

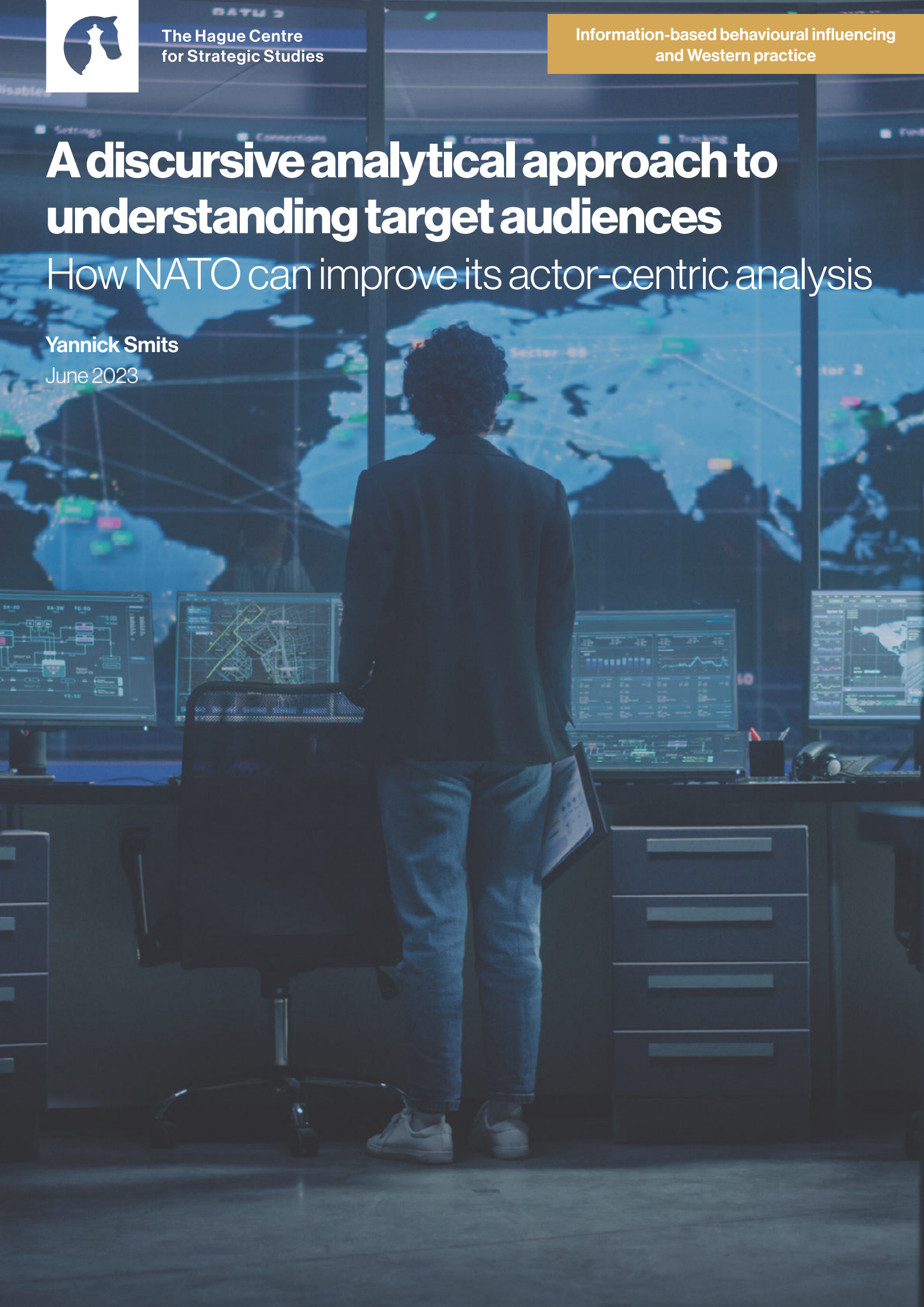


# A discursive analytical approach to understanding target audiences

## How NATO can improve its actor-centric analysis

Yannick Smits

June 2023





**Paper 6**

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How NATO can improve its actor-centric analysis

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This paper is part of the *Information-based behavioural influencing and Western practice* paper series.

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This paper is published as part of the project Platform Influencing Human Behaviour, commissioned by the Royal Netherlands Army. The aim of this platform is to build and share knowledge on information-based behavioural influencing in the military context. We bring together international experts and practitioners from both military and academic backgrounds to explore the military-strategic, ethical, legal, and societal issues and boundaries involved. Responsibility for the content rests solely with the authors and does not constitute, nor should it be construed as, an endorsement by the Royal Netherlands Army.

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## Introduction

The rapid developments in information technology and the subsequential abundance of information increasingly complicate the military and political context NATO operates in.<sup>1</sup> For instance, it results in modern warfare moving more to the virtual and cognitive domains and, accordingly, in NATO's adversaries having more recourse to the so-called overt and covert sub-threshold activities (e.g. cyberattacks).<sup>2</sup> To address both potential and actual security threats emerging from such activities, NATO recognised the necessity to improve its abilities to function optimally in these domains and recently revised its main doctrine, the *Allied Joint Doctrine* (AJP-01), by incorporating a behavioural-centric approach.<sup>3</sup> As such, AJP-01 now largely revolves around the need to influence human behaviour through kinetic and non-kinetic techniques. Although information-based behavioural influencing (IBI) operations are therefore not considered "a separate domain of operations", NATO's reprioritisation also indicates the need to better understand a target audience (TA).<sup>4</sup> To enlarge its understanding of TA's to increase IBI's effectiveness, NATO predominantly relies on analytical methods that belong to the academic fields of sociology and psychology.<sup>5</sup>

