Transnational nationalism?

Comparing right-wing digital news infrastructures in Western Democracies

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Introduction

The rise of right-wing populist parties and movements across European countries, increasing tensions between EU member states in light of issues such as the handling of debt crises, the challenges of migration or the 'Brexit' all signal growing polarization within and across European societies (Armingeon, Guthmann and Weisstanner, 2015). In the United States, the unexpected outcome of the 2016 election and the Trump presidency have widened partisan divides (Pew Research Center, 2017) and challenged core beliefs about the institutional media environment. While traditional mass media as one of the cornerstones of democratic societies are under pressure, confronted with decreasing trust and accused of being aligned with a political mainstream and a 'lying press' (Chandler, 2015); online news media such as *Breitbart.com*, the German *Compact* magazine or Swedish *Nyheter Idag* rely on digital platforms to establish a new media landscape on the political right. These online partisan news media promise to provide an alternative to legacy or mainstream media sources in times of high-choice media environments (Van Aelst *et al.*, 2017). This emerging digital news infrastructure on the political right, which might foster further polarization and radicalization of political views within and across national and transnational public spheres - especially since their users are unlikely to be exposed to the so-called mainstream media (Benkler *et al.*, 2017; Newman *et al.*, 2017) -, lies at the center of our attention.

Our study focuses on far-right and right-wing populist online news media which are part of the political information environment in digital times. We examine alternative online news media (and accompanying social media accounts on Twitter and Facebook) used by far-right actors as their main mode of news distribution and political mobilization. Such sites are marked by populist communication styles (Jagers and Walgrave, 2007; Wolf, 2017) as they refer to 'the people' combined with an anti-establishment, anti-elite tone and take up right-wing, anti-hegemonic positions on many issues. With their claim to challenge power structures and their stance of being an alternative to the media mainstream they inhibit some features of 'alternative media' (Atkinson and Berg, 2012) while lacking media practices that strengthen democratic culture (Atton, 2006, 2007). While their digital reach increases, as of yet there exist no comprehensive, comparative accounts of their infrastructures and their national and transnational interconnectedness. We assume that the embeddedness in particular media and political contexts is decisive for the shape those infrastructures and interconnections take.

Against this backdrop, our analysis is driven by two overarching research questions: First, we assess what commonalities and differences we can find in the architectures of right-wing digital news infrastructures in different countries and how they correspond to variations in the media and political contexts. Second, we analyze to what extent this digital information environment on the far-right is interconnected both within and across countries capitalizing on the unique opportunities of digital technologies and media to build transnational networks and alliances of mutual recognition and support.

Our paper proceeds as follows: First, we provide a short overview on research on digital news infrastructures and focus on research on far-right and right-wing populist online news media. We then present the design of our study including 70 alternative online news media on the far- and populist right from six countries (Austria, Denmark, Germany, Sweden, United Kingdom and United States). Those countries have been chosen due to differences in the general political information environment in which the partisan news providers emerge. We explain the methods we applied to gather insights into the supply and demand structures of those media and their national or cross-country interconnections. In the results section, we begin presenting our findings on overall structural characteristics of the online news media analyzed, including their topical scope and transnational features. In the final part of our analysis, we present results on the extent to which these online news media are interconnected within and across countries.

Digital news infrastructures and context dependency

Our study draws on research characterizing the media environment and especially the political information environment within a specific society (Brüggemann *et al.*, 2014; Mosca and Quaranta, 2016; Humprecht and Esser, 2017; Van Aelst *et al.*, 2017). Van Aelst et al. define the political information environment as "the supply and demand of political news and political information" (2017, p. 4). This literature offers several indicators to describe and explain the emergence of distinct news infrastructures. While such research attempts to describe and explain the supply and demand side of political information in general, our study focuses on the partisan news niche of far-right and right-wing populist online news media. However, as a background for explaining different patterns of digital news infrastructures on the political right and their transnational interconnectedness, the following context conditions could be decisive:

First, how online news media in general are facilitated and controlled in a given context influences the conditions under which our partisan news sites can be established. Whether public press support, e.g. through state subsidies or VAT exemption, is (also) made available for online news media might influence their foundation and maintenance. The same applies to the steps necessary to register as an online medium (accreditation requirements) and the regulation of right-wing extremist content.

Second, the levels of overall online news media polarization as well as the polarization within the traditional mass media and their tendency towards populist communication styles constitute the context in which far-right and right-wing populist news can either fill a market niche or are less noteworthy. In a similar vein, trust in 'mainstream' news on- and offline might influence the demand and thus prospects of alternative online news providers on the political right. For example, research shows consistently for various countries that the audiences who identify as right-leaning are deeply distrustful of the news in general and use alternative media because of their distrust in mainstream media (Hölig and Hasebrink, 2018; Newman *et al.*, 2018).

Finally, the existence of online niche news providers on the political right and especially their degree of (transnational) interconnectedness might be linked up to patterns of overall online and social media usage among a given population. If online media and social media do not play a sufficiently large role as a source of news in a given market it doesn't seem sustainable and lucrative to establish oneself as a new brand and to address users and supporters in this way.

Regarding the political context, the electoral success of right-wing parties and the participation in (or support of) governments can be seen as indicators of public tolerance towards right-wing and populist positions, i.e. to what extent right-wing positions and populist views have institutionalized access to mass media and public debates. In contexts where right-wing positions are pushed aside in the established mass media, niche media on the far- and populist right might be more likely to flourish, as well as have an incentive to establish transnational connections among like-minded outsiders. The interesting question to ask here is to what extent niche media in this specific segment behave like media actors that pay attention, for example, to their professionalism and uniqueness treating other media as competitors or whether they are closer to the behavior of political and movement actors. For parties and movements on the far right, research has shown that linking to one another is used to coordinate action, to amplify their positions, to foster a sense of community and to build an overarching group identity (Burris, Smith and Strahm, 2000; Ackland and Gibson, 2013; Caiani and Parenti, 2013; Pavan and Caiani, 2017). For example, Burris et al. (2000) showed that white supremacist movements often linked to sites in other countries. The authors interpreted this as a response to restrictions the movements face in the national context. Journalistic media traditionally cater to geographically located audiences and act as competitors, