Abstract
The research seeks to understand how extreme opinions are voiced in the increasingly ‘non-anonymous’ social web. It does so by analyzing Facebook to understand how the platform structures public discussion and the way debate about Zwarte Piet on Facebook might constitute forms of 'new racism,' or more subtle expressions of racial prejudice. This research highlight forms of subtle racism that would not necessarily be reported or 'flagged' and deleted according to Facebook’s rules. A critical discourse analysis has been conducted to analyze how Facebook structures discussion alongside a discursive psychological analysis of user comments from four Facebook pages related to the debate. Although new racism is certainly prevalent in the debate about Zwarte Piet, what is perhaps surprising is the fact that the non-anonymous context doesn’t seem to reduce the amount of blatant racist expressions. In conclusion Facebook seems to have potential to foster public discussion, but it is still up to its users how they use the platform.

KEYWORDS – Online public discussion ● Facebook ● New racism ● Zwarte Piet debate
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Introduction
The Internet has long been seen as a solution to problems of public debate. Since the Internet would for instance bypass mass media, giving voice to the marginalized and erasing cultural difference. The Internet was often referred as a utopian technology (Diakopoulos & Naaman, 2011). Utopian since it would allow people to communicate from beyond their real world boundaries crossing geographic and cultural borders. In theory, people would no longer be limited by where they lived, their gender or race. Creating an anonymous world in which people would be able to attend globally. In this ideal world people would be able to share diverse opinions among large populations over this network, the World Wide Web.

For many years, the web was seen as a space 'separate' from the real world, based on the technical features of the medium. For example, McKenna and Bargh (2005) describe four main differences between communication of the Internet and in real life. First, Internet makes it possible to be anonymous. Secondly, the physical distance doesn’t matter on the Internet. Third, physical appearance and visual cues are not present and finally, time, which becomes immaterial.

Despite the utopian visions, the web's value for public discussion has long been debated, in particular its capacity for anonymity (Johnson, 1997; McKenna & Bargh, 2000; Lee, 2006; Christopherson, 2007). Over time, anonymity came to be seen as a threat to public discourse, in particular because it allowed extreme political views as well as racist and sexist opinions to flourish. Anonymity gives people the opportunity to connect with others whom they wouldn’t be able to reach in their daily life, but a treat of this anonymity is what McKenna and Bargh (2000) call the process of deindividuation. In which users feel freer in posting extreme opinions, because of the anonymous character of the Internet. Eventually, the sense of the Internet as a 'virtual space' declined. Not least because of the perceived threats of anonymity. As many researchers have shown, anonymity lends itself to expressions of extreme political views (Diakopoulos & Naaman, 2011; Hlavach & Freivogel, 2011; Santana, 2014).

More recently, new social media platforms such as Facebook have tried to ensure users use their real identities. This is commercially motivated, as it helps them gather demographic information they can use to sell advertising, but these platforms also argue that this will ensure higher-quality discussion and generally benefit the 'community' (Facebook). But when Facebook introduced the real-name policy to ban anonymity this led to a lot of
controversy. Facebook insisted people to use their birth names on their account, but this caused for problems for people who used different names from the one they were born with, including transgender people and victims of domestic violence who use aliases to hide from their abusers. After a year of controversy Facebook eased the rules on how people can verify their names and changed how people can report fake names, but still remains firmly committed to having verifiable names on Facebook accounts. However recent instances have shown that social media are very much prone to many of the same problems as 'anonymous' spaces. An example of this is the ‘Gamergate’-campaign, which was a hashtag primarily, used on Twitter to address the issues around sexism and misogyny in the gaming culture. This raises questions about how the structure of social media platforms impacts public debate, when anonymity is no longer (or at least less of) a factor. Clearly research on online discourse needs to change as the web has changed, focusing less on the issue of anonymity.

Another issue with much of the literature is that it focuses primarily on overt expressions of extremism (Chen, Thoms, & Fu, 2008; Costello, Hawdon, Batliff, & Grantham, 2016), sexism (Fox & Tang, 2014) and racism (Rajagopal, 2002; Chaudhry, 2015). As important as it is to study such overt expressions, this does not capture more subtle forms. As Van Dijk (1992) argues, in addition to overtly racist discourse we must be attuned to more subtle and convert expressions of racism, which is often referred to as ‘new racism’. In this new racism denial is key and discursive strategies have been developed to express and convert more subtle expressions of racism in talk.

In order to understand how extreme opinions are voiced in the increasingly ‘non-anonymous’ social web, this research looks at public discourse on Facebook. The social network site has been active since 2004 and has since grown to be the most popular social network site in the world with 1.59 billion monthly active users as of December 2015 (Facebook N. ). In this research I will critically study if and in what way Facebook fosters public discussion and furthermore analyze the way public discussion in the comments may constitute new racism. Since on Facebook most posts are a type of text, I will use a discourse analytical approach to analyze the Facebook platform as a whole and discursive psychological approach to analyze comments. I will be looking at the public discussion about Zwarte Piet (Black Pete). The celebration of the Dutch Sinterklaas has been a tradition for years, but in 2013 the discussion about Zwarte Piet, the black face painted servant of

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Sinterklaas, intensified when Quinsy Gario, spoke his mind on the Dutch television talk show Pauw & Witteman. He stated that Zwarte Piet is a racist caricature of black people and shouldn’t be part of the Dutch celebration. Ever since, the discussion has reached new heights (or lows) within Dutch society. Numerous articles have been published about this topic the past years and different groups have gathered themselves on Facebook. I will be looking at two Dutch newspaper Facebook pages and two community Facebook pages. The story that journalists produce not only constructs, but also maintains our shared realities (Carey, 1989). This makes studying the Facebook newspaper pages an interesting social relevant affair. Furthermore, racism or racial divide is prevalent in all aspects of society, but is often very subtle and insidious (DeCuir & Dixson, 2004). Therefore it is interesting to analyze whether the subtle form of racism is prevalent in public debate on Facebook.
Theoretical background

Context matters: Understanding public discussion on the web

Starting from the end of the 20th century, when the Internet started emerging within the general public, there has been a lot of debate about whether CMC is a new form of audience participation and to what extent the use of online technology is an advantage in facilitating audience participation to for instance, creating an online public sphere. Some earlier studies suggest that the medium provides ‘scant social information’, which makes computer-mediated messages ineffective and/or inappropriate in cases where personal exchange is needed (Walther, 1996). CMC was understood as a way to simply transmit information between people. It emerged when computers were linked to one other for security and information redundancy. Operators found that they could also send simple messages to each other as an addition to the transmission of data. From there the notion grew that CMC could be used to coordinate (emergency) tasks among geographically dispersed individuals (Walther, 1996). In the next few years CMC grew from simple relay systems into a new planned application for group communication.

In the early and mid-1990s a lot of optimism is noticeable in the academic field surrounding the web and CMC as it grew as a new way of communication. The Internet was thought to replace the mass media and announce new possibilities for the public sphere in which political participation is accessible to all (Bowman & Willis, 2003). CMC was often compared to face-to-face communication (FtF). The most interesting difference between the two is that unlike FtF communication, CMC is primarily textual. Excluding non-verbal cues regarding gender, age or status (Bordia, 1997). In the virtual world, where people are disembodied, a new virtual community could be established. An ‘online’ world is one constructed by information rather than matter (Donath, 1998). Information in the online network diffuses and spreads. When one node in this network is removed information can take so many alternative routes, which makes the Web extremely flexible (Rheingold, 1993). Barlow (1996), in a widely-circulated manifesto, stated that because in cyberspace matter is irrelevant any legal concept of property, expression, identity, movement and context doesn’t apply to it. For online information there is no protection law. In this intangible virtual community the users are also diffuse and people are free from not only their physical appearance, but also time, money and geographical distance. In 1993, Rheingold expressed his optimism about CMC by introducing the concept of the virtual community. Rheingold
states that because of the virtual community the future of the Web is directly connected to the future of community, democracy, education, science and the intellectual life.

According to Rheingold (1993) CMC has the potential to change people’s lives on three levels: as individual human being, in person-to-person interaction and on the political level. At the individual human being level CMC can affect the way people experience the world by influencing our perceptions, thoughts and personalities. The person-to-person interaction concerns the idea of a community, where a group of people come together to share characteristics and interact. In the virtual community user can interact in essence or effect only (Hill, Stead, Rosenstein, & Furnas, 1995). Thus, CMC can influence the way friendships and relationships happen in people’s lifes and the way communities are built, maintained and constructed. The political significance of CMC could be the most progressive notion, claiming that the virtual world means a return to the idealized public sphere, in which representative democracy by public debate is revitalized. CMC can challenge the current existing political hierarchy where mass media is dominated by few and information and news are commercialized. Citizens’ voices can be heard online and lead the discussions of the news today.

With the new possibilities the Web and CMC offers, comes the idea that journalism is also changing into a way that promotes more active participation rather than passive consumption (Thurman & Hermida, 2010). CMC are being integrated into the online platform which leads to what is referred to as participatory journalism. Participatory journalism captures the idea that journalism is a collaborative and collective practice, where people from inside and outside the newsroom are engaged in communicating not only to, but also with, one another (Singer, et al., 2011). The way audience can participate in news is therefore greater. Once upon a time the only way for the audience to engage in the news was by taking the time and energy in writing a letter to the editorial office. Nowadays everyone, connected to the Internet, can easily get involved with different forms of online participation including comments, discussion forums and user blogs. Along with this are other user-generated content like visual and non-visual reports, reviews and articles supplied by readers.

