In Search for Unexpected Allies? Radical Right Remediation of
þÿ t h e 2 0 1 5 R e f u g e e C r i s i s o n S o c i a l M e d i a

Bauvois, Gwenaëlle

In Search for Unexpected Allies? Radical Right Remediation of 'the 2015 Refugee Crisis' on Social Media

Gwenaëlle Bauvois and Niko Pyrhönen

Introduction

The large-scale arrival of asylum seekers and refugees to Europe in the summer of 2015 stirred media debates, realigned political agendas and created opportunities for grassroots level mobilisation—both domestically and on the European level. In Finland, the mediatisation of the 'refugee crisis' peaked sharply in late-September 2015 (Pyrhönen & Wahlbeck, 2018, p. 4), focusing both on the influx of asylum seekers and radical right activism. While the 'refugee crisis' also gave rise to surges of local solidarity activism to help the newcomers (Seikkula, 2021), the public response was largely mediatised with reference to semi-organised,

G. Bauvois · N. Pyrhönen (✉)
University of Helsinki, Helsinki, Finland
e-mail: niko.pyrhonen@helsinki.fi

G. Bauvois
e-mail: gwenaelle.bauvois@helsinki.fi

223

anti-immigration vigilantism and online mobilisation—often presented as "counter-reactions to the so-called 'refugee crisis' in the Nordic countries" (Pyrhönen et al., 2021). In Finland, several such movements emerged, among the most prominent being *Rajat Kiinni!* (*Close the Borders!*, hereinafter "CB") and *Suomi Ensin* (*Finland First*, hereinafter "FF"). These two movements—competing in the mainstream space for the 'title' of the largest Finnish anti-immigration movement, especially with the *Soldiers of Odin*—were among the most vocal on social media, most active in the streets and were also able to secure salient mainstream media coverage by the end of 2015.

Informed by recent research illustrating how similar nationalist, conspiratory, and radical right movements have successfully coordinated and scaled up their activities from grassroots level social media platforms (Finlayson, 2020; Kotonen, 2019; Laaksonen et al., 2020), we collected all CB and FF posts on Facebook between September and November 2015, from directly before the radical right's crisis frames found coverage, also, in journalistic media (Pyrhönen et al., 2021).

While many of the post-truth tropes entail explicit hostility and criticism towards epistemic authorities themselves, particularly mainstream media (Ylä-Anttila et al., 2019, p. 2)—that are "by definition as good a gauge of the truth as can usually be found" (Dormandy, 2018, p. 786)—it is advantageous for these groups to also develop more nuanced approaches. For instance, emotionalised reframing of salient issues in the news cycle and false equivalences between facts and interpretations can be efficient in disseminating disinformation (Harjuniemi, 2021; Waisbord, 2018) and *reinforming* audiences (Pyrhönen & Bauvois, 2019) through remediation, without the need for a full-frontal assault on epistemic authorities.

In this chapter, we analyse the *remediation*—a process through which mainstream media content is not excluded, but adapted and transformed (Toivanen et al., 2021)—of the mainstream news cycle on the 'refugee crisis' to the social media audiences of CB and FF. The analysis focuses on the post-truth tropes employed by these groups as practices for subverting information and interpretations in mainstream media in radical and subtle ways. In particular, we look into the practice of selectively remediating mainstream news articles in a process that does not directly challenge the journalistic media, but rather appears to embrace its epistemic authority (Ylä-Anttila, 2018)—at least to the extent it facilitates the search and discovery of 'unexpected allies' for the radical right. By 'unexpected

allies', we refer to actors that would not usually be associated with the radical right, such as moderate politicians, legacy media journalists, liberal celebrities or objectivity-aspiring researchers, and whose words or actions are reframed and remediated by the radical right in order to strengthen and legitimise their arguments and claims.

Indeed, instead of consistently voicing explicit hostility and criticism against their 'enemies' (Bauvois et al., 2022), the radical right can also strategically piggyback on the journalistic media's legitimacy. By being highly selective with which passages they quote and paraphrase, the radical right can effectively hijack the news cycle with the alleged support from 'unexpected allies' in the mainstream media. As we illustrate in the analysis, harnessing this dimension of post-truth tropes allows the radical right to reinform their audience with some of the most established anti-immigration talking points, narrated in a manner that appears to be supported by both journalistic media and the population at large. Before moving into the analysis, however, we first discuss some theoretical and methodological considerations related to the key arenas and actors involved in the remediation process, particularly concerning how remediation structures radical right online activities.

Theoretical Framework

Social media have opened up new avenues for organising collective action that remediates both mundane and high-profile events in the political news cycle for specific audiences (Toivanen et al., 2021). To the extent that the process of remediation challenges news-framing practices and the agenda setting power of journalistic media, this type of collective action can be considered an instance of "counterpower", vesting the social media audiences—ranging from more passive 'likers' and 'sharers' to active discussants and actual political entrepreneurs—with "the capacity […] to change the power embedded in the institutions of society" (Castells, 2015, p. 5). To a significant degree, this capacity is brought about by platform-specific affordances and network effects—particularly the low marginal costs for remediating journalistic content—that efficiently allows for the reaching of increasingly diverse audiences (Huntington, 2016).

