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International Symposium

Journalism, Media and the Normalization of (Right-Wing) Populism and Nativist Authoritarianism: Analysis of Practices and Counteracting Strategies before and during the COVID-19.

PROGRAMME

Day I, Thursday 4 February 2021

Time: 13:00-18:30 CET / 12:00-17:30 GMT

Theme: **Journalism, Right-Wing Populism and the Pandemic: Interactions between Mainstream and Alternative Sites of Mediation**

Chair: Michał Krzyżanowski – Uppsala University, Sweden

13:00-13:15 CET / 12:00-12:15 GMT: Welcome, Opening & Info by the Organizers

13:15-14:00 CET / 12:15-13:00 GMT: Opening Presentation

- **The failure of magic realism: Right-wing populism, the pandemic, and the collapse of the communicative commons** – (Presenter: Silvio Waisbord - George Washington University, Washington DC, USA; Comment/Open Questions: Mats Ekström – Gothenburg University, Sweden)

14:15-16:15 CET / 13:15-15:15 GMT: Session I

- **The limits of critical news journalism and the normalization of a ‘politics of fear’** (Mats Ekström - Gothenburg University, Sweden; Marianna Patrona - Hellenic Military Academy, Athens, Greece & Joanna Thornborrow – Université de Bretagne Occidentale, Brest, France)
- **Morality, the political and contemporary media cultures** - (Sean Phelan – Massey University, Wellington, New Zealand & University of Antwerp, Belgium)
- **The Populist Radical Right & The Media – Friend or Foe?** (Léonie de Jonge – University of Groningen, The Netherlands)

- **“Join Me on Parler!”: Populist discourses around the conservative exodus from Facebook and Twitter in the United States** (Gina Masullo – University of Texas at Austin, USA)

1630-1830 CET / 1530-1730 GMT: Session II

- **Alternative and mainstream news media during the Coronavirus crisis: Insights from a largescale computational content analysis** (Thorsten Quandt & Svenja Boberg, University of Münster, Germany)
- **Gender, Expertise and Gender in Times of Populism: A study of government communications of COVID in Scotland and England** (Michael Higgins – University of Strathclyde, UK)
- **How populism and conservative media fuel conspiracy beliefs about COVID-19 and what it means for COVID-19 behaviors?** (Dominik Stecula – Colorado State University, USA)
- **Alternative realities? Alternative news, populist sentiments, and disinformation during the COVID-19 crisis** (Lena Frischlich – University of Münster & Ludwig Maximillians University, Munich, Germany)

DAY II: Friday 5 February 2021

Time: 08:00-14:45 CET / 07:00-13:45 GMT

Theme: **(Re-)Defining Normalization and Mainstreaming in Media, Journalism and Political Communication**

Chair: Mats Ekström – Gothenburg University, Sweden

08:00-08:45 CET / 07:00-07:45 GMT – Input Presentation

- **Normalization, Mainstreaming, and Crisis: Discursive Strategies in Politics, Media and Journalism** (Presenter: Michał Krzyżanowski - Uppsala University, Sweden; Comment/Open Questions: Aurelien Mondon - University of Bath, UK)

09:00-11:00 CET / 08:00-10:00 GMT: Session III

- **Normalising extremist pedagogies in post-literate cultures** (Philip Graham & Harry Dugmore – University of Sunshine Coast, Australia)
- **How Do Mainstream Parties ‘Become’ Mainstream, and Pariah Parties ‘Become’ Pariahs? Conceptualising the Processes of Mainstreaming and Pariahing in the Labelling of Political Parties** (Benjamin Moffitt – Australian Catholic University, Melbourne, Australia)
- **‘We Try to Avoid Fake News’: Examining Journalistic Reflections on Fake News** (Johan Farkas – Malmö University, Sweden)
- **Attack the (Watch) Dog: A longitudinal analysis of how Australian politicians attack journalists on Twitter** (Scott Wright – Monash University, Melbourne, Australia)

11:30-13:30 CET / 10:30-12:30 GMT: Session IV

- **Is ignoring the neo-fascist politics of provocation the way forward?** (Bart Cammaerts – London School of Economics & Political Science, UK)