**Criticism on the hopes and dreams of an online public sphere**

By 2000, this optimism started being criticized. A number of critics argue that online participation through CMC and the virtual community doesn’t necessarily mean a more citizen lead democratic public sphere or participatory journalism. Concerning a democratic
society, in order for it to concede a well-functioning system of free expression people should be exposed to information they would not have chosen in advance and most citizens in a society should have a range of common experiences (Sunstein, 2001). As stated earlier, online information is diffused, and the more information available the more people feel the need to eliminate which they don’t like or disagree with (Donath, 1998). In the virtual world where information is in overload people tend to choose sites or discussion groups that support their own beliefs to deliberate. In these so-called echo chambers, people seek and exclude other (political) perspectives from their universe (Garrett, 2009). This stimulates group polarization, a phenomenon that refers to the idea that whenever like-minded people engage in a discussion with each other, people are more likely to move towards a more extreme viewpoint than which they originally started from (Sunstein, 2001).

Group polarization invalidates the notion that CMC creates new public sphere, which replaces the function of mass media. The media, in this context referring to journalistic work from newspapers, television- and radio broadcasters, has always functioned as a general interest intermediary. The media not only create encounters between citizens and unintended, unplanned information, but furthermore functions as a social glue to create common experiences which makes addressing social problems more possible. Without these two distinctive requirements social fragmentation, extremism and political polarization is inevitable (Sunstein, 2001). The disembodiment of users in a virtual world where written communication is dominant takes away the social context in which something should be interpreted and therefore lacks meaning. This creates a semblance of anonymity and lack of awareness of the social context. Both the anonymity and the text-only communication later have been used to predict that CMC will lack the richness of normal FtF interaction and hence be very task oriented and low in socio-emotional content (Joinson, 2001).

**Anonymity**

With the exponential growth of the use of Internet as a mean of communication, anonymity has reached different interesting dimensions throughout the years. In the early years, online anonymity was often seen as a natural state, whereas offline anonymity requires effort on the part of the individual seeking anonymity (Johnson, 1997). One mentions a dimension in which online anonymity creates a ‘global village’ where everyone is just an individual and traditional social boundaries could be taken down (Postmes, Spears, & Lea, 1998). Another refers to a dimension in which CMC changes the way in which people present the self to
others (Sessions, 2009). Traditionally, anonymity refers to the inability of others to identify an individual or for others to identify one’s self (Christopherson, 2007). Marx (1999) defines this more specific and explains anonymity to a state where a person is not identifiable. When communicating face-to-face both verbal as non-verbal skills are needed, which lack when communicating online. This lack of identifiability, often from both sides in an online environment, allows people to feel more free to express one’s true mind or authentic self-unrestricted of concerns of self-presentation (Joinson, 2001). In the CMC environment there have been two predominate theories posited to better understand how anonymity can affect or predict behavior in CMC: the equalization hypothesis and the social identity model of de-individuation effects (SIDE) theory.

One way in which CMC has the ability to give anonymity to a user is by hiding the physical appearance, the equalization hypothesis focuses upon this idea. In CMC all physical cues are hidden, offering users a new liberate way of being, since physical appearance is an important cue in social interaction. In the academic field, the physical anonymity is hypnotized to positively empower those who traditionally have less power in society, for instance women and members of a minority group (Christopherson, 2007). The equalization theory covers the idea that the Internet offers a more equal playground for every member in the society. Barlow (1996) famously wrote about cyberspace as a world that is free of privilege and prejudice accorded by race, economic power, military force or station of birth, because one leaves behind the body. In this world all that matters is one’s ideas without the fear of being forced into silence or conformity. Anyone could express their beliefs, no matter how singular they might be.

The SIDE theory goes beyond the physical cues for communicating and places more importance on the situational specific variables in a social situation (Christopherson, 2007). Stating that the characteristics of a communication medium interact with characteristics of the social context (Postmes, Spears, & Lea, 1998). This framework argues that there are two components of the effect and use of anonymity in CMC, the cognitive and the strategic. The cognitive component of anonymity focuses on how group dynamics and individual behavior within groups is mediated by anonymity and the strength on an individual’s identification with the group (Christopherson, 2007), which is the ability to influence salient behavior of a particular identity (Postmes, Spears, & Lea, 1998). The strategic dimension refers to the ability afforded by prevailing conditions to express oneself or behave in ways in line with a salient identity (Postmes, Spears, & Lea, 1998). In this case the benefits of anonymity in CMC are intentionally abused, because people create a depersonalized perception of the self.
and others. Online one can create as many electronic personas as time and energy allows (Donath, 1998), providing conditions that contribute to depersonalization. Depersonalization refers to the idea that under conditions where the member is not individuate in the group, inner restraints reduces which can lead to loss of selfhood and hence of control over behavior (Reicher, Spears, & Postmes, 1995).

**Facebook: ‘From authenticity to authentication.’**

Although it was claimed that anonymity is naturally an inevitable part of CMC, the way that anonymity was organized in the 90s and early 2000s and the experience people have nowadays with being anonymous online has changed drastically. Nowadays, there are more means to measure the connection between the online and the offline self, allowing a higher level of authentication. The rise of social network sites (SNSs) and technological innovations are important elements in this change (Sessions, 2009).

Unlike other CMC, in most social network sites the strategy is ensuring people use ‘real names’ and to not only meet or interact with new people, but also far more with people they know offline. Facebook is one of the most popular social network sites. In a survey among college students in the mid-Atlantic an overwhelming of 94,9% of the Facebook users reported using their real names (Tufekci, 2008). SNSs form social communities, where individuals are allowed to share their thoughts, ideas and creativity on the network space (Viswanath, Mislove, Cha, & Gummadi, 2009). Individuals can present themselves, make their (offline) social networks visible and establish or maintain connections with others (Ellison, Steinfield, & Lampe, 2007). Instead of CMC creating possibilities for anonymity, SNS leads to more self- and information disclosure, including a variety of personal information like their name, age, gender and address (Tufekci, 2012) or the sharing of content including photos, videos and messages (Nam Ko, Cheek, Shebab, & Sandhu, 2010). This posting of information online creates a permanent record of users and can in case of abuse by a third party, results in various risks to the users. Risks on the level of privacy, security of personal information, identity abuse and socially, for instance by cyber bullying or stalking (Al Hasib, 2009).

Along with the rise of SNS are related technological innovations, for instance the online application programming interfaces (API) for websites. API’s allows third-party developers to interface with the SNS, access information and media posted with user profiles and build social applications that combines, process and create content which are based on user’
interests (Nam Ko, Cheek, Shebab, & Sandhu, 2010). For the user this means they can easily access applications with content from any other website, which makes use of API, without creating a new account. SNSs are allowing users to export their personal data and expose themselves to third-party web archiving, with website which might have other requirements concerning information maintenance and privacy. Although not every website makes use of API, in a lot of the online interactive features an account is needed to participate in debates. And this account needs to be verified with personal information of the individual. Therefore limiting one’s anonymous online state and demanding authentication. The idea that the Web is an ‘universal’ medium in which social division imposed from the ‘real’ world, as well as internalized boundaries such as social norms, are eliminated, is not necessarily the case (Postmes, Spears, & Lea, 1998). People do not necessarily choose to liberate themselves from social influences, despite that CMC provides the opportunity for this freedom.

CMC used to be primarily anonymous in a way that in most online communication, for instance in chat rooms and forums, users had the possibility to interact using a pseudonym. Although identity cues seemed to be scarce online, they played a key role in virtual communities (Hill, Stead, Rosenstein, & Furnas, 1995). The online identity was mostly constructed by the establishment of their own reputation and the recognition of others (Donath, 1998). It has therefore been assumed that the possibility to hide ones physical appearance and using pseudonyms, to become anonymous positively creates a more equal playground to all, but can also foster negative consequences in which deception is more occurring (Donath, 1998). Deception can easily be managed and is often hard to unravel, especially in an online environment, even with the use of pseudonyms. Deception can occur on purpose by changing one’s identity by stating you belong to another social category, which influences the way others shape their opinion on how to interpret an individual’s motive and behavior or by impersonation where someone claims to be a certain individual. In other cases the deception originates from the hiding of one’s identity, which is a result of the omission of information (Donath, 1998).

Overall what is noticeable when it comes to CMC and in particular when it comes to social network sites is the shift further away from the virtual community, less online anonymity and more authentication of someone’s identity.
The promise of interactivity and participation online

While anonymity has declined, because, among other things, social network sites as Facebook, the same promise of a new public sphere remains attached to the Web. But in the sense optimists believe, interactivity doesn’t necessarily equal interaction and audience participation on the Web. The basis of this new ways of interactivity is Web 2.0. O’Reilly and Battelle (2009) argue that Web 2.0 is all about harnessing collective intelligence, since collective intelligence applications depend on managing, understanding and responding to massive amounts of user-generated data. These new possibilities have its influence on journalism, creating what Abdul-Mageed (2008) refers to as Journalism 2.0. New technologies are used by laypersons with (minimal) web publishing skills in collaborative news making and news analysis. In various studies interactivity is proposed as the key character in new media (Boczkowski & Mitchelstein, 2012). In contrast with traditional journalism, journalism 2.0 fosters freer, more decentralized and more convergent journalistic practices, which is a new step toward user-focused services (Abdul-Mageed, 2011). In his book Briggs (2007) states this as a new spirit within the consummation of journalistic work, in which readers are no longer passive receivers of our messages, they create, share and comment. This encourages the envisioned optimism surrounding CMC in the journalistic practice where a new era in which audiences play a significant role in the editorial policy of news organizations with their opinions and comments, can provide news, build a better relationship with their news organization of choice and new relationships with other readers, leading to a more active public opinion (Fortunati, Raycheva, Harro-Loit, & O'Sullivan, 2005).

Concept of online interactivity

In order to analyze in what way the public discussion has been influenced by interactivity online, this concept needs to be explained. There are various definitions of interactivity and depending on one's scholarly perspective the term can have many different meanings. Originally the concept ‘interactivity’ is derived from the concept of ‘interaction’, which generally means ‘exchange’, ‘interplay’ or ‘mutual influence’ (Jensen, 1998). Jensen (1998) therefore states that, “interactivity is ‘a measure of a media’s potential ability to let the user exert and influence on the content and/or form of the mediated communication.’”. In general three levels of interactivity can be distinguished which represent a lens through which interactivity can be studied; interactivity as a feature, as a process of message exchange or as
something a user perceives after using technology (Lowry, Jenkins, & Guthrie, 2009). CMC has the capacity of enabling high interactivity (Rafaeli & Sudweeks, 1997), within all these different levels. When interactivity is explained in CMC three elements are frequently distinguished: direction of communication, user control and time (McMillan & Hwang, 2002). Direction of communication includes the concepts of responsiveness and exchange. In this case the focus lies upon how the Web enables communication. User control encompasses functions as participation and features as search engines, and examines the ways humans control computers and other media. The concept of time embraces issues such as timely feedback and time required for the information retrieval and is influenced by the speed at which messages can be delivered and at which persons can process messages. In the concept of CMC interactivity, these three elements are central, but often overlap and are interrelated.

This current study grounds the CMC interactivity towards the direction of communication. Once CMC interactivity is placed in the corner of communication, there can be three forms distinguished: two-way communication, reactive communication and fully interactive communication (Rafaeli S., 1988). According to Rafaeli (1988), two-way communication occurs when messages are delivered between both source and receiver. Massey & Levy (1999) refer to this as interpersonal interactivity, which for instance can be the communication between people through online tools such as forums, chatrooms or in this research through the Facebook comment section. Reactive communication takes place when newer placed messages respond to previous ones. Fully interactive communication only occurs when older messages respond to a sequence of previous messages.

**Interactivity and participation**

Even though CMC seems to create various ways of interactivity, online the most and first interactivity that is offered regards human-to-human interactivity (Steensen, 2011). Rafaeli and Sudweeks (1997) state that the extent to which messages relate to each other in a sequence and especially the recount of later messages to earlier messages is interactivity. Liu (2003) developed a scale that measures the interactivity of websites, concluding that one of the most important elements of interactivity is the extent to which it facilitates communication between the people, in other words the users. Thus, in order to speak about interactivity, communication is needed, real interaction. And interaction can be interpreted as the engagement with an interactive feature. Historically, journalism enables one-to-many information spread, whereby interaction with the audience was limited by personal phone
calls, signed letters to the editor (Nielsen, 2014). Nowadays, the interactivity offered by online journalism mostly gives users interactive opportunities in the content contribution by submitting videos or photos, commenting on news stories and participation in discussion forums, but seldom allow participating in the process of filtering and news selection. The power relation between journalists and the audience seems to be, even in online journalism, still in place. Journalists set the agenda and are the gatekeepers, but hardly ever interact directly with audience (Díaz Noci, Domingo, Masip, Lluís Micó, & Ruiz, 2012).

It has been calculated that on the whole only 10% of the Internet users makes use of online interactivity (Fortunati, Raycheva, Harro-Loit, & O'Sullivan, 2005). On the Web a majority of the people tend to be silent and prefer to remain anonymous, ignoring the interactive possibilities. The comment section on Facebook posts is one of these places where interactivity, can lead to engagement, thus interaction, when used by (news) organization. For instance, when news media platforms post their articles on Facebook. But this interaction is mostly between users. Interactivity arises at its best when a number of users participate and when these users repeatedly post comments referring to prior user posts (Weber, 2013). Most users tend to post just one message, which makes it difficult to create a real conversation and debate, but a higher number of different commentators does lead to more total comments on a news article (Díaz Noci, Domingo, Masip, Lluís Micó, & Ruiz, 2012). Brossoie, Roberto, and Barrow (2012) analyzed the reader comments in news stories finding that users reacted more to other users than the issues in the articles. So when studying public debate online, then, one must not buy into the belief that social media turn all readers into active, rational-critical participants.

The comment section
On Facebook, ‘the comment section’ is a standard feature for users to engage with each other and participate. In the recent years, commenting is considered positive from a societal, democratic point of view to stimulate audience participation and interactivity online, but the dynamic of this interactivity within these comment sections does lead to mixed feelings. A democratic society requires freedom of speech, exchange of information, diversity of views and active citizenship (Yardi & Boyd, 2010). But to what extent is the comment section on Facebook creating an online democratic environment where people share information and debate or rather a place overruled by offensive discriminate comments?
Although the Web offers new possibilities concerning audience participation, only a small minority of the citizens actually uses the technologies that facilitate this participation (Thurman & Hermida, 2010). These are often the high-educated young frequent online news users, which are the minority in the society (Bergstörm, 2008). Other users often consider themselves as spectators. Despite this, user comments are generally the most common and popular form of audience participation in Journalism 2.0 (Reich, 2011). The control journalists have on these online comments are far less than within the traditional media platforms. Unlike traditional media platforms comments threads are inclusive spaces, where all comments, unless they do not break explicit rules of participation, are included (Hara, Bonk, & Angeli, 2000). A recent Pew survey from 2010, which analyzed the Internet and mobile phone use of Americans in consuming news, found that 37% of online news users believe that commenting on news stories is an important feature to have. Between 18 and 29 year olds this number increased to 51%. A quarter of the users state that they have contributed comments to online news stories (Diakopoulos & Naaman, 2011). Although it seems limited, to some extend it shows the importance of online commenting.

LeDuff and Cecala (2012) found in their research about audience response and online news stories that most of the time the dialogue and debate that takes place in the comment section didn’t reflect the issues set by the news article. The comment sections on websites provide users the ability to provide feedback or information in the form of textual comments, but often discussions online leads to ‘flame wars’ (Diakopoulos & Naaman, 2011). Flame wars can create a hostile environment that reflects upon the journalistic organization. Insensitive comments are more rule than exception within online communities, but not always welcome (Brossoie, Roberto, & Barrow, 2012). The practices of online news consumers are depended of the contextual matter too. For instance, in news article concerning highly sensitive issues, such as religion and immigration, users tend to express themselves in a more intense and opinionated manner, regularly crossing the border of hate speech (Milioni, Vadratsikas, & Papa, 2012). News events that are controversial, negative and involve the own nation tend to have a high social impact. In case a news event is characterized by a determinable temporal structure more user comments are attracted (Weber, 2013).

Boczkowski and Mitchelstein (2012) analyzed comments during different levels of political activity. During times of national elections, when political activity is heightened, users tend to comment more on political, economic, business and international topics. One could state that this is a logical consequence of the fact that during that time most news articles focus
upon these themes, but in general articles dealing with positive topics tend to even have fewer comments per article (Diakopoulos & Naaman, 2011).

Many online communities are structured around groups of socially similar individuals (Yardi & Boyd, 2010), but since people from different social groups can freely join the online debate of Facebook, the notion that the online participation helps in creating a representative public sphere makes the dynamics of the comments interesting. A potential of this is that people with opposing views can have a rational discussion. Although online commentary is available to all the users of the news websites this does not necessarily contribute to an improved public sphere (Weber, 2013). For a democratic discussion to occur, information and knowledge is needed, but even after reading an article users seem to lack sufficient knowledge about a subject to be able to contribute to the discussion (Brossoie, Roberto, & Barrow, 2012).

Very few users actually use the comment section as a channel to provide original information about reported news (Milioni, Vadratsikas, & Papa, 2012), but the core of thoughtful users that does post information is often driven by their own experience. These users not only offer different perspectives, but also challenge and dismiss socially unaccepted statements with their participation (Brossoie, Roberto, & Barrow, 2012).
**Background**
As discussed so far, the Web started off with a lot of optimism concerning public discussion and audience participation. This optimism was soon criticized since being online not necessarily means a more citizen led democratic public discussion. In addition, the rise of social network sites as Facebook fostered the shift from being online anonymous to more authentication. This research seeks to understand how extreme opinions are voiced in the increasingly ‘non-anonymous’ social web. By looking at the public discussion about Zwarte Piet on Facebook and the ways this discussion constitutes new racism. An overview of how the Zwarte Piet debate developed in The Netherlands is followed by an introduction to the concept of new racism.

**Zwarte Piet debate**
In The Netherlands every year on 5 December there is the celebration of Sinterklaas (Saint Nicholas) with Zwarte Piet (Black Pete). A tradition that is both celebrated by parents and kids, but is especially known as a children’s festivity. In October 2013 this tradition became a hot debated topic when Quinsy Gario went on the Dutch television program Pauw and Witteeman stating that Zwarte Piet is a racist caricature of black people and therefore shouldn’t be part of the celebration anymore. Although this is something that had been questioned more often in earlier years, one month later the discussion exploded even more in the media and on social media, when the United Nations were requested to do an investigation on this topic and investigator Verene Shepherd called the Dutch government’s attention to what she considered the racist traits of the tradition. Ever since then, this debate has been ongoing in the media and social media.

