Right wing identities in Social Media

A case study on Swedish alternative media Fria Tider

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1. Introduction

Alternative media and fake news are on the rise on the internet and in society. Alternative media refers to a platform that covers an alternative view of news or tries to challenge the traditional mainstream media by presenting alternative news or views of political and societal issues (Heft et. al. 2019; Holt, 2018). On the other hand, traditional printed newspapers both in Sweden and the world become fewer and for corporations to save money multiple newspapers are combined into one (Edge, 2019). With a smaller amount of news to choose from alternative media and their news coverage could have an easier time being seen and constructing their identities as new forms of journalism in online societies. This form of media could be making use of the new social media to spread the news.

Fake news has as well become a common topic in recent years and new increased capabilities for anyone to produce and spread content through the internet which could be a primary source of new alternative facts. Social media is more common to consume news through than traditional media (Shu et. al., 2017) and there is also an increased mistrust in traditional mainstream media organizations (Holt, 2018).

This paper aims to further understand the use of social media within the right-wing news sites in Sweden and how they use social networks to spread information. With right-wing media, I imply in this paper, media outlets that are aimed at political ideologies such as Nazism, fascism or other right-wing ideologies. This study is conducted on the Swedish right-wing oriented website Fria Tider, which in 2018 had 11% of the Swedish citizens on the internet reading it daily and as such is the most visited and known alternative media site (Newman et. al., 2018).

This paper makes use of the definition of network societies by Castells (2004) who defines networks as a flow of communication between different nodes. This study is using his perspective to understand how the alternative media in Sweden are using social media as a powerful tool to create and spread information to users and in turn, construct their identity as an alternative platform.

To further understand and contextualize the aim of this paper and how Fria Tider use social media, the following research question has been formulated: *How does the right-wing alternative media Fria Tider use Twitter to construct their identity as a news source and newspaper in Sweden?*

To answer this question, this study makes use of a qualitative analysis of Fria Tider's Twitter account.

2. Methodology

2.1 Textual analysis

For this study, a qualitative content analysis in the form of a textual analysis was conducted on some of the published tweets on Fria Tider's Twitter account. With the qualitative textual analysis, the aim was to understand the contents of the tweets in what words are used and how the sentences are constructed. A textual analysis is useful for understanding underlying meanings of words (Ledin & Moberg, 2013) and this approach aims to understand the use of Twitter based on Castells (2004) theories of how networks are based on the control between nodes. The textual analysis is used in this paper to understand the meaning of how Fria Tider present their news and identity on Twitter and as well as how they use this social media when producing their news.

What a text says and how sentences are constructed is a powerful tool to control how people perceive reality (Bergström & Boreus, 2012) and tools of control is one of Castells' (2013) definitions of how network societies are constructed. A textual analysis would then help with understanding the meaning of words and connect these to Castells' (2013) theories on network societies in how power relations are shaped in Web 2.0.

The approach in this paper was to deconstruct the text to analyze the elements of it, in the form of individual words and the meanings of these words. Bruno Latour (2005) explains that technology also is actors in the network. The approach in this study did not include any analysis of the technical aspects of the platform and how these can be understood or how Fria Tider makes use of technical advantages. The only focus was on the use of the medium and the published text. This is one of the primary limitations of my study. The only approach in this paper is studying how Fria Tider uses text as a tool on the platform.

The original tweets were written in Swedish and because of that, the quotes also needed to be translated into English to fit into this research paper. There can always be an issue of translating the sample since the translation is based on my interpretation of the words. There could also be cultural differences between the meaning of words.

2.2 Sample

Fria Tider's account has as of writing this paper in January of 2020, more than 22000 Tweets published on their account. To find a sample suitable for this small-scale research, I aimed at

finding five Tweets for the analysis from one week. This would be enough data for this small-scale qualitative research and to find reasonable results for the research question in a limited timeframe.

The sample selected for this paper was a few tweets that were published in the week between New Year's Day of 2020 up until and including the 10th of January 2020. This week was selected since it was the week this paper was written and as well since there were no holidays at the specific days selected, which could affect the active participation on the platform by the user account, by producing fewer Tweets and empirical data to choose from.

