

Discussion on social media. A qualitative study of communicative practices on the Facebook site Debatten - DR

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This article presents a study of discussion and communicative practices on Debatten - DR's Facebook site. In the analysis, we deal with a variety of activity types: regulation of language use, person-related assessments, and argumentative activities. On that basis we discuss how to assess the deliberative quality of the debate. The study is based on the five posts that generated the most activity on the platform in the period leading up to the Danish general election in 2019. Our analytic approach consists primarily of ethnomethodological conversation analysis, supplemented by insights from pragmatic analysis of argumentation. The study shows how language use is regulated in interaction, how assessments of opponents' personality or appearance play a major role in the interaction, while at the same time, actual argumentative activities do also occur. The results suggest that a substantial part of the posts should be understood as expressing special interests and meeting local interactional needs, rather than as sustaining a deliberative process. While informative argumentation does contribute to the perceived democratic quality of the debate, there is, however, a tendency for the interaction to degrade into incivility. This tendency is reinforced by specific constraints and affordances of the medium.

KEYWORDS: debate on Facebook; social media; communicative practice; ethnomethodological conversation analysis; argumentation