On Facebook, both pro- and anti-Zwarte Piet movements gathered themselves on Facebook pages. The anti-Zwarte Piet movement already had a Facebook page, Zwarte Piet is Racisme launched since 1 July 2011. Pietitie, the biggest pro-Zwarte Piet movement on Facebook, broke records and had more than one million likes in day\(^3\). The Dutch government didn’t get involved for a long time in the issue, stating that this is a celebration of the nation and the government shouldn’t get involved in this.

After research in 2014 different organizations made recommendations that there has to be made changes to the appearance of Zwarte Piet, including the United Nations.

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Traditionally, people paint their faces black, put on red lipstick, golden earrings with an afro-like wig. But during the national entry of Sinterklaas in Gouda in 2014, the traditional Zwarte Piet was replaced or accompanied with a Piet with only soot sweeps or painted in other bright colors.

In the academic field Zwarte Piet origin and the discussion surrounding Zwarte Piet, whether it is a racist caricature or not, has been questioned and researched at different moments in history. The first signs that people publicly made their unease known concerning the role of Zwarte Piet date from the sixties, but historians still can’t seem to adequately explain the origin of Zwarte Piet and the caricature character. There are different theories and ideas about where the dark servant of Sinterklaas comes from (Bijnaar & Maris, 2014). Some state Zwarte Piet was originally a chimney sweep and became black from the soot. Another idea is that he was a Moor who accompanied the Saint from Spain. And even other theories claim he was actually a black devil who got defeated by the Saint and was then forced to do good deeds. Although these theories explain how Zwarte Piet might have become part of Sinterklaas, it doesn’t clarify the whole appearance of the black face, red lips, curly black hair and the golden earrings. One explanation for the appearance of Zwarte Piet comes from art historian Eugenie Boer who claims that Zwarte Piet appearance was inspired by the paintings of the seventeenth and eighteenth century (Helsloot, 2008). In that time there was a trend in the European art where a little black servant is illustrated as an accessory for their wealthy white masters. The black servant was a symbol of wealth and moreover a decorative contrast with the white protagonist. This trend might have been the spark of the first illustration of Zwarte Piet next to Sinterklaas in the first book made by in 1850 by Jan Schenkman (Helsloot, 2009). Although this might seem a justification for the origin of Zwarte Piet, this has never been entirely proven. Anti-Zwarte Piet arguments tend to be based upon this theory, which makes it harder to deny the link between Zwarte Piet as a racist caricature of black people. In the academic field this tension is increasingly being criticized. John Helsloot (2009) raises the question if Zwarte Piet can still be explained to the contemporary Dutch society. His conclusion is that there is no doubt about the racial and racist stereotype in the perception of black people with Zwarte Piet.

**Racism & subtle forms of racism**

In the Zwarte Piet debate, the most important question is whether or not Zwarte Piet is a racist caricature of black people. The interesting thing is that Zwarte Piet is a classic example of racism as we normally understand it, but the debate around it reveals more subtle forms of
prejudice. In this research I will focus on how the Zwarte Piet debate is being discussed on Facebook with the focus on how this may constitute forms of new racism.

The way that racism was constructed before in the public discourse and everyday conversation in times of slavery, segregation, ‘apartheid’, lynching and systematic discrimination, in which blatant forms of prejudice were very common, is very different from how contemporary racism is expressed and constructed. In the most basic form, racism refers to differential treatment due to the perceived racial membership of an individual or group on stereotypic characteristics (Phelan, Link, & Dovidio, 2008) and this can be expressed through stereotypes, prejudice and discrimination. When observed as stereotyping, racist beliefs are viewed as cognition. Racist emotions and attitudes as affect are prejudiced. And discrimination entails the enactment of racist laws, norm and practices as behavior (Quillian, 2006). In this case, racism can be broadly defined, including cognitive, affective state or behavior that advances the differential treatment of individuals or groups due to their racial, ethnic, cultural or religious background (Grigg & Manderson, 2015). There is a consensus that expression of racial, ethnic or religious hatred is a violation of basic human right, but at the same time discursive strategies have been developed to generate subtle and convert expressions of racism, which serve to continuously express, convey, legitimate or indeed conceal and deny negative, mostly ethnic, attitudes (Nelson, 2013). This is problematic, because it defies the widely shared understanding of racism as a blatant, easily recognizable behavior (Essed, 1991). In addition, the subtleness makes the experience ambiguous, because it is often combined with behavior that can be perceived as positive or empowering (Van Laer & Janssens, 2011).

In this new racism denial is a key feature (Van Dijk, 1992). Augoustinos & Every (2007) identified five major strategies that speakers use to avoid being seen to violate prejudice norms and deny racism: positive self and negative other presentation, the denial of prejudice, grounding one’s views as reflecting the external world, discursive deracialisation and liberal arguments for ‘illiberal’ ends. To justify negative views on ‘others’ or the minority out-group, people tend to create a positive self- or in-group-presentation which strategically denies race talk by making a distinction between ‘us and them’ and presenting the in-group as good in contrast to the out-group.

Social interactions are formed, performed and reformed in terms of individuals’ concerns of their own face, as well as for others (Chiang, 2010). In other words to maintain or create a good impression people try to act and speak in such a way that their interlocutors construct an impression of them that is as positive as possible or at least speakers try to avoid
a negative impression or bad face (Van Dijk, Discourse of denial of racism, 1992). Although, it may be assumed that an individual have concerns of a bad face in any situation, they are probably more anxious to avoid a general negative evaluation about their personality than avoid a negative judgment about one particular action in one specific situation (Van Dijk, 1992). Being characterized as ‘a racist’ or even ‘intolerant’ is a negative evaluation of ones personality and therefore face-threatening on an individual level. At the same time, on a social level denial is used as a defense for the in-group as a whole. Hence, when a negative remark is being made about a certain (out)-group they will often start of with a comment like, ‘I/We have nothing against them, but..’. Here is where the denial of prejudice is expressed. People use disclaimers like this to create the idea that one is not talking about a permanent characteristic of the whole group, but puts the focus on some specific members of the out-group or a specific event or action. This creates the idea that there is no link between the particular negative instance and a general impression they might have. In this case, when someone’s negative remark about a group is classified as racist this can be easily denied. After all, the judgment is not about a whole group, but only one certain action or members of this group.

Denial of racism is a communication strategy, which may help to distance speakers from any inference of racism while they manage to communicate a potentially racist remark (Chiang, 2010). The grounding of views as reflecting the external world is a strategy used to present any opinions that could be potentially seen as prejudicial as being grounded in reason and therefor as rational. Prejudice is viewed as irrational and by making an argument attributed with reason, other than race, the speaker appears to be reasonable and rational (Burke & Goodman, 2012). Discursive deracialisation is the way in which references to ‘race’ can be removed from talk that may appear to be about race. Finally the liberal arguments for illiberal ends refers to a strategy in which supposedly liberal ideals, such as treating everyone the same, are used to argue for illiberal actions. An example of this is the use of notions of fairness and equality to argue against affirmative action schemes that are designed to overcome existing inequalities (Augoustinos & Every, 2007). But when it comes to it, it’s the manifestation that makes is subtle, not the effect it has on the individual confronted with it (Van Laer & Janssens, 2011).
Method

Research design
This research is characterized by a qualitative, inductive approach with some deductive features. The analysis for this research is undertaken in two stages. I start with a critical discourse analytical approach to analyze Facebook as a platform and in what way the platform fosters public discussion. In the second part I use a discursive psychological approach to analyze the user comments to examine which forms of new racism can be identified.

Analysis 1 – Critical discourse analysis
In the first stage I will conduct a critical discourse analysis. In the most abstract sense, discourse is an analytical category describing the vast array of meaning-making resources available to us (Fairclough, 2001). A discourse analysis concerns itself with relations of power and inequality in language (Augoustinos & Every, 2007). At this level the alternative term for discourse is *semiosis*, which comprehends words, pictures, symbols, design, color and gesture, in order to distinguish it from the other common sense of ‘discourse’, which is a category for identifying particular ways of representing some aspects of social life (Fairclough, 2001). The critical discourse analysis (CDA) explicitly intends to incorporate social-theoretical insights into discourse analysis and advocates social commitments and interventionism in research (Blommaert & Bulcaen, 2000).

Language and discourse are constituted by broad patterns of sense-making practices that shape and furnish our understanding of the world. CDA states that discourse is both socially constitutive as socially conditioned and is a form of social practice. The aim of a CDA is to make the relationship between a particular discursive event and all the diverse elements of the situation(s), institution(s) and social structure(s) that frame it more visible and transparent (Blommaert & Bulcaen, 2000). In the first stage this means examining the Facebook platform on different levels with a focus on particular discursive strategies that have the potential to harbor ideological meaning and the way it enables public discussion on the web.

To understand the kinds of discussion and debate afforded by Facebook's platform, the critical discourse analysis in this research has several levels. First, I will analyze Facebook's general efforts to structure discussion by examining the Facebook’s Community Standards. Second, I will analyze the discursive structure of the four Facebook pages. Third, I will look at the interactivity of the Facebook comment section and focus on the way the users
are able to communicate within the commentary section, which depends on the interactive features offered by Facebook. This allows a better understanding of how interactive Facebook is and to what extent it facilitates communication between people and how this influences the debate. At last I will be looking at the Facebook posts. Here I will focus on the way each page presents their post to the Facebook users and if the way the posts are presented foster public discussion.