No external tools were used to collect the tweets from the account. The process of finding relevant data was in going through the Twitter feed and find Tweets that were published in the selected week and finding tweets that are relevant for this study.

To collect tweets to analyze, the first step was to visit the Twitter account of Fria Tider, which is called @friatider. When selecting which Tweets to analyze, I only choose to include those that had a text written by the Twitter account. All tweets that only contained a link to a shared news article were excluded since the aim of this paper was not to study the contents of the written news articles, but the use of Twitter as a social platform to spread and comment on the news.

Due to ethical reasons, I also choose to exclude tweets that named or showed a lesser-known individual, such as some journalists or other people who should not be considered public for this type of research.

For this study, five tweets were selected from Fria Tider's Twitter account to limit the scope of data. The final sample of these five tweets is presented in appendix I.

2.3 Ethics

When studying social media, different types of ethical issues arise. These could be the risk of harming the users of the platform, the informed consent of studying the content produced or the privacy and availably of posts that may be hidden for the public (Townsend & Wallace, 2016).

The sample used for this paper was collected from a public page run by the news site Fria Tider. It is not a closed page where the posts are hidden, and they are available to read for anyone. As a page not run by an individual but by an organization that wants to be seen as a news media

(Holt, 2018), there should not be any issues of the writers not knowing they make public posts on the platform and that these can be studied by anyone.

The tweets that are analyzed do not include any commentaries or responses written by any individual user. During this paper, every connection to Fria Tider is mentioned by Fria Tider as a newspaper and no tweets regarding an individual user are mentioned. Hence, there is no risk of harm for any user of the Twitter platform. The tweets in the empirical data that were selected, were chosen to not include texts or links to images that mention an unknown or lesser-known person. Those tweets that were selected only contained names of people that could be seen as a public person, such as a prime minister, a president or another person who is in high positions in other countries. These are people that should generally be accepted of being part of research in their role as a public person.

3. Theoretical perspective

In this paper, Manuel Castells' (2004) theoretical framework of political economy was applied to study the networks. Castells defines networks as different nodes that are connected and that these nodes hold power in the network. A node works on binary logic, meaning it can exclude or include actors in the network (ibid., 2004).

This paper aims to understand how Fria Tider uses Twitter. Hence it could be relevant to understand exclusion and inclusion as a tool of control in the network societies.

However, all nodes may not hold equal power. Castells (2013) further emphasizes:

> "Power is the relational capacity that enables a social actor to influence asymmetrically the decisions of other social actor(s) in ways that favor the empowered actor´s will, interests, and values. Power is exercised by means of coercion (or the possibility of it) and/or by the construction of meaning on the basis of the discourses through which social actors guide their actions (p. 10).

This quote may suggest that Castells believe there are more powerful nodes in the network. If there are more powerful nodes there could also be some actors or some "nodes" that may be less powerful than other actors. Hence this could support Castells' idea of inclusion and exclusion in the network societies and that inclusion or exclusion are tools for control. Fria

Tider could possibly be one node that is or tries to be seen as a powerful node, or a powerful actor in the network. They could also try to control less powerful nodes and these nodes may as well be more vulnerable for control by other actors.

Castells (2013) emphasizes that the different actors in networks can be anything from an individual person to an organization or a network itself.

For this study, Castells' theory will be applied to understand the power relation of social media and Fria Tider's power of identity construction. Fria Tider's use of Twitter could be one of these power tools they use to influence other actors.

Castells (2013) also points out how social media can be a form of mass communication between different actors in society. With this paper, I will aim to use the theoretical approach of understanding Twitter as a tool of mass communication and how Fria Tider uses the platform as a tool for producing content aimed at controlling the network.

