfaction
HRs= Negative HRs= Positive
Othering The Us

The usefulness of conducting a CDA was explained in the literature review under the heading "Discourses & Frames According to Poststructuralism". The main objective was to analyse how the discourses conveyed a meaning and constructed social identities and relations. When the CDA was carried out on the compilation of extracted comments and their codes, it was possible to objectively identify widespread linguistic patterns. These patterns were thoroughly examined in order to understand how the comment authors constructed meaning, perceptions of HRs, and different versions of reality. By challenging that these patterns can be taken for granted, it was possible to analyse how they were merely perceived understandings, and, hence, both are and can be reconstructed. A special interest for the CDA in this thesis was constructions of the Other and the Us. When reviewing the inductively processed and coded data, it was early detected

that these constructions were fundamental for perceptions of HRs' universalism, which in turn is one of the focus areas of this thesis. Apart from that, the CDA was directed towards the most frequently detected discursive patterns in the inductive research process. Which these were, will be presented in the next chapter. As already mentioned, the results and implications of the CDA will be discussed under the heading "Discussion: What Do the Results Imply?".

Other scholars have reported that a common challenge in online discourse analyses is to handle the frequency of malformed words, slang, irony, context specific words etc.[108] However, because of its manual research method, this thesis circumvented most of this problematic. Indeed, as soon as all comments that mentioned *human rights* had been automatically compiled, the comments were coded and analysed in a manual, text-mining process. Thereby, most relevant irony, slang, malformed, or context specific words (for example LOL), were both detected and understood. Hence, they could be coded and analysed accurately.

In what now follows, the research result will be presented. Thereafter, the thesis continues with an extensive interpretation of the findings and discussion about their implications.

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[108] J. S. Lee & A. Nerghes, "Refugee or Migrant Crisis?", 2018, p. 13

4. RESEARCH RESULTS

In what now follows, the research results will be presented. This chapter has been divided into four subheadings under which the most important outcomes of the research are presented. Since the inductive research process has already been completed, the three areas identified as especially interesting have from now on been allowed to impact the direction of the thesis. Hence, the results were divided into four subheadings depending on if they 1) were considered to be important overreaching findings, or could assist an examination of the special areas of interest by 2) conveying something about the contexts that generated public HRs discourses 3) explaining public perceptions of HRs' universalism by including Othering or deservingness, or 4) systematised public attitudes or support for HRs.

As will now be shown, the inductive coding and processing of the data produced a great amount of information that is essential for understanding public HRs discourses. Likewise, it enabled a CDA of the contexts of public HRs discourses, HRs' universalism, and general attitudes or support for HRs. This will now be presented and visualised. Note that in this chapter, the results are presented as objectively as possible. The implications of the results will not be further discussed until the next chapter, in which the poststructural approach is utilised to interpret the results.

4.1   Initial & Overreaching Research Findings

The first, most obvious research result was the lack of HRs discourses in the extracted data. One could have assumed, that since the newspapers' Facebook posts mentioned HRs, they would encourage commentators to these posts to refer to HRs. However, among the 23806 extracted comments, only 1320 mentioned *human rights*. Since only these 1320 comments were analysed in-depth, this result does indeed impact the generalisability of the research. Nonetheless, it is also a highly valuable finding because it tells something about how the public constructed, perceived, and discussed HRs in the extracted online discourses. So, despite the perceivably impacted generalisability, this finding does rather contribute to an answer to the research question than obstructing it. The insight that only 5,54% of the extracted comments mentioned *human rights* confirm that the public might be part of the same cyclical logic that has been observed between politicians and media. Previous research has claimed that neither of

them frame issues in terms of HRs because the other does not do so. [109] This will be discussed further under the heading "The Absence of Human Rights Discourses".

A second noteworthy quantitative result is the overrepresentation of comments to Facebook posts published by German newspapers. The number of comments to German newspapers' posts was 14769 (62% of all extracted comments), and the number of comments to Swedish posts was 9037 (38% of all extracted comments). The same discrepancy was seen in the number of referrals to HRs: 71% of the comments mentioning *human rights* stemmed from German sources and 29% from Swedish. This means, that the research findings might be more representative of German discourses. At first sight, this might seem like an unwanted or destructive result. However, as the thesis was not designed to be comparative, this discrepancy is not harmful for the research. Indeed, considering the population size and hence number of internet users in the respective countries, this result did not come as a surprise. The intention of gathering data from two countries was merely to enforce a greater diversity by including study subjects with various origins, native languages, occupations, socio-economic statuses etc. Indeed, as in all studies, the representativeness of the data is limited, but the thesis does still succeed with exemplifying how the public in European liberal democracies participate in HRs discourses online. So, even though the quantitative findings are not statistically safe, they provide useful insights and constitute a legitimate base for the thesis' qualitative arguments.

As mentioned earlier, the remaining key findings have been divided into three subheadings that systematically present results from the research process. Since many comments encompassed more than one theme and several component codes, most segment were coded with multiple codes. For example, the following comment obtained three codes:

> *"Concepts like human rights and democracy don't mean anything special for this Mister* [Erdogan] *anyhow"[110]*

The comment above was assigned with the theme code *Criticizing individuals/NSA*, the component codes *Othering* ("this Mister") and *Negative Phenomena/Dissatisfaction,* as the author's main purpose was to express critique and dissatisfaction. This means, that the number of allocated codes (3887) was distinctly higher than the number of analysed comments (1320). For the purpose of diversity and for the sake of transparency, comments that in the following

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[109] S. M. Brandle, "Media Coverage of Human Rights", 2018, p. 167
[110] Please note, that all quoted comments in the thesis have been translated into English by the thesis author if nothing else is stated.

are quoted stem equally often from Swedish as from German sources. Additionally, if nothing else is indicated, the comments were originally written in Swedish or German and have been translated into English.

4.2   Contexts that Generate Public Human Rights Discourses

To examine in which contexts HRs discourses appeared, all comments that mentioned *human rights* (*Menschenrechte* or *mänskliga rättigheter*) obtained different theme codes. This was described in the method section. The five most frequently used theme codes were *Criticising Individuals/NSA* (non-state actors) with a frequency (F) of 314, *Criticising State(s)* (F=255), *Security/Criminality/Terrorism* (F=213), *HRs Encouragement* (F=169), and *HRs Explanations* (F=151). The top five of the 16 theme codes were allocated to 63.2% of the analysed segments. The frequencies for all theme codes are presented in Table 3.

The frequencies of the component codes are presented in Table 4. The code *Negative Phenomena/Dissatisfaction* could be allocated to 58% of the coded segments (F=765) and was

Table 3: Frequencies of theme codes

	Theme code	Frequency
1.	Criticising Individuals/NSA	314
2.	Criticising State(s)	255
3.	Security/Criminality/Terrorism	213
4.	HRs Encouragement	169
5.	HRs Explanations	151
6.	HRs Criticism	123
7.	Migration/Asylum/Foreigners	78
8.	National Politics	73
9.	EU/European Institutions	68
10.	Religion/Ideology	65
11.	International Politics	60
12.	UN Institutions	49
13.	Supporting State(s)	48
14.	Supporting Individuals/NSA	34
15.	Women's Rights	28
16.	Climate	15

Table 4: Frequencies of component codes

	Component code	Frequency
1.	Negative Phenomena/Dissatisfaction	765
2.	Othering	549
3.	Whataboutism:Them/That	167
4.	HRs= Exclusive	159
5.	HRs= Positive	119
6.	The Us	99
7.	HRs= Universal	80
8.	Positive Phenomena/Satisfaction	65
9.	Whataboutism: Us/Our Own	58
10.	Nationalism	46
11.	HRs= Negative	37

thereby certainly the most frequently used code. Thereafter, the components *Othering* (F=549), W*hataboutism: Them/That* (F=167), *HRs=Exclusive* (F=159), and *HRs=Positive* (F=119) made their way into the top five. An explanation of the code *Negative Phenomena/Dissatisfaction* and a definition of Othering has been provided earlier in this thesis. Additionally, the code *HRs=Exclusive* was simply allocated when an author expressed that HRs are not, or should not be, universal. The code *HRs=Positive* was allocated when an author expressed support for HRs. This being explained, a clarification of the code *Whataboutism* might still be necessary.

In this thesis, the phenomenon of whataboutism was divided into two component codes, one that focused on constructions of the Us and one that focused on the Other. In summary, the code *Whataboutism* was allocated when authors sought to call attention to any situation that they perceived as worse than the one that was presently discussed. The third most used code, *Whataboutism*: *Them/That,* was allocated when authors expressed something like "but what about them/that!" or "look at them/that instead!". Many of these posts claimed that certain groups, that were not part of the original context, were mistreated, overshadowed, or unfairly treated. These groups were often retirees or nationals from particular countries. In other cases, authors claimed that certain groups or actors, that were not part of the original context, were treated too well, or spoken about too nicely. Multiple examples of this will be provided as the results are discussed later on.

Apart from observing individual frequencies, one main task when compiling the codes was to notice how various themes and components were combined. This revealed in which contexts certain attitudes, perceptions, or discourse phenomena occurred more frequently. As already explained, the contexts were coded with theme codes and the other phenomena with component codes. The top 10 most common combinations of theme codes and component codes are presented in Table 5. Even though the combination of component codes internally will not be extensively presented, it is noteworthy that the component code *The Us* (Table 4, row 6, F=99) almost exclusively was allocated to comments that also included an Other. Hence, in almost all comments to which the code *The Us* was allocated, one could also find the code *Othering*. This indicates that an Us was necessary to construct the Other, which is a well-known phenomenon among poststructural scholars. To know what the Us is, it must also be known what it is not, and whom the Us is different from. How this affects HRs discourses will be discussed later in the thesis.

