Immigrant-critical alternative media in online conversations

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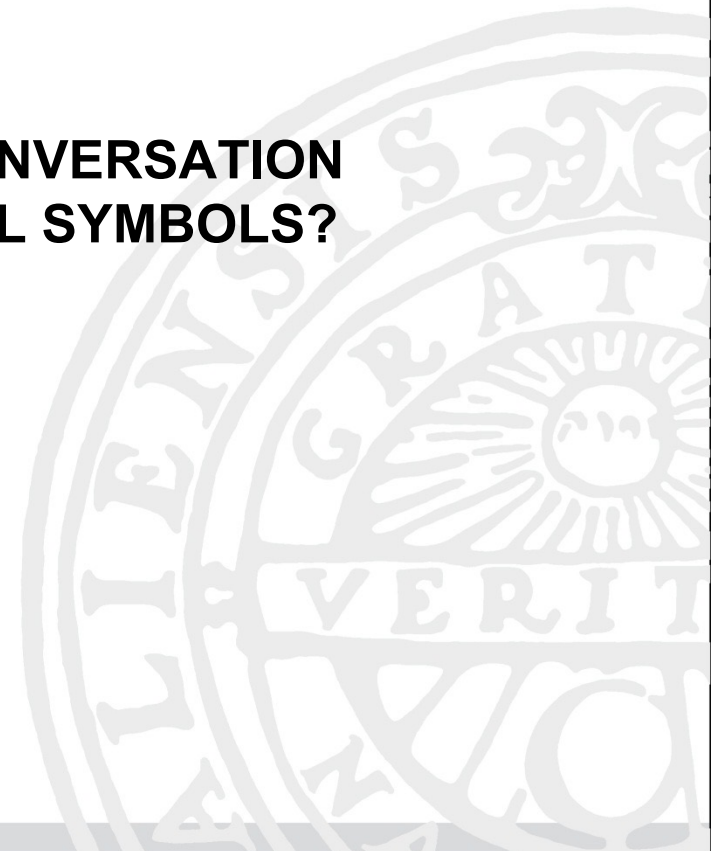@uuinfolab | https://uuinfolab.github.io

**The Nordic Observatory
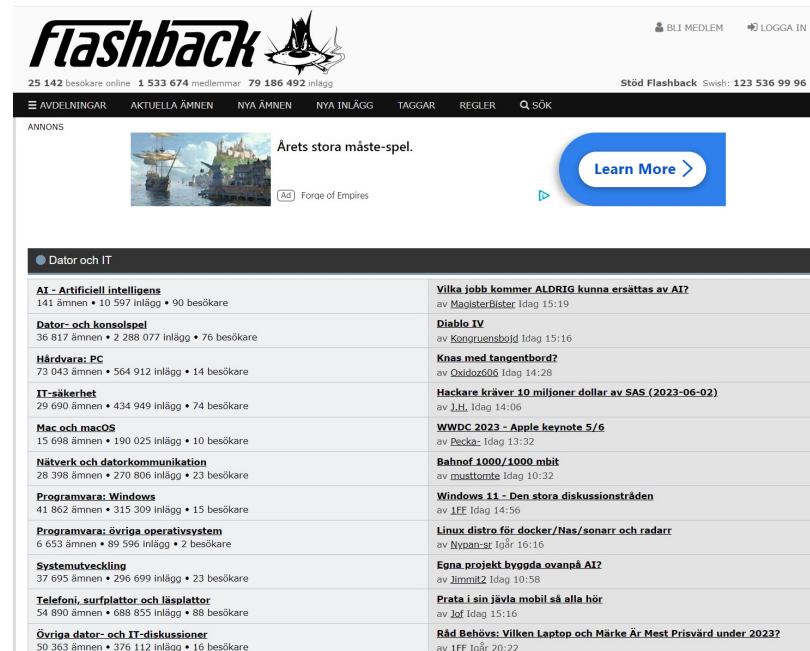for Digital Media and
Information Disorder**

NORDIS

RESEARCH QUESTION

DO ALTERNATIVE MEDIA SERVE AS SONVERSATION DRIVERS OR MERE COLLECTIVE RITUAL SYMBOLS?

The empirical case

- Flashback forum, Sweden
  - One of the largest forums in Sweden, ~ 1.4M users
  - Focus on *Integration and immigration subforum*
  - Data collection* around the last elections (2019-2022)

*Research approved by the Swedish Ethical Review Authority

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Theoretical framework

- Micro-sociology and Interaction Ritual chains (IRC) theory. Collins (2024)
  - Group solidarity / a sense of belonging
  - Production of "emotional energy"

Figure 2.4 A ritual victory pile-on: high school hockey championship (2002).

Image source: Collins, R. (2004). Interaction Ritual Chains. Princeton University press.

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  - Potentially: radicalization?

Figure 2.4 A ritual victory pile-on: high school hockey championship (2002).

Figure 2.2 Celebrating victory by ritualized full-body contact. U.S. and Russian troops converge in Germany (April 1945).