Castells (2015) discuss how new media can make use of Web 2.0 to produce new content. Web 2.0 refers to the web where the user is responsible for producing the content and as well the active participation of the user. Social media would then be one primary new source of information as part of the new Web 2.0. Castells (2015) also explains that Web 2.0 creates new types of social movements. I see the Twitter-platform and Fria Tider as a combination of different types of these social movements. Since this study is based on the analysis of Twitter, Castells' theory is relevant since it takes Web 2.0 into consideration and through that theory helps with analyzing Twitter.

Previous research in the field shows that right-wing media are more successful in using rhetoric and amassing more followers than the traditional media (Larsson, 2019). Hence the alternative media may have different usage of the media platforms. Alternative media also focuses on sharing their content in similar-minded and homogenous communities (Horne et. al., 2019).

José Van Dijck (2013) mentions in her book how social media are shaping people's perceptions. She also points out the importance of studying the history and future of social media. In this paper I will only study five tweets from January of 2020, thus there is no historical aspect taken into account for this case study.

She also explains how networks are formed through the interaction of liking and sharing content (ibid., 2013). However, since I do not study the commentaries or interactions from other users, this approach is not used for this case study.

Bruno Latour (2005) uses the Actor-network theory to blend the boundaries between technology and humans. He explains: "Object to have agency" (ibid., p.63). He also explains that technology is actors in the network. In this study, however, I do not study Twitter as a technical platform and how for instance hashtags and retweeting options work in relation to human input. Hence, I do not apply Latour's Actor-Network theory to this study.

4. Analysis and discussion

In this section, I will present to main findings and analysis of the five tweets. I start by presenting two themes identified and then I will move on to connect these with the theoretical framework.

Fria Tider's posts contain word usage such as I and Me. This use of words could suggest Fria Tider to be more of a traditional blog where the writer or writers present its own personal ideas, rather than the ideas of the newspaper as an organization.

> "The more I read about Soleimani, the more I can understand what a genius act this assassination is." (Fria Tider, 2020-01-03).

> "Do you remember Finnair's answer to our old Turkish revelation?" (Fria Tider, 2020-01-09).

These two quotes support the idea that the writer of Fria Tider is an individual or a group of some individuals and the page could be interpreted as a blog complementing the news rather than a newspaper on its own. In the first quote, the writer is visible by using the pronoun "I". The second one uses the plural form of "our" which also makes the writers visible in the text.

In Tweet 3, Fria Tider also uses the words of:

> "we have been familiarized to" (Fria Tider, 2020-01-06).

Using this formulation could indicate that the aim is to create a community with the reader by including them in the Tweet with the pronoun "we". The meaning of "we" in this context is different from above where it was used as a pronoun referring to the writers. Here it could instead mean that Fria Tider wants the reader to feel included in this society where Fria Tider

could take on the role of a leader or instructor for their community that they have created. As Horner et. al. (2019) explains the alternative media also acts in environments with similarly minded individuals. The finding in my paper would further confirm this previous research and that the personal blog use of Twitter is to make the news sound like personal issues.

I suggest that Fria Tider wants to write for their selected audience by using tools of inclusion and exclusion when writing about their news and presenting these. Exclusion from a network could be a powerful tool of control of the network (Castells, 2013).

The post also includes the words of: "What Svenne (slang for a Swedish Citizens) need to learn" (Fria Tider, 2020-01-06). This could suggest that Fria Tider differs between different actors and hence creating a "we" and "them" situation in their context. They also use a slang word to possibly enhance the feeling that not everyone is part of their network yet.

This competition could be different nodes of its own as Castells (2013) describe them. Each node holds power and how Fria Tider uses Twitter could support this theory. One tool of power on the network societies could be the exclusion of a user.

Tweet 2 further supports this idea of Fria Tider creating excluding and including scenarios.

> "that we have some objections to a war doesn't mean we like your Islamist Regime. What regime controlling your desert country we don't care. Because we are Swedes and our only interest is..." (Fria Tider, 2020-01-04)

In this Tweet, Fria Tider differs between "we", who is the writer, are "Swedes". On the other hand, the ones being criticized are "they", or as Fria Tider puts it "your Islamist Regime" or "your desert country". This would create a form of power relation by showing that Fria Tider wants to be in control, by excluding one actor on the network in how Castells (2013) describes it.