**Analysis 2 – Discursive psychological analysis**

The second stage of this research is an analysis of the user comments. And the main question is in what way forms of new racism, with the focus on denial of prejudice, is structured in the discussion about Zwarte Piet on Facebook. In the discursive psychological approach the focus lies upon the action orientation of talk. This means focusing on what is accomplished in the interaction by what is said, rather than focusing on what this tells us about the speaker’s internal cognition (Goodman & Burke, 2010).

Three strategies were identified as common features when denying racism in the Zwarte Piet debate: (1) statements claiming that Zwarte Piet is not equivalent to black people (2) statements claiming it’s a celebration for the children (3) statements claiming it’s a tradition. By analyzing patterns of talk about Zwarte Piet in the user comments on Facebook both the interpretative repertoires as discursive resources that perform social actions such as blaming, justifying, rationalizing and constructing particular social identities for speakers and those who are positioned as other can be uncovered. The interpretative repertoires can be explained as a set of descriptions, arguments and accounts that are recurrently used in people’s talk to construct versions of the world (Augoustinos & Every, 2007).

The interpretative repertoires in this research are based on the five strategies Augoustinos and Every (2007) identified that speakers use to avoid being seen to violate prejudice norms and deny racism. These strategies include: (1) positive self and negative other presentation (2) Denial of prejudice (3) Grounding one’s view as reflecting the external (4) Discursive deracialisation (5) Liberal arguments for illiberal actions.

As this analysis specifically focuses on the ways in which ‘new racism’ are explicitly constructed and managed, extracts were chosen based on explicit arguments in which these concepts are noticeable. Therefore, the extracts featured in this research all contain explicit references to and include arguments about ‘denial of racism’ or ‘prejudice’. This doesn’t mean that the extract that aren’t mentioned definitely don’t contain any of these features, but
only that the analysis gives attention to those examples where participants in the debate specifically make this the topic. Furthermore all the extracts are reproduced as they were presented on Facebook, including grammar and spelling errors.

**Selection of news event and timeframe**

On 15\textsuperscript{th} November 2014 Sinterklaas and Zwarte Piet arrived in Gouda (The Netherlands) again for the yearly celebration, but in that year things went different. As explained earlier, Zwarte Piet became a hot debated topic throughout the year after Quincy Gario spoke out on a the Dutch television program Pauw & Witteman in 2013. During the national entry of Sinterklaas and Zwarte Piet in 2014, activist group Kick Out Zwarte Piet organized a big protest. This protest got out of hand and as many as 90 demonstrators were arrested. This was certainly a highlight in the debate around Zwarte Piet and a lot was written by media and people were constantly talking about this. For this reason, I only selected the Facebook posts from the pages about the arrival of Sinterklaas and Zwarte Piet in 2014. The posts

**Selection of Facebook pages**

For the analysis I selected four Facebook pages to analyze: Pietitie, Zwarte Piet is Racisme (ZPR), De Volkskrant and De Telegraaf. Pietitie and ZPR are both community Facebook pages and De Volkskrant and De Telegraaf are news/media Facebook pages.

Pietitie is a Facebook community page, which present itself as an anti-Zwarte Piet page. Zwarte Piet is Racisme is a pro-Zwarte Piet community page. I selected these pages, because they are biggest pages with strong views concerning the Zwarte Piet debate on Facebook. Pietitie has the most likes with more than 1.800.000 likes and ZPR has over 16.000 likes.

The selection of the two news/media Facebook pages is based on their circulation figures. De Telegraaf is the biggest newspaper in The Netherlands with more than 450.000 newspaper distributed and De Volkskrant has more than 220.000 newspaper distributed in 2014\textsuperscript{4}. Beside the numbers, I choose these newspapers because De Volkskrant is known as a high quality newspaper and De Telegraaf is known as a popular newspaper (Bakker & Scholten, 2011). De Telegraaf has a total of over 284.000 likes and De Volkskrant over 146.000 likes.

\footnote{Numbers are gathered from HOI (Dutch Institute for Media Auditing) - \url{http://www.hoi-online.nl}}

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Selection of the Facebook posts
As stated earlier, I put the focus on the entrance of Sinterklaas and Zwarte Piet in Gouda in 2014. Based on this I also selected the Facebook posts. I selected two posts from every Facebook page. Since on both news/media Facebook pages they displayed only two posts on their Facebook pages about the entrance of Sinterklaas and Zwarte Piet I used that as my criteria for ZPR. Pietitie didn’t post anything particular about the entrance of Sinterklaas in Gouda. That is why I selected the first two posts they posted from 15 November 2014, the day Sinterklaas and Zwarte Piet arrived in Gouda.

The comments I analyzed were only from the posts I selected. From De Volkskrant I collected the least comments a total of 151, from De Telegraaf I collected over 4700 comments, from ZPR I collected 810 comments and Pietitie was good for 1525 comments.

All the posts from the Facebook pages were content which were in the public domain, readable for everyone and anyone with a Facebook account can post a comment. When Facebook users like the page they receive automatic updates in their ‘newsfeeds’. An overview of the selected post can be found in the appendix.

Reflection and limitations
The method outlined here was selected, as it was best suited to an exploratory case study of this kind. This research is qualitative, which means it does not result in general findings. The reason why the qualitative design is most useful instead of quantitative methods is that it allows you to identify issues from the perspective of the study participants and understand the meanings and interpretation that they give to behavior, event and objects (Hennink, Hutter, & Bailey, 2010). In this research I am interested in understanding the kinds of discussion and debate afforded by Facebook’s platform and the presence or absence of new racism, without imposing any ‘a prior’ categories to the data. Instead the aim is to build theory around a new object of study, which in this research is ‘new racism’ within a non-anonymous social media context. This is also reflected in the inductive approach.

However, the downside of using qualitative research is that selection bias occurs, because of the small numbers (Creswell, 2013). Although there is all lot of data to look at, I am only interested in the comments in the discussion that somehow reflect subtle forms of prejudice and new racism. As a result there can’t be any general conclusion made.

Other limitations are related to the representativeness of the case study, which in this case is specific to the Dutch context. To help ensure the reliability of the results, I have
included examples and did preliminary coding. However, since qualitative research is always subjective, the results should be approached with this in mind.
Critical Discourse Analysis

Facebook’s effort to structure discussion

In 2004 Facebook was first launched by Mark Zuckerberg as an interactive and online version of the paper-based Facebook’s, which were spread around Harvard. The idea of this digital Facebook was for people to see who they shared classes with, find more information about other students and develop new friendships (Raynes-Goldie, 2012). The years that followed Facebook developed more and more as a service available to facilitating social interactions for anyone and everyone. In an interview with Time in 2007, Zuckerberg stated that his intention with Facebook was to ‘make it really efficient for people to communicate, get information and share information’ (Locke, 2007). Facebook forms a social community, where individuals are allowed to share their thoughts, ideas and creativity on the network space (Viswanath, Mislove, Cha, & Gummadi, 2009).

In the debate surrounding the Web and a new public sphere, Facebook has often been questioned for this matter. To some extent Facebook has characteristics of the virtual community Rheingold (1993) introduced, since the social network creates a community where individuals can participate, communicate and interact with each other, present themselves and is open to public debate. Facebook members have their own profile page and newsfeed. Users can add other users to make them part of their online social network, which are the Facebook friends. On the newsfeed a user can post a status update to share ‘what’s on their mind’, photos or videos and life events. Facebook friends communicate by either posting a message on the Facebook page, commenting on a Facebook post or via a private message. The ‘like’ button stimulates interaction between Facebook friends. This new opportunities on Facebook seems to capture the first optimism which where expressed when computer mediated communication emerged. The idea that CMC is a new way of audience participation and the use of online technology is an advantage in facilitating audience participation to for instance, creating an online public sphere.

To further understand Facebook’s general efforts to structure discussion I examined Facebook’s Community Standards and analyzed in what way the platform fosters public discussion. The Community Standards Facebook starts off with stating their mission:

Our mission is to give people the power to share and make the world more open and connected. Every day, people come to Facebook to share their stories, see the world through the eyes of others and connect with friends and causes. The conversations that happen on Facebook reflect the diversity of a community of more than one billion people - (Community Standards)
In the introduction of the Community Standards Facebook introduces itself as a platform, which to some extent has features of the virtual community. Rheingold (1993) states that CMC has the potential to changes peoples live on three levels. On the individual human being level, Facebook touches upon the idea that the platform affects the way people experience the world, by stating that people come to Facebook to ‘see the world through the eyes of others’. Facebook states that the platform is to ‘share their stories’ and ‘connect with friends and causes’, which Rheingold (1993) identified as the person-to-person interaction level, which concerns the idea of a community, where a group of people comes together to share characteristics and interact. Furthermore, Facebook states that ‘The conversation that happen on Facebook reflect the diversity of a community of more than one billion people’, which is in line with the political level Rheingold (1993) introduces. Since on the political level it is claimed that the virtual world means a return to the idealized public sphere, in which representative democracy by public debate is revitalized. To some extent this supports the idea of a virtual community, since people’s voices can be heard and discussion can be held between the users.

But reading more in depth on the policies the virtual community can be questioned and the criticism scholars have have can be more identified. The Community Standards continue with four main policies. One of the policies concerns ‘Encouraging respectful behavior’:

People use Facebook to share their experiences and to raise awareness about issues that are important to them. This means that you may encounter opinions that are different from yours, which we believe can lead to important conversations about difficult topics. To help balance the needs, safety, and interests of a diverse community, however, we may remove certain kinds of sensitive content or limit the audience that sees it. Learn more about how we do that here (Community Standards).