Table 5: Combinations of themes and component codes

	Themes	Components	Frequency
1.	Criticising Individuals/NSA	+ Negative Phenomena/ Dissatisfaction	274
2.	Criticising State(s)	+ Negative Phenomena/ Dissatisfaction	215
3.	Criticising Individuals/NSA	+ Othering	199
4.	Security/Criminality/Terrorism	+ Othering	153
5.	Security/Criminality/Terrorism	+ Negative Phenomena/Dissatisfaction	144
6.	Security/Criminality/Terrorism	+ HRs= Exclusive	131
7.	Criticising State(s)	+ Othering	127
8.	HRs Criticism	+ Negative Phenomena/Dissatisfaction	108
9.	HRs Encouragement	+ HRs= Positive	99
10.	Criticising State(s)	+ Whataboutism: Them/That	57

In Table 5, the most frequent combinations of component codes and theme codes are presented. In the first two rows, it is visualised how critique against individuals and non-state actors, as well as states (including state actors), were the most common themes in comments that were coded with *Negative Phenomena/Dissatisfaction*. This suggests that the main catalyst for authors' dissatisfaction was firstly individuals or non-state actors, and secondly states. Correspondingly, individuals and non-state actors were the most frequent targets of Othering (Table 5, row 3), whereas states and state actors took second place (row 7). As just mentioned, comments with the main theme of criticising non-state actors or states were often assigned with the code *Negative Phenomena/Dissatisfaction* (see Table 5, row 1 and 2). Additionally, comments with these themes did also often included the code *Othering* (see Table 5, row 3 and 7). This means, that comments, which mainly mediated critique, often entailed dissatisfaction and constructions of an Other. In most cases, non-state actors or states were blamed for the negative phenomenon in question, or for not doing enough to prevent it. Thereby, these themes provoked expressions of dissatisfaction, and the actors were subjected to Othering.

In row 8 of Table 5, it is visualised how HRs criticism also provoked dissatisfaction or made authors frame a phenomenon as negative. These comments expressed diverse critique directed against HRs institutions and frameworks, like the European Court of Human Rights or the United Nations' Human Rights Council, or against conventions, interpretations of HRs standards, the implementation of HRs, or against the concept of HRs as such. Furthermore, just as negative themes were frequently combined with negative components, positive themes were often combined with positive components. Accordingly, row 9 of Table 5 shows that comments

that were coded with *HRs encouragement* often were combined with the component code *HRs=positive*.

In row 4, 5 and 6 of Table 5, it is visualised how HRs discourses on security, criminality and terrorism often incorporated Othering-practices, expressions of dissatisfaction, and claims that somehow revoke the universality of HRs. That discourses on security, criminality or terrorism often were coded with *Othering* (see Table 5, row 4) indicates that authors sought to distance themselves from these contexts, and from people associated with these contexts. They clearly stated that they were different. Hence, groups and individuals that perceivably were associated with these contexts were constructed as an Other through negative appraisal. Furthermore, as seen in row 5 of Table 5, comment authors that mentioned HRs in contexts of security, criminality and terrorism often framed the context as a negative phenomenon and expressed dissatisfaction. Concerning this, authors did usually express disgust, opposition, anger or despair towards culprits or criminal acts, or towards the way these were handled by society. Therefore, these comments were frequently coded with *Negative Phenomena/Dissatisfaction*.

Apart from negativity, themes related to security, criminality, and terrorism did also entail expressions that HRs are, or should be, exclusive rather than universal. This is visible in row 6 of Table 5. In these cases, authors did frequently mention that certain criminal acts, like terrorism or murder, disqualify culprits as HRs holders. Hence, authors to these comments framed culprits that violated HRs as unworthy of HRs. More results related to this will be presented under the next subheading. The implications of these results are, as already explained, discussed later in the thesis.

As shown in row 10 of Table 5, so called whataboutism was found in 57 of the comments that criticised states. Thereby, states were the most common subject in comments that involved whataboutism. An example of this now follows:

> *"Did you forget about Spain? Again? Always only Poland and Turkey? Reports on Spain are very critical and say that human rights are violated"*

This comment was written on an article that criticised Turkey for HRs abuses. However, the author sought to steer attention away from Turkey and instead call attention to Spain. Indirectly, this comment proclaims, "what about Spain, look at it/them instead!". In the comments, to which both *Criticising State(s)* and *Whataboutism: Them/That* were allocated, authors did often

mention state abuses. The purpose of these comments was to express either support for, or opposition against, a specific state.

Interestingly, there was no strong relation between the theme code *Migration/Asylum/Foreigners* and the component code *HR=Exclusive*. A greater frequency could have been expected since previous research found a strong correlation between topics of migration and deservingness, for example by showing how refugees have been portrayed as more deserving than migrants.[111] In this research, these two codes were only allocated to the same comments seven times. Thus, it does not prove any correlation at all. More results related to deservingness will be introduced in the next section, in which results related to HRs' universalism will be presented.

4.3   Universalism: Othering & Deservingness

Practices of Othering, in which the Other was constructed through negative appraisals, were frequent in the collected HRs discourses. As already mentioned, the code *Othering* was the second most allocated of the component codes (see Table 4). The code was allocated to a wide range of actors, and even the actor that most frequently was subjected to Othering (Anders Behring Breivik) only occurred 42 times in the 549 segments coded with *Othering*. So, since constructions of the Other initially did not present any obvious pattern, all segments that were coded with *Othering* were inductively categorised. This means, that all actors that were subjected to Othering were categorised depending on the trait of the actor. The result of this process is presented in Table 6.

Culprits were most frequently subjected to Othering (F=130). The culprits were in many comments either terrorists, rapists, or murderers, that were accused of or sentenced for HRs violations. After culprits, state actors were most frequently subjected to Othering. The category *State Actors* (F=90) included politicians, state officials and head of states that were criticised for a specific action, or for their politics in general. Thereafter, the most frequent categories were *States* (F=81) and *Political Dissidents* (F=75). "Political dissidents" does in this case mean that the subject of Othering had another political opinion than the author, and was constructed as an Other for this reason.

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[111] S. M. Holmes & H. Castañeda, "Representing the 'European refugee crisis'", 2016, p. 13; J. S. Lee & A. Nerghes, "Refugee or Migrant Crisis?", 2018, p. 12

Table 6: Categories of Othering

	Category	Frequency
1.	Culprits	130
2.	State Actors	90
3.	States	81
4.	Political Dissidents	75
5.	Foreigners	58
6.	Religious Groups/Individuals	36
6.	Activists	36
7.	Nationals	32
8.	EU/UN	9

The fifth most frequent category was *Foreigners* (F=58), which included migrants, asylum seekers, and citizens of any other state than the one of the comment author. In many cases was this category closely related to the sixth most popular category, namely *Religious Groups/Individuals* (F=36). It was often hard to decide whether the Other-positioning was caused by the fact that the author considered the Other to be a foreigner, or because the Other had a certain religious belief that often was associated with foreigners. In the end, this categorisation was decided based on the focus of the comment, and on the author's critique against this Other.

At the shared sixth place of Othering categories, we also find *Activists* (F=36). In these comments, authors did most often target HRs activists, political activists, or climate activists. In all these cases was the term "activist" used by either the author itself, or in the newspapers' posts which the author had commented. The eight most frequent category was *Nationals* (32). Since these constructions were closely related to the ones in the category *Foreigners* (Table 6, row 5), these categories could have been combined. In that case, *Foreigners* would have shared the second place as most frequent category of Othering (F=90). However, this thesis separated them because, after all, they emphasised different traits. Simply put, in the case of *Nationals*, the Other was an Other purely because it had a different nationality than the author. In the *Foreigners* category on the other hand, other traits than a specific nationality were emphasises, for example culture or values. Importantly, these traits were denigrated because they were alien to the author. Finally, the ninth category reveals that the EU and UN also were subjected to Othering. However, this only occurred nine times and will therefore not be discussed further.

The categorisation of actors who were subjected to Othering enabled a structured CDA of public impressions of HRs' universalism. Just as previous research has reported, the coding indicated a correlation between Othering and constructions of HRs' deservingness. This was seen when examining how the code *Othering* and *the Us* were combined with the codes *HRs=exclusive* and *HRs=universal*. Indeed, in almost all comments where the code *HRs=Exclusive* was allocated, so was the code *Othering*. As already mentioned, the CDA was especially useful for examining the phenomena of Othering and its correlation with frames of HRs' universalism.

The codes *HRs=Exclusive* and *HRs=Universal* were allocated when authors expressed their opinions about who deserves HRs. If the author claimed that everyone deserves HRs, the comment was coded with *HR=universal*. If the author on the other hand claimed that there are, or should be, exceptions, the comment was coded with *HR=exclusive*. In all cases where the code *HRs=exclusive* was allocated, the author did either express that HRs only are relevant for some people, or that HRs must be deserved by either abstaining from criminal acts or by fulfilling certain obligations. It turned out, that the only strong relation between the code *HRs=Exclusive* and any specific category of Othering was in the case of culprits. The majority of segments that mentioned *human rights,* and constructed culprits as the Other, conveyed that HRs are, or should be, exclusive. A typical example looked like this:

> *"Breivik- like a few other perpetrators of serious crimes against international law- do of course lack human rights. They have robbed themselves of them by committing such heinous crimes"*

So, even though there was a correlation between the general code *Othering* and claims of HRs' exclusivity, this correlation could only be seen with one specific category, namely *Culprits*. This can partly be explained by the fact that constructions of Others frequently varied in the discourses, and hence, it was hard to observe any fixed relations between a specified Other and other phenomena.

After identifying categories of Othering and examining their relationship with the codes *HRs=Exclusive* and *HRs=Universal*, the third step of the analysis was to scrutinise how whataboutism might be involved in views on universalism. As already mentioned, phenomena of whataboutism was divided into two codes, namely *Whataboutism: Them/That* and W*hataboutism: Us/Our Own*. As both these codes centre around constructions of the Us and the Other, they are closely related to practices of Othering. Therefore, they also reveal patterns of perceptions of HRs' universalism. In the comments where the code *Whataboutism:*

Them/That was allocated, the author did either seek to bring attention away from accusations against the Own/Us, or sought to protect or improve the perception of the Own/Us by claiming that someone else somehow was worse. Comments that were assigned with the code *Whataboutism: Us/Our Own* did rather express a desire for attention and compassion. Authors often expressed that the Us had been left behind, and that other groups or people enjoy benefits that the Us cannot enjoy, but should be able to. Both these types of whataboutism constructed an Other and an Us. These constructions were employed in different claims about HRs distribution, compliance, or violations. All of which often were used in arguments about HRs' universalism. Three examples will now follow.

Example 1: One newspaper posted an article that explained how the UN deems a ban on veils in France, such as burqa and niqab, to be a HRs violation. In a comment to this article, one author sought to defend bans on veils by relativizing France's actions. For this purpose, the author called attention to other countries (the Others), which according to the author are greater threats towards HRs. This is an example of *Whataboutism: Them/That*:

> *"They* [the UN] *should rather reprimand or sanction Saudi-Arabia, Iran, Russia, China, Myanmar and Turkey* [the Others] *for violating human rights"*

Example 2: In the second example, one comment author criticised a politician who argued in favour of generous migration policies and universal HRs. In the first sentence, the author called attention to the mistreated rights of the Us, which is an example of *Whataboutism: Us/Our Own*. In the second sentence, the author shifted focus to refugees (the Other) in order to emphasise the mistreatment of the Us, and hence exemplified *Whataboutism: Them/That*. In this comment, an Us was constructed based on nationality, i.e. people that are part of the constitutional law:

> *"How can one call for human rights and at the same time trample our* [the Us] *constitutional law. Where is the committee of inquiry regarding refugees'* [the Other's] *illegal entrance from 2015 until today?"*

Example 3: The third example is one of *Whataboutism: Us/Our Own*. Many authors called for a national focus in discussions about migration, aid, or support to other countries. A common perception was that there is an opposition between helping the Other and protecting the Us. Therefore, it was often argued that the Us must be prioritized. This is exemplified in this concise comment to a politicians' call for the importance of HRs internationally:

"Start with solving human rights in our own country: homeless,
poor, retirees…"

Even though the comments that were assigned the codes *Whataboutism* did not automatically defy HRs or claim that some do not deserve HRs, they all contained an element of dissatisfaction considering accusations, priorities, or distribution or HRs. It was claimed that an Other, or the Us, deserved better or more than it was given. Thereby, contexts of whataboutism revealed authors' impressions of HRs' deservingness and were hence relevant in examinations of public perceptions of HRs' universalism. Additionally, these discourses did often entail arguments that were constructed based on nationalistic or populistic claims, where different versions of "the People" were constructed, and portrayed as threatened by the Other. In many of these cases was the distribution and enjoyment of HRs portrayed as a zero-sum-game, in which the author often argued in favour of downgrading the Other's HRs in order to protect the Us. The implications of this will be discussed under the heading "Discourses on Universalism: Who Deserves Human Rights?". Before that however, it will be presented how the element of dissatisfaction was not only present in contexts of whataboutism. Rather, it turned out that most attitudes in HRs discourses were characterised by dissatisfaction or negativity.

4.4   Attitudes in Human Rights Discourses: Dissatisfaction

Apart from frequent contexts in which HRs discourses appeared, and perceptions of HRs' universalism, one main area of interest for this thesis was general attitudes towards HRs. As shown in Table 4, and in the components' cell of Table 5, it was very frequent that authors framed a phenomenon as negative or expressed dissatisfaction in the comments which contained referrals to *human rights*. Whereas the code *Negative Phenomena/Dissatisfaction* was allocated 765 times, the code *Positive Phenomena/Satisfaction* was only used 65 times. The remaining comments had no explicit tone in that sense. Table 7 beneath presents the most frequently combined theme and component codes in which positive attitudes were expressed. Here, the most common combination was *HRs encouragement* and *HRs=Positive* (F=99). Since the criteria for allocating these two codes individually were closely related, this was a logical result. Further, Table 7 visualises how the component code *Positive Phenomena/Satisfaction* was combined with the themes *HRs encouragement* 37 times and *Supporting State(s)* 20 times. In conclusion, the data showed that positivity and satisfaction was expressed relatively rarely, and that when it was expressed, it was most often connected to HRs encouragement or state actions that were recognized as positive.

Table 7: Combinations of positive codes & themes

	Theme code	Component code	Frequency
1.	HRs Encouragement	HRs= Positive	99
2.	HRs Encouragement	Positive Phenomena/Satisfaction	37
3.	Supporting State(s)	Positive Phenomena/Satisfaction	20
4.	Supporting Individuals/NSA	Positive Phenomena/Satisfaction	13

Since the code *Negative Phenomena/Dissatisfaction* was the overall most allocated code, the combination of negative codes can also be seen in Table 5, which revealed the most frequently combined codes overall. Here, in contrast to combinations of positive codes, states were only at second place (see Table 5, row 2). Instead, individuals and non-state actors were most often connected with negative phenomena or dissatisfaction (see Table 5, row 1). For example, it was common that authors expressed aggression towards, or disagreement with, political dissidents (who often were previous commentators on the same Facebook post), culprits, activists, or religious groups.

The 5th row of Table 5 visualised how security, criminality and terrorism contributed to expressions of dissatisfaction and made authors frame the context of the comment as a negative phenomenon. In the 8th row of Table 5, a connection between *HRs criticism* and *Negative Phenomena/Dissatisfaction* was visible. In the comments where these two codes were combined, the authors expressed explicit critique against HRs, and accordingly shared their dissatisfaction. Here are a few examples:

"You can already tell from the fact that Saudi Arabia is chairing the human rights committee that human rights are nothing but empty words"

"Only when the Western stop being arrogant and ignorant, and stop imposing their criteria of SOCALLED "Menschenrecht" and "Democratie" on other countries, can they really go far" [original post in English]

"Human Rights? Just get rid of them already"

"The fight for human rights has developed into humiliation of the people and its country"

"LOL human rights are not what they have been"

As exemplified in the extracted comments, HRs critique and dissatisfaction was often combined with critique against actors. This critique was sometimes directed against states, other times individuals, various groups, or constructed geographical areas like "the West" or "Islamic countries". In yet other cases, the newspapers' post, or previous comments to the post, triggered authors to criticise and take a stance against the concept of HRs itself, as exemplified in the three last quotes.

As the key results from the inductive coding and analysis process have now been presented, the thesis will move on to an in-depth discussion of these results. Whereas the data processing and coding benefited from a grounded theory approach, a poststructural approach was necessary for conducting the CDA and interpreting the coding process. The poststructural approach will provide several examples of how Human Rights are constructed, perceived, and discussed in public, online discourses. Thereby, an answer to the research question will start to evolve.

5. DISCUSSION: WHAT DO THE RESULTS IMPLY?

As already explained, the data in this thesis was collected, coded, and processed inductively. This has now been presented in the chapters above. To present the results, the data findings were divided into four areas that were of special interest for the upcoming discussion. These areas were, firstly, general important findings, and thereafter the contexts in which HRs discourses appear, how the public perceives and discusses the concept of universality, and attitudes towards HRs. The focus on these areas was decided based on previous, academic claims about HRs discourses. Apart from this inspiration from previous studies, the research was inductive because of the lack of suitable methodologies for analysing public HRs discourses online.

In what follows, the results stemming from the CDA of the inductively processed data will be interpreted and discussed. As already explained, this part of the thesis will foremost discuss the identified three focus areas. It will be shown how constructions of deservingness and the Other are vital in public perceptions of HRs' universalism, and the contexts in which HRs discourses appear will be scrutinised. Because of CDAs' potential to explore discursive constructions, the discussion will be dominated by aspects of HRs' universalism, Othering and deservingness. However, one detrimental gap in previous research was the lack of knowledge about the contexts in which public HRs discourses appear. Therefore, a few reflections on these contexts will be shared. First, the rarity of HRs discourses will be discussed. Thereafter, the contexts of HRs discourses will be discussed. It will not only be discussed in what contexts HRs are discussed, but also how they convey numerous conclusions about public attitudes towards, and support for, HRs. It is however notable, that since the contexts are the foundation of the HRs discourses, they cannot be separated from the rest of the findings and will therefore be exemplified and discussed throughout the rest of the thesis.

5.1   The Absence of Human Rights Discourses

As mentioned above, it would not make sense to squeeze all interesting aspects of the contexts, in which HRs discourses appear, into one section. Therefore, this part will focus on certain findings that deserve special attention and clarification. To begin with, the absence of HRs discourses, as well as the relation between positive attitudes towards HRs and referrals to *human rights* will be discussed.

At the outset of this research, there was a logical expectation that comments to HRs related Facebook posts would mention *human rights* relatively frequently. However, even though only comments to newspapers' posts that explicitly mentioned *human rights* were collected, there was a clear absence of HRs discourses among the comments. Only 1320 of the 23806 extracted comments mentioned *human rights*. Even though the lack of HRs discourses might have affected the thesis' generalisability, it is foremost a valuable finding. As discussed in the literature review, previous scholars have reported that there is an absence of HRs discourses in media. However, there has been a lack of knowledge about how this finding translates into public discourses. This thesis can now confirm that the same absence of HRs discourses that has been observed among politicians and mass media is present in public, online discourses as well. Based on the insight that visibility is essential for any promotion, it is clear that the absence of HRs discourses is obstructing the proliferation of HRs in European liberal democracies. At the bottom line, if the public is not familiar with the concept of HRs, and therefore lacks basic knowledge about it, there is not even a fundament on which a promotion of HRs can be built.

The claim that support for HRs benefit from awareness about HRs is aided by the insight that a majority of the analysed comments, i.e. comments that mentioned *human rights*, expressed support for HRs. In fact, the theme code *HRs encouragement* (see Table 3) and the component code *HRs=positive* (see Table 4) were together allocated 288 times. The codes *HRs criticism* (Table 3) and *HRs=negative* (Table 4), on the other hand, were only allocated 160 times. Thereby, the comment authors who mentioned *human rights* expressed support for HRs more often than they opposed them. This indicates that there could be a relation between positive attitudes towards HRs and the usage of HRs discourses. It appears that there are three possible shapes of this relation. Either, this finding suggests that comment authors who were familiar with the concept of HRs, and hence referred to it, were likelier to support HRs. Another possibility is that people who supported HRs, and were familiar with the concept, were likelier to refer to *human rights* in discourses. The third possibility is that there is an interplay between both these explanations. Even though it is still unclear what the causal relation looks like, it is unlikely that a promotion of HRs discourses could do anything but benefit HRs. If HRs discourses are proliferated, awareness and knowledge about HRs will grow. Whatever the relation might be, as long as there is a positive relation between the referral to *human rights* in discourses and support for HRs, it will be fruitful to promote HRs discourses. What this research has done is simply to indicate that there might be a relation, but further research is still needed to confirm and thoroughly analyse it.

So, if a proliferation of HRs discourses can lead to an increased support for HRs, can an absence of HRs discourses either lead to, or indicate, a lack of support for HRs? This is possible, however, it was beyond the scope of this thesis to examine, and the answer is still unknown. Nevertheless, the inductive research in this thesis revealed a pattern, which might indicate a relation that could be further explored. That argument aside, there are still a lot of arguments in favour of promoting a proliferation of HRs discourses. For example, previous scholars have shown that a marginalisation of HRs leads to less awareness and knowledge, both about HRs per se, and about HRs issues and violations.[112] This lack of knowledge and awareness might in turn contribute to insufficient funding to HRs issues, less donations to HRNGOs, and less interest in HRs work and research. Thereby, an absence of HRs discourses is detrimental for the fulfilment of HRs.

In summary, it is possible that an absence of HRs discourses both indicates and contributes to a weakened state of HRs.[113] From a poststructural perspective, this productive side of HRs discourses is vital. Since discourses produce the world we live in, the contexts and truths that are produced in these discourses are vital. Accordingly, if HRs discourses are rare and thereby only appear in specific contexts, there is a risk that HRs discourses are either forgotten, seen as irrelevant, or are dominantly used by particular groups of people. As will be discussed later, this might stimulate public impressions that HRs are irrelevant, exclusive, or politically biased, which in turn might contribute to HRs opposition and endanger HRs' universalism. Therefore, it is important that HRs advocates promote HRs discourses. By doing so, the public will not only be exposed to HRs topics more often, but they will also be reminded of the implications of HRs, and have the possibility to engage in HRs discourses more often.

Another danger with the scarcity of HRs discourses is that it complicates research on public support for HRs. How do we research HRs discourses if there are none? If the public does not speak about HRs in terms of HRs, it is harder to find data to analyse public support and perceptions of HRs. Consequently, it is harder to produce reliable knowledge about this vital issue. For this reason, HRs advocates are deprived of the expertise of how the promotion of HRs could be developed, modernised, and improved in order to attract more public support and funding. Hence, as long as HRs advocates frame their work in terms of *human rights*, one quest

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[112] See for example S. Cardenas, "Mainstreaming Human Rights: Publishing Trends in Political Science", *PS: Political Science and Politics*, 42:1, 2009, p. 164

[113] See literature review on media coverage, for example S. M. Brandle, "Media Coverage of Human Rights", 2018, p. 176

should be to ingrain this concept in public discourses. This would not only help scholars, but it would also empower the public with greater awareness and ability to formulate their own rights.

Based on the collected data and previous studies, it appears that the phenomenon of echo-chambers might undermine the occurrence of HRs discourses, especially the occurrence of diverse and meaningful HRs discourses. This is so because echo-chambers isolate groups of likeminded people from other social media users. For example, as explained in the literature review, most people on Facebook are primarily exposed to discourses that confirm their own views and opinions. Thereby, if users are not exposed to HRs discourses within their echo-chamber, it is more unlikely that they will engage in HRs discourses in this forum. Additionally, it is likelier that certain notions of HRs might be understood as a truth among certain users, whereas other groups have a completely different understanding. As seen in previous research and exemplified in this thesis, there are groups that frame HRs as exclusive, negative, or useless. In order to avoid that some people are only exposed to such frames, and hence viewing them as "truths", the isolation between echo-chambers must be countered. Internet users must be exposed to alternatives. For this purpose, it is vital to promote and remind of accurate truths; for example, that all human beings are equally entitled to enjoy HRs and that all benefit from them. This is especially important since HRs were often left out, or as will be discussed later, misrepresented, or recognised as exclusive in the collected data. In summary, it seems like the public constantly must be reminded of the applicability and value of HRs.

Numerous claims that emphasise the importance of promoting HRs discourses in order to advance HRs have now been presented. It has been claimed that awareness of HRs is the foundation of HRs support and, accordingly, that a greater awareness and frequency of HRs discourses is necessary for propagating HRs. Additionally, a greater awareness and frequency of HRs discourses enables a greater involvement of rightsholders in the process of developing HRs. Lastly, it was claimed that the quest of proliferating HRs discourses is obstructed by echo-chambers' tendency to eradicate common grounds, homogenise discourses and strengthen the perceived distance between a constructed Us and the Others.

Until now, this thesis has discussed the absence of HRs discourses. However, as already known, HRs discourses were not completely absent. Thus, in what follows, the contexts in which HRs discourses appeared, and what they convey about public attitudes towards HRs, will be discussed.

5.2 The Contexts of Human Rights: Dissatisfaction

As mentioned in the first part of this discussion, this thesis has confirmed that the previously reported absence of referrals to HRs seen elsewhere also applied to the public in the observed online discourses. Another finding related to the contexts, in which HRs discourses appear, concerns the prevalence of dissatisfaction. As seen in Table 3 and mentioned earlier, HRs discourses most frequently occurred in contexts of critique, negative phenomena and dissatisfaction. There was a high frequency of critique against both non-state actors and individuals, as well as against states and state actors (see Table 5, row 1 and 2). Furthermore, HRs discourses in contexts of security, criminality, or terrorism was another frequent source of dissatisfaction (Table 5, row 5). Crucially, as already mentioned, 58% of the posts expressed an explicit dissatisfaction, or framed the context of the HRs discourse as a negative phenomenon, whereas only 5% of the posts obtained the component code *Positive Phenomena/Satisfaction* (see Table 4). These findings are not only interesting for the examination of the contexts in which HRs discourses appear, but also for examinations of general attitudes towards, and support for, HRs. Therefore, these results will now be discussed more thoroughly.

The research findings of this thesis indicate that HRs discourses are either absent or appear in contexts of dissatisfaction or negativity. However, this is not to be confused with the previous claim, that comment authors who mentioned *human rights* more often expressed support for HRs than opposed them. Even authors who expressed support for HRs were often dissatisfied. As seen in Table 5, critique and negativity was often directed towards states, individuals, groups, or ideologies. In these cases, the authors were not necessarily expressing an opposition towards HRs per se. On the contrary, comments coded with *Negative Phenomena/Dissatisfaction* sometimes expressed positive attitudes towards the concept of HRs and therefore criticised an actor that somehow endangered HRs. Nevertheless, in other cases, the critique was explicitly directed towards HRs. A few examples of this were mentioned earlier (see page 37) and a few more will soon be presented.

The critique directed against HRs was either coded with the component code *HRs=negative* or the theme code *HRs criticism*. When conducting a CDA of the comments to which these codes had been allocated, a few discursive patterns were frequently detected. Many authors mentioned that HRs are ineffective, biased towards certain groups, politically leftist, or protecting the "wrong" people (the Others). A few examples will now follow. In the first quote, the author

framed HRs as ineffective. In the second quote, HRs were described as politically leftist, and in the third quote, as something that is only protecting the Other.

> *""Human Rights" are a senseless, undefined, and purely propagandist concept. They are barely or just very inadequately enforceable"*

> *"Do human rights possibly only apply to leftist people? [..] I'm simply just missing the question if you have human rights even if you don't agree with the politically mainstream opinions"*

> "*Human rights for these guests* [migrants] *that attack our own population every day? [...] It's a ship of fools that I will never ever support…."*

Even though dissatisfaction was not necessarily connected to HRs opposition, it was, as exemplified in the quotes above, regularly combined with explicit critique against HRs. When analysing this critique against HRs, several traits, which correspond very well with previous research, were found. For example, the CDA revealed that some groups perceive HRs as irrelevant for the Us, or only protecting certain groups, peoples, or Others. Authors to the analysed comments did often argue that HRs are biased because the people promoting it (politicians, activists, "the West", or similar) have particular interests. In other cases, it was claimed that HRs in practice only protect certain people; protecting someone that often was constructed as an undeserving Other. Thereby, this thesis can confirm that parts of the public, just as some previous researchers have claimed, is of the understanding that HRs only protect certain groups. These notions led to dissatisfaction and critique against HRs in the observed discourses.

That HRs discourses appear in contexts of negative phenomena or dissatisfaction did not come as a surprise since negative news are dominating media content in general. As reported by for example Thrall et al. and Powers, only newsworthy phenomena make it into the news and positive news are rarely seen as newsworthy.[114] This might explain why the extracted data, which consists of comments to (newsworthy and hence negative) news, contains critique and dissatisfaction. Logically, if something bad happens, most people will rightfully react with disgust. As such, the high frequency of the code *Negative Phenomena/Dissatisfaction* can partly be explained by the negative contexts surrounding HRs topics, and partly by the appeal of negative news. However, the fact that discourses produce the world we live in implies that the

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[114] A. T. Thrall et al., "May We Have Your Attention Please?", 2014, p. 159; M. Powers, "A New Era of Human Rights News?", 2016, p. 317

fusion of *human rights* and negative contexts has consequences. Even though the frequency of negative phenomena in HRs discourses partly can be traced to the characteristics of news articles, it also implies that HRs mainly are perceived as relevant in negative contexts.

As just explained, HRs were often mentioned in contexts of expressed disappointment, critique, disagreement, or anger. In these contexts, HRs were perceived as unfair, deficient, violated, or absent for some individuals or groups. This will be further exemplified throughout the thesis. As mentioned in the literature review, social media is for many people the only place where they are exposed to HRs themes. This means, that most people are only exposed to HRs in discourses that frame them as highly inadequate. It thereby seems like the concept of HRs is perceived as relevant when HRs frustrate, rather than when they are enjoyed. Accordingly, HRs might be understood as foremost disappointing, upsetting, or sad. This endangers attitudes towards HRs because, if HRs predominantly are framed as something negative and disappointing, how can the public be expected to support the concept of HRs?

Until now, the contexts of HRs discourses have been discussed. In summary, it was claimed that the overrepresentation of HRs discourses in negative contexts is likely to affect the public's impressions of HRs. Hence, since such notions are contributing to less support of HRs, they must be countered. To boost public support for HRs, it is necessary to correct any falsely constructed "truths" about HRs. Indeed, the main truth about HRs is that they are good news, that they should protect everyone everywhere. In what now follows, the thesis will continue to discuss the specific discourses produced within these examined contexts. The focus will foremost be on Other-positioning, perceptions of HRs' universalism, constructions of victims and HRs' deservingness.

5.3   Discourses on Universalism: Who Deserves Human Rights?

As described earlier and seen in Table 4, *Othering* was the second most frequently allocated component code in the extracted comments. This exemplifies the frequency of Other-positioning in HRs discourses. When conducting a CDA of the coded data, the importance of Othering-practices for public perceptions of HRs' universalism and deservingness was accentuated. In fact, in all discourses on HRs' universalism was there at least one Us or one Other. Therefore, to answer the research question, it was fruitful to analyse constructions of the Other and the Us, and how these constructions were used in arguments about HRs' universalism or deservingness.

In Table 6, it was shown that certain types of groups, mainly culprits and state actors, tended to be subjected to Othering in HRs discourses. However, apart from that, constructions of Others were constantly instable and varying. Therefore, this thesis suggests that the relation between Othering, perceptions of HRs' relevance, and deservingness, is more complicated than previous research has implied.[115] It seems impossible to establish any fixed correlation between a specified Other and deservingness because these constructions frequently vary and shift in discourses. This argument will be exemplified and discussed throughout this chapter.

These diverse, varying, and competing discourses contributed to a theoretical insight. Namely, how important it is to look beyond the traditional CDA question of how more "powerful groups control public discourse".[116] Since this question does not account for the constant instability and variety of constructions in public discourses, it must be modified in order to capture the complexity of discourses. This is especially true since we live in a time of mediatisation, in which discourses, their constructions and interrelation, are influenced by new technologies. Admittedly, this traditional, poststructural question does still have value, but because neither power nor discursive constructions are absolute or fixed, it must be complemented with questions and methodologies that utilise this complexity. What is needed is for example examinations of situational power, changing discourses and relative discursive power.

In what follows, practices of Othering in HRs discourses will be thoroughly reviewed, and their implications for notions of HRs' universalism will be discussed.

5.3.1 The Other that Deserves Human Rights

In previous research, it has been claimed that the Other is perceived as "deserving" if that Other is seen as a victim rather than an actor with strong agency. Accordingly, it has for example been observed how refugees are constructed as more deserving than migrants. Previous research has also concluded that HRs foremost are framed as relevant for someone else than the Us, which was exemplified by the fact that mass media mainly covers HRs in domains of foreign affairs. In summary, previous research reported that victims are recognized as deserving of HRs, and that the public perceives HRs as relevant when speaking about someone else. In many cases, this was true in the discourses analysed for this thesis as well. For example, based on the theme codes, authors did often use HRs discourses in contexts of foreign countries, state actors,

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[115] See for example foot notes 36, 37, 38, 39 and 73
[116] P. Baker & T. McEnery, "A Corpus-Based Approach to Discourses", 2005, p. 198

groups, or individuals. Accordingly, when analysing the comments coded with *Othering,* it was visible that many authors proclaimed that the rights of various kinds of victims should be (better) protected.

So, comment authors did often advocate for victims' HRs. The culprit, however, was in most cases described as undeserving of HRs. Within these discourses, victims were deserving of HRs, whereas culprits were not. The coding process revealed that this categorisation of people into undeserving and deserving is related to the discursive phenomenon of Othering. In some cases, the Other was constructed as a victim and seen as deserving of HRs. In these posts, in which the Other was a victim, it was often claimed that this Other was unable to enjoy HRs even though it deserved them. In the case of victims and culprits, both were constructed as Others, meaning that they did not belong to the own group: The Us. The difference was that, with culprits, authors practiced Other-positioning through negative appraisal (referred to in this thesis as Othering), but in the case of victims, there was no negative judgement. Victims were categorised as an Other, but in contrast to culprits, as an Other that the authors supported and sympathised with. This insight leads to the conclusion that there is indeed a correlation between HRs deservingness and Othering. In the cases where someone was seen as undeserving of HRs, that someone was constructed as the Other through negative appraisal. In the cases where an Other was perceived as deserving of HRs, that other was not constructed through negative appraisal. In most cases, but not all, was the deserving Other some sort of victim of conflict, unfair labour conditions, online harassment, crime etc.

The findings above indicate that there are various explanations of how Other-practices affect constructions of HRs' deservingness. The discussion suggested one dynamic, flexible explanation of the relation between Othering and deservingness. In what now follows, constructions of victims and perceptions of HRs deservingness will be further discussed.

5.3.2 Constructions of Victims & Deservingness

The relation between perceived victims and HRs deservingness constitutes a pattern that cuts across all the unstable constructions of Others and HRs' universalism. This pattern suggests that there is a link between victim constructions and perceived deservingness of HRs. Even though not all actors that were claimed to be deserving of HRs were constructed as victims, there was no instance where an author portrayed someone as a victim and at the same time as undeserving of HRs. Hence, the data suggests that *perceived* victims are constantly recognized as deserving of HRs. In this regard, it is important to remember that there is no neutral or

absolute construction of a victim. Instead, it is the authors of the discourse that construct and define who "the real" victim is. Therefore, it is the author that decides who is a victim and who is not, and hence, decides who is deserving of HRs and who is not. A few examples of varying constructions of victims will now be provided.

In this first comment, asylum seekers are framed as victims:

> *"That Sweden use an unsafe method is scandalous. Unscientific and legally uncertain assessments that have awful consequences for the asylum seeker. Sweden violates the foundational human right to have your asylum case examined in a legally safe way"*

In the second example, migrants are not victims but threats:

> *"And exactly those that despise human rights are the ones coming here"*

In this following comment, the Palestinians are framed as victims:

> *"I'm in favour of the Palestinians, support their right to human rights and right to democracy. But as long as Hamas, Fatah and PA are ruling with dictatorial power is peace impossible and the Palestinians' right to human rights remains a distant dream"*

In this last example, the Palestinians are not framed as victims but instead, the author claims that they only have themselves to blame:

> *"The Palestinians spoken about here are not denied human rights by Israel but by themselves and their leaders"*

These changing constructions of victims emphasise the instability of discourse and the complexity of understanding perceptions of HRs' universalism. However, regardless of who the victim was, no one that was constructed as a victim was claimed to be undeserving of HRs. This finding suggests that one logic behind the discourse of deservingness is that perceived victims never are deprived of their deservingness. In the collected data, this was true across all constructions of Others and victims. In the cases where the Us was perceived as victims, it was claimed that the Us deserves HRs. The same was true for discourses in which the Other was perceived to be a victim. However, one difference between these discourses was that deservingness more often was relativized when the Us, and not the Other, was described as a victim. When the Us was a victim, the HRs of the Us was compared with the rights of the Other. In these cases, it was often claimed that the Other enjoyed too many rights, and that this threatened the Us, or was unfair towards the Us. On the other hand, when the Other was a victim, it was never claimed that the Us somehow could be blamed for this.

The findings above exemplify how HRs were not always framed as irrelevant for the Us, something that previous research has claimed. Instead, the findings regarding constructions of victims emphasise that the Us has a role in HRs discourses. In fact, there were numerous examples of how the Us was perceived as relevant and deserving of HRs. These will now be reviewed and discussed.

5.3.3 The Us That Deserves Human Rights

Even though HRs were often perceived as relevant for someone somewhere else, this was not always the case. Instead, the comments coded with *the Us* (F=99) or *Whataboutism: Us/Our Own* (F=58) conveyed a completely different perception. Comments entailing the code *Whataboutism: Us/Our Own* demanded HRs, and attention, for the Self or the Us. This insight turns observations that HRs are foremost seen as relevant for the Other on their head. Even though such observations might be accurate in media sources, they do not seem to be the whole truth in the case of public discourses. Instead, the data collected for this thesis indicates that, whereas HRs are framed as relevant for "someone else" in some discourses, they are in other discourses framed as equally, or even more, relevant for the Us. For example, many discourses expressed a perception that the Us (often being "Germans", "Swedes", "taxpayers", or people with certain political opinions) deserved HRs but did not have the possibility to enjoy them. In fact, all comments coded with *Whataboutism: Us/Our Own,* and many with *the Us,* exemplified this. These discourses proclaimed that HRs were most relevant for the Us because the Us deserved more attention.

