Framing Video Games and Internet Bullying
on the 'Smarter' Channel of the 'Debating Europe' Platform

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Abstract: The new digital world may propagate old subjects, such violence in and through new media. Violent behavior is a concerning topic for academia, EU institutions and the large public that could be debated on online platforms which take the citizens' questions and comments directly to policy makers for them to respond. 'Debating Europe'[1] is a multi-channel online platform that encourages citizen to debate diverse topics that include violent behavior. Acknowledging that participants could have their own interests, divergent from those of the institution, legitimating or delegitimating the topic, our intention is to observe and analyze through the lens of frame analysis the citizens' communicative practice on the SMARTER channel of the Debating Europe platform and their perceptions and attitudes towards the violent behavior topic in Europe.

Keywords: violence, aggressiveness, Europe, Debating Europe, video games, internet bullying, frames.

1. Context

The phenomenon of violence and how it is expressed is studied by a wide range of conceptual approaches, both theoretical and empirical, within the lens of various disciplinary orientations (Arendt, 1970; Newman, 1979; Gelles, 2000; Reemtsma, 2012). Violence in and through digital media is a concerning topic, increasing in exposure. The magnitude of the topic resides in the EU laws concerning violence. For example, European Council has a strategy on combating

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1 Launched in 2011 by the Brussels-based think tank Friends of Europe and the Europe-wide policy journal Europe's World, in partnership with the European Parliament, Microsoft and Gallup. Retrieved December, 9, 2016 from http://www.debatingeurope.eu/about/.

cyberbulling[1] and there is an EU directive considering unlawful use of internet (Directive 2011/92/UE). Allegedly, the effects of violence in audio-visual media and especially on video games are common in media discourse, despite the fact that recent studies show no connections[2]. Therefore, the intersection of violence and new digital media shows interest of academia (Karatzogianni, 2012; Gosselt et al., 2015), authorities[3] and common people towards various topics covering violence frames.

By appealing to a public sense of reason, open debate on online platforms includes a much larger portion of the population than was possible in previous epochs (De Zuniga, 2015, p. 3155). Taking citizens' "questions, comments and ideas directly to policy makers for them to respond"[4], 'Debating Europe' is a multi-channel online platform, which "encourage a genuine conversation between Europe's politicians and the citizens they serve". Echoing Wodak and Wright's syntagm (2006) of „the future of broad-based participatory democracy", the 'Debating Europe' permits a two-way debate "where the citizens initiate the debate and they put forward their opinions for the politicians and policy-makers to react"[5].

The channel 'SMARTER Europe' of 'Debating Europe' is likely to give an institutional context, focusing on Europe's ability to compete in the global marketplace and "it places education and skills, job creation, completing the internal market, economic growth, industrial change, innovation and digital revolution at the forefront of its agenda"[6].

Building on Karlsson's (2012, p.65) observation about the fact that participants in online discussions on EU forums have their own interests which possibly diverge from those of the institutions, our intention is to observe and analyze citizens' communicative practice on the SMARTER channel of the Debating Europe platform and their perceptions and attitudes related to the violent behavior topic in Europe.

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1 Conclusion of the Council 2009/C62/05 on 27 November 2008. Retrieved November 27, 2016 from http://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/ALL/?uri=OJ%3AC%3A2009%3A062%3ATOC.

2 The American Psychological Association Task Force on violent media resolution on the Technical Report on the Review of the Violent Video Game Literature shows that are insufficient research to link violent video game play to criminal violence (Appelbaum et al., 2015). Retrieved December 9, 2016 from http://www.apa.org/pi/families/review-video-games.pdf.

3 Retrieved December 11, 2016 from http://europa.eu/rapid/press-release_MEMO-09-58_en.htm?locale=en.

4 Retrieved December 9, 2016 from http://www.debatingeurope.eu/about.

5 'Debating Europe' 2013 Report. Retrieved December 9, 2016 from http://www.debatingeurope.eu/hello/.

6 Retrieved December 9, 2016 from http://www.friendsofeurope.org/policy-area/smarter-europe.

2. Analytical Framework

The advantage of using an approach based on framing is that it provides the possibility of building frames on "causal links, moral judgments and selective involvement of actors" (Sommer et al., 2014), all being representative for an online debate.

The notion of frame was introduced by the anthropologist Gregory Bateson (1954) "as a metacommunicative device that set parameters for 'what is going on'"[1]. He showed that interaction always involves interpretative frameworks by which participants define how others' actions and words should be understood. Applied since 1974 by researchers all over the world to compare and analyze the media and its effects, "framing essentially involves selection and salience. To frame is to select some aspects of a perceived reality and make them more salient in a communicating text, in such a way as to promote a particular problem definition, causal interpretation, moral evaluation, and/or treatment recommendation for the item described" (Entman[2], 1993, p. 52) .