While social media as an infrastructure facilitates both deliberate disinformation and inadvertent misinformation (Conrad, 2021, p. 302), audiences are rarely passive consumers of remediated content. Instead, many participate in selecting events within the mainstream news cycle

to be reinterpreted, either by actively sharing content themselves, or upvoting content shared by others. In so doing, they effectively curate or "produse" (Bruns, 2008) hybridly mediatised (Chadwick, 2013) flows of subversively reframed information that can rapidly spread between 'counterpublics' transnationally, and occasionally receive salient coverage in journalistic media (Pyrhönen & Bauvois, 2019; Runciman, 2017, p. 13). For the emergent and aspiring 'counterpublics'—such as *Finland First* and *Close the Borders* during the 2015 'refugee crisis'—one of the key strategies for successfully redirecting hybridised flows of information pertains to presenting the coverage of mundane and ubiquitous political strife as evidence of the political sphere being marked by a societal 'crisis' or 'threat'. Often the crisis or threat is neither an outcome of political and sociocultural change, nor a narrative put forward by the leading figures of a social movement (Ruzza, 2009, p. 87). Rather, it is important to emphasise the collective agency of the counterpublics, whereby both the leaders and audiences collaborate to deliberately *perform crisis* by remediating specific content—polarising media events, in particular—as evidence or indicators of a large societal crisis (Moffitt, 2016, pp. 119–121).

While performing crisis is a repertoire potentially available to a range of actors with significantly diverging agendas and backgrounds, many of these actors and their audiences appear "motivationally post-factual" (MacMullen, 2020, p. 105) in that they appear "seemingly indifferent about the factual veracity of the information" they peddle (Conrad, 2021, p. 302). Regardless of their political goals, this detachment from the bounds of empirical observations is clearly helpful in rousing strong emotions that fuel the crisis performance. It is important to note that motivational post-factualism—as a feature of counterpublic—does not necessitate widespread lying or belief in lies, even as the discussants make strong claims marked by 'the stamp of certainty'. Rather, as researchers of new conspiracism have pointed out, the bar can be set much lower: "if one cannot be certain that a belief is entirely false, with the emphasis on *entirely*, then it might be true – and that's *true enough*" (Rosenblum and Muirhead, 2019, p. 43, emphasis added).

In principle, such a post-factual or conspiracist collective mindset can be used to drive a wide range of political agendas. In practice, however, certain types of social mobilisation appear to harness post-factual crisis performance more successfully than others. An expanding scholarship focuses on how particularly "[u]ncivil actors, with explicit racist and anti-democratic goals" (Ekman, 2018, p. 9), far-right and

anti-immigration movements (Laaksonen et al., 2020), and "nativist, authoritarian, extremist, anti-pluralist and exclusionary-populist" platforms (Hatakka, 2019, p. 1316) participate in propagating, proliferating and capitalising on a sense of crisis. With the rapid influx of hybridly mediatised content diminishing the capacities for journalistic gatekeeping (Vos, 2020), vulgar, sensationalist and hateful content can be rapidly spread in arenas marked by a dearth of moderation and content guidelines (Hakoköngäs et al., 2020).

Contemporary journalism research is still searching for the means by which to evaluate the extent that social networks actually facilitate conversation topics for public debate, as opposed to "repeat[ing] the agenda of topics proposed by the elite media" (Aruguete, 2017, p. 51). However, such a juxtaposition can be misleading. Even in cases where online groups exclusively or predominantly link news events already circulating in the journalistic media, the groups tend to be highly selective about which topics they address and invite group members to react to and discuss. Indeed, as research on Finnish countermedia by Toivanen et al. (2021) suggests, the process of remediation engages with the remediated content by employing a variety of distinct tropes or "styles". These include issuing a direct critique of the journalistic source in which the remediated news item emerges, constructing a completely different narrative from individual points established by the original source and, most commonly, reframing the original content to appear as if it supports the agenda of the remediating party (ibid, pp. 12–14). Recent research on online anti-immigration groups in social media in the Nordic countries (Ekman, 2018; Merrill & Åkerlund, 2018; Nelimarkka et al., 2018; Sandberg & Ihlebæk, 2019) illustrates how these groups employ a range of remediation styles in order to advance their own agenda and mobilise their followers. Featuring high among the common practices is cherry picking individual excerpts about immigrant crime and sexual harassment from immigration-related coverage, either directly from the journalistic news outlets or via countermedia outlets that remediate journalistic news output (Ylä-Anttila et al., 2019).

Picking the topics specifically from mainstream media serves a dual purpose for these online groups. First, by linking their posts to widely discussed topics in public debate, they can easily justify the topicality of the content they create and share it as ordinary citizens engaging in mundane public discussion: "We are only talking about what everyone

else is talking about!" Second, even as the radical right subjects the mainstream media at large to harsh criticism (which typically goes beyond the particularities of subject-matter of the news item at hand), they can claim to find 'unexpected allies' in carefully selected (passages of) journalistic content. This way, the radical right can advance their political agenda by effectively piggybacking on the legitimacy created by the epistemic authority of the quoted or paraphrased news outlet.

Indeed, many online platforms "induce this kind of political performance in which people appear as authoritative, interpreters of what is 'really' going on, inviting viewers to experience this truth for themselves" (Finlayson, 2020, p. 2). In this sense, the online *produsers* (Bruns, 2008) do not focus their critique on just correcting alleged errors and remedying biases as they see them, but rather aim at adopting the role of an ardent whistleblower. In this way, they are not afraid to draw appropriate conclusions from the journalistic content in a manner that 'stays post-true' to the original content, while also 'speaking truth to power' in a manner that is allegedly not available to the 'politically correct' elite.