However, as valuable as these approaches are, their explanations are not always complete because they, analytically speaking, question *why* "particular behaviour is (or is not) displayed" but do not ask *how* a TA does (not) socially construct this behaviour as an option.<sup>6</sup> Presuming that people's reasons to adopt behaviour are not objectively defined, the latter question asks how a TA constructs its own and others identities and attaches more meaning to certain subjects/objects than to others so that it is, accordingly, more inclined to act in this rather than in that manner. Being a fundamentally different question, it studies the discourses in which the nexus between identity and behaviour is constructed. At the core of this paper is therefore the idea that identity informs behaviour *not* because people with different identities have different interests and, accordingly, act differently to further their interests but rather that understanding how people (will) act means interpreting how they construct their own and other identities. Presuming that NATO can contribute much from assuming such an emic perspective for its IBI operations, this paper therefore enquires *how a discursive approach can increase NATO's understanding of TA's and, accordingly, its insights into IBI's success-potential*.<sup>7</sup> First elaborating on how discursive approaches complement actor-centric analysis, I then discuss the ontological and epistemological principles of one discursive approach. I argue that interpreting how a TA discursively constructs its identity-behaviour nexus increases NATO's insight into a TA's receptivity to IBI before and after its application.

1 As already noted in 2009, see NATO, 'Allied Joint Doctrine for Information Operations (AJP-3.10)' (NATO, November 2009), <https://info.publicintelligence.net/NATO-IO.pdf>.

2 NATO, 'AJP-01. Allied Joint Doctrine. Edition F. Version 1' (NATO, December 2022), p. 16-17, [https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment\\_data/file/1128191/AJP-01\\_EdF\\_V1.pdf](https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/1128191/AJP-01_EdF_V1.pdf).

3 Iven Markus, Laura Jasper, and Michel Rademaker, 'Cognitive Effects in Combined Arms: A Case Study of the Division 2025: Five Keys to Implement Information Activities More Effectively in the German-Dutch Army Structures', Platform Influencing Human Behaviour (The Hague: The Hague Centre for Strategic Studies, February 2023), p.7-8, <https://hcass.nl/report/cognitive-effects-in-combined-arms-a-case-study-of-the-division-2025/>.

4 Klaudia Klonowska and Frank Bekkers, 'Behavior-Oriented Operations in the Military Context: Enhancing Capabilities to Understand and Anticipate Human Behaviour', Platform Influencing Human Behaviour (The Hague: The Hague Centre for Strategic Studies, 23 February 2021), p.66, <https://hcass.nl/report/behavior-oriented-operations-in-the-military-context/>.

5 Klonowska and Bekkers, 'Behavior-oriented Operations', 24-25.

6 Klonowska and Bekkers, 'Behavior-oriented Operations', 47.

7 To better integrate this paper in the *Platform Influencing Human Behaviour*, it adheres to the meanings of relevant terms as defined by Klonowska and Bekkers in a publication of HCSS. See Klonowska and Bekkers, 'Behavior-oriented Operations', v-vii.

The rapid developments in information technology and the subsequential abundance of information increasingly complicate the military and political context NATO operates in.



## Conventional actor-centric analysis

With an analysis of the operational environment partly comprising an analysis of actors, NATO generally has recourse to the method of analysis known as 'Target Audience Analysis' (TAA) to further its emic understanding of a TA.<sup>8</sup> As a part of the 'Behavioural Dynamics Methodology' (BDM), which is "a scientific approach to conducting effective and measurable strategic communication, influence and behaviour change", a TAA mainly revolves around examining a TA's pre-intent factors (e.g. beliefs, norms).<sup>9</sup> Analysing these pre-intent factors elucidates why a TA intends to assume one pattern of behaviour rather than another and, accordingly, to what kind of behavioural influencing it will, in theory, be susceptible.<sup>10</sup> To conduct a TAA, the BDM prescribes 44 descriptive, prognostic and transformative parameters to understand a TA's existing features, its motivations, behaviour and methods to influence its behaviour, respectively. As such, a TAA provides insights into "the ways in which members of the group think and consequently how they act [...] of 'why' certain behaviour is (or is not) displayed".<sup>11</sup> Its analytical usefulness thus largely emanates from its ability to increase NATO's understanding of what either prompts a TA's undesirable behaviour or could spark desired behaviour.<sup>12</sup>

Despite its analytic usefulness, BDM is rooted in "behavioural science theories and social science research methods" and is as such not concerned with mapping a TA's discourse and thus with analysing how a TA's discursive identity construction informs its behaviour.<sup>13</sup> On the contrary, a discursive analytic approach looks at what people speak or write and how this ties to their social context.<sup>14</sup> Accordingly, its analytic value stems from its ability to clarify *how*, rather than explaining *why*, people behave on the basis of their pre-intent factors. This is relevant because why-questions mostly "take as unproblematic the *possibility* that a particular decision or course of action could happen" and do as such not ask how people produce meaning and attach this to various objects/subjects, thereby constructing specific interpretive dispositions.<sup>15</sup> Analysing how interpretive dispositions, which are the lenses through which people view the world, are constructed, can therefore clarify what behaviour a TA constructs as meaningful and, accordingly, how this TA might behave. While this can be done by studying all kinds of data, the wide availability of texts makes it logical to focus on a TA's writings.<sup>16</sup> With a discourse being defined as "groups of related statements which cohere in some way to produce both meanings and effects in the real world", a discourse analysis thus

Analysing how interpretive dispositions, which are the lenses through which people view the world, are constructed, can therefore clarify what behaviour a TA constructs as meaningful and, accordingly, how this TA might behave.