Dietram A. Scheufele (1999), in his work about framing as a theory of media effects, synthesized previous researches and created a process model of framing, identifying four key processes that should be addressed in future researches: frame building, frame setting, individual-level processes of framing, and a feedback loop from audiences to journalists. From all, the first process, frame building, predicted that elites, social ideology, news organizational norms, and journalists' individual preferences influence the building of the media frame. To know what is framed means to discover meanings of articles and subjects from the public agenda. Semetko and Valkenburg (2000) identified two methods: the deductive and the inductive. Through the first one, they have noticed the presence of five news frames in press and television: conflict, human interest, economic consequences, morality, and attribution of responsibility.

"A deductive approach involves predefining certain frames as content analytic variables to verify the extent to which these frames occur in the news" (Semetko and Valkenburg, 2000, p. 95), but the main limitation is the fact that the frames are already known and one researcher can only find them or not. The inductive method is the opposite of the deductive one and through it new frames can be revealed.

In this article we will use Teun A. van Dijk's definition of *legitimacy* (2000, p. 255) which implies that the participant to a debate provides "good reasons, grounds or acceptable motivations for past or present action that has been or could be criticized by others". *Delegitimacy* challenges the very existence or identity of

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[1] Cf. Oliver and Johnston, 2000, p.37. Retrieved December 14, 2016 from
file:///C:/Users/rocasveatu/Downloads/13499349.pdf .
2 Cf. Johnson-Cartee, 2005, p. 162.

the other group, downplaying its social position and/ or practices (ibidem, pp. 258-59), inducing resistance in things that people believe is "morally necessary to oppose" (Lamb, 2014, p. V). These two key concepts are not opposing each other in absolute terms, a third option being possible, showing the absence of both legitimacy and delegitimacy: *neutrality* that shows neither support nor opposition.

Robert D. Lamb (2014, pp. 34-44) draws attention to the fact that legitimacy is broadly applicable (it can include government, a position of authority, a corporation, a regime, law, justice, regulation of violence etc. - anything that somebody can judge to be worthy or unworthy of their support or opposition), is multidimensional (is predictable, justifiable, equitable, accessible, respectful), is multilevel (individual believes, group behavior, public attributes), is bilateral (a two-way street), is unobservable (since legitimacy is a worthiness of support, an indicator that measures support can be used as an effect (or proxy) indicator of legitimacy). Therefore, establishing the dimensions of legitimacy and deligitimacy is the key, being outlined by the coding system used for analyzing the corpus.

3. Methodology

We performed a frame analysis on violent behavior included into the debates published on the SMARTER channel of 'Debating Europe' platform, published between 2011 and 2016 as part of 'Debating Europe Schools' series. As criterion of selecting the debates we looked for explicit titles including themes related with violent behavior. We found out two debates related with the topic in interest: "Should cyberbullying be a criminal offence in the EU" (published on the 19th of March 2015) and "Do violent video games make people aggressive" (published on the 18th of June 2015). These led to a corpus that includes two debates' articles and 438 comments (units of analysis) posted by the citizens.

We used a deductive method searching for the following frames: legitimating and de-legitimating of violent behavior through:

(a) norms and values expressed by the citizens as recipients suffering because of violent behavior;

(b) solutions by credit claiming or granting, requesting others to solve the issue, admitting mistakes or blame shifting.

The codes cover legitimation (*L*) and delegitimation (*DL*), being structured towards *individuals* (another speaker is legitimated ('I agree with you') or delegitimated ('I do not agree with you')) and *EU institutions* (are legitimated or delegitimated (blamed for the situation) and it is required to make some decisions or to stop from functioning.

We structured the codes on three main variables:

(a) *micro-group*: participants (a community or a region) directly affected by the debated topic;

(b) *mezzo-group*: participants of a MS country who are directly targeted by the topic;

(c) *macro-groups*: EU citizens not affected directly or EU country which has any affected community or where the topic debated is not directly targeted.

Each of these groups was structured based on type of authority: *recipients* (*Lr* or *DLr*), *communication strategies* (admitting mistakes (*DLs1*), blame shifting (*DLs2*), requesting others (*Ls3 / DLs3*), credit calming (*Ls1*), and credit granting (*LS2*).