Although Facebook is open to anyone to join and to share content, this has limitations. In case it doesn’t fit the Community Standards, Facebook can remove posts or ‘limit the audience that sees it’. Users who feel like a post isn’t in line with the Community Standards can report the post, which then will be reviewed by Facebook’s team. In the policies this is even specified by stating: ‘As with all of our standards, we rely on our community to report this content to us.’ Referring to any content that might not be in line with the policies. Thus the freedom of information is limited, since it always has to be in line with the Community Standards. And therefore the claims by Barlow (1996) stating that there is no protection law on online information is also not fully the case on Facebook. Facebook does seem to be
aware that discussions occur on the platform and encourages it by stating that, ‘we believe can lead to important conversations about topics’.

Facebook is often used by people to meet and interact with people they already know offline. That might enable conversation, but is not utopian or necessarily egalitarian. As stated in the policies ‘people use Facebook to share their experiences and to raise awareness about issues that are important to them’. The amount of information people receive through Facebook may also be limited for this reason. In order for a democratic society to concede a well-functioning system of free expression people should be exposed to information they would not have chosen in advance and most citizens should have a range of common experiences (Sunstein, 2001), but when information is shared between only Facebook friends this might be hampered.

The Community Standards also focus on ‘Hate speech’ and Facebook tries keeping control of the discussions that are being held, by stating that ‘Facebook removes hate speech, which includes content that directly attacks people based on their: race, ethnicity, national origin, religious affiliation, sexual orientation, sex, gender, or gender identity or serious disabilities or diseases (Community Standards)’. This means that any comment that might include any of these hate speech can be reported by its users to Facebook. While Facebook tries to remove any hate speech, they also give its users five tools to avoid distasteful or offensive content. These tools include: sending a message to the person responsible for posting, unfriending the person to remove them from your friend list, block the person from contacting you, report the person from contacting you or use privacy settings (Help Center, 2016). With these tools Facebook gives its users control of what they see on their newsfeed and again this limits the amount of information people receive and creating echo-chambers, because people can seek and exclude other political perspectives from their own believes (Garrett, 2009).

Furthermore it seems that Facebook is aware of the discussions that can be held on the platform by stating the following:

People can use Facebook to challenge ideas, institutions, and practices. Such discussion can promote debate and greater understanding. Sometimes people share content containing someone else's hate speech for the purpose of raising awareness or educating others about that hate speech. When this is the case, we expect people to clearly indicate their purpose, which helps us better understand why they shared that content (Community Standards).
The idea that online people are disembodied from the non-verbal cues as gender, age or status and freed from their physical appearances is also not the case on Facebook. In their policies Facebook focuses on the authentication of people’s identity by stating the following:

Using Your Authentic Identity: How Facebook’s real name requirement creates a safer environment. People connect on Facebook using their authentic identities. When people stand behind their opinions and actions with their authentic name and reputation, our community is more accountable. If we discover that you have multiple personal profiles, we may ask you to close the additional profiles. We also remove any profiles that impersonate other people (Community Standards).

This is a shift even further away from the virtual community, because the authentication requirements on Facebook create fewer abilities to be anonymous online.

**Discursive structure of Facebook pages**

Although Facebook started as a platform connecting individuals in 2006 this changed when Facebook opened its registration process for organizations (Caers, De Feyter, De Couck, Stough, Vigna, & Du Bois, 2013). Organizations were able to create a Facebook page, which offer a way of promoting activities and hosting a discussion between different Facebook users (Davis, 2008).

Zwarte Piet is Racisme (ZPR), Pietitie, De Volkskrant and De Telegraaf are examples of Facebook pages. These Facebook pages are open to the wider Internet and both Facebook members and non-members can display these pages. Facebook pages can be ‘liked’ by Facebook members and therefore create a ‘fan’ base. These pages also have a newsfeed where the administrator can publish posts, which will be visible in the newsfeeds of the users who have liked the page. A Facebook page offers a long-term public record of the dialogue and engagement from people over the longer term (Davis, 2008).

Every Facebook page can give a heading to specify what kind of page it is. De Volkskrant and De Telegraaf are specified as ‘News/Media website’ and Zwarte Piet is Racisme (ZPR) and Pietitie are both specified as ‘Community’ pages. This immediately creates a different expectation for the users. De Volkskrant and De Telegraaf refer more to the idea that the Facebook page is an extension of their own website. ZPR and Pietitie specified their page as a community, which is open to anyone and people who support the
ideas can like the page. One could state that this supports the idea of echo chambers. As explained earlier, this refers to the idea that people tend to choose sites or discussions that already match their opinion and therefore exclude other (political) perspective from their universe (Garrett, 2009). Since people who support the group will like the page and therefore built a fan base of people with matching opinions. And in this case the idea that a new public sphere is being created online is invalid.

The description box is also an interesting point to look at. Facebook pages can fill in a long and short description. The short description box is directly visible on the front page, the long description can be found under the heading ‘about’. De Volkskrant describes the page in the short description as the official page of De Volkskrant that provides a selection of the articles. The long description box discloses a few sentences, in which they explain that comments are appreciated, only if the comments aren’t offensive, discriminatory or abusive. De Volkskrant editors reserve the right to delete comments. On the other hand De Telegraaf invites everyone to join the discussion in the short description box. And in the long description box De Telegraaf wrote an extensive list of 17 house rules users should comply with in their comments. These house rules describe far more detailed what isn’t allowed. This includes basic rules such as no discrimination, insulting or infringement of the law. But also goes more into detail on the content of the comments by stating that comments shouldn’t be longer than 500 words, consist of only capital letters, written in a foreign language and consist of too many grammatical or linguistic mistakes. Again when these house rules are violated, the editors can delete the comment. Both ZPR and Pietitie don’t explicitly invite the users to leave a comment. The pages explain in the description box what they stand for. Pietitie only filled in the short description box and explain that the page is against the abolition of the Sinterklaas celebration and that they want to gather as many likes before it is too late. ZPR started a campaign and the main goal is to create a Sinterklaas celebration which includes everyone, and without the racist aftertaste or exclusion. These two pages clearly have a very different goal and view on the Sinterklaas celebration. Many online communities are structured around groups of socially similar individuals (Yardi & Boyd, 2010). It is only logical that Facebook users who like Pietitie most likely won’t like the page ZPR, because of their opposing views. This makes it more difficult for people with opposing views to have a (rational) discussion, but since people from different social groups can post a comment on a Facebook post, as long as they are logged into their account, this supports the potential of people with opposing views having a (rational) discussion. Users can respond directly to other user comments, creating different layers within the comment section.
Interaction in Facebook comments

Below a Facebook post Facebook users have the possibility to leave a comment. The comments can be arranged by ‘top comments’, ‘most recent’ or ‘top comments (unfiltered)’. When you click on them Facebook gives a short description of these options. Comments that are arranged by most recent means the newest comments and comments with newest replies go to the top. When arranged by ‘top comments (unfiltered)’, all comments, including spam and comments in other languages, with most relevant comment are put on top. The preset for the comments is ‘top comments’ and means that the most relevant comments appear on top. But what does most relevant mean? If you look at the comments the comments with the most likes and the most replies are on top. So Facebook has preset that the most relevant comments are comments users are more actively involved. There is a possibility for two-way communication, since users can respond directly to other user comments, creating different layers within the comment section. The response can be made immediately and every time someone responds to a comment you have written Facebook will send you a notification of this, which stimulates the interaction. These notifications can also be turned off. An example of this can be found on all four Facebook pages.

Another interesting point is the interaction by the Facebook page admins. On Pietitie and especially on ZPR the admins get themselves involved in the conversation. They actively reply to the users and enter the public debate actively and keep the debate going. On both news/media pages De Telegraaf and De Volkskrant, this doesn’t happen. The only engagement on the news/media pages would be the deletion of comments, which are not in line with the guidelines.

Facebook post: News/Media Website vs. Community

Although the pages have the same layout, every page can present their posts differently, by choosing to add a photo, video, a link to websites or only text. In this research I will only focus on the 2 posts I selected for this research from each page.

De Volkskrant and De Telegraaf both post articles on their Facebook page with a short description, mostly the first few sentences of the article. Users can click on them which will directly send them to the official newspaper website to read the full article. Of course, users can comment on the post, but nothing in the post necessarily invites the users to do so. ZPR and Pietitie use their platform in a different way. Based on the two selected posts these
pages want to create awareness and mobilize the followers. In the post of 15 November 2014 from Pietitie they request people to take a picture of Zwarte Piet and post this in the comment section. Among all entries they will raffle a personal video of Sinterklaas. The idea behind it is to show what the celebration of Sinterklaas, including Zwarte Piet, is really about: FUN for the children. With this request they not only get people involved, but also make a clear statement regarding the Zwarte Piet debate. In the post the word ‘FUN’ is written in capitals, which puts more emphases on the statement. On the post of 18 November Pietitie invites everyone to sign a petition to keep Zwarte Piet black. In both posts Pietitie assumes that the readers of their post agree with their opinion. Nothing in the post in particular invites readers to debate about Zwarte Piet.

On ZPR page the two posts are very different too. The post of 15 November 2014 is presented similar as on De Volkskrant and De Telegraaf with a link to an article of the Dutch newspaper website AD. The difference is that they selected a particular sentence of the article, which makes a statement in favor of the anti-Zwarte Piet movement. This is about how the anti-Zwarte Piet protestors were standing still with banners and were being yelled at by pro-Zwarte Piet protestors during the entrance of Sinterklaas. The second post, which was published on 17 November 2014 on their Facebook page, was text with a YouTube video. The text discloses how one of the protesters got arrested during the protest, which is also shown in the video.