8 Although I believe that it is theoretically impossible to separate factor-centric analysis from actor-centric analysis, this paper focuses, due to considerations of space, upon the latter. Having said that, I do not deny that material events on the ground have an impact upon discursive structures, but I do maintain that material events on the ground are always interpreted through particular optics. That is, whether a foreign soldier volunteering in a warzone is interpreted as a freedom fighter or as a terrorist depends not necessarily on his behaviour but upon the way in which we discursively construct his identity in general and its resemblance to our identity in particular.

9 Klonowska and Bekkers, 'Behavior-oriented Operations', v.

10 For a good overview of TAA, see Steve Tatham, 'Using Target Audience Analysis to Aid Strategic Level Decisionmaking' (Strategic Studies Institute, US Army War College, 2015).

11 Klonowska and Bekkers, 'Behavior-oriented Operations', 47.

12 Klonowska and Bekkers, 'Behavior-oriented Operations', 46-48 & 84-86.

13 Klonowska and Bekkers, 'Behavior-oriented Operations', 67.

14 Kevin Dunn and Iver Neumann, *Undertaking Discourse Analysis for Social Research* (Michigan: University of Michigan Press, 2016), 1-10.

15 Roxanne Lynn Doty, 'Foreign Policy as Social Construction: A Post-Positivist Analysis of U.S. Counterinsurgency Policy in the Philippines', *International Studies Quarterly* 37, no. 3 (1993): 298, <https://doi.org/10.2307/2600810>.

16 Obviously, the spoken word can also be recorded and written down so that it also can be included among the studied texts.

seeks to grasp what people think and how this does (not) induce certain behaviour.<sup>17</sup> With IBI assuming “that information conveyed through language, with specific choices of words and their sequencing, fundamentally affects the way in which people will interact with and interpret their surroundings”, discursive approaches therefore study the how behind the why.<sup>18</sup>

Because the field of discourse analysis has grown exponentially in recent decades, I focus upon an approach known as poststructuralist discourse analysis (PDA), which is an influential approach that stands at the basis of, among others, the field of critical discourse analysis (CDA).<sup>19</sup> Developed most extensively by the International relations scholar Lene Hansen, PDA is generally concerned with analysing the co-constitutive relationship between identity and policy.<sup>20</sup> Although Hansen’s monograph centres on analysing foreign policy discourses in particular, its theoretical and methodological relevance goes beyond this analytical focus.<sup>21</sup> Assuming that actions are “dependent upon representations of the threat, country, security problem, or crisis they seek to address”, it is applicable to studies asking how people’s discourses explicitly or implicitly construct their identity-behaviour nexuses.<sup>22</sup> As such, although this macro-perspective is particularly useful in analysing the behaviour of nation-states, it thus also retains its clarificatory value in analysing smaller groups by furthering an understanding of how identity, as a pre-intent factor, manifests itself in the ‘real’ world.<sup>23</sup> With NATO aiming to increase its insights into IBI’s success-potential, PDA could therefore clarify what a TA’s discourse indicates about the behaviour it considers meaningful.<sup>24</sup>

## Ontological principles

Presuming that if NATO comprehends how discourses operate, then it can better act upon them, I first introduce two ontological principles that underpin Hansen’s theory.<sup>25</sup> First, Hansen contends that a discourse’s material and ideational structures cannot be disentangled from each other on ontological and, therefore, conceptual levels. For Hansen, discourses not only consist of ideas (e.g. norms, values) but also have a material character. For example, tanks not only exist in terms of their materiality (e.g. metal) but also insofar they embody ideas such as national security or war and peace.<sup>26</sup> For Hansen, there is therefore no material

Hence, materiality and ideas have no meaning apart from each other.

17 Jean Carabine, ‘Unmarried Motherhood: 1830-1990: A Genealogical Analysis’, in *Discourse as Data*, ed. Margaret Wetherell, Simeon Yates, and Stephanie Taylor (London: Sage, 2001), 268.

18 Sofia Romansky, Lotje Boswinkel, and Michel Rademaker, ‘The Parallel Front: An Analysis of the Military Use of Information in the First Seven Months of the War in Ukraine’, Platform Influencing Human Behaviour (The Hague: The Hague Centre for Strategic Studies, 31 October 2022), p.3, <https://hcss.nl/report/the-parallel-front-military-use-information-ukraine/>.

19 Allan Luke, ‘Theory and Practice in Critical Discourse Analysis’, in *International Encyclopedia of the Sociology of Education*, ed. Lawrence Saha (Oxford: Elsevier, 1997), 50–56, <https://pages.gseis.ucla.edu/faculty/kellner/ed270/Luke/SAHA6.html>.

20 Lene Hansen, *Security as Practice. Discourse Analysis and the Bosnian War* (London: Routledge, 2007).

21 Although Hansen also puts forward an extensive method of data selection and collection, this paper focuses, for practical and substantial considerations, on the method of analysis she elaborates on in her monograph.

22 Hansen, *Security as Practice*, 5.

23 However, because discourse analysis has an analytical focus on the construction of meaning as it is articulated in a shared discursive space rather than in the psyche of individual human beings, it treats the so-called pre-intent factors (e.g., attitude, perception) “less as psychological traits and more as intersubjective constructs” whose analysis requires a different but no less rewarding approach. See Maaike Warnaar, *Iranian Foreign Policy during Ahmadinejad: Ideology and Actions* (New York, NY: Palgrave Macmillan, 2013), 24.