Both of the rationales for remediating mainstream content rely heavily on "affective economies" (Ahmed, 2004), whereby similar or same narratives become 'proven' by their transnational circulation itself, with little need for any external or additional evidence. Communities bonded by affective economies are not only invested in supporting individual pieces of disinformation (for instance, concerning refugees, as in the FF and CB data), they are also keen to find 'unexpected allies' in the journalistic news cycle—at least to the extent that nevertheless allows them to spread distrust in the epistemic authority of the mainstream media at large. Without intertwining these two narratives, the online *produsers* in FF and CB would find it very difficult to address why their content is so commonly at odds with the observations and conclusions established in journalistic media that quotes and paraphrases academic research, public officials and other expert practitioners (Ylä-Anttila, 2018).

Therefore, while the topics covered by FF and CB groups are thoroughly political—pertaining almost exclusively to immigration, asylum seekers and the alleged political goals of both 'the Islamists' and 'the media elite'—these groups rarely discuss the actual politics (of immigration) in terms of any (more or less) specific policy goals or outcomes. These political entrepreneurs perform politics based on what Weber refers to as "ethics of conviction" (Weber, 1994[1919], pp. 309–369), where they often authentically believe that they can "transcend the messy reality

of politics [because] they have their eyes set on something higher"
(Runciman, 2017, p. 7)—namely a victory in the war against an exis-
tential, alien threat to their country, manifesting in the influx of refugees.
With such an approach to politics, any arguments for incremental policy
changes appear, first and foremost, as diversions, minutiae that distracts
the audience and discussants from perceiving 'the reality of the total war'.

As we illustrate in the analysis, these remediation practices allow
the curation of an alternative political news cycle that seeks to *rein-*
form (Pyrhönen & Bauvois, 2019) its audiences of the Finnish people's
struggle against the influx of refugees, spearheaded by the radical right—
with the occasional and welcomed support from 'unexpected allies.'

Data and Methods

During the peak of media attention concerning the 'refugee crisis', from
September to November 2015, we collected all Facebook posts (see
Fig. 11.1) by *Finland First* ($n = 76$) and *Close the Borders!* ($n = 172$).

Close the borders! (CB) emerged as a spontaneous and loosely organised
protest movement that began its online and offline activities in late August
2015, with demonstrations held in Helsinki and Finnish Lapland in
September. After some leading figures of the movement created an active
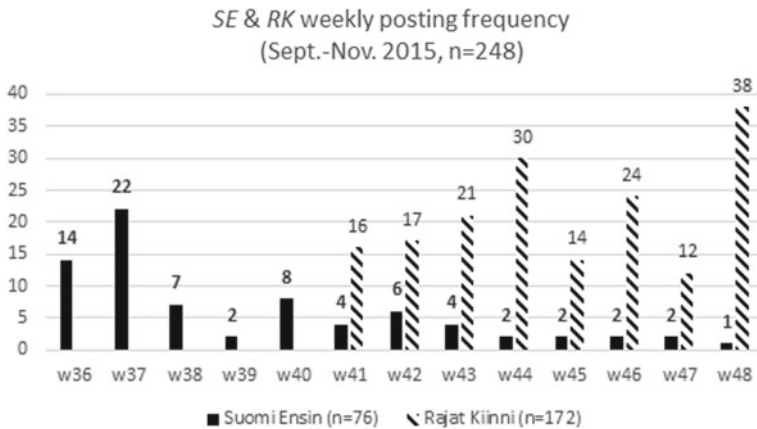Facebook group in October, their activities quickly spread throughout the

Fig. 11.1 Weekly posting frequency

country during the winter and spring of 2016, attracting up to several hundreds of demonstrators to torchlight processions, marches and gatherings in front of reception centres or in neighbourhoods with immigrant communities. Even former Estonian Foreign Minister Kristiina Ojuland gave an opening speech to one of CB's events on 3 October 2015. Before eventually being permanently removed from Facebook during the spring of 2020—together with a number of other radical right groups—the number of participants in the CB Facebook group had exceeded 10,000 members. In 2015 and 2016, some local CB groups organised events in collaboration with more established nationalist, extremist and radical right groups. These included *Suomen Sisu*, a nationalist association serving as the ideological home of Jussi Halla-aho, who would become the chairman of the right-wing populist *Finns Party* (formerly known as the *True Finns*), and the *Finnish Defence League*, a far-right anti-Islam organisation modelled after the *British Defense League*. In 2016, their offline activities started to reduce as media attention waned and in March 2017, members of CB alongside FF and the neo-nazis organised the last large-scale counter demonstration in Helsinki against refugee demonstrators, with a total exceeding one thousand participants.

The *Finland First* (FF) movement was already active on social media via a Facebook page created in February 2015 before becoming a registered association in 2016. The page had attracted almost 20,000 followers before being banned from Facebook, similar to CB, during spring 2020. Unlike CB, several local FF chapters have remained active on Facebook. The association was founded by a number of active CB members—most notably, co-founder Marco de Wit, a Finnish-Dutch anti-immigration activist, YouTuber and aspiring politician. They sought to expand the political agenda beyond border control to include a range of conservative (anti-LGBT activism), nationalist (reinstatement of the Finnish currency markka) and conspirational (global elite-driven climate and population change) issues (Sallamaa, 2018, pp. 26–27). FF organised a series of events throughout Finland in 2016–2017 and gained massive mainstream visibility with its 100-days long *Finland-Maidan* (*Suomi-Maidan*) demonstration at Helsinki central train station square where they established a camp in February 2017 to protest against alleged 'illegal immigration' in Finland. After many incidents (most of the 57 acts of violence or incitement based on ideological motives reported by the police that year were directly linked to the camp and 56 were committed by the

camp's far-right activists), the camp was dismantled by a major police operation on June 26, 2017.

