Results: Our findings show statistically significant differences in commenting patterns across platforms and journalistic genres.

- **Comment Count**
  - Across platforms, the number of comments to the same news items on Facebook is almost double the number of comments on Ynet, and almost ten times higher than the number of comments posted through Facebook Plugin.
  - Across Genres, there are more comments to hard news than soft news on Ynet and Facebook Plugin (T=724.18, P=0.005) (See Figure 3.)
  - Cross Genre Analysis: There is a marked difference in the commenting behavior between platforms and genres. Across platforms and genres, there is a marked difference in the commenting behavior between platforms and genres.

- **Comment Length**
  - Across platforms, on average, the comments posted on Facebook are shorter compared to the comments posted on Ynet. However, comments posted via Facebook Plugin are strikingly longer than the two other platforms, indicating a performative and deliberative behavior (F=4.63, P<0.05).
  - Across Genres, comments to hard news items are nearly two-thirds longer than comments to soft news items (T=3.163, P=0.002).

- **The Life Cycle of Comments on Facebook across Journalistic Genres**
  - The mean commenting time to hard news is almost 5 hours after an article is posted vs. 3 hours for soft news. This difference could be explained by the hybridity of this social media feature.

- **Topic Modeling**
  - There are distinct commenting topics to the same news articles across platforms and genres. Facebook comments to hard news contain negative emotional elements, expressing sadness, anger, and grief related to terrorism and security issues (see example in Figure 6).
  - Topics in comments to hard news posted on Ynet relate to security and terrorism, but they also deal with other domestic issues relating to the economy, the government, and the Iranian nuclear weapon program (see example in Figure 7).
  - Overall, the topics extracted from all comments exhibit a strong element of national identity. A recurring word in topics across platforms and genres is the pronoun "we" or "us", which can be seen as a banal marker of nationalism (Billig, 1995).

Discussion

Cross Genre Analysis: Hard and soft news—terms originally related to news production and editorial decisions—were found relevant in characterizing online user comments. Our findings indicate that hard news trigger more comments, and the cycle of comments to hard news is distinct from the cycle of comments to soft news. This confirms previous studies that have found that news stories on controversial political/social issues receive the highest number of comments (Boczkowski & Mitchell, 2013, p. 135).

Cross platform analysis: While our analysis is limited to commenting features that are available, measurable and shared by the three studied platforms, the comparison of comments to the same content across platforms allows us to characterize as contextual environments that shape commenting cultures. Our different analyses show the prominent role preserved to social media in people's engagement with news.

The differences found in the number of comments between the news website and its Facebook page do not relate to quantifying readership, but may also be an outcome of comment pre-moderation on the news website. Thus, the comment moderation process in popular news sites such as Ynet—which receives vast numbers of comments—might result in a high rate of comment rejection. As a result, the public opinion climate, which is reflected through reading the published comments at the comments section, is not identical to the one that would have been reflected through reading all posted comments.

Overall, the topics extracted from all comments exhibit a strong element of national identity. A recurring word in topics across platforms and genres is the pronoun "we" or "us", which can be seen as a banal marker of nationalism (Billig, 1995).

Works Cited


