Mobilizing the Disenfranchised: Post-Truth Public Stories in Finland, France and the United States

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**Summary of the project:**

Mobilizing the Disenfranchised – project studied how countermedia mobilize a “disenfranchised” community of people, those who are losing trust in the mainstream media. We analysed data from Finland, France, the United States, and Poland on polemic news event coverage in the so-called hybrid media space, using a mixed-methods approach; qualitative methods from media studies and sociology complemented a computational big data toolkit.

**The key findings of the project:**

- The project further developed the notion of “countermedia”, which we define as ultrapartisan media outlets that position themselves in opposition to the mainstream media and “the establishment” more broadly, in typical populist style.
- The project critically assessed the notion of “post-truth” and argues that other terms, such as “reinformation”, “counterknowledge”, and “counter-expertise” may be more appropriate.
- Our analysis of conspiracy stories in countermedia in France and the United States suggests a range of more nuanced approaches for studying “post-truthfulness”, beyond the juxtaposition of facts and lies. These conspiracy stories all draw from a common “reinformative” toolkit designed to erode trust in “the elite” but their produsage – more of less “strategic” or “organic” - takes highly divergent paths and does impact their success in the hybrid media space.
- It is often claimed that populists are “post-truth”, “against experts” and “anti-intellectual”. By studying the political use of knowledge on the anti-immigration websites Homma and MV, we found that those writing for these websites actually often use what we call “counterknowledge” and “counter-expertise”: they justify their arguments with knowledge and expertise, but in simplistic and politicized fashion.

- In Finland we examined how Jussi Halla-aho's nationalist anti-immigration faction in the Finns party gained victory of the simmering malcontent by the radicals and broke a decade of impasse in the power relations between the nationalist faction and the “softer” populist faction led by Timo Soini. Countermedia has been instrumental in the rise of Halla-aho as a political character and in his later victory in the party.

- One news event we analyzed was the coverage of Independence Day in two countries where populist right has gained a significant political power: Poland and the United States. Countermedia outlets in both countries positioned the populist right as the protagonists of national pride that shield the ‘patriots’ from the leftist/liberal ‘pedagogy of shame.’ In addition, the populist rise to power in the two countries elevates the importance of history and its evaluation in the countermedia coverage as a key polarizing theme.

Aim of the project:

The aim was to produce research knowledge on alternative news outlets and how they mobilize “disenfranchised” constituencies.

The aim was achieved (scale 1-5)

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Peer-reviewed research publications of the project, published or accepted for publication


Peer-reviewed research publications of the project, submitted and under review
Ylä-Anttila, Tuukka, Gwenaëlle Bauvois and Niko Pyrhönen, Politicization of migration in the countermedia style. Manuscript submitted for review in *New Media & Society* in December 2018.


**Publications intended for the general public, published or accepted for publication**

Bauvois, Gwenaëlle (forthcoming, accepted for publication in March 2019) “France has never been and never will be a multicultural country”. (Super)-diversity in Macron’s France. *Siirtolaisuus-Migration Quarterly*, Migration Institute of Finland.


Presentations at scientific conferences


Other presentations, lectures, and training sessions


Bauvois, Gwenaëlle (2018). Presentation at the workshop organised by the Radicalisation Awareness Network (RAN) working group 'Communication and narratives', Vienna.


Bauvois, Gwenaëlle (2017). Presentation at the workshop organised by the Radicalisation Awareness Network "Dealing with fake news, conspiracies and propaganda in the classroom; media literacy in the digital era". Budapest.

Bauvois, Gwenaëlle and Pyrhönen, Niko (2017). Tracing the Steps of the Trustbusters The Produsage of Post-Truth Public Stories on Corruption and Conspiracy During the French and American Presidential Elections of 2017 and 2016, Presentation for the 'Protest and political violence network' at the University of Helsinki


Ylä-Anttila, Tuukka (Oct/Nov 2017) Three training workshops for journalists at YLE on how journalists should deal with populism and populists.
Pyrhönen, Niko and Bauvois, Gwenaëlle (2018) Poster presentation, CEREN 20 years seminar, University of Helsinki: “Mobilizing the 'Disenfranchised' in Finland, France, and the United States. Post-Truth Public stories in the transnational hybrid media space.”


Pyrhönen, Niko (2018) Training session on populism for high school students and teachers: “WeQ Pedagogy goes to Populism: Meet the Expert Workshop for High School Students.”


**Doctoral dissertations:** –

**Media exposure of the project**


Pyrhönen, Niko Oikeus paalutti rajoja vihapuheelle Suomessa, 5.11.2018 Sveriges Radio.

Pyrhönen, Niko De inåtvändas utrikespolitik, 28.10.2018, YLE Spotlight. TV.


Pyrhönen, Niko Vastamedioita syntyy nyt nopeaa tahtia - mainostajat arastelevat sekalaista joukkoa, 19.10.2017, YLE Uutiset. TV.


Data sets produced by the project


Data storage and possible use of the material after the project ends

The data sets are under copyright so unfortunately they cannot be shared or archived by the project.