The most striking general observation about the data analysed—and the one that prompted us to focus the analysis on remediation—is that almost all (92%) of these 248 posts made use of URLs linked to a range of information sources (see Fig. 11.2). This suggests that these groups' online activities primarily consisted of remediating to their audiences the existing coverage in the journalistic media, the countermedia and the blogosphere—sometimes only tenuously linking this content to the 'refugee crisis'. The posts without URLs ($n = 19$) are mostly nationalist memes created by *Finland First*.

Considering that a significant portion of the social media and countermedia URLs point to content originating in mainstream media, the latter is a much more prevalent remediation source than Fig. 11.2 would appear to suggest.

FF and CB adopted a distinctly different format for conducting online discussions. FF is a Facebook page managed by an 'institutional actor account' that only the anonymous group administrators can use to post content—although all group members (~20,000 followers in 2016) can like, comment and share the content posted by the anonymous admins. On the other hand, CB is a public Facebook group where the feed is collectively curated by identifiable group members (~10,000 members in
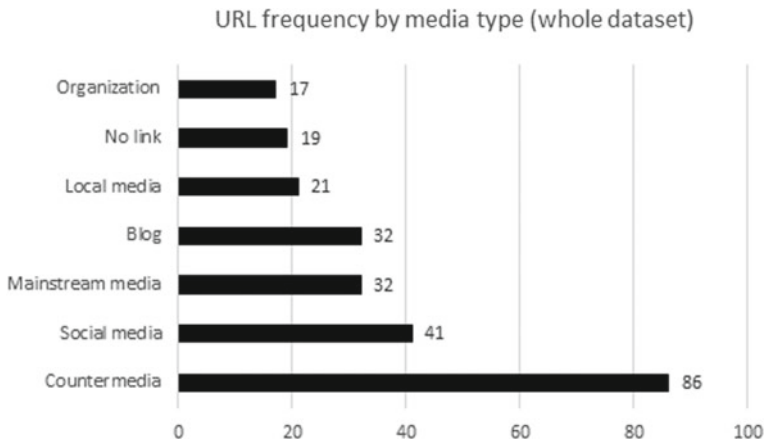

Fig. 11.2   URL frequency by media type, whole dataset

2016), who jointly posted more than twice the number of FF posts. The FF posts, however, cater to its audience by adhering to a more coherent style and logic, resulting in the most successful FF posts generating over five times more likes than the most liked CB posts. However, even though all members were free to post content in the CB group, the actual number of posters was low relative to the group size, and only a few individuals were posting multiple times in the group. For both groups, we only collected the original posts, not the follow-up discussion. In the following section, we analyse how the two Facebook communities remediate mainstream content into a polarised, deeply affective, narrative of the people's struggle against the influx of immigrants.

Remediating the News Cycle by Introducing 'Unexpected Allies'

The radical right has been shown to commonly adopt deeply distrustful, even conspiratory positions towards epistemic authorities, often seeking to delegitimise knowledge that can be traced back to authoritative sources (Knops & De Cleen, 2019; Ylä-Antilla, 2018). In practice, however, the ethnopolitical entrepreneurs remediating content for FF and CB audiences do not consistently categorise researchers, journalists and other experts as 'enemies' of the people. Instead, by harnessing careful, nuanced and context-sensitive remediation practices, FF and CB are also able to present certain news items as indicative of wider support for nativist and anti-immigration talking points. In doing so, they leave no stone unturned in order to advance the narrative of new, unexpected allies in Finland and abroad who constantly join the ranks of 'the true patriots'.

The most liked post in the CB dataset (181 likes) is a case in point. This post remediates the globally circulated news item from 14 November 2015—during the aftermath of the Paris terrorist attacks—where the French President François Hollande publicly described Isis as having committed "an act of war" against France and promised that "France will be merciless towards Isis barbarians […] within the framework of law". From the outset—being a socialist president operating in the very core of the global power elite—Hollande would appear a remarkably unlikely figure to champion the cause of the Finnish radical right. Indeed, this instance of remediation relies on the counterfactual post-truth trope

that—by only slightly manipulating the original news item—clearly positions Hollande as an ally, congratulating him as the harbinger of the war against Islam and against terrorists disguised as 'so-called refugees'.

The posted URL links to *MV-lehti*, the largest countermedia in Finland, citing an article by *The Guardian* from the same day. It is noteworthy that neither *MV-lehti,* nor the CB post, mentions any of the articles originating in the Finnish mainstream media, considering the frequency with which both cite Finnish journalistic sources, in general. The omission of any Finnish mainstream source creates more opportunities for fine-tuning the headline and body text, in both of which *MV-lehti* misquotes Hollande as saying, "We are going to a war which is ruthless!"[1] The CB poster reinforces the notion of Hollande being the leader of European-wide war against Islam by commenting: "This is where the eradication of Islam in Europe starts… It is war now!".