QDA Miner 4.1.27 software helped us to rank the primary units of coding (words and syntagms), and to run cluster & co-occurrence analysis for the corpus under study. The current investigation developed word association diagrams based on the Jaccard similarity measure/index that allow extraction of conceptual association around the frames selected. In addition, we looked after references (assessing words, positive or negative association) associated with *violence, aggressiveness,* and *bullying* keywords and the context of using those keywords (before and after words). We have not coded the comments that stated agreement or disagreement with the propose topic by simple "yes" or "no", focusing on that comments that cover explicit opinions that could fit into a frame.

For a better understanding the interaction between the participants on the debate topic, we measured the total number of comments and the type of it and the frequency of publishing.

This analysis allows us to answer to following research questions:
RQ1: How are citizens communicatively involved in the (de)legitimating violent behavior?
RQ2: Which violent behavior frames are most active in the online debate?

4. Findings

Both debates start with questions addressed by students and active citizens on the debating platform, being built up around statistics quoted both in the lead text and in the infographics. The debate about cyberbullying has been posted on the 19th of March, being active by the 17th of December 2015, with 17 active days, gathering 144 comments from 120 participants. The debate on the influence of violence from video games was on between the 18th of June 2015 and the 2nd of June 2016, with 19 active days, gathering 294 comments from 188 of participants.

We noticed that most of the comments are one-way (65% in case of bullying debate and 73% for violence from video games), answering either to the debates' questions ('yes' or 'no'), or showing personal opinions related or not to the topic

("I've played Mario for some time now and everytime a turtle tries to steal a mushroom from me, I kill it. Does that make me violent?", Nuno Ramos, May 30, 2016; "No, and althoght this was the case, the government shouldn´t forbid them. Our freedom comes first.", Guillem Marti Bou, June 18, 2015; "Nobody will be able to control the internet. Never. No authority or state or union. So, STOP TRYING TO MAKE LAWS FOR THE INTERNET BECAUSE NONE WILL EVER CONTROL THIS SPACE. IT S MONEY SPENT IN VANE.", Eugenia Serban, July 28, 2015; "Could make some laws for all the people, sometimes smalls cases make more time like big cases.", Alejandro W Fabicio, March 19, 2015).

It was interesting to find out that, in both cases under analysis, the comments focus rather on macro-groups either at individual and EU institutions level (Figure 1).
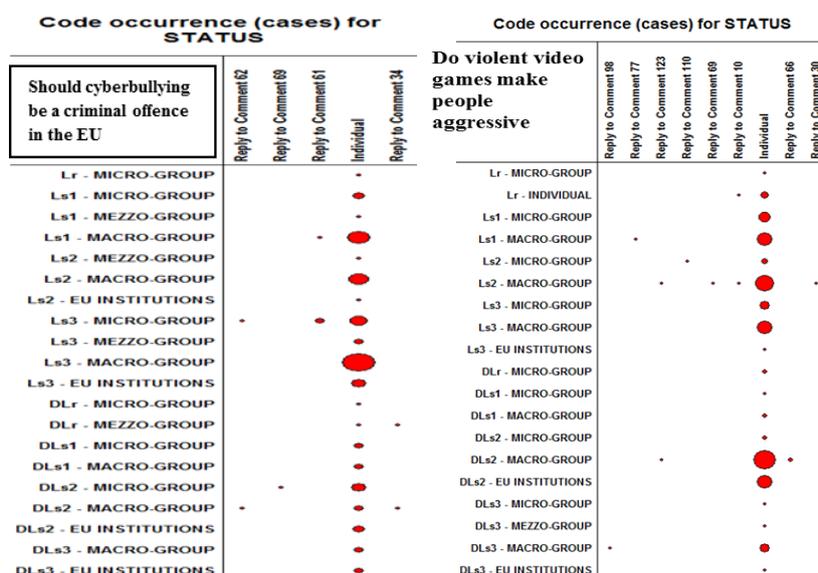
Figure 1. Cross tabulation of code occurrence and post type

In the case of EU institutions one aspect that should be highlighted is the fact that very few comments refer to it, and as expected, in the case of cyberbullying, even the percentage is low (8.3%), some participants consider European Union, European Parliament, or European Commission responsible. In opposition, when legitimating, citizens participating in the debates are not focusing on EU institutions, but rather on individuals and macro-groups. The clusters formed indicate citizens' interest on defining the problem and diagnose the causes and less on prescribing solutions to the problem. For example, in case of video games violence, the Jaccard's coefficient (occurrence) shows that the most frequently

used codes revolve around the *video games, violent people, violence, medium, gaming, social*. The second important cluster is focused on *play* and *young*. Likewise, in the bullying debate, the most important cluster concentrates interests on *bullying, young, people, online*, *parents, children, free, speech, abuse, social, victims.* The second important cluster focuses on *behavior, bully, simple, kids, problem*.

