

Performing the populist media critic: Contestations of journalistic authority in right-wing alternative media

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Abstract

Swedish legacy news media has for decades enjoyed a high and stable level of trust among citizens. However, the level of trust is not even across all groups in society, with primarily right-wing sympathizers becoming increasingly skeptical. At the same time, newspapers struggle with declining revenues and readership, creating a very competitive market that is also characterized by increasing media ownership concentration. In contrast, a plethora of options exist for news consumers online. In what has indeed developed into a high-choice media environment, several alternative news sites have emerged. These sites often display strong ideological profiles and produce content that counter that of legacy media, which is seen as disconnected from ordinary people.

This context of greater news production diversity that simultaneously facilitates very partisan news reporting distrustful towards legacy media poses questions regarding the effects of contesting views on whose news reporting should be seen as legitimate, authentic, and true. Through the lens of populism and performativity, the present paper analyzes how a right-wing Swedish alternative news channel manifests a sense of journalistic authority as a critic of legacy media. The analysis explores two aspects of the intermedial relations between alternative media and legacy media: a content analysis of news clips critical towards Swedish news media as well as a mapping of how these clips connect to other news media content, both alternative and not as well as how media performativity plays a role. The paper adds to the research on possible implications of contestation of journalistic authority in alternative media for overall trust and relations across different media contexts and types.

Keywords

Alternative media, Sweden, right-wing, populism, performativity

Bio

Emma Ricknell is a post doc in the Linnaeus knowledge environment A Questioned Democracy (if-dem) and a Senior Lecturer in Political Science. Her research is on media in a wide sense, including mainstream media, social media, and online forums, with particular focus on the spread of false and misleading information.

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