- **Building authority and legitimacy for alt-right media: The discursive strategies of Breitbart and the attack on the establishment** (Karin Wahl-Jorgensen & Jason Roberts – Cardiff University, UK)
- **Far-right alternative media, mainstreaming processes and institutional boundary struggles** (Tine Ustad Figenschou & Karoline Andrea Ihlbæk – Oslo Metropolitan University, Norway)
- **Framings of populism in media: comparison in time and between six countries** (Juha Herkman – University of Helsinki, Finland)

13:45-14:45 CET / 12:45-13:45 GMT: Final Session

- **“Big lies” and “Ministries of Truth“: the shameless normalisation of "message control", "fake news" and "alternative facts“** (Presenter: Ruth Wodak - Lancaster University, UK & University of Vienna, Austria; Comments/Open Questions: Cristian Vaccari – Loughborough University, UK)
- **Closing remarks by the organizers** (Mats Ekström – Gothenburg University, Sweden & Michał Krzyżanowski - Uppsala University, Sweden)

ABSTRACTS

(in order of presentations)

Day I, Thursday 4 February 2021

The failure of magic realism: Right-wing populism, the pandemic, and the collapse of the communicative commons

Silvio Waisbord

This presentation discusses the response to the pandemic in countries governed by right-wing populist administrations. The pandemic has been a natural laboratory to examine and compare unique aspects of global populism. As demonstrated by the administrations of Donald Trump in the United States and Jair Bolsonaro in Brazil, populism embraced junk science in response to the pandemic, with undivided support from supportive legacy news organizations and digital media platforms. Its position stands in opposition to rational, evidence-based response grounded in public health expertise as well as socio-economic and behavioural considerations. These cases show not only the proximity between populism and contemporary forms of irrationalism. Equally troubling, they also reveal the decomposition of public communication as a necessary common space for collective decision-making to address a global crisis. By definition, a “public” health crisis demands collective debate and decision-making. Instead, populism offers an exclusivist, narrowly partisan, anti-scientific rationale that exacerbates the challenge of confronting common, global problems.

The limits of critical news journalism and the normalization of a ‘politics of fear’

Mats Ekström, Marianna Patrona and Joanna Thornborrow

The politics of fear is a political rhetoric consistently mobilized in authoritarian right-wing populism (Béland, 2020; Wodak, 2017; Wojczewski, 2020). Three related elements are distinguished: (1) the narratives of threat and fear; (2) the scapegoating of collectives such as immigrants, refugees and Muslims; (3) the call of radical political measure to secure ‘the people’ and restore social order. In this study we investigate the following overall question: How does news journalism handle the challenges of reporting on

terrorist attacks, without validating and propagating a politics of fear? Extensive research provides evidence of the tendency of news reporting to reproduce stereotypical negative views on ‘immigrants’ or ‘Muslims’ as threat, danger and potential terrorists (Ahmed & Matthes, 2017; Georgiou and Zaborowski, 2017; Hameleers, 2019; Kopytowska and Chilton, 2018). However, research also shows examples of how narratives of civil inclusion and solidarity are enacted in news reporting on terrorism (Luengo and Ihlebæk, 2018). Based on a most-similar design in comparative qualitative research, we study the press coverage of the terrorist attacks in Stockholm (April 7, 2017) and London (June 3, 2017). In both cases, the perpetrators deliberately drove into pedestrians in a crowded area in the centre of the capitals. Five and eight people were killed and many more were injured. Islamist extremist motives were claimed. More specifically, we apply a discourse analytical approach to answer the following empirical questions: How is the threat of a terrorist attack discursively constructed in the news? How is the perpetrator represented in the news? How are political arguments reproduced, contextualized and critically scrutinized in news reporting? The study shows how contrastive discourses both validating and countering a politics of fear are constructed. In op-eds in some news papers, journalists, for example, typically articulate a critical stance to narratives of threat and fear, and justifications of an increasingly repressive policy, reproduced and foregrounded in the news articles.