In this Tweet, however, Fria Tider speaks of "us", which refers to the Swedish citizens that are included in the network, which also opposes the above claim were Swedish citizens were less knowing.

The text begins with creating a community of inclusion to the network and this is a recurring theme in the analyzed tweets.

> "without regular western-citizens knowing why" (Fria Tider, 2020-01-03)

At this tweet, the word regular is used, which could suggest that Fria Tider sees a difference between those of us who already know something, and those who are "regular", which could also be explained with Castell's theory of inclusion and exclusion. Being a "regular western citizen" could mean there are unwritten rules established by the right-wing that empowers the idea of inclusion and exclusion, and these rules need to be followed to be a western citizen. Other people or organizations being in Sweden could then be seen as not being "regular".

The use of "without" and "knowing why" could also be a tool of exclusion towards Swedish citizens that they are lesser knowing and Fria Tider are there to inform how it really is in society.

The opposing force that is being criticized is not seen as regular. Fria Tider may suggest that one actor needs to follow these unwritten rules to be included in the network which is one of the primary tools of control (Castells, 2013).

> "talking about buffoon-liberals (…) except when it comes to the welfare-immigration and all other insane cultural-Marxists things the left parties" (Fria Tider, 2020-01-10).

This tweet includes different words that create a community of different or opposing actors. These would be the multiple opposite nodes.

It is important to consider that this study only used five tweets from one form of alternative media. This would make it impossible to generalize these findings presented here or if other alternative media use the same approaches. However, the results from my study in this context show that there are visible elements of inclusion and exclusion in the network.

5. Conclusion

There are two main findings presented in this paper. The first finding shows that Fria Tider is similar to a personal blog with the writer(s) taking on a personal role and as well the writer(s) are visible in the texts. As Castells (2013) also believed, nodes in the network could be both individuals and organizations. This finding could show that Fria Tider wants to be seen as an individual leader or a role model for those included in the network.

The account also makes use of words to create a situation of "we" and "them" in their writings. The use of we and them in the content would as well suggest that Fria Tider uses

Twitter to create a platform of exclusion and inclusion. As Castells points out, all networks build on nodes that are either included or excluded from the network. One form of control could be in choosing who is being excluded and who is included. In my analysis, these nodes became visible in the Tweets produced by alternative media. The tweets also show that Fria Tider actively excludes and includes actors in their communication.

Fria Tider's Twitter-account may claim that there are unwritten rules to be included in the network. This could be one form of aiming their content towards a homogenous group described in Horne et. al.'s (2019) article.

Further research could as well be aimed at studying the alternative medias identities on other media platforms such as Facebook or Youtube to further analyze usage of networks. This could make it relevant to use Van Dijck (2013) approach to networks. A study could also be conducted on more of the alternative media platforms in different countries. A quantitative approach could as well help understanding general patterns in the alternative media's use of social media.

Using the approach described by Latour (2005) another researcher could analyze the actions caused by Alternative media's use of networks or the constructions of their website. A technical approach to Twitter as a platform or the study of users' agreement of the platform could be analyzed from Latour's perspective of how objects have an agency as well and if this agency forms other actions in the network.

Van Dijck (2013) also points out the history and future of social media. Using her perspective could be useful in studying the change of alternative media as a network over a longer time frame. Van Dijck's perspective could also be used to study the interactions with the content in the form of sharing and liking.

6. References

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7. Appendix I - Tweets from Fria Tider's Twitter feed

Tweet 1: Fria Tider, 2020-01-03, https://twitter.com/friatider/status/1213037199832289280

Tweet 2: Fria Tider, 2020-01-04, https://twitter.com/friatider/status/1213446092928491520

Tweet 3: Fria Tider, 2020-01-06, https://twitter.com/friatider/status/1214297081424338944

Tweet 4: Fria Tider, 2020-01-09, https://twitter.com/friatider/status/1215345316620312577

Tweet 5: Fria Tider, 2020-01-10, https://twitter.com/friatider/status/1215464281686401025