24 NATO, ‘The North Atlantic Treaty’ (NATO, 10 April 2019), [https://www.nato.int/cps/en/natohq/official\\_texts\\_17120.htm](https://www.nato.int/cps/en/natohq/official_texts_17120.htm).

25 Because of limitations of space, this paper only introduces the basic contours of Hansen’s approach and does not discuss the details of her theoretical and methodological framework.

26 Hansen, *Security as Practice*, 21-23.

reality that exists outside the realm of discourse precisely because the question of how people attach meaning to certain subjects/objects in the world is affected by the ideational constructs they adhere to. Hence, materiality and ideas have no meaning apart from each other. Implying that there are no objective security threats 'out there', the question whether a TA's materiality (e.g., its financial resources, military capabilities) poses security threats can therefore only be answered with reference to the discourses in which these materialities are given meaning. For instance, although Ukrainians identify Russian tanks as security threats, Polish tanks located close to the border are not interpreted as such because there is a discursively constructed similarity between Polish, but not Russian, and Ukrainian identities.<sup>27</sup> As materiality is given meaning in a discourse "by drawing upon a particular set of identity constructions", one's behaviour cannot thus be understood without understanding the discourse it is located in.<sup>28</sup>

Second, Hansen's claim that ideational and material structures cannot be disentangled implies that practices, irrespective of the fact whether these are a state's policies or an individual's behaviour, are also part of discourses. For instance, Russia's conduct on the Ukrainian front is as discursive as Vladimir Putin's speeches as both conduct and speech produce meaning. As such, the conduct is not separate from the speeches but, so to speak, again feeds into the discourse from which it originated. Conversely, when Putin gives a speech, he is simultaneously performing an action by creating meaning. For this reason, Hansen refers to behaviour as a 'discursive practice'.<sup>29</sup> Implying that the distinction between discourse and practice is a mere analytical tool, she therefore not conceptualises their relation as causal (as in, Russia's conduct is caused by Putin's discourse) but as co-constitutive (as in, Russia's conduct is constituted by Putin's discourse *et vice versa*).<sup>30</sup> While behaviour is thus informed by the discursive construction of identity, their dynamic operates in two directions because people's behaviour also reproduces or enacts their identities. In poststructuralist language, behaviour is thus how "identity comes into being".<sup>31</sup> Applied to this paper, a TA's behaviour, which is presumed to be the outcome of processes in the cognitive domain, must thus not be conceptualised as an independent variable that is causally separate from a TA's identity.<sup>32</sup> Therefore, if NATO aims to understand a TA's "drivers of a non-desired behaviour or a potential desired behaviour", then it must enquire after its discursive construction of identity.<sup>33</sup>

27 As Olha Tkachenko puts it, the *perception* of similarity between Ukrainian and Polish identities played an important role in their bilateral relations. See Olha Tkachenko, *Discourse of Ukrainian Identity in the Polish Opinion-Forming Press during the Orange Revolution and the Euromaidan. Media Linguistic Analysis* (Warsaw: Warsaw University Press, 2022), 11-34.

28 Hansen, *Security as Practice*, 23.

29 Hansen, *Security as Practice*, 21.

30 Theoretically, this interpretative approach is compatible with the dimensions model that NATO but also the militaries of most of its member states including the Netherlands, adhere to. This model distinguishes between the physical, virtual and cognitive dimensions and sets forth that all military activities take place in one of these domains. It holds that the physical and virtual dimensions affect the cognitive dimension and that, although an actor's behaviour manifests itself in the physical and virtual dimensions, the decision making processes occur in the latter. Put otherwise, this model also recognises a co-constitutive relationship between the physical/virtual domains and the cognitive domain as it claims that the former two domains inform the last domain *et vice versa*.

31 Hansen, *Security as Practice*, 21.

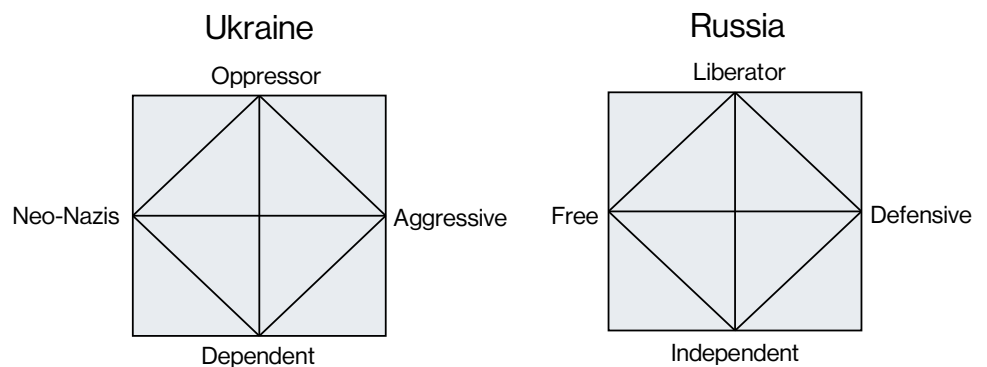
32 Contrarily, as Hansen puts it, theorising "policy as discourse is to argue that identity and policy are constituted through a process of narrative adjustment." See Hansen, *Security as Practice*, xvi.