Often the process of remediation can be harnessed for the purpose of creating or reinforcing alliances in a more straightforward manner, simply by sharing carefully selected content without altering it in any way. For instance, on 5 September 2015, FF shared a statement by Viktor Orbán, quoted in an article by the Finnish tabloid *Iltasanomat*: "After [mid-September], Hungary will send soldiers to its southern border to prevent the arrival of refugees if the parliament accepts the proposal. This is what the country's Prime Minister Viktor Orban [*sic*] says". FF only adds to the excerpt their motto (as they do in every single post), "Finland First: We do not surrender, we will not give up!", and a single question: "Wonder when this happens in Finland?".

Orbán is often discussed as a strong ally and a model to follow, both in CB and FF. Known as the champion of 'Christian Europe', fighting against immigration, Islam and LGBT+, Orbán represents the kind of authoritarian and illiberal nationalism (Palonen, 2018) that corresponds very closely to the ideas and attitudes shared in these groups. While Orbán himself, therefore, is not an unexpected ally for the radical right per se, the radical right finds an unexpected ally in *Iltasanomat*, instead. Simply quoting Orbán in verbatim via links to mainstream media is enough to legitimise the harsh rhetoric and the similar political pursuits found among the radical right in Finland and abroad.

---

[1] Unless otherwise specified, all translations in the chapter are made by the authors.

However, the remediation of Orbán's statements by the radical right often goes beyond merely reaffirming him as a prominent source of symbolic support. By explicitly asking when (not if) Finland will adopt similar measures against asylum seekers, FF suggests that Finland will have to eventually follow this 'European trend.' Moreover, by emphasising the fact that Finland does not 'yet' operate in this fashion, FF also implicitly invites its online audience to put pressure on Finnish politicians, and the population at large, to start adapting to an allegedly 'new political reality.'

While the practice of highly selective remediation of content from the foreign press advances the narrative of the Finnish radical right enjoying the support of strong, transnational allies, the great majority of the remediated content emerges from within Finland. Among the most liked posts in the dataset (262 likes, 8th most liked) is a screenshot of a poll from *MTV3*, the biggest private TV channel in Finland, asking the readers on their website at the beginning of the 'refugee crisis': "*Should Finland close its borders?*" This is an example of emotionalised content that can be used with relative ease to fuel the performance of crisis, indicating that the post-truth tropes are not monopolised by the 'alternative' media spheres, but can also originate in the mainstream (Fig. 11.3).

Similarly to the Orbán quotation in *Iltasanomat*, there is little need for FF to manipulate this content, as it fits well into the narrative of the government of Finland being either oblivious or dismissive towards the will of the people. After all, 88% of the 22,021 respondents appear to be 'on their side' by expressing their will to close the borders. Of course, beyond the obvious self-selection bias among the respondents in the poll, the original question effectively maintains that Finland's borders are currently open, which was not the case. As this subtle piece of misinformation has already been presented by *MTV3*, there is, again, little incentive for FF to alter the framing that is readily applicable for their purposes. Instead, FF only inserts their motto and the caption: "The people knows! CLOSE THE BORDERS!", which only further builds on the counterfactual notion that the premise of the poll is correct, and that the Finnish people at large are both aware of the current situation and share the same view expressed by the majority of respondents on the topic. The cases where a mainstream outlet serves on a silver platter a perfectly suitable argument for mobilising the radical right provide golden opportunities for actors like FF and CB. Obviously, being able to actually grasp such opportunities, especially with any consistency, takes the distinct effort of being

Fig. 11.3 An illustration of the poll published by MTV3, remediated on the FF Facebook page with their motto: "Finland First: We will not surrender, we will not give up!" and the commentary: "The people knows! CLOSE THE BORDERS!" (excerpt 12:1)

on a constant 'standby mode', actively scanning for valuable, easily 'remediatable' content in the political news cycle, skimming through an endless flow of 'worthless' news items. When such an opportunity arises, however, it becomes easy for these actors to address the audience with remediated content that is already validated and legitimised with the epistemic authority of journalistic media.

In practice, it can be quite difficult to differentiate cases where remediation *generates* misinformation from cases where remediation merely *circulates and spreads* extant, news-framed misinformation. This is particularly true when the news item in question is not commonly identified as misinformation by the epistemic authorities, either. These news items can present themselves as low-hanging fruit for the radical right, who not only

remediate them as certain pieces of information but also stretch the originally cautious arguments to the extreme. An oft-quoted anti-EU argument, attributed to the then president of the EU Commission Jacques Delors in 1988, suggests that 80% of member states' national legislation originates in the EU (Auel et al., 2015, p. 27). Although Delors never argued that this is the case—rather, he only presented 80% as a projection for what might happen in future—his assessment soon mutated into an argument concerning contemporary political reality. In October 2015, several mainstream news outlets quoted (and misquoted) Markku Kuisma, professor of Finnish and Nordic History at the University of Helsinki, who said in an interview by the Finnish National Broadcasting Company *YLE*: "Currently, 80% of the legislation, *in a certain sense*, comes from Brussels" (emphasis added). While *YLE* correctly reported the caveat established by Kuisma, many other mainstream news outlets did not. For instance, the Finnish economics weekly, *Talouselämä*, cited Kuisma in the headline: "Professor to YLE: Useless to talk about the Finnish independence - '80% of laws coming from Brussels'".