Morality, the political and contemporary media cultures

Sean Phelan

This paper asks – in a more theoretical mode – how we might grasp the relationship between moral discourse and political discourse in a public culture that seems increasingly steered by the imperatives of social media. I focus on the political aspects of this question, particularly as it relates to the work of Chantal Mouffe. I affirm Mouffe’s general critique of discourses that cultivate “a moralisation of politics”, something she typically attributes to the “third way”, but which is also a discernible tendency in different fragments of today’s media culture. At the same time, I highlight aspects of Mouffe’s argument that are less convincing, especially when we consider the simultaneously political and moral question of how to counter the mainstreaming of far right discourses. This paper therefore offers an early attempt to articulate a critical understanding of the relationship between morality, the political and contemporary media cultures by thinking through some of the tensions and silences in Mouffe’s work.

The Populist Radical Right & The Media – Friend or Foe?

Léonie de Jonge

Although there is widespread agreement in the literature that the media play an instrumental role in furthering or limiting the spread of right-wing populism, the exact nature of the relationship between right-wing populist parties (RWPPs) and the media remains underexamined. In my research, I analyse the ways in which the media choose to deal with RWPPs in the Benelux region (i.e., Belgium, the Netherlands, and Luxembourg). I show that in the absence of a credible right-wing populist challenger, media practitioners in Luxembourg and Wallonia adhere to strict demarcation, whereas the Dutch and Flemish media have become gradually more accommodative to RWPPs. In this contribution, I reflect on the ways in which the ongoing pandemic has affected the relationship between the populist radical right and the media. Focusing particularly on the Netherlands, I show that the initial public thrust for trustworthy news information rapidly gave way to an increase in distrust. The main argument is that the current climate ultimately plays into the hands of the populist radical right.

“Join Me on Parler!”: Populist discourses around the conservative exodus from Facebook and Twitter in the United States

Gina Masullo

When American voters elected Joseph Biden to replace Donald J. Trump, it was a stark assault on Trump’s populist rhetoric. Yet, it also unleashed a backlash. Trump refused to accept defeat and repeatedly challenged the results in court. As he had throughout his presidency, Trump used social media to further his populist rhetoric, repeatedly questioning the legitimacy of the election and spreading disinformation about non-existent voter fraud. Twitter and Facebook labeled his posts as “disputed” because they were factually inaccurate – an unprecedented step by the platforms to highlight Trump’s disinformation. Trump’s supporters saw this as an amplified effort by social platforms to shut out conservative voices, leading them to announce their intentions to abandon Facebook and Twitter for a newer platform, called Parler, that promises no limits on free speech. This paper will examine the discourses resonating from these “Join Me on Parler!” messages across Facebook and Twitter with an aim for unpacking and contextualizing populist divisiveness in America. It examines what role – if any – social media should play in ensuring free speech and safeguarding truth in an age of disinformation.

Alternative and mainstream news media during the Coronavirus crisis: Insights from a large-scale computational content analysis

Thorsten Quandt and Svenja Boberg

In recent years, so called „alternative media” established themselves as dissenting voices to institutionalized “mainstream” news media. In Western democracies, they seem to be closely linked to specific political or ideological movements: In Germany, for example, there is a notable bias of alternative media toward populist, right wing positions, and some even push conspiracy theorist thinking or anti-systemic messages. Further, there is suspicion that some of these media are not independent but linked to domestic or foreign groups trying to discredit democratic institutions and traditional news media for the purpose of societal polarization (that serves their own political or ideological long-term goals). In particular, there has been a societal debate about the destructive effects of purposefully spread disinformation in alternative news media during the coronavirus crisis. However, some critics also noted a ‘system affirmative’ position of mainstream media during the crisis, i.e. an uncritical coverage that did not include oppositional voices – so they claim that such a position was ‘inviting’ the counter-reaction of the alternatives. The presentation will compare the content published by alternative and mainstream news in Germany during the first 9 months of the coronavirus crisis. More than 600.000 news items will be analyzed using time-based structural topic modeling, named entity recognition, and sentiment analysis, based on a sample compiled through the Facebook news channels of 110 alternative and mainstream media. The analysis reveals that alternative media were indeed attacking societal institutions and spread problematic content, while mainstream media largely tried to debunk such misleading stories. However, some tabloid media also adopted conspiracy and anti-government frames as established by alternative media, pointing to a more complex interplay of alternative and established media beyond a simple oppositional setup.

Gender, Expertise and Gender in Times of Populism: a study of government communications of COVID in Scotland and England.