33 Klonowska and Bekkers, 'Behavior-oriented Operations', 84.

## The prism of identity

Building upon this ontological foothold, Hansen develops a discursive epistemology to analyse how identity and behaviour co-constitute each other in the texts a TA articulates.<sup>34</sup> First, analysing a discourse begins by identifying the explicit articulations of identity that entail clear constructions of either the Other or of the Self (e.g. barbarian/civilised, bad/good).<sup>35</sup> Second, because identity construction is not “accomplished solely through the designation of one particular sign for the Other or the Self”, these identity articulations must not only be identified but also located in the discursive web of meaning they are part of.<sup>36</sup> With identity articulations only *making sense* in their discursive context, it should thus be mapped how the signs constitute relations of difference or likeness between a Self and Other. To observe how these relations are constituted, it must be ascertained how particular signs are juxtaposed to a series of other signs through the so-called ‘dual processes of linking and differentiation’. These processes connect signs indicating identity positively and negatively, respectively.<sup>37</sup> The juxtapositions ensure that a certain sign is explicitly or implicitly valued over its opposite as in, say, Putin’s referrals to Ukraine the oppressor, which suggests it is in a certain way less esteemed than its opposite, Russia the liberator.<sup>38</sup> Accordingly, the meaning of signs is constructed “through the discursive juxtaposition between a privileged sign on the one hand and a devalued one on the other hand.”<sup>39</sup> For example, see *Figure 1.0* in which Putin, during his 24 February 2022 speech, discursively constructed the Other, Ukraine, and the Self, Russia, by juxtaposing them to each other to constitute *similarity* between different signs.<sup>40</sup>

**Figure 1.0. Process of linking**



————— Process of linking: positive identity to construct similarity.

34 As a reviewer of Hansen’s monograph already indicated; understanding one’s behaviour is much expedited by understanding the identities of the people in relation to whom this behaviour is being performed. See Laura Shepherd, ‘A User’s Guide: Analyzing Security as Discourse’, *International Studies Review* 8, no. 4 (2006): 656–58, <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1468-2486.2006.00635.x>.

35 As mentioned above, this paper does not discuss Hansen’s methods of data selection and data collection. Having said that, when analysing a TA, one can for instance analyse speeches, statements, social media context, blog posts, newspaper articles, interviews: in other words, any kind of textual data in which there are explicit or implicit references to either identity or behaviour (ideally, to both of them) would be analytically useful.

36 Hansen, *Security as Practice*, 42.

37 Hansen, *Security as Practice*, 41-46.

38 Hansen, *Security as Practice*, 18-21.

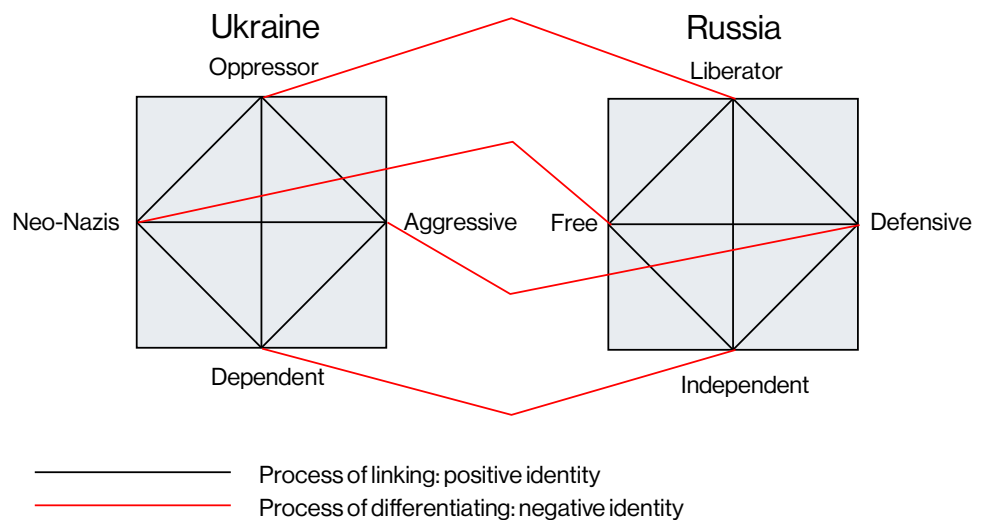
39 Hansen, *Security as Practice*, 19.

40 Team of the Official Website of the President of Russia, ‘Address by the President of the Russian Federation’, President of Russia, 24 February 2022, <http://en.kremlin.ru/events/president/news/67843>.



Now, see *Figure 2.0*, in which the juxtaposition between different signs comes more explicit to the fore to constitute *difference* between the Other, Ukraine, and the Self, Russia.

**Figure 2.0. Linking and differentiation**



Third, although these figures already indicate that language is a referential system of signs that construct the identity of a Self *in relation to an Other*, Hansen supplements the analysis of identity by three extra dimensions that more clearly embody its political character. These three dimensions are the analytical lenses of spatiality, temporality and ethicality and refer to signs that are predominantly implicitly rather than explicitly articulated.<sup>41</sup> They are signs that, in the case of spatial identity, demarcate who does (not) belong to a certain group (e.g. religious communities, political parties) or in the case of temporal and ethical identity, to signs such as development or stagnation and responsibility or accountability, respectively. Whereas examples of spatial identity articulations thus entail 'Russia' or 'Ukraine', examples of temporal and ethical identity constructions are Putin's constructions that neo-Nazis "seize power in Ukraine" and Russia's ethical responsibility "to demilitarise and de-nazify Ukraine," respectively.<sup>42</sup> Simply said, identity constructions are thus not simply 'us' against 'them' but encompass different degrees of Otherness that allow for more than one construction of a Self and Other. Accordingly, although not all dimensions recur in texts to the same extent, it is also the case that most discourses "articulate the three elements in such a manner that they draw upon and reinforce each other".<sup>43</sup> Therefore, a PDA should examine all three dimensions.