However, Kuisma's original point was not to deplore the current state of Finnish independence, even less the number of immigrants in Finland. Rather, he sought to underline the "unrealism" inherent in the way many Finns relate to independence in public debate and to set the public's expectations straight concerning the ways in which independence should be qualified in contemporary Finland. FF, however, added fuel to the fire by captioning their post linked to the article in *Talouselämä* with: "OUT OF THE EU, CLOSE THE BORDERS and OUT OF SCHENGEN!" The post also accurately cites specific passages from Kuisma's interview, but radically changed the context. For example, when Kuisma compared the degrees of independence between contemporary Finland and the Grand Duchy of Finland (as an autonomous part of the Russian Empire 1809–1917), he also listed "the currency, the central bank and legislation" as areas marked by less extra-national influence. In essence, FF remediated the news article as evidence of Finland having been reduced to a mere vassal of the EU.

Far-right entrepreneurs and media outlets also often target both national and local celebrities viewed as too 'liberal' and 'leftist', notably in sports. Celebrities who express any criticism against the far-right camp are shamed and called out as 'non-patriotic', such as the National Football League (NFL) player Colin Kaepernick who was crucified, particularly by

Breitbart News, for refusing to celebrate Independence Day as it symbolises the mistreatment of Black people (Duvall, 2020; Kazlauskaitė et al., 2022). However, celebrities are also sought-after allies as they can give a familiar and sympathetic face to a cause. Athletes, in particular, are often perceived as embodying strength, discipline and perseverance, with the far-right utilising these characteristics as they reflect commonly shared perceptions of key national(ist) virtues (Black, 2021; Kusz, 2007). When an athlete refuses to get vaccinated, even in cases where the refusal is not intended as a political statement, this nonconformity can be easily presented as an indicator of the athlete being an ally in the fight against the 'leftist' or 'progressive' cause.

In September 2015, Finland's largest private TV-channel, *MTV*, organised a 'refugee night' where 'successful' migrants to Finland were invited to share their views concerning the ongoing refugee crisis. In the talk show, the MMA-fighter Makwan Amirkhani, himself a refugee from the Iranian Kurdish diaspora, said he understood, to some extent, the critical views against immigration among the Finnish population. Some of his quotes were quickly published in mainstream news articles that incorporated some of the most pertinent parts from Amirkhani's interview in the two-hour-long broadcast. FF was quick to share a link to one of the shortest such articles, published by the tabloid *Iltalehti*, only adding the caption "Well done, Makwan!" before quoting him in verbatim:

> In some ways, I understand the Finns, when your own people can't make ends meet. It brings up the question of how carefully the right refugees should be selected […] Even if it [the Alan Kurdi case] breaks the heart, we need to stay vigilant to ensure that no one is abusing the system, said Amirkhani.

Amirkhani, although known to many Finns for his generally sunny, humble and charitable disposition, became instantly championed as an alleged ally for anti-immigration and anti-refugee movements in FF and beyond—despite his explicit refusal to "be political or politicised". For instance, the then Finns Party MP (currently MEP and vice chairperson) Laura Huhtasaari asked Amirkhani to become a member of the Finns party, which he refused publicly in a humorous tweet. Then Finland's largest radical right countermedia outlet, *MV-lehti,* began actively covering Amirkhani's life and exploits both via remediated and

original news-framed stories supportive of the anti-immigration move-ment, while sometimes opportunistically criticising the sportsman when such an approach better suited their purposes.

Conclusions

Contemporary research on the 'post-truth era' commonly addresses the actors, arenas or agendas that advance disinformation or benefit from its spread. This body of research identifies right-wing populists, conspiracy theorists and far-right ethnopolitical entrepreneurs as the main culprits who, not only, have a vested interest in advancing their political agenda with disinformation content, but also actively seek to discredit the journal-istic media and other epistemic authorities in the process. In this chapter, we have sought to complement this literature with a more nuanced approach to the post-truth tropes where the generation of fake news and explicit disinformation is only the tip of the iceberg.

Rather than putting resources into generating convincing disinforma-tion from scratch to advance their political agenda, many successful actors rely on opportunistic strategies for attracting a large base of social media followers with relatable, affective content revolving around a specific set of themes, more specifically here, the 'refugee crisis'. Even so, these followers are rarely voluminous enough to directly push forward a specific political agenda on the high political arena, even in cases where they can agree in broad strokes what that agenda is. Instead, many online groups, like *Close the Borders!*, tend to rely on followers to operate as *produsers* (Bruns, 2008) or "digital foot soldiers" (Vaccari & Valeriani, 2016, p. 306) to whom much of the content creation is crowdsourced. While this can be an efficient strategy for electrifying the most active followers, the content created by unsupervised *produsers* on an unmoder-ated platform tends to be idiosyncratic and less engaging to their larger, less active audience. Only by comparing the number of likes for posts between *Close the Borders!*, who crowdsources the content creation, and *Finland First*, whose anonymous leadership takes care of the posting activity, we can see that the most liked *Finland First* content generates some ten times more likes than CB content, even though *Finland First* only has twice the number of followers.

An important way to make the content creation more efficient—partic-ularly for an online group like *Finland First*, whose moderators have to create all the content—is to make use of content that is already readily

available, such as mainstream news articles. Indeed, posts with direct links to journalistic output encompass about one third of all the articles within our dataset of 248 posts, and this figure approaches 50% of all content when we include countermedia articles that remediate mainstream articles. The obvious challenge with engaging audiences with mainstream—or mainstream originating—content is that the journalistic media tends to frame their output in a manner that impedes, rather than advances the political agenda of the radical right. On the other hand, when the online group remediates this content as only indicative of 'the elite's lies', this may be enough to infuriate the audience, but not commonly enough to support collective action in the long run (Franks et al., 2013, p. 9).