Michael Higgins

Two strands of research into populism can usefully inform analysis of political behaviour and communication around COVID, and enrich our understanding of populism in a nationalist context. The first of these is the tension between populist style and discourses associated with formal knowledge and expertise. That is, successful government communication has required the incorporation of scientific information, including acknowledgement of the complex and on-going character of COVID research. This has foregrounded discursive styles that are frequently contrary to the anti-elite underpinnings of the populism ethos. The second of these strands of research looks to the relationship between gender and political style, as it relates to populism. A number of scholars have recently argued that populism is routinely articulated with particular performances of masculinity: this in a context in which female political leaders are overwhelmingly cited as handling the COVID pandemic more effectively than their male counterparts. The paper outlines the terms of a comparative study of government communication using the examples of Scotland and England, conducted collaboratively between the Universities of Stirling, Strathclyde and Sunderland, which sets out to examine the dynamic between gendered performance and the use of expertise in government communications, and its implications for our understanding of populism.

How populism and conservative media fuel conspiracy beliefs about COVID-19 and what it means for COVID-19 behaviors

Dominik Stecula

Research examining attitudes and behaviors of Americans during the COVID-19 pandemic has largely focused on partisanship as a lens through which many Americans see the coronavirus. Given the importance of partisan affiliation and the degree of partisan polarization in the American society, that is certainly an important driver of public opinion, and a necessary one to understand. But an overlooked set of predispositions might also shape COVID beliefs and attitudes: populism. It is a worldview that pits average citizens against “the elites” and, importantly in the context of a pandemic, it includes anti-intellectual attitudes such as distrust of experts (including scientists). We find that populism is correlated with conspiracy beliefs about COVID-19, above and beyond partisanship. Furthermore, we find that conservative media consumption tends to be a stronger predictor of conspiracy belief among those high in populism than among those low in populism. We also show that these beliefs have consequences: those who believe the conspiracy theories about COVID-19 are less likely to adapt behaviors recommended by public health officials.

Alternative realities? Alternative news, populist sentiments, and disinformation during the COVID-19 crisis

Lena Frischlich

The last years have witnessed an upraise of alternative news that position themselves as correctives to a hegemonically interpreted ‘mainstream’ in many Western countries. In Germany, the context of the current study, alternative news often spread populist worldviews and sometimes publish disinformation and conspiracy narratives. This could be particularly problematic in times of a public health crisis when successful crisis-control often depends on citizens access to factual information and their trust in the employed policy-measures. Accordingly, this paper examines the role of alternative news media during the early month of the COVID-19 pandemic. Study 1 explored whether alternative news sowed populist and conspirational accounts of the unfolding events by means of a qualitative content analysis of German alternative news Facebook posts (N = 503, covering February till April 2020). The analysis found only few conspirational stories (n = 13, 2%), however, a large share of the posts transmitted anti-elitist sentiments,

spreading anger and distrust towards the political elite, science, and the media. The second study was a random-quota survey (N = 967) of the German population conducted at the end of March 2020, in which we quasi-experimentally confronted participants with disinforming and factual headlines circulating during that time and examined the association between participants attitudinal susceptibilities, their alternative news use and their believe in these headlines. Participants who recalled having seen the distorted headline before, who had a stronger conspiracy mentality, or who consumed alternative news were more likely to believe in COVID-19 related disinformation, although the effects were overall small.

DAY II: Friday 5 February 2021

Normalization, Mainstreaming, and Crisis: Discursive Strategies in Politics, Media and Journalism