<sup>41</sup> Hansen, *Security as Practice*, 46-51.

<sup>42</sup> Team of the Official Website of the President of Russia, 'Address by the President of the Russian Federation', President of Russia, 24 February 2022, <http://en.kremlin.ru/events/president/news/67843>.

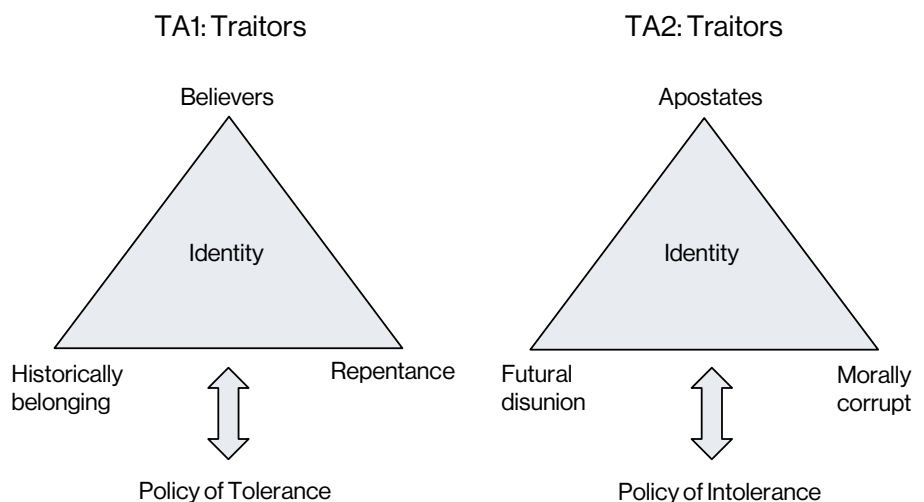
<sup>43</sup> Hansen, *Security as Practice*, 42.

## Identity and Behaviour

Although why-questions are thus analytically valuable as they explain *why* Russia invaded Ukraine, they remain incomplete because they do not ask *how* Putin legitimated the invasion by making it discursively possible.

Seeing behaviour as the coming into being of identity, these two analytical lenses - the dual processes of linking and differentiation and the three identity dimensions - clarify much about how people construct their behaviour preferences. In the example above, the signs juxtaposing Ukraine against Russia thus construct both, such that it appears as if the latter was *necessitated* to interfere to prevent worse from happening. Put otherwise, the identity constructions made the option of invading more *imaginable* than the option of not doing so. Although why-questions are thus analytically valuable as they explain *why* Russia invaded Ukraine, they remain incomplete because they do not ask *how* Putin legitimated the invasion by making it discursively possible, as the above illustrates.<sup>44</sup> Returning to its analytical value for NATO; whereas a TAA has recourse to methods of behavioural profiling to identify a key TA and to measure its susceptibility to IBI, PDA therefore suggests that discourses also show much about what behaviour a TA constructs as meaningful to pursue.<sup>45</sup> To clarify, let us recall that identity is, as discussed above, not one-dimensional. This implies that if people use the same sign to refer to the same entity (either a Self or an Other), then this sign can nevertheless have different meanings. This is because it has different dimensions that articulate different identities and constructs, accordingly, different behaviour as meaningful. *Figure 3.0.* visualises how two (fictional) Islamic fundamentalist discourses articulated by two officials from the same TA (i.e., TA1 and TA2) refer to the same Other, namely 'group-members who previously cooperated with the enemy', through the same sign, namely 'traitors', make them *nevertheless* perceive different policies as more meaningful than others.

**Figure 3.0. Different constructions of the sign 'traitors'**



44 The inclination to ask why-questions recurs in many analyses of the war both from academia and media. See, for instance, Jokull Johannesson, 'Russia's War with Ukraine Is to Acquire Military Industrial Capability and Human Resources', *Journal of International Studies* 10, no. 4 (December 2017): 63–71, <https://doi.org/10.14254/2071-8330.2017/10-4/4>. / 'Has Putin's War Failed and What Does Russia Want from Ukraine?', *BBC News*, 24 February 2023, sec. Europe, <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-europe-56720589>.

45 Tatham, 'Using Target Audience Analysis', 21-25.

As one sees, TA1 refers to the Other as traitors who are still believers that, in terms of their historical sameness, belong to the same group as the Self, the more so because they still have the moral capacity for repentance. Contrarily, TA2 refers to the Other as traitors that have become apostates and have therefore effectuated, in combination with the moral corruptness that being non-religious implies, that their historical connection with the group must be severed. Therefore, whereas both TA1 and TA2 refer to this Other as 'traitors', the differences between their discursive constructions of this Other make them perceive different policy preferences as more meaningful than others and, accordingly, to pursue a policy of either tolerance or intolerance. This difference in behaviour is, however, *not* clear if the sign articulating identity (i.e., traitors) is not located in the textual web of meaning it is part of. This means that the meaning of each sign articulating identity cannot be determined on its own but only insofar it is studied in relation to the other signs that are articulated. Therefore, if NATO aims to comprehend if a TA might showcase the desired behaviour (i.e., tolerate the co-operators) or endeavours, in TAA's terminology, to determine its "latent behaviour", then it must map the identity-behaviour nexus as constructed in this TA's discourse.<sup>46</sup>