There are several remediation practices that can help online groups with this challenge. For instance, by cherry picking content from online groups' social media feed from the mainstream news cycle on a suitable theme—such as incidents of sexual violence perpetrated by refugees—the radical right encourages its audience to internalise the notion of rampant and violent throngs of foreign men seeking to rape autochthonous women.

The appropriation of celebrities, politicians, scientists and athletes through remediation practices as alleged allies—rather than only enemies and targets—has become a strategy used globally by far-right entrepreneurs and far-right social media platforms and outlets (Kazlauskaitė et al., 2022). The search for 'unexpected allies' further empowers the audience with the notion that they are not alone, but have powerful friends in high places, who can help them to emerge victorious in the ongoing war for defining who are the rightful heirs of their land.

References

Ahmed, S. (2004). Affective economies. *Social Text, 22*(June), 117–139. https://doi.org/10.1215/01642472-22-2_79-117

Aruguete, N. (2017). The agenda setting hypothesis in the new media environment. *Comunicación y Sociedad, 28*, 35–58. https://doi.org/10.32870/cys.v0i28.2929

Auel, K., Rozenberg, O., & Tacea, A. (2015). Fighting back? And, if so, how? Measuring parliamentary strength and activity in EU affairs. In C.

Hefftler, C. Neuhold, O. Rozenberg, & J. Smith (Eds.), *The Palgrave handbook of national parliaments and the European Union* (pp. 60–93). Palgrave Macmillan. https://doi.org/10.1177/1354068812462931

Bauvois, G., Pyrhönen, N., & Pyysiäinen, J. (2022). Underdogs Shepherding the Flock—Discursive Outgrouping of the Internal Enemy in Action. In K. Pettersson, & E. Nortio (Eds.), *The far-right discourse of multiculturalism in intergroup interactions: A critical discursive perspective.* Palgrave Macmillan. https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-030-89066-7

Black, J. (2021). Sport and the 'national Thing': Exploring sport's emotive significance. *Sport in Society, 24*(11), 1956–1970. https://doi.org/10.1080/17430437.2020.1865928

Bruns, A. (2008). *Blogs, wikipedia, second life, and beyond: From production to produsage.* Peter Lang Publishing Inc. https://doi.org/10.1080/19331680802664697

Castells, M. (2015). *Networks of outrage and hope: Social movements in the internet age.* John Wiley & Sons.

Chadwick, A. (2013). The hybrid media system: Politics and power. *Oxford University Press.* https://doi.org/10.1093/acprof:oso/9780199759477.001.0001

Conrad, M. (2021). Post-truth politics, digital media, and the politicization of the global compact for migration. *Politics and Governance, 9*(3), 301–11. https://doi.org/10.17645/pag.v9i3.3985

Dormandy, K. (2018). Epistemic authority: Preemption or proper basing? *Erkenntnis, 83*, 773–791. https://doi.org/10.1007/s10670-017-9913-3

Duvall, S.-S. (2020). Too famous to protest: Far-right online community bonding over collective desecration of colin kaepernick, fame, and celebrity activism. *Journal of Communication Inquiry, 44*(3), 256–278. https://doi.org/10.1177/0196859920911650

Ekman, M. (2018). Anti-refugee mobilization in social media: The case of soldiers of Odin. *Social Media + Society, 4*(1). https://doi.org/10.1177/2056305118764431

Finlayson, A. (2020). YouTube and political ideologies: Technology, populism and rhetorical form. *Political Studies* (July). https://doi.org/10.1177/0032321720934630

Franks, B., Bangerter, A., & Bauer, M. (2013). Conspiracy theories as quasi-religious mentality: An integrated account from cognitive science, social representations theory, and frame theory. *Frontiers in Psychology, 4*, 424. https://doi.org/10.3389/fpsyg.2013.00424

Hakoköngäs, E., Halmesvaara, O., & Sakki, I. (2020). Persuasion through bitter humor: Multimodal discourse analysis of rhetoric in internet memes of two far-right groups in Finland. *Social Media + Society, 6*(2). https://doi.org/10.1177/2056305120921575

Harjuniemi, T. (2021). Post-truth, fake news and the liberal 'regime of truth' – The double movement between Lippmann and Hayek. *European Journal of Communication*, October. https://doi.org/10.1177/02673231211046784

Hatakka, N. (2019). Expose, debunk, ridicule, resist! Networked civic monitoring of populist radical right online action in Finland. *Information, Communication & Society, 23*(9), 1311–1326. https://doi.org/10.1080/1369118X.2019.1566392

Huntington, H. E. (2016). Pepper spray cop and the American dream: Using synecdoche and metaphor to unlock internet memes' visual political rhetoric. *Communication Studies, 67*(1), 77–93. https://doi.org/10.1080/10510974.2015.1087414

Kazlauskaitė, R., Pyrhönen, N., & Bauvois, G. (2022). Mediating shame and pride: Countermedia coverage of Independence Day in Poland and the US. *Emotions and Society*. https://doi.org/10.1332/263169021X16364177574612

Knops, L., & De Cleen, B. (2019). The radical right versus the media: From media critique to claims of (mis) representation. *Politics and Governance, 7*(3), 165–178. https://doi.org/10.17645/pag.v7i3.2131

Kotonen, T. (2019). The soldiers of Odin Finland: From a local movement to an international franchise. In Bjørgo, T., & Mareš, M. (Eds.), *Vigilantism against Migrants and Minorities* (pp. 241–256). Routledge. https://doi.org/10.4324/9780429485619