So, many comments expressed that the Self or the Us is relevant in HRs discourses, and thereby deserves more HRs or attention than it is given. These expressions were often combined with claims that the Other does not deserve HRs or the perceived privileges it is given. Other times, it was claimed that the Other, undeservingly, enjoys proportionally more HRs than the Us. In many of these posts, the Us was constructed as a victim because it was understood to be unfairly treated. A typical example of this now follows:

> *"Human rights are always spoken about like an argument, we that live here*
> *and have built this country shall we sacrifice all our rights? It's shrinking*
> *around us, our freedom is decreasing. Old don't dare going out anymore,*
> *that is a right…"*

The just mentioned example disclaims arguments that HRs are merely understood as relevant for Others, and not for the Us or the Self. Further, it exemplifies how these authors often alleged that the Us deserved HRs but were not able to enjoy them for some reason. Because of such notions, HRs were often framed as unfulfilled or unrealised. Accordingly, because it was claimed that the Us was deserving of HRs but denied the possibility to enjoy them, these comments often included expressions of dissatisfaction. Thereby, an interplay between dissatisfaction, coded with *Negative Phenomena/Dissatisfaction,* and the promotion of HRs as relevant for the Us, was often visible.

The beforementioned dissatisfaction and perception that HRs are relevant for the Us often stemmed from perceptions that the Other endangered or obstructed the HRs of the Us. Hence, even though HRs were perceived as relevant for the Us in these comments, the Other seemed necessary to construct this relevance. This is supported by the finding that, in almost all comments to which the code *Whataboutism: Us/Our Own* or *the Us* was allocated, so was the component code *Othering*. Thereby, it seems like only an Us was not enough to generate discourses that framed HRs as relevant for the Self or Us. Instead, to frame HRs as relevant for the Us, an Other was needed as a reference point that either indicated how mistreated the Us was, or how relatively privileged the Other was. Hence, HRs were not constructed as relevant because of what they perceivably offered the Us, but because they created a perception of unfairness or relative neglect that affected the Us. In the next section, it will be discussed whether these perceptions of dissatisfaction and HRs' relevance might be fuelled by the nationalistic and populistic trends that previous scholars have reported about.

5.3.4 Nationalism and Populism as Promoters of Human Rights Relevance for the Us?

As just mentioned, there was a notable recurrence of Facebook posts that mentioned *human rights* and claimed that the Us was unfairly treated or neglected. Previous research has claimed that HRs most often are perceived as relevant for someone else, somewhere else. However, this claim is to some extent contested by the insight that comment authors often called attention to their own HRs. As discussed earlier, these posts were often coded with the component codes *Whataboutism*. When conducting a CDA of these comments, and comparing them with previous research, it was discovered that these discourses often entailed populistic or nationalistic rhetoric. Indeed, many of the findings related to deservingness, Othering and dissatisfaction contain features that can be traced to both populistic and nationalistic discourses.

This is most obvious when observing construction of the Us, which principally were constructions of "the People". It was often proclaimed that "the real" people, which in these cases was synonymous to the Us, was the actual deserving rights holders. This notion of "the People" is a common trait in both populism and nationalism.[117]

In the data, this perception of the People was sometimes constructed based on geographical areas like Europe or "the West". Sometimes it was based on nationality and, hence, was labelled as nationalistic rhetoric. Other times, the People was constructed based on political opinions, cultures, or social or economic status. A few examples of different constructions of the People will now be provided. In the first quote, the Us are those who are citizens of the country that is threatened by "illegally trafficked men from archaic regions". In the second and fourth quote, the Us is based on nationality. In the third quote, it is based on culture.

"What do human rights have to do with illegal trafficking? How many million men from archaic regions should be humanely relocated to a culturally alien area? Is this not against the humanity of the people who have to live with the consequences of their crimes?"

"Time to fight for our human rights in Sweden first that get worse every year"

"'The UN committee says it's a violation of freedom of religion and human rights of those wearing a Niqab'. It's also a violation of our culture to be forced to tolerate everything that will never be changed in other cultures!!!"

"Citizen rights are superior to human rights. It's based on citizen obligations, i.e. that citizens pay tax to society. This tax money should give the nationals health care, education, welfare, legal system etc [..] Then there's no space for playing global Messiah. Clean up here first and then help refugees, but using tax money to pay for migrants is repulsive"

These posts, and their various constructions of Us and Them, are greatly representative of the overall analysed data. They also exemplify the instability of discursive constructions. In the collected data, it was often proclaimed that the Us, the real People, is threatened by the Other, and that the deserving rights holders are denied their rights because of the Other. Hence, the populistic trait of uniting the People for the purpose of defending it from an Other, could be observed. For the purpose of serving the Us or an identified victim, the HRs of the Others were frequently renounced. Accordingly, HRs were framed as a zero-sum game, in which the

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[117] This was thoroughly explained in the literature review. See for example C. Rodríguez-Garavito & K. Gomez, "Responding to the Populist Challenge", 2018, p. 20

deserving rightsholders (being either the People itself, or someone they identified as deserving) had to battle an alien Other.

In all comments where there was an Us, there was also an Other. Hence, the component code *the Us* was almost exclusively found in comments to which the code *Othering* also had been allocated. Furthermore, just as the constructions of the Us varied in populistic and nationalistic discourses, so did the constructions of this Other in discourses that emphasises the relevance of the Us. The Us was constructed in relation to an Other that frequently varied. The categories of Othering revealed the groups, which most often were subjected to Othering (see Table 6). In the analysed data, these categories were used in different ways to construct a threat against the Us, the People, and its HRs. It is however noteworthy, that even though *Culprits* was the most used category, culprits were in many cases rather seen as problematic individual cases than a structural threat towards the Us. Nevertheless, Others from all categories were used to construct various threats against the People's HRs. In some cases, it was claimed that the People's HRs were threatened by some sort of elite that wrongfully prioritised the Others', including culprits', HRs, or mistreated the Us. This elite was accused in the discourses where the Othering categories *State Actors*, *Politicians*, *Activists,* and *EU/UN* were allocated. In other cases, the threat was understood to come from groups or individuals with dissenting political opinions, or from foreigners with alien cultures or religions. This was the case in comments in which the Other was categorised as *Political Dissidents*, *Foreigners*, *Religious Groups/Individuals*, or *Nationals*. In general, it can be said that comment authors sought to hold powerful actors (the "elite") accountable for the perceived maltreatment of the Us, whereas Others from the other categories were accused and criticised for endangering the People's rights or privileges, but not subject to claims of accountability.

So far, this section has discussed two interesting observations in the collected data. These were, firstly, that certain discourses proclaimed that the People deserves increased attention and thereby frame HRs as relevant for the Us. Secondly, it was argued that these analysed discourses accommodated phenomena that could be traced back to nationalistic and populistic rhetoric. It will now be discussed how, in accordance with previous studies, this research indicated that such rhetoric might be enhanced by social media.

When groups of like-minded people, with similar understandings or versions of reality, encounter other groups of people, in for example commentary sections to newspapers' posts, there is a clash of discursively constructed truths. Basically, this means that various groups and

individuals with different opinions and conceptions meet. Even though this clash has not been recognised until now, the entire analysis in this thesis builds on data from such clashes. This thesis suggests that many participants of these discursive clashes, because of echo-chambers, felt like their alternative discourses and understandings were part of a greater context. Therefore, they were encouraged to propagate their version of the "truth" about HRs and HRs related phenomena. This argument goes well along with previous studies, which for example claimed that echo-chambers fuel alternative discourses and contribute to polarisation.[118]

According to the collected data, it does indeed seem like online forums fuel alternative and less powerful discourses, as a contrast to hegemonic and more broadly accepted discourses. Thereby, populistic and nationalistic discourses have a chance of establishing. This can partly be explained by the fact that echo-chambers encourage and empower alternative discourses by bringing like-minded people together. Because of these chambers, social media users consume and produce discourses that confirm their views on a daily basis, even if these views and discourses are generally rare. This might explain why the comment authors dared to express views that could be seen as inappropriate, for example those of nationalistic or populistic character, and hence defy dominating discourses. This was seen in many posts with negative characteristics and was exemplified in several of the quotes in this thesis. Probably, the authors knew that these expressions would be viewed as inappropriate by many other users, but still, such polarizing opinions were frequently expressed. Authors of these posts often expressed that understandings in previously (arguably) appropriate or hegemonic discourses were wrong or biased. Instead, for them, the "truth" was that the Us was misunderstood or neglected in contexts of HRs, and that they had to speak up about it.

In the heading of this section, it was asked if nationalism and populism promote a perception that HRs are relevant for the Us. The answer to this question is, that this indeed seems to be the case in the collected data. Previous research has argued that HRs only are seen as relevant for someone else, but all segments that were coded with *Whataboutism: Us/Our Own*, or the code *the Us*, clearly emphasised the relevance of the Us in HRs discourses. Typically, it was stated that the Us is more deserving of HRs and should be able to enjoy them accordingly. These statements often entailed an expression of dissatisfaction based on the claim that someone denies or hinders the Us, the People, from enjoying HRs. Therefore, these discourses also contributed to the recurrence of the code *Negative Phenomena/Dissatisfaction*. Furthermore,

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[118] These studies were exemplified in the literature review. See for example K. Niklewicz, "How the Social Media Mechanisms Push its Users to Populism", *Konrad Niklewicz*, 13, 2017, p. 15-17

even though these ideological discourses promoted a relevance of HRs for the Us, which essentially is something positive, this relevance was only ascribed to this exclusive in-group. The Other was often framed as undeserving, or as a threat towards the People's HRs. This was also seen when analysing the comments to which both *HRs=Exclusive* and *Othering* had been allocated. The trait of "less deserving" was frequently ascribed to the Other. Hence, discourses with populistic and nationalistic elements divided people into deserving and less deserving. Thereby, such discourses threaten the fulfilment of HRs by opposing their universalism.