If NATO has mapped the discourse and concluded that a specific identity construction either does not prompt the desired behaviour or stimulates undesired behaviour, then it might increase IBI's success-potential by posing so-called discursive interventions. These discursive interventions can, as the scholar of international sciences Schmidt puts it, change the meaning that is predominantly attributed to certain ideological constructs, thereby changing the way in which one perceives one's social reality and, therefore, how one behaves or will behave.<sup>47</sup> In this context, it means trying to influence a TA's identity constructions so that these might constitute the desired behaviour as more meaningful *than* the undesired behaviour. Here, PDA's recognition that the constructed relationship between identity and behaviour is intrinsically unstable is analytically valuable. It maintains that although discourses attempt to create stable relations, the inherently unstable nature of language guarantees that these relations cannot be indefinitely maintained as the meaning of signs is not 'fixed'. That is, as identity is constructed through the processes of linking and differentiation, discourses can destabilise if links between specific negative or positive signs become unstable or change.<sup>48</sup> On the one hand, the TA2's link between 'apostates' and 'moral corruption' can destabilise if the apostates appear not to be morally corrupt or, on the other hand, if the co-operators do not 'repent', then this can destabilise the TA1's construction of their 'religiousness'. As such, other paths could now be perceived as more meaningful to pursue for either TA1 or TA2.

Simply put, understanding *which* identity dimension to target (i.e., which dimension stimulates the (un-)desirable behaviour) and *where* discursive interventions are most likely to succeed (i.e., which discursive link can be destabilised) could increase IBI's success-potential. Depending on the desired outcome, different kinds of discursive interventions are possible.<sup>49</sup> Returning to *Figure 3.0.*, the undesirable behaviour of TA2 could, for instance, be prevented by broadcasting information on media affiliated to NATO that the co-operators acted out of their

46 Tatham, 'Using Target Audience Analysis', 40.

47 Vivien A. Schmidt, 'Taking Ideas and Discourse Seriously: Explaining Change through Discursive Institutionalism as the Fourth "New Institutionalism"', *European Political Science Review* 2, no. 1 (2010): 4, <https://doi.org/10.1017/S175577390999021X>.

48 Hansen, *Security as Practice*, 20-21.

49 The analytical focus on the discursive construction of the identity-behaviour nexus does not mean that discourses are to be studied independent from their social and political context. After all, a discourse's stability is not only internal but also depends upon its relation to other discourses in general and their agreeing or disagreeing with the discourse in question in particular. See Hansen, *Security as Practice*, 29-30.

Simply put,  
understanding  
*which* identity  
dimension to target  
(i.e., which  
dimension  
stimulates the (un-)  
desirable  
behaviour) and  
*where* discursive  
interventions are  
most likely to  
succeed (i.e., which  
discursive link can  
be destabilised)  
could increase IBI's  
success-potential.

religious beliefs and that they therefore still showed moral behaviour.<sup>50</sup> Seeking to change, respectively, the TA2's construction of the co-operators' spatial and ethical identity, these newly articulated dimensions aim at severing the link between the signs indicating these constructions. As NATO identified this link to induce undesirable behaviour (i.e., TA2's policy of intolerance), the task here therefore becomes to change the TA2's identity constructions so that it now perceives another policy as a more meaningful path to pursue. Another option is to strengthen already existing links between signs. In this context, NATO could thus also choose to further promote the TA1's link between the signs indicating the co-operators' spatial and temporal identities ('historical belonging' and 'believers', respectively) so that the TA1's construction and the behaviour it induces become more prevalent in the discursive context. Moreover, NATO could allocate financial or physical resources to TA1 so that the power balance in the TA gradually shifts from the extremist TA2 to a more moderate version. Again, this is not just a case of identifying which elements in the TA are more moderate or extremist but of mapping how different elements discursively construct the identity-behaviour nexus.<sup>51</sup>

## Measuring behavioural influencing

Presuming that IBI has been implemented, then PDA's discursive epistemology could likewise contribute to measuring IBI's effects. Here, Hansen's argument that behaviour is how identity comes into being is again at the analytic centre. Accordingly, in the post-campaign phase, the analytical focus should not be on what identity constructions are *required* to make a particular kind of behaviour meaningful, but on what kind of behaviour is *imaginable* given the identity constructions present. Here, it thus boils down to reasoning backwards by analysing how, if at all, the TA's identity constructions have changed. It must then be studied whether the changed constructions now make the TA perceive the desired behaviour as a more meaningful path to pursue than before.<sup>52</sup> Although this contrasts with NATO's general approach, whose analysis centres on the end-product, namely whether or not a TA now assumes the desired behaviour, a reversed approach could also work as identity and behaviour are part of the same discourse.<sup>53</sup>

50 In line with a report of HCSS, adjustments to the information environment could, for instance, be achieved through the capabilities of operational and tactical messaging, boosting civilian resilience, and influencer level engagement. See Lotje Boswinkel, Michel Rademaker, and Sofia Romansky, 'Information-Based Behavioural Influencing in the Military Context. Mapping Current Expert Thinking', Platform Influencing Human Behaviour (The Hague Centre for Strategic Studies, 21 June 2022), p. 9-12, <https://hcss.nl/report/information-behavioural-influencing-expert-thinking/>.

51 In all, discursive interventions can target either a TA's will or a TA's understanding. See NATO, 'Allied Joint Doctrine for Information Operations', Chapter 1, Section 2.

52 Optionally, it could be analysed whether the TA's new identity constructions now make the undesirable behaviour appear as a less meaningful path to pursue than the desired behaviour.