Although these posts are posted on a certain page, they have a much bigger reach than only the people who have liked the page. Posts on Facebook can be shared and anyone with a Facebook account can share a public post. Depending on the settings a post can be shared public, only with friends, send in a private message or any other customized share. The numbers of shares on a post vary incredibly on each page. Pietitie has the most shares on their Facebook posts. The post posted on 18 November 2014 has a many as 2069 shares. The post of 15 November 2014 had 191 shares. Followed by De Telegraaf, both posts are posted on 15 November 2014 and received 804 and 1098 shares. Meanwhile ZPR and De Volkskrant didn’t pass the 100 shares. ZPR had 59 shares on the post of 15 November 2014 and 60 shares on the post of 17 November 2014.

Overall, when we look at the Facebook platform, it can foster public discussion in different ways, but the promises of a new online public sphere in which the audience actively participate and interact, isn’t necessarily what Facebook is used for. It’s still up to its users what they use the platform for.
Discursive psychological analysis

The critical discourse analysis shows that Facebook does have features that might foster public discussion, but it is still up to its users what they do with it. In this part of the analysis I will be looking at how discussion on Facebook take place focusing on the debate about Zwarte Piet and if forms of new racism can be identified. In the debate about Zwarte Piet the most important question revolves around whether or not Zwarte Piet is a racist caricature of black people. In this debate a lot of different arguments are made. I will focus on some of the discursive strategies people use in this debate and discuss how they can be understood in relation to new racism.

New racism refers to a subtle form of racism in which denial is key. Based on the five strategies that speakers may use to avoid being seen to violate prejudice norms and deny identified by Augoustinos & Every (2007) I will analyze comments from the Facebook pages. These strategies include: (1) positive self and negative other presentation (2) the denial of prejudice (3) grounding one’s views as reflecting the external world (4) discursive deracialisation and (5) liberal arguments for ‘illiberal’ ends.

In the discussion on Facebook comments of people who don’t agree with the claims that Zwarte Piet is racist or stands for a racist portrayal of black people consists of strongly criticizing these accusations by arguing that Zwarte Piet has nothing to do with racism. Within this strategy three categories can be distinguished: (1) statements claiming that Zwarte Piet is not equivalent to black people (2) statements claiming it’s a celebration for the children (3) statements claiming it’s Dutch culture and tradition.

**Argument 1: Zwarte Piet is not black**

The argument that Zwarte Piet is not equivalent to black people is an argument that is often used in the debate around Zwarte Piet. A few of the comments with that argument are lined out here, with the focus on comments that may constitute forms of new racism.

*Extract: De Volkskrant, 16 November 2014*
This extract begins by directly addressing ‘Alcazar’ to make clear to whom this post is directed to. The commenter takes reasoning as the main issue and implies that that’s what goes wrong when arguing that Zwarte Piet is racist. At first the commenter explains that although Zwarte Piet may be called black, he isn’t of the black race. She repeats this denial in the next sentence by pointing out that it is assumed that Zwarte Piet depicts the black race, but this isn’t true. So any argument that presents Zwarte Piet and black people as being the same is automatically being down played. The writer down plays this further by calling the whole discussion ridiculous and stating that it’s a non-existing, fantasy caricature, which have been around for ages. This post demonstrates that by presenting her opinion as fact the writer appears rational and not prejudiced (Burke & Goodman, 2012).

Some commenters say that it’s pathetic that people identify themselves with a fairytale character.

Extract: Zwarte Piet is Racisme, 17 November 2014

This comment responds to the video ZPR posted where the police is holding one of the protestors to the ground to arrest him. He not only calls it pathetic that the protestors are
screaming, but also mentions that it’s pathetic if you identify with a fairytale and placing yourself as a victim at the expense of children. This is what is creating more extreme right wing ideas. He ends by asking, how many of them have actually been a slave. This comment indicates that racism is not part of society and if it is, that is because of how the anti-Zwarte Piet movement present themselves. Meanwhile the commenter is making subtle insults by comparing the protester to a Piet by calling the protester an ‘overreacting’-Piet. Although the commenter doesn’t express any blatant forms of prejudice, he uses the discursive strategy of denial.

**Argument 2: It’s for the children!**
Some participants argue that it is a celebration for the children and that racism isn’t even the question, because of the children.

*Extract: Pietitie, 15 November 2014*

Jennifer Boes Hammer En het is een kinderfeest....afblijven dus. De volwassenen maken er ineens een probleem van wat er nooit is geweest.
Kinderen worden geen racist door dit geweldige feest.
See Translation
Like · Reply · 6 · November 16, 2014 at 8:46am

This commenter states that it’s a children’s celebration and shouldn’t be touched. Suddenly adults are making it a problem, which has never been before and that children don’t become racist because of this ‘great’ celebration.

*Extract: De Telegraaf, 15 November 2014*
In this comment the writer starts of by stating if this is what the anti-Zwarte Piet opponents want, ruining a children’s party. The writer explicitly puts the focus on the children by stating that by invading the entrance of Sinterklaas the anti-Zwarte Piet movement overlooks the children and in her opinion that’s what creates racism against people. By doing so this writer is grounding one’s view in reason by putting the focus on the children. The children don’t understand racism and this celebration is for the children, they shouldn’t be involved in the argument. Particularly, not on the ‘big’ day when Sinterklaas and Zwarte Piet arrive in The Netherlands. Whether it’s Zwarte Piet is racist or not, the adults shouldn’t involve the children in their debate by protesting while children are there.

Others go even further, by stating that anyone who doesn’t agree with Zwarte Piet shouldn’t come and live in The Netherlands. Since Zwarte Piet is for the children.

*Extract: Pietitie, 15 November 2014*

In this post the writer talks about how the ‘adult colored people’ are making a problem of the celebration. The writer declares that when people come and live in the Netherlands they
should adjust and if The Netherlands were really racist colored people wouldn’t come live here. By making this remark the writer is downplaying and denying any issues with racism.

Some go even further and state that it’s pathetic to ruin a children’s celebration.

Others express their displeasure by stating that because of the anti-Zwarte Piet protest during the entrance of Sinterklaas, the opponents not only ruined it for the children, but also ruined it for themselves.

Extract: Pietitie, 18 November 2014

Another interesting way of talk in this comment is that the commenter specifically appoints that he is not racist. He is a father of two young children and wants his children to be as mesmerized about Sinterklaas and Zwarte Piet as he used to be. As explained earlier, in any social interaction concerns over your own face is what forms, performs or reforms the interaction. And by first making the disclaimer that he is not a racist and further creating a image of what kind of person he is, the commenter hedges himself from the idea that because he prefers to keep Zwarte Piet black as it is, that he is racist. This is the key of denial of prejudice.

Argument 3: It’s Dutch culture and tradition
Another argument often made in the discussion is that Zwarte Piet should stay black, because it’s a tradition and part of the Dutch culture.

Extract: De Telegraaf, 15 November 2014
In this post the commenter states that if you aren’t satisfied with ‘our’ tradition, then you should go back, to the country you came from. By saying this, the commenter assumes that whoever is against the traditional Zwarte Piet isn’t a Dutch native. He strategically denies race talk by making a distinction between ‘us’ and ‘them’, without mentioning a certain race or ethnicity.

Other commenters state that the discussion isn’t about Zwarte Piet, but about adjusting the Dutch tradition.

*Extract: Pietiteit, 15 November 2015*

This commenter takes the discussion away of Zwarte Piet by illustrating that the issue isn’t about the color, but about a group of 100 people who want to change the tradition. He further illustrates that ‘we’ should be careful, otherwise more of these things changes will happen. This commenter removes any talks about race from this issue to makes his point.

*Extract: Pietiteit, 15 November 2014*
This commenter says that Zwarte Piet should always stay, because the commenter has known it for more than 75 years. The word ZWART (= black) is written in capital letters, putting the focus on that word.

Some commenters use the different arguments together to make their statement.

*Extract: De Volkskrant, 16 November 2014.*

This commenter states that is has been a tradition for years, without discrimination and now all over sudden this has changed. It’s a children’s celebration without rules or discrimination. In this comment the commenter uses the argument of and at the same time denying that it has anything to do with discrimination.

**Simply racist?**

While analyzing the comments, I noticed that a lot of the comments weren’t very subtle in the way they voiced their opinion. Comments stating that, who doesn’t agree with Zwarte Piet should ‘go back to where they came from’ and many more comments passed while scrolling to the comments. In this debate somehow there doesn’t seem to be room for understanding, causing users to be extremely harsh in the way they express their opinions and even simply racist. They way the debate developed, there is a big divide between the pro- and anti-Zwarte Piet movements. There doesn’t seem to be a middle way. You are either totally for Zwarte Piet or fully against. And it seems that, that has influence on the way people express their opinions about Zwarte Piet in the debate. Of course, one has to take in account that probably a lot of the extreme comments had been reported and deleted already before I could see them.
Conclusion and discussion

In the early stages, the rise of CMC went along with a lot of optimism in the academic field. Researchers expressed this optimism in discussing new ways for audience participation, which would lead to a more democratic public sphere. Online everyone would have the natural state of being anonymous, allowing everyone to join the public debate freely and is open to everyone and all participants voice can be equally heard. But these ideas were soon criticized, since being online not necessarily means being anonymous and interactivity not interaction and more online debate not quality. Before one can speak of active audience participation or an online public sphere more is needed. In 2004 when Facebook was launched this idea became even more prevalent. A shift from, what we can call, authenticity to authentication. Facebook has the policy that people use their real names, removing the anonymous feature of the Internet and taking away the hopes and dreams of a democratic public sphere in which for instance race wouldn’t matter, but that doesn’t mean public discussion isn’t possible. In this research the focus lies up how extreme opinions are voiced in the increasingly ‘non-anonymous’ social web. I first analyzed Facebook as a platform to examine in what way Facebook fosters public discussion. I analyzed the Facebook platform on different levels to come to a conclusion about this question.