Michał Krzyżanowski

My presentation explores the notion of normalization and highlights its theoretical and empirical relevance for the analysis of contemporary media and journalistic practices in the wider processes of construction and dissemination of public discourse of the far right and the 'new' authoritarianism. Establishing the connection between norms, normality, normalization and discourse (Krzyżanowski 2020a) - as well as relating these to the static and processual take on mainstreaming - the paper will argue that the by now widespread production of 'the new normal' in the public domain - in particular by the far right - relies on a number of factors including, very prominently, pre-/legitimation of 'new' social and political norms and normativities via imaginaries of 'crisis'. Drawing on examples from public discourses on the recent 'Refugee Crisis' in Europe, I will call for an understanding of normalisation as the key stage in a multi-step process of strategically orchestrated "discursive shifts" (Krzyżanowski 2013, 2018a, 2019, 2020b). I will show how - acting on a par with mediated political ideologies and discourse - media and journalistic practices (help) carry extremist views which are enacted, perpetuated and eventually normalised in the public domain as part and parcel of pronounced political strategies. I will also claim that the highlighted normalization processes entail the creation of a specific, public "borderline discourse" (Krzyżanowski and Ledin 2017) wherein, civil, rational and politically correct language has been increasingly used to pre-legitimise (Krzyżanowski 2014, 2016) uncivil, radical and extremist positions and ideologies thus contributing to the formation of a wider, and in effect explicitly exclusionary, nativist or even racist, 'common sense'.

Normalising extremist pedagogies in post-literate cultures

Philip Graham and Harry Dugmore

In this paper we present a perspective on normalisation. Our question is: how do extremist discourses get "normalised" under current circumstances? We argue for a view of normalisation that turns on public pedagogies; that is, on ambient, ever-present systems of mediated experience designed to inculcate ways of seeing, evaluating, acting, and reacting. Our perspective is based in medium theory and takes the view that we are in, or at least fast moving towards, post-literate cultures for which "instructions for living" are grounded in narrative rather than formal logic. Formal logic derives factual or probable conclusions from given premises, or propositions, and is the basis of scientific method. Narrative logic, we argue, derives moral or axiological conclusions from a staple collection of characters, contexts, roles, motives, and acts. Our post-literate perspective

therefore situates pedagogies of any kind within a framework of narrative logic. It focuses theoretically on the intersections between the analytic character of literate culture and the catalytic nature of oral culture, with its “playbook” of staple stories, characters, and situations that are used to propagate, maintain, and ground moral interpretations of experience. We demonstrate our theory and methods using examples from extremist manifestos, including those of Tarrant and Breivik. We show how the narrative staples of those manifestos are revocalised by “mainstream” politicians, remediated through “mainstream” news, and rearticulated through social media platforms including YouTube and Facebook. In doing so we show the kinds of ‘prefabricated materials’, characteristic of the post-literate pedagogies that have been used by extremists to educate a fast-growing public in multimodal environments.

How Do Mainstream Parties ‘Become’ Mainstream, and Pariah Parties ‘Become’ Pariahs? Conceptualising the Processes of Mainstreaming and Pariahing in the Labelling of Political Parties

Benjamin Moffitt

How does a political party become ‘mainstream’? And what makes some parties receive arguably the opposite designation – ‘pariah party’? This conceptual article examines the processes by which parties’ mainstream or pariah status must be constructed, negotiated and policed, not only by political scientists in the pursuit of case selection, but by several actors actively involved in the political process, including media actors and political parties themselves. It explains how these actors contribute to these processes of ‘mainstreaming’ and ‘pariahing’, considers their motivations, and provides illustrative examples how such processes take place. As such, the article moves beyond the literature on the ways in which mainstream parties seek to deal with or respond to threats from a variety of pariah parties, instead paying attention to how those parties have been constructed as pariahs in the first place, and how these processes also contribute to the maintenance of mainstream party identities.

‘We Try to Avoid Fake News’: Examining Journalistic Reflections on Fake News Coverage

Johan Farkas

Fake news has become a ubiquitous concept in journalism and politics in recent years. Fear of its influence on democratic elections has become subject to much speculation. At the same time, the concept has become one of the most contested of our time – a ‘floating signifier’ used by different political projects to attack perceived opponents. As Donald Trump has famously phrased it: ‘You are fake news’. In this climate of fear, speculation and political attacks, journalists have to navigate the role of ‘fake news’ in media coverage and weigh cons and pros of giving it increased attention. This paper examines how journalists and key media actors reflect on ‘fake news’ as a journalistic topic as well as their own role in this regard. The study focuses on Denmark, specifically media coverage during two overlapping national elections held in 2019 for the European and Danish parliaments. The article builds on 34 qualitative interviews with journalists (n=16), researchers and analysts (quoted by journalists as experts on disinformation, n=14), state officials (n=2) and social media company representatives (n=2). The study finds a number of internal tensions around fake news – as both a concept and topic – within the field of journalism. On the one hand, journalistic institutions and editors have in many ways co-opted fake news for corporate branding, arguing that they embody democracy’s safeguards against it. On the other hand, newsroom journalists express concern about uncritical journalistic use of the concept and about journalism’s potential role in contributing to an inflated sense of fear in the public.