53 An interesting example of what this looks like is an article that studies how changes in the discursive construction of the Taliban made the policy option of reconciliation with the Taliban, which was previously unimaginable, a possibility. Whereas previous discursive constructions of the Taliban revolved around the sign 'terrorist', which ruled out engagement with them, later constructions revolved around constructing a dichotomy between its extremist core, which was now identified with the sign 'terrorist', and its more moderate elements, which suggested new political actions were made discursively possible. See Judith Renner and Alexander Spencer, 'De-Antagonising the Other: Changing Constructions of the Taliban and the Possibility of Reconciliation', *Global Society: Journal of Interdisciplinary International Relations* 27, no. 4 (2013): 475–96, <https://doi.org/10.1080/13600826.2013.823915>.

To improve influence measurement, I therefore propose that a post-campaign analysis of a TA's discourses follows a two-step approach.<sup>54</sup> First, NATO must remap the discursive terrain in general and the identity dimension(s) it previously identified as being inducive to undesirable behaviour in particular. Although it cannot be expected that all dimensions have changed (moreover, this might not even be necessary), slight changes in the TA's construction of spatial, temporal or ethical identities already suggest subtly different kinds of behaviour. Depending on the context, it is therefore crucial to start by tracing the conceptual histories of central identity constructions of either the Self or the Other. For instance, if NATO concluded that a TA (different from the above example) might become violent to NATO's local allies because of the way in which it constructed its temporal development path as ruling by force over these allies, then it must analyse whether the TA's construction of this dimension changed. In this case, it means analysing if the TA's construction of its temporal identity now rests on, say, ruling by cooperation instead of by force or on an entirely other development path.

Second, as a TA's construction of its identity always occurs in juxtaposition with one or multiple others, NATO must also analyse how a TA now articulates the signs that construct either negative or positive relationships. This is crucial because behaviour, irrespective of whether it is desirable or undesirable, manifests itself in a social context and people other than the TA will either directly or indirectly notice its effects. As, in the above example, the effects of IBI will be directly felt by NATO's allies, it therefore remains vital to gain insight into whether the TA now visualises its relationship with NATO's allies in less antagonistic terms. Whereas an analysis of the TA's identity dimensions before and after IBI can therefore clarify how it visualises its own temporal development path, the analysis must simultaneously be combined with an analysis of how its signs constitute sameness or difference with these local allies. It might, after all, be the case that the TA changed the construction of its temporal identity, which now induces cooperation rather than force, but also that it still conceives of NATO's allies as different, hence that it will seek cooperation with another actor on the map and might still be inclined to show the behaviour NATO previously identified as undesirable.

As a TA's construction of its identity always occurs in juxtaposition with one or multiple others, NATO must also analyse how a TA now articulates the signs that construct either negative or positive relationships.

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54 A report from NATO already recognised that many kinds of relevant data require qualitative analysis and, as such, someone versed in the craft. See NATO, 'How to Improve Your Aim: Measuring the Effectiveness of Activities That Influence Attitudes and Behaviors' (NATO, August 2011), Chapter 4 - Data Analysis, <https://info.publicintelligence.net/NATO-MeasuringInfluence.pdf>.



## Conclusion

To summarise, the following pieces of advice can improve NATO's actor-centric analysis in general and its emic understanding of the identity-behaviour nexus in particular:

- A. **Conceptually:** Focus on the how-question rather than on the why-question to understand how behaviour is formed in a discursively constructed reality.
- B. **Theoretically:** Theorise language as ontologically productive and identity constructions and behavioural preferences as co-constitutionally related.
- C. **Methodologically:** Use a discursive epistemology to comprehend how identity constructions constitute (un-)desirable behaviour in a TA's discourses.
- D. **Procedurally:** Test PDA by analysing how the identity-behaviour nexus manifested itself in the discourses of some of NATO's earlier TA's.
- E. **Practically:** Consider discursive interventions to shape behaviour rather than directly targeting the TA's behaviour to increase IBI's success potential.

In all, I argued that interpreting how a TA discursively constructs its identity-behaviour nexus increases NATO's insight into a TA's receptivity to IBI before and after its application. Yet, this does not mean that this discursive approach must stand alone. To the contrary, the fact that this approach is interpretative does not entail that its methods are not compatible with more quantitative approaches, as Hansen herself already recognised.<sup>55</sup> Given the difficulties the new information environment entails, both in terms of quality and quantity, the need to analyse ever larger bodies of texts calls for more research in this area. For instance, the analytical value of computer-assisted analysis, which looks at discursive *frequencies* rather than discursive *meaning-making*, suggests that mapping discursive fields entails understanding how people speak about themselves and others but also comprehending how much their identity constructions are reproduced in the discursive field. Therefore, although this paper contributed to gaining more insight into the identity-behaviour nexus, further research must more thoroughly inquire how these qualitative and quantitative approaches can be combined to optimise NATO's theoretical and methodological toolkit.<sup>56</sup>

55 Lene Hansen, Interview - Lene Hansen, E-International Relations, 12 July 2018, <https://www.e-ir.info/2018/07/12/interview-lene-hansen>.

56 One option is to utilise both qualitative and quantitative methods to retain two analytical focuses so that their conclusions can supplement each other. See Andrew Bennett, 'Found in Translation: Combining Discourse Analysis with Computer Assisted Content Analysis', *Millennium* 43, no. 3 (2015): 984–97, <https://doi.org/10.1177/0305829815581535>.

Interpreting how a TA discursively constructs its identity-behaviour nexus increases NATO's insight into a TA's receptivity to IBI before and after its application.

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