In summary, this thesis has until now disclaimed that HRs are always understood as irrelevant for the Us, which has been reported in previous studies. However, even discourses which centred around the Us did often subscribe to the feeling that HRs only protect the Other. These discourses often entailed critique or dissatisfaction with HRs. Accordingly, the Other was constantly present. In what follows, the thesis will dive deeper into the constructions of this Other, which constantly varied, but still presented some recurring patterns.

5.4   Patterns of Other-Positioning

As already explained and exemplified, perceptions and constructions of relevant rightsholders, deservingness, the Us and Other shifted frequently within and between discourses. In all comments coded with *Othering* was there at least one Us or one Other. In some cases, HRs were claimed to be more relevant for the Us, and the Us was constructed as more deserving of HRs. In other cases, HRs were framed as relevant only for someone else; someone that sometimes was described as deserving of HRs because it was a victim, and sometimes constructed as an Other that did not deserve HRs. Since the content of these constructions constantly shifted, a fixed explanation does not suffice to understand the content. Instead, explanations of Othering and HRs deservingness should seek to explain, not the content, but the construction process itself. Therefore, this thesis has sought patterns that might explain temporary phenomena and recurring patterns in discourse constructions. These patterns can help to understand constructions of Othering and deservingness. As has already been explained, such understanding is important for recognizing perceptions of HRs' universalism. Indeed, in order to frame HRs as something else than universal, there must be an Other that legitimises such reservations.

Several patterns of how constructions of Others were used in various arguments have already been discussed. However, a few findings regarding how the Other tends to be constructed in

discourses on HRs' universalism are still to be discussed. This will now be done, in the last part of this thesis' discussion.

5.4.1 Deservingness Based on Distance & Conditionality

When conducting the CDA, a few discursive phenomena were detected, which provide explanations for Other-positioning. For example, the data indicated, that the further the geographical distance was between the Us and the Other, the more generalised was the construction of the Other. Accordingly, if the Other was closer to the Us, the construction of it was more differentiated and specified. For example, in cases of Othering within the own country (typically Sweden or Germany), specific groups like culprits, politicians of a certain party, or state actors were constructed as the Other. However, in cases where the Other was geographically further away, whole populations were lumped together and labelled as the Other. For example, if the comment was coded with *Criticising State(s)* and concerned a foreign country, there was seldom a differentiation between corrupt or criticised governments and their population. On the other hand, the authors clearly differentiated governments or state actors from other groups within the population if the critique concerned the "own" geographical area.

Just as geographical distances influenced constructions of Others, did the same seem to be true concerning imagined cultural or psychological distance. In these cases, when the Other was perceived to be distinctly distant from the Us, a metonymy was used to mark an ideological distance between the author and the Other.[119] Hence, the author had the power to lump entire ethnic or religious groups together if it considered the Other to be different enough from the Us. Two examples now follow. In the first example, all "Asian people" are lumped together in the construction of the Other. This lumping is possible because of the perceived distance between the author and "Asian people". In the second example, the Others are more specifically differentiated because they all belong to "the European people", just as the author itself. Hence, because the author considered itself to be closer to the Other, the author had to specify that the Other was not the entire European people, but special fragments of it.

> *"How can Asian people complain in front of the ECTHR? Especially in front of the one for human rights, which they don't know at all"*

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[119] This phenomenon has previously been described in I. Bruna Seu, "In Countries Like That", 2012, p. 1174

"You must ask who the judges in the European Court are, GREENS, HUMAN RIGHTS ACTIVISTS, AMNEST[Y] INTERNATIONAL, for sure people that don't give a shit about the European people"

These quotes do once again exemplify how constructions of the Other frequently shift in discourse. Hence, it is anew appropriate to emphasise the fact that explanations of the relation between a specific Other and HRs deservingness cannot be static.

As explained earlier, the constructed Other was necessary to construct an Us. Identity scholars have always been aware that constructions of an Us are depending on an Other and that this is an inescapable reality of rhetoric and discourse. Therefore, the problem cannot be that there is an Other. Rather, the problem lies in the way Othering is used in HRs discourses and affect perceptions of HRs. In the data collected for this thesis, Othering was closely tied to practices of relativizing and grading HRs deservingness. Authors' reasons for relativizing and withdrawing the HRs of the Other varied. However, as will now be explained, in all cases where someone's HRs were revoked in the discourse, the authors always sought to justify this.

In all cases where the Other was claimed to be undeserving of HRs, this Other was constructed through negative appraisal. It might seem obvious that people only consider Others to be unworthy of HRs if there is something perceivably unacceptable about this Other. However, since there is a lack of research on this topic, it is a valuable point to raise. This finding suggests that the comment authors had to justify the withdrawal of someone else's HRs by including negative appraisals when referring to this Other. Further, this implicates, that in cases where there was an "other", but this Other was not constructed through negative appraisal, that "other" could potentially still be considered to deserve HRs. These "others" were not part of the Us, but still not constructed through negative appraisal. However, it was only people belonging to the Us that were automatically perceived as deserving HRs holders. For both Others and "others", HRs were frequently framed as conditional. This was detected when conducting a CDA of the comments coded with *Othering*. In these comments, the "other" (that potentially could be deserving of HRs), had to fulfil certain criteria in order to deserve HRs. For example, the authors often withdrew HRs from people that were not considered to be integrated, had committed criminal acts, or did not comply with HRs. Hence, HRs were not framed as universal in these cases either. In summary, this means, that the Other is not automatically considered to be undeserving of HRs. However, for an "other" to deserve HRs, it must either be constructed without negative appraisals, or fulfil certain criteria.

Based on the CDA of Othering-constructions, it seems more accurate to claim that public discourses tend to frame HRs as conditional rather than exclusive or universal. In the comments where someone was perceived as undeserving of HRs, the author always presented some kind of justification for this. Even in comments where the code *HRs=Exclusive* was allocated, HRs were rather constructed as conditional than exclusive per se. The authors did, directly or indirectly, present certain criteria that must be fulfilled in order to deserve HRs according to them. Hence, HRs were not randomly revoked. Instead, authors put the responsibility on the Other itself, or justified withdrawals of HRs with referrals to certain unfulfilled criteria. Accordingly, where the code *HRs=Exclusive* or *HRs Criticism* was allocated, HRs were often described as something that should be possible to withdraw, or something that in fact can be withdrawn. The accuracy of describing the discourses as conditional is also emphasised by the fact that the words *deserve* (*verdien-* or *förtjäna*) and *obligation* (*pflicht* or *skyldighet*) were mentioned no less than 283 times in the overall collected data.

In conclusion, one can say, that since universalism is the essence of HRs, this observed conditionality is endangering the fulfilment of HRs. The strength of HRs is that they are universal, unconditional and cannot be revoked. Only by upholding these standards can it be ensured that HRs are not excluding, used for political purposes, or revoked based on ambiguous or wrongful criteria.

Throughout the past sections, numerous findings concerning Othering, deservingness and universalism have been presented. As already explained, the examination of Other-practicing is vital for understanding the logic behind discourses that grade HRs' deservingness. In summary, this last part has for example discussed how constructions of the Other constantly vary but are influenced by perceived distances. Further, discourses on HRs' conditionality, and the connection between victims and deservingness, have been discussed. Apart from these findings, the data also suggests that perceptions of HR's deservingness are depending on discourse participants' feelings of compassion for the Other. This will be further discussed under the next heading.

5.4.2 No Compassion, No Human Rights?

In all analysed cases where the code *HRs=exclusive* was allocated, the author either expressed that HRs are only relevant for some people/group, or that HRs must be deserved by fulfilling certain criteria, for example abstaining from criminal acts. Suitably, a correlation was seen between culprits (as a category of Othering, see Table 6) and the code *HRs=Exclusive*. However, in contrast to previous findings, no correlation was seen between categories of foreigners or migrants and the code *HRs=Exclusive*. Accordingly, the CDA revealed, the justifications for constructing someone as undeserving of HRs were most often based on the Other's wrongful actions, and not on personal traits or backgrounds. There was an understanding that culprits, like for example Anders Behring Breivik, had actively renounced their HRs by committing crimes that violated someone else's HRs. Subsequently, comment authors argued that the culprits did not deserve HRs because they did not deserve sympathy or respect.

These notions of sympathy and respect were recurring phenomena in all discourses on HRs' universalism. Regardless of who the Other was, various arguments of compassion were detected in all cases when HRs were either yielded or withdrawn. Consequently, HRs were framed as depending on compassion because only people that the author felt certain feelings towards were perceived as deserving of HRs. This is quite related to the conclusion that victims were always considered to deserve HRs. Arguably, an author does not portray the Other as a victim if it does not feel compassion with it.

In a sense, this finding of compassion utilises one of HRs advocates' main arguments against the concept of HRs itself. Indeed, most HRs campaigns and advocacies target the audiences' commiseration and compassion in order to convince them to get involved or donate money for people that they will never meet in person. Undeniably, little money would be donated if the audience did not feel any compassion or sympathy for the target group. Hence, just as feelings are utilised to boost HRs, so are they to justify deviations from HRs' universalism. Feelings might be the reason why someone recognises or demands HRs, but they were also the reason why authors claimed that someone does not deserve HRs. Consequently, the observed discourses were to a large extent emotional, regardless of their attitude towards HRs. This was foremost the case when comment authors called attention to certain HRs situations, countries, or peoples. A few examples of how emotional discourses were combined with notions of compassion and HRs deservingness will now be provided.