Attack the (Watch) Dog: A longitudinal analysis of how Australian politicians attack journalists on Twitter

Scott Wright

This paper analyses how Australian politicians attack journalists on Twitter from 2011-2018. Rather than limit the analysis to phrases such as fake news, it takes a more holistic approach, capturing a wide range of a forms of attack such as 'biased', '#theirABC' and personal attacks on individual journalists. This is contextualised with an analysis of all engagements with the media, and with defending and praising comments. The article finds that attacks on journalists have increased significantly since 2016 when President Trump came to power. However, Australian politicians rarely call the media fake or fake news; such discourse is used largely to attack political opponents. Rather, Australian politicians generally criticise either the veracity of reporting, or describe the media as biased. Such attacks are largely focused on the national public service broadcaster, the ABC, with very limited attacks on commercial media, and particularly New Corp mastheads.

Is ignoring the neo-fascist politics of provocation the way forward?

Bart Cammaerts

Neo-fascists, a term I prefer over and above rightwing or nativist populism, practice what could be called a politics of provocation. By constantly making transgressive statements, they not only unsettle commonly accepted political and social morality and decency, but they also deliberately aim to create political consternation and to dominate the public sphere. These daily provocations, usually disintermediated through social media, are amongst others geared towards getting a vigorous response from the so-called 'snowflake' or 'woke' liberal elite (which includes journalists) and it also enables neo-fascist politicians to position themselves as victims rather than discursive perpetrators and as different compared to traditional politicians even though they might be in power. It is fair to say that the liberal mainstream media has a tough time dealing with this, especially as spectacle, drama, audience engagement and circulation of emotive content drives the business model of contemporary mainstream media. Hence, the neo-fascist provocations get amplified, repeated, regurgitated, discussed and condemned, which is precisely what the provocateurs aim to achieve. Another way that journalists have dealt with the politics of provocation is fact-checking. However, as more and more research points out, this is ineffective as it is a quintessentially rational response to something that is inherently emotive and not invested in truth or facts in the first place. If ostracisation, condemnation and fact-checking are ineffective, maybe journalists should consider to stop taking the bait of the neo-fascist provocateurs and disallow them to dominate the public sphere to the extent they have in recent years? This would require a re-positioning of journalists as passionate defenders of democracy and human rights, in line with more radical normative roles.

Building authority and legitimacy for alt-right media: The discursive strategies of Breitbart and the attack on the establishment

Karin Wahl-Jorgensen and Jason Roberts

This talk is based on a study of Breitbart's coverage of mainstream media, demonstrating that the site seeks to build legitimacy and journalistic authority by attacking established media actors. The talk draws on thematic and discourse analysis of stories from Breitbart's "Media" section published between September 1, 2018 and April 1, 2019. The analysis is based on the stories generating the most comments each day during this period, with a total sample of 213 stories. The talk identifies discursive

strategies that include (1) celebrating the victories of the right by detailing the failures of political opponents, including mainstream media and Democrats; (2) pointing to the victimhood of the right by identifying attacks and injustices ranging from violence to cultural marginalisation; and (3) engaging in vilification of mainstream media and Democrats by describing their behaviour as lawless, unhinged, cruel and hypocritical. Through these strategies, Breitbart gains legitimacy as the media arm of the Trump administration, the bastion of a new conservative movement, and the voice of a victimised minority. At the same time, Breitbart claims the moral high ground as the defender of liberal democracy in the face of the irrational behaviour of its political opponents. These strategies should be understood as situated within the “angry populism” cultivated by Trump and his followers (Wahl-Jorgensen, 2018). If angry populism capitalizes on anti-establishment sentiment and draws on a politics of negative emotion to mobilize the alt-right as a political force, Breitbart is one of the most prominent channels for its propagation.