Kusz, K. W. (2007). From NASCAR Nation to Pat Tillman: Notes on sport and the politics of white cultural nationalism in Post-9/11 America. *Journal of Sport and Social Issues, 31*(1), 77–88. https://doi.org/10.1177/0193723506296820

Laaksonen, S.-M., Pantti, M., & Titley, G. (2020). Broadcasting the movement and branding political microcelebrities: Finnish anti-immigration video practices on YouTube. *Journal of Communication, 70*(2), 171–194. https://doi.org/10.1093/joc/jqz051

MacMullen, I. (2020). Survey article: What Is 'Post-Factual' politics? *Journal of Political Philosophy, 28*(1), 97–116. https://doi.org/10.1111/jopp.12212

Merrill, S., & Åkerlund, M. (2018). Standing up for Sweden? The racist discourses, architectures and affordances of an anti-immigration Facebook group. *Journal of Computer-Mediated Communication, 23*(6), 332–353. https://doi.org/10.1093/jcmc/zmy018

Moffitt, B. (2016). *The global rise of populism*. Stanford University Press. https://doi.org/10.11126/stanford/9780804796132.001.0001

Nelimarkka, M., Laaksonen, S.-M., & Semaan, B. (2018). Social media is polarized, social media is polarized: Towards a new design agenda for mitigating

polarization. In *Proceedings of the 2018 Designing Interactive Systems Conference* (957–70. DIS '18). Association for Computing Machinery. https://doi.org/10.1145/3196709.3196764

Palonen, E. (2018). Performing the nation: The Janus-faced populist foundations of illiberalism in Hungary. *Journal of Contemporary European Studies, 26*(3), 308–321. https://doi.org/10.1080/14782804.2018.1498776

Pyrhönen, N., & Bauvois, G. (2019). Conspiracies beyond fake news. Produsing reinformation on presidential elections in the transnational hybrid media system. *Sociological Inquiry.* https://doi.org/10.1111/soin.12339

Pyrhönen, N., Bauvois, G., & Rosenström, S. (2021). Soldiers of Odin as Peril or Protection? Hybrid mediatization of oppositional framings on anti-immigration responses to the 'Refugee Crisis.' *Nordiques, 40*(May). https://doi.org/10.4000/nordiques.1464

Pyrhönen, N., & Wahlbeck, O. (2018). *The Finnish national report on the politicization of the 'Refugee Crisis' in PUBLIC DEBATE.* 9. CEASEVAL Research on the Common European Asylum System. Chemnitz: Technische Universität Chemnitz. http://ceaseval.eu/publications.

Rosenblum, N. L., & Muirhead, R. (2019). *A lot of people are saying: The new conspiracism and the assault on democracy.* Princeton University Press.

Runciman, D. (2017). Political theory and real politics in the age of the internet. *Journal of Political Philosophy, 25*(1), 3–21. https://doi.org/10.1111/jopp.12087

Ruzza, C. (2009). Populism and Euroscepticism: Towards uncivil society? *Policy and Society, 28*(1), 87–98. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.polsoc.2009.02.007

Sallamaa, D. (2018). *Ulkoparlamentaarinen äärioikeistoliikehdintä ja maahanmuuttovastaisuus 2010-luvun Suomessa.* Eurooppa-tutkimuksen keskus, Helsingin yliopisto. https://helda.helsinki.fi/handle/10138/253474.

Sandberg, L., & Ihlebæk, K. (2019). Start sharing the news exploring the link between right-wing alternative media and social media during the Swedish 2018 election. *Statsvetenskaplig Tidskrift, 121*(3), 421–440.

Seikkula, M. K. (2021). Affirming or contesting white innocence? Anti-racism frames in grassroots activists' accounts. *Ethnic and Racial Studies.* https://doi.org/10.1080/01419870.2021.1897639

Toivanen, P., Nelimarkka, M., & Valaskivi, K. (2021). Remediation in the hybrid media environment: Understanding countermedia in context. *New Media & Society, 24*(9), 2127–2152. https://doi.org/10.1177/1461444821992701

Vaccari, C., & Valeriani, A. (2016). Party campaigners or citizen campaigners? How social media deepen and broaden party-related engagement. *The International Journal of Press/politics, 21*(3), 294–312. https://doi.org/10.1177/1940161216642152

Vos, T. P. (2020). Journalists as gatekeepers. In K. Wahl-Jorgensen, & T. Hanitzsch (Eds.), *The handbook of journalism studies.* Routledge.

Waisbord, S. (2018). The elective affinity between post-truth communication and populist politics. *Communication Research and Practice, 4*(1), 17–34. https://doi.org/10.1080/22041451.2018.1428928

Weber, M. (1994 [1919]). The profession and vocation of politics. In P. Lassman, & R. Speirs (Eds.), *Weber: Political writings*. Cambridge University Press.

Ylä-Anttila, T. (2018). Populist knowledge: 'Post-Truth' repertoires of contesting epistemic authorities. *European Journal of Cultural and Political Sociology, 5*(4), 356–88. https://doi.org/10.1080/23254823.2017.1414620

Ylä-Anttila, T., Bauvois, G., & Pyrhönen, N. (2019). Politicization of migration in the countermedia style: A computational and qualitative analysis of populist discourse. *Discourse, Context & Media, 32*(December). https://doi.org/10.1016/j.dcm.2019.100326