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- **Conditions for IRC**
  – Co-presence
  – Group assembly
  – Common mood & focus of attention

Figure 2.2 Celebrating victory by ritualized full-body contact. U.S. and Russian troops converge in Germany (April 1945).

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Theoretical framework

ONLINE CONVERSATIONS IN FLASHBACK AS TYPE OF IRC

- Presume message sequencing and turn taking

- Participants take into account (*and renew*) conv. context

- Entrainment (engagement) with the ritual
  - Pace: synchronization with the ritual
  - Emotions: co-evolution of emotions and sentiments expressed

Theoretical framework

WHY ALTERNATIVE MEDIA?

- Alternative media (AM)…
  - enable offline mobilization and support for protest partcipation (*e.g. Wahlström &Törnberg 2021*)

  - have impact on immigration attitudes (*Theorin 2020*)

  - represent a challenge for democracy (*Strömback 2023*)

  - affect the emergence of alarmed citizens (*Thorbjørnsrud &Figenschou 2020*)

  - may have more pronounced effect in fringe online groups?

RESEARCH QUESTION

DO ALTERNATIVE MEDIA SERVE AS SONVERSATION DRIVERS OR MERE COLLECTIVE RITUAL SYMBOLS?

We explore the properties of various conversation networks and compare the differences depending on the types of content shared

We analyze users' engagement in the conversations (conversation pace and sentiments)
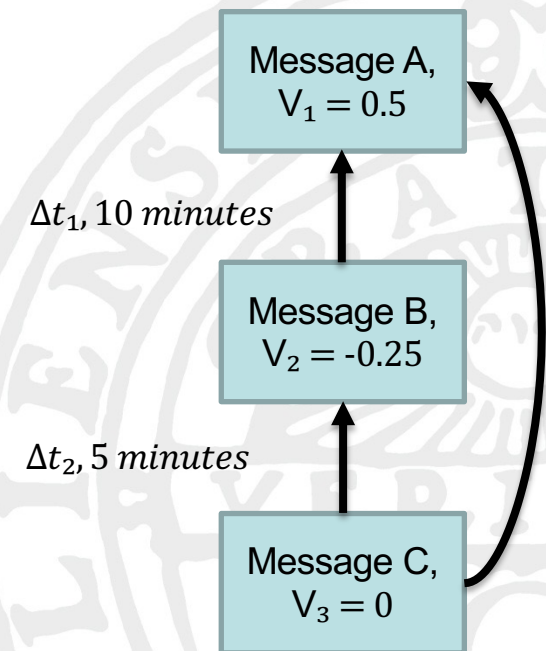
1. Manual modelling of most common media sources

Alternative media	Number of shares	Mainstream media	Number of shares
samnytt.se	1,131	svt.se	2,916
friatider.se	1,095	expressen.se	2,379
uvell.se	115	aftonbladet.se	1,993
petterssonsblogg.se	98	sverigesradio.se	1,253
detgodasamhallet.se	88	svd.se	888
nordfront.se	88	dn.se	870
snaphanen.dk	77	gp.se	611
swebbtv.se	44	sydsvenskan.se	310
thereligionofpeace.com	38	svtplay.se	262
breitbart.com	37	hemhyra.se	198

2. Conversation networks
  – Identification of basic properties

Message A, $V_1 = 0.5$

$\Delta t_1, 10\ minutes$

Message B, $V_2 = -0.25$

$\Delta t_2, 5\ minutes$

Message C, $V_3 = 0$

Methodology

1. Manual modelling of most common media sources
2. Conversation networks
   – Identification of basic properties

3. Stance classification *w.r.t immigration issue*
   – Negative / non-negative classes
   – Unsupervised sentiment analysis (*VADER in Swedish*)

4. Mixed-effects modeling to infer users' stances
   – Pace of conversations (Δt)
   – Sentiment expressed (V)

- Conversation synchronization regarding *pace*
  - Previous sentiments expressed are significative, but less relevant

- AM links have very limited (or none) effect on the conversation development
  - They are element of *collected symbol*

  - They are enabled by the platform design

  - Hence, they are not a mechanism to engage

- **Users consume/disseminate content that covers a wide ideological spectrum**
  - A possibility for deliberate talk?

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- **Conversations with AM content are more negative**
- Also shorter, with fewer messages and shorter in time
  - Role of individual users in content dissemination?

Conversation property	Conversations with AM links (vs. MM links)	Conversations with links (vs. no links)
Duration (hours)	Shorter	Longer
Ratio of messages with negative stances	Higher	Lower
Ratio of messages with non-negative stances	Lower	Higher
Average negative stance probability	No difference	Higher
Average non-negative stance probability	Lower	Lower
Average clustering	No difference	No difference
Number of nodes	Lower	Higher
Number of edges	Lower	Higher
Density	Higher	Lower

Note: The results of Mann-Whitney U test where we compared a) conversations with AM versus MM links, and b) conversations with any type of links versus no links.

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