In the first example, the author expressed compassion with people of the LQBTQI community. People that think that LGBTQI "is not human rights" were called "idiots":

> *"Then they're idiots anyway since they think lgbtq is politics and*
> *not human rights"*

In the second example, the author expressed compassion with the women, men and children that live under fear and oppression in Sweden. To relieve them, it was claimed that someone else's HRs should be restricted:

> *"Everything is fuc..ing allowed in Sweden, from Nazi signs to chants! Somewhere*
> *there is a limit for freedom of expression and religion! Maybe when you overstep*
> *the human rights that we have in Sweden. Where every woman, man and child*
> *should be able to live without fear and oppression!"*

In the third example, the author expressed a complete absence of compassion with a culprit, and accordingly called for a withdrawal of his HRs:

> "*Wheeh he's an animal, there are limits for what you deserve as a murderer. May*
> *he slowly rot away in prison, in his lifetime sentence, may he suffer all agony of*
> *hell in each of his breaths"*

In the last example, the author is upset because, allegedly, Europe and the European people execute heinous actions. Hence, they are not considered to deserve HRs or be worthy of compassion:

> *"Europe has become a FASCISTIC HELL!!!!! FIRST MURDER the poor people,*
> *TORTURE, destroy their existence and THEN also foolishly decide against*
> *asylum. You're all EXACTLY LIKE HITLER!!!!!!! YOU with your ONLY thought,*
> *the GREED FOR MONEY!!!!! Human rights are LONG GONE"*

There are many possible reasons why so many of the analysed posts were as emotion-driven as the examples above. The main reason might be that, as mentioned in the literature review, social media is emotion-driven. Therefore, Facebook does hypothetically feature more emotion-driven discourses than other kinds of platforms. These emotion-driven discourses clearly exemplified the link between HRs deservingness and the dependency on certain feelings towards the Other. Accordingly, the collected data showed that, if the comment author expressed compassion or sympathy for the Other, that Other was claimed to deserve HRs. Within such discourses, you deserve HRs if you deserve compassion. Consequently, an Other that did not earn the author's compassion was not considered to deserve HRs. The danger of

justifying HRs, or a deprivation of HRs, based on emotions like commiseration and compassion, lies in the risk of making HRs conditional. If HRs are understood as conditional, only people that are not constructed as an Other through negative appraisal, or are perceived to be worthy of compassion, or fulfil certain criteria, are considered to deserve HRs. Since HRs frequently were framed as conditional or depending on compassion in the collected data, this is not a hypothetical danger but an existing threat towards HRs' universalism.

Since compassion is a main leverage of HRs advocacy, it does not seem appropriate to counter emotional discourses in HRs contexts. Indeed, since HRs campaigns and advocacies depend on compassion and sympathy, they can only be successful by utilising emotions. However, the downside of these emotion-driven discourses is that they construct a dependency on these feelings. The CDA showed that attitudes towards HRs depend on feelings of compassion, and that people risk losing their status as deserving HRs holders if these feelings are absent. Thereby, emotion-driven discourses constitute a trap. On the one hand, they endanger the acceptance of HRs' universalism and unconditionality. On the other hand, they are necessary to promote HRs. The solution can therefore not be an abandonment of emotion-centred discourses. Instead, the solution must be to promote discourses that complement the negative sides of them. For example, discourses that remind the public of the importance of HRs' universalism must be promoted. Based on the discussion above, this is especially urgent in cases where there is a lack of compassion.

In conclusion, HRs advocates must constantly remind of the importance of HRs' universalism by promoting discourses in which HRs are constructed as something beneficial for everyone. The universality of HRs must be framed as an insurance for the Self and the Us. An insurance that the Us, as well as the Other, will always have HRs, even if someone else wishes the opposite. Such framing counters perceptions of HRs as only relevant for someone else, and not the Us. Thereby, it also counters the polarization between the Us and Them in HRs discourses, and hence contributes to a proliferation of discourses in which HRs are constructed as universal.

6. CONCLUSIONS

The thesis at hand has sought to answer how Human Rights are constructed, perceived, and discussed in public, online discourses. Understandings that HRs are irrelevant, or automatically safe, in certain countries have been countered by showing how some discourses threaten the support and universality of HRs in both Germany and Sweden. Thereby, the research findings emphasised the need to widen research scopes and explore HRs discourses in diverse contexts. Since the research only targeted consolidated European liberal democracies, no argument will be made about how these discourses differ from discourses in other contexts. However, the findings are useful for comparative purposes, or for the development of future research questions which dig deeper into public discourses.

The somewhat risky methodological route taken in this thesis proved to be fruitful. The initial, inductive approach enabled an open-coding process that provided unbiased, unexpected, and interesting findings. If this process would have been based on a pre-decided scheme, the results would have been different and some new, previously disregarded insights, probably completely overlooked. Though, despite the value of inductive approaches, the poststructural understanding of discursive phenomena was vital for the CDA and interpretation of the research results. Furthermore, the assumption that social media would be a suiting place to examine HRs discourses was confirmed by the fact that the discourses in the collected data were both highly diverse and seemingly authentic. In what follows, the most important conclusions of the thesis will be provided.

One objective of this thesis was to explore the contexts in which public HRs discourses appear and the attitudes conveyed in them. It turned out, that HRs were rarely mentioned in the public discourses. Further, considering the attitudes in the comments, there seemed to be a relation between positive attitudes towards HRs and referrals to HRs since most of the comments expressed support for them. However, only 5% of the comments expressed satisfaction, whereas more than half of the comments expressed negative attitudes, dissatisfaction, or referred to the context in question as a negative phenomenon. This suggests that many people are only exposed to HRs discourses, and participate in them themselves, in contexts of dissatisfaction, bad news, or disappointment. If such discourses are not countered or nuanced, this contributes to a risk that HRs per se are associated with these contexts. Further, it turned out that many of the analysed HRs discourses were emotion-driven, and HRs were often

claimed to be threatened by the Other. Accordingly, HRs were often described as a zero-sum game, in which the Us must deprioritize the Other's HRs in order to protect the Us.

Because there has previously been a lack of analyses of public, online HRs discourses, the thesis at hand detected several phenomena which, as far as the author is concerned, have not been discussed in previous studies. Many of the main findings were related to the insight that discourses on HRs deservingness and universalism are depending on constructions of an Other. It was concluded that it is impossible to provide a static explanation of the relation between HRs deservingness and a specific Other because these constructions frequently change in discourse. Nevertheless, the CDA revealed patterns of these constructions which provide certain explanations. Four important conclusions will now be mentioned. Firstly, if the Other was constructed based on negative appraisal, it was most often viewed as undeserving of HRs in the analysed discourses. Secondly, the logic behind Other-positioning seemed to be influenced by the perceived, or actual, distance between the Us and the Other. The further away the Other was, the more general and undifferentiated were the constructions. This implies, that the further away the Other is, the likelier it is that an actually heterogenous group will be perceived as homogenous, and undeserving of HRs. Thirdly, even if an actor was subjected to Othering, that Other could still be viewed as deserving of HRs if 1) the author expressed compassion or commiseration with this Other or 2) the Other fulfilled certain criteria. In both these cases, HRs were rather framed as conditional than universal. Fourthly, every time that someone was portrayed as a victim, this someone was considered to deserve HRs. This was true both if the victim was the Us and the Other. Hence, in contrast to what previous research has claimed, HRs were in many instances also framed as relevant for the Us. This relevance was especially emphasised in comments which expressed explicit critique against certain group or individuals. Therefore, constructions of an Us, and HRs' relevance for the Us, also depends on an Other.

The abovementioned findings stress the importance of conducting further research on public HRs discourses. This study alone could bring several new aspects up for discussion, as well as identify worrying trends and various threats against HRs in European liberal democracies. For example, the results showed a recurrence of public discourses in which HRs were portrayed as conditional, biased, irrelevant, ineffective, or even harmful. Not until implications like these are explored can strategies to counter them be developed. Until then, such perceptions endanger HRs' universalism and public support for HRs. Therefore, it seems like a lot of work needs to be done in order to counter these negative, excluding and conditional HRs discourses.

To counter unwanted or incorrect discourses is, to say the least, a challenging task. This has been highlighted in recent debates, for example in those covering so called "alternative facts"[120] or echo-chambers. However, challenging is not equal to impossible. Therefore, as long as HRs are worth fighting for, it is worthwhile to promote accurate and beneficial HRs discourses. For this purpose, this thesis suggests that it is necessary for HRs advocates to promote HRs discourses and spread knowledge outside of HRs academia. We, as HRs advocates, must constantly remind the public about the fundaments of HRs, and the importance of their universality. Emotional arguments that are used to both legitimise HRs support, and to argue against HRs' existence or universalism, must be complemented with discourses of reason and necessity. For example, it seems like the public must continuously be reminded of why the concept of universality is vital for everyone; that it does not only protect and ensure HRs for the Other, but also for the Self. Such awareness must be systematically spread at schools, workplaces, through media and other institutions.

By promoting HRs awareness and a more wide-spread usage of HRs discourses, broader masses will be involved in HRs discussions and aware of their own HRs. While initiating such awareness and hosting such discourses, HRs advocates must listen to the critique that is raised in these contexts. Thereby, a spread of HRs discourses and awareness would not only make the pursuit of HRs more inclusive, but it would also bring diverse and public critique of HRs promotion to light. By initiating such processes, and listening to such critique, the discrepancy between how HRs advocates want HRs to be perceived, versus how they are perceived by the public, can be countered.

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[120] The debate on "alternative facts" was considered to be beyond the scope of this thesis. However, it is an interesting and, in many aspects, very related topic. Thus, for a poststructural perspective, please see R. Crilley & P. Chatterje-Doody, "Security studies in the age of 'post-truth' politics", 2019, p. 168

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