Far-right alternative media, mainstreaming processes and institutional boundary struggles

Tine Ustad Figenschou and Karoline Andrea Ihlebæk

The news institution is under pressure globally, due to dramatic technological disruption, financial struggle, ideological and political critique (Reese, 2020). Criticism from far-right alternative media (Figenschou & Ihlebæk, 2019) and right-wing populist actors (Robinson, Carlson & Lewis, 2020), represent a particular form of attack on professional journalism that have proven difficult to tackle (Krämer & Langmann, 2020). Concurrently, the boundaries of the news institution are renegotiated and blurred as new alternative actors opposing the establishment enter the field. The present paper investigates boundary-work processes, between mainstream and alternative media, in the context of the Norwegian media system characterized by strong press organizations, strong consensus around professional ethical standards and a self-regulatory system guarding these principles (Hallin and Mancini 2004; Syvertsen et al 2014). Combining interviews with key stakeholders, document analysis and textual analysis, it analyzes institutional protection of normative boundaries after far right-alternative media actors repeatedly attempted to join key professional organizations (2018-2020). The institutional response is a process of ‘ethical cleansing’ (Raaum, 1999), clarifying and tightening the criteria for inclusion in the self-regulatory system. It demonstrates the professional ambivalence towards attempts of mainstreaming controversial alternative actors. On the one hand, it represents an opportunity to discipline and train non-professional newcomers. On the other, it represents a potential undermining of professional authority based on ethical journalism.

Framings of populism in media: comparison in time and between six countries

Juha Herkman

Even if populism has become a catchword in public discourse on politics during the twenty-first century, the very concept and term ‘populism’ has remained rather vague and contested. Therefore, it is important to study the ways media frames populism to reveal the contextual differences in public understandings of the term and phenomenon itself. In public use of the term, populism was connected to high variation of actors and meant generally provocative and irresponsible political style and rhetoric in British and Dutch newspapers during the beginning of the century (Bale et al. 2011). According to my analysis, the similar pejorative framing was common also in the Nordic newspapers during the early 2010s, however the meanings of European nationalist and nativist right-wing populism had raised the most popular in that context and were also linked to

domestic political parties called populist (Herkman 2016). This paper investigates more thoroughly the developments and changes in the public use of populism terminology in leading dailies of six countries: Helsingin Sanomat (Finland), Dagens Nyheter (Sweden), New York Times (US), The Times (UK), De Volkskrant (Netherlands) and Hürriyet (Turkey). The sample (n=3252) contains every tenth article discussing explicitly populism in these papers during 2000-2018, thus covering the pre-pandemic period of the century and including the Brexit vote and election of Donald Trump in 2016. The analysis is work in progress and carried out with my colleague Niko Hatakka.

“Big lies” and “Ministries of Truth“: the shameless normalisation of "message control", "fake news" and "alternative facts“

Ruth Wodak

Lies and “fake news” are certainly not new phenomena in politics (Arendt 1971/72). The same is true for processes of “normalization” which always acted as catalysts or facilitators of socio-political (and discursive) change/s, top-down or bottom-up, depending on political systems. Nowadays, disinformation is spread locally and globally at enormous speed via Twitter, Facebook and other social media, assisted by conservative far-right media. “Alternative facts” quickly become normalized; simultaneously, facts are systematically and shamelessly transformed to so-called “fake news.” New public spheres are continuously created because everybody (also every politician) is now able to act as one’s own “journalist”; in this way, serious journalism is threatened and might even become obsolete. In my monograph *The Politics of Fear. The shameless Normalization of Far-right Discourse (2020)*, I define “shameless normalization” as the process through which “[T]he boundaries of the ‘sayable’ are being shifted, and ‘anything goes’.” (p. 6). Conventions and norms, rules governing dialogues, negotiations, and debates are violated through continuous provocations, previously tabooed discriminatory, racist, sexist, antisemitic, homophobic etc contents and expressions are disseminated via the media, supported by mainstream conservatives — and thus normalized. In my presentation, I first discuss some historical dimensions of the impact of politics on journalism and media, and then focus more specifically on recent developments in pluralist democracies (in the European Union). The detailed analysis of shameless normalization of far right ideologemes in Austrian media serves as example of such developments. An example of - what is now called - “message-control” which refers not only to news production and dissemination but also to media economies.