Solutions were given mainly in relationship with micro-groups, such as *kids* and *parents* (i.e.: "The parents should enroll their kids in some activity that'll keep them busy from being online all day long.", Imane Majid, April 19, 2015; "There is a need to educate children, and also parents, about cyberbullying.", João Martins, March 20, 2015).

The keywords were grouped into five clusters based on the association diagram extracted by the used software (see Figure 2 and Figure 3). We have observed that clusters built around the key concepts depicting several common themes to both debates (*violence, people, social, EU*), as well specific ones, such as *play, game*, *religion*, *real, life*, *law, free*.

Figure 2. Distribution of keywords and word association diagram
for the debate on videogame violence

Figure 3. Distribution of keywords and word association diagram
for the debate on bullying

In the case of videogame violence, *violence* is depicted by *aggressiveness* in the context of several keywords that have been found in 111 cases (48.8%): *aggressive; video games; people; play; social; violent; children.* An interesting subtheme, present in 7.8% of cases (18 comments), is *religion and videogame.* This is associated with keywords of the spectrum of *religion; videogames; people; killing; aggressive; violence:* "Religion makes people aggressive. The two worst of them are christianity and islam, two ideologies that have caused more misery, killing, slavery, colonization and oppression of women/gays etc… than all other ideologies combined. People who play video games have likely killed less than 1,000 people in world history. The count for religion is north of 200 million.", Marcel, June 19, 2015; "The irony here is that this whole 'video games make people agressive' meme comes from religious people who obviously forgot the texts of their favorite religious book and the history of their favorite religion. No major religion has ever been about peace apart from peace defined as an absence of opposition to religion.", Marcel, June 18, 2015; "If you want to ban something, ban religion!", Marijus Stasiulis, June 18, 2015.

Assessing the debate on bullying we noticed that *cyberbullying offense* subtheme was most present, covering 41.6% of cases (57 comments), being associated with by keywords, such as: *cyberbullying; offence; Europe; penalty; criminal; young; question; EU; people; European; bullying; age; online.* Another problem pointed by the participants is '*violent behavior* and *crime*' present in 25 comments (18.3% cases), connected with keywords, such as: *behavior; crime; laws; cyber; victims; abuse; social; bullies.*

The recipients of micro-groups identified are mainly *'kids'* and '*parents'* (12.4% of cases) that have this "problem". Debaters consider that both can act

against cyberbullying via education ("With a legal act there should also be an educational action. Kids have make contact with social media early and they are not taught how to protect themselves and, worse, the parents know even less than their own children do. There is a need to educate children, and also parents, about cyberbullying.", João Martins, March 20, 2015; "Parents shouldn't forbid them from using the Internet because that doesn't solve the problem from its roots. Instead, the parents should enroll their kids in some activity that'll keep them busy from being online all day long.", Imane Majid, April 19, 2015.

The participants are split between the ones who support a dedicated law ("it makes all sense to punish it by criminal & civil law !", Carlos Em Lisboa, July 28, 2015) and the ones who are looking for maintaining the free internet ("I don t think we need any more laws. It's already getting complicated as it is. More Laws=More Ministers and Politicians=More Salaries to pay", Manfred Kulemann, March 19, 2015). This sub-theme was present in 11.7% of cases (16 comments), being associated with keywords, such as *law, free, and victim*. On the other hand, debaters consider cyberbullying as an *'offense'* or a *'crime'*, expressing it in 32.9% of cases (45 posts) and associating it with keywords, such as: *behavior; crime; laws; cyber; victims; abuse; social; bullies, offense; abuse; social; matter; penalty* .

6. Conclusions

Despite the fact that topics were proposed by students and active citizens on the debating platform, being built up around statistics quoted both in the lead text and in the infographics, both assessed topics raised moderate interest of citizens active on *Debating Europe* platform with less than 200 participants each. Most of the comments were individual comments (65% in case of bullying debate and 73% for violence from video games) not replying to other comments, answering either to the debates' questions with 'yes' or 'no', or showing personal opinions related or not to the topic.

Findings shows that citizens are legitimating the topics mostly at individual and macro-group level, emphasizing 'aggressiveness' in the case of video games and 'offence', and '*violent behavior* and *crime'* in the case of cyber bullying. When delegitimating, the participants also focused on macro-group. In the case of cyberbullying, an important part of delegitimation was oriented to the EU institutions. Participating citizens to the debates showed interest on defining the problem and diagnosing the causes and less on prescribing solutions to the problem.

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