When it comes the Facebook platform, it has some characteristics of a virtual community in which individuals are allowed to share their thoughts, ideas and creativity, but Facebook is mostly a social network site where people interact with people they already know offline. So even though it might seem like there is a public opportunity to debate, most people are more likely to share things about themselves to people they already know. The Community Standards

The Facebook pages to some extent are a virtual community, but not the virtual community Rheingold (1993) refers to. The pages are open to everyone, but are still very fragmented. Pages as ZPR and Pietietie are more similar to the idea of echo chambers (Garrett, 2009), because people who are already interested in the topic and already have an opinion will be the ones to get involved. Although the platform is open to anyone, these pages make a statement and likeminded people are mostly involved. De Volkskrant and De Telegraaf Facebook page are more an extension of their regular website, a place to publish the articles and probably reaching more people than they would on their regular news website. Although the way that Facebook has been built, the interaction that is made possible, is certainly a good direction in stimulating a public discussion. It does fit in the democratic society that we are living in, since there is freedom of speech, exchange of information, diversity of views and
active citizenship (Yardi & Boyd, 2010). But overall, it is still very fragmented and Facebook is a social network site, which people don’t seem to take so seriously.

The second part of this research focused on the comment section. I selected the case of Zwarte Piet to examine in what way forms of new racism are constructed in this debate. After analyzing the comments on four different Facebook pages it is seems that there can be some forms of new racism identified, but in this debate there doesn’t seem to be a lot of subtleness, which makes a lot of the comments quite simply racist.

The Zwarte Piet debate is a debate about the black character of Sinterklaas and if this is a racist character of black people. In the discussion, people who prefer the traditional Zwarte Piet to stay use a few different arguments and I looked mainly at these three: (1) statements claiming that Zwarte Piet is not equivalent to black people (2) statements claiming it’s a celebration for the children (3) statements claiming it is a Dutch culture and tradition.

In this debate, the way people use language is very harsh. While Facebook claims to be to make their statement a lot of denial emerges. Some statements claim that Zwarte Piet is not equivalent to black people and that it’s because of the debate that racism is growing. In this denial especially the ‘them vs. us’ strategy in talk is being used Commenters using the argument that it’s a celebration for the children and the adults are ruining it by getting themselves involved and whoever doesn’t agree with this should go back to the country they came from. Making prejudiced assumptions about the origin of people who don’t agree with the traditional Zwarte Piet and pushing them away as being not Dutch. People who don’t agree are put into a corner in which there is no place for them in this society. This creates a ‘them vs. us’ idea, but at the same time claiming that the discussion isn’t about racism. Others stating it is a Dutch tradition and shouldn’t be changed, because it is culture. Although many comments include characteristics of new racism, much of the discourse was more blatantly prejudiced. This is a limitation to this study and has probably mostly to do with the debate I choose. Since the debate is not necessarily about people, there wasn’t any prejudice that people could have. Since new racism is about having prejudice and avoiding this prejudice in talk another discussion would be better to analyze. For instance discussions about minority groups in a society.

Overall, the conclusion of this research is in line with the other researches that CMC and social network sites do not necessarily mean a new public sphere or more public discussion. And in terms of racism there is still much that can be researched and criticized, beyond flagging content for moderation.
Bibliography


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Appendix

The selected Facebook posts
De Volkskrant – 15 November 2014
https://www.facebook.com/volkskrant/posts/836071483081231

Ondanks een opstootje en zestig aanhoudingen bij de controversiële Sinterklaasintocht in Gouda, verliep het evenement vandaag grotendeels in een gemoedelijke sfeer. Geruchten over opstootjes tussen voor- en tegenstanders van Zwarte Piet achter het stadhuis, bereiken de menigte pas als Sinterklaas al is gehuldigd op het bordes.

See Translation

Iedereen wil op de foto met de stroopwafel-Piet | Binnenland
Ondanks een opstootje en zestig aanhoudingen bij de controversiële Sinterklaasintocht in Gouda, verliep het evenement vandaag grotendeels in een...

VOLSKRANT.NL | BY OLAF TEMPELMAN

222
19 shares
115 comments
Het was D-Day in Gouda, onbedoeld de vuurlinie van de discussie over Zwarte Piet de afgelopen maanden. Compleet met bodyguards. Maar het was toch vooral een gemoedelijke dag, zag Olaf Tempelman - op die rellen na dan.

See Translation

Intocht in Gouda: een o zo gezellige dag - met een roetzwart randje | Binnenland

Het was D-Day in Gouda, onbedoeld de vuurlinie van de discussie over Zwarte Piet de afgelopen maanden. Compleet met bodyguards. Maar het was toch vooral…
Diep en diep triest noemde Rutte het.

Deep and deep sad called rutte it.

Translated from Dutch

Rutte over arrestaties bij intocht: dit is diepriest

Het is diep, diep triest dat de intocht van Sinterklaas moest eindigen met zestig arrestaties van voor- en tegenstanders van Zwarte Piet. Dat zei premier Rutte.

TELEGRAAF.NL
Maar liefst 90 aanhoudingen in Gouda vanwege Zwarte Piet.

**No fewer than 90 arrests in Gouda because of Black Peter.**

Translated from Dutch

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**Vechtpartij voor- en tegenstanders Zwarte Piet**

Tijdens de ontvangst van Sinterklaas op het stadhuis van Gouda, ontstond zaterdag vlak achter het oude stadhuis een vechtpartij tussen de voor- en tegenstanders van Zwarte Piet.

WWW.TELEGRAAF.NL
'Anti-piet-demonstranten die stil met een spandoek protesteerden, werden toegeschreeuwd door pro-piet-demonstranten.'

See Translation

Demonstranten naar grond gewerkt, ouders naar huis
Er worden steeds meer mensen aangehouden tijdens de intocht van Sinterklaas. Volgens AD-verslaggever Tobias den Hartog ontstaan er opstootjes en ...

AD.NL

Like Comment Share

181
52 shares 152 comments
Bekijk hieronder de schokkende beelden van de arrestatie van Kno'ledge Cesare.

Tijdens de nationale intocht op zaterdag 15 november 2014 in Gouda, werd Kno'ledge Cesare, dichter en mede initiatiefnemer van de Zwarte Piet is Racisme campagne, op gewelddadige manier gearresteerd door politie Gouda. Hij stond met een groep in stilte te protesteren op de Goudse Markt toen de groep naar geschreeuw van extreemrechtse demonstranten werd ingesloten door de politie. De politie heeft Kno'ledge uit de groep getrokken en wat volgde is te zien in onderstaand filmpje. Helaas waren ook kinderengatuiige van dit excessieve geweld.

Na de hardhandige arrestatie werd Kno'ledge op het politiebureau nog eens onmenselijk behandeld. Zo riep een agent naar hem "Je hebt hier niks te willen" toen hij naar zijn advocaat vroeg. Eerder op de dag ontving Kno'ledge een waarschuwing van de politie via sms: "Hou het een kinderfeest". Dit alles wijst erop dat de politie in Gouda het op Kno'ledge had gemunt. Kno'ledge maakt het naar omstandigheden goed en zal zich blijven inzetten voor een racismevrij Nederland.

See Translation

Jerry Afrijie slachtoffer van buitensporig politie geweld tijdens intocht Gouda
www.Voorbeeld-Allochtoon.nl Medea Media 2014©

Like Comment Share

Top Comments

183 shares 666 comments

Write a comment... Press Enter to post.
Eindelijk is het zover. Na veel discussie en commotie komen Sinterklaas en Zwarte Piet vandaag aan in Nederland.

Neem een foto van de stoerste, leukste, gekste, liefste Zwarte Piet die u vandaag tegenkomt en plaats de foto als reactie onder dit bericht. Laat Nederland zien waar het feest om gaat; PLEZIER voor onze kinderen.

Onder alle inzendingen verloten wij een gratis persoonlijke video van www.sint.tv

See Translation

Nog een aantal handtekeningen en dan zijn we er!
Witte pieten in het Sinterklaasjournaal, Stroopwafelpiet, Kaaspiet en zelfs Clownpiet in Gouda. Wat vinden we daar nou van?
Wij blijven ons hard maken voor het Sinterklaasfeest in zijn huidige vorm, dus met Zwarte Piet! Teken nu op [http://referendum.pietitie.nl](http://referendum.pietitie.nl), zodat we in de toekomst ook nog van Zwarte Piet kunnen genieten.

See Translation

**OPROEP VOOR NATIONAAL REFERENDUM**

Bijna 90% procent van de Nederlanders wil geen verandering!! We laten ons dit niet langer opleggen door een stichting die betaald wordt met ons geld. Vul de steunbetuiging in en zorg er zo voor dat Zwarte Piet blijft bestaan door middel van een landelijk referendum. Wij, de stichting Pietitie, hebbe…

[REFERENDUM.PIETITIE.NL](mailto:REFERENDUM.PIETITIE.NL)

Like Comment Share

14K

2,081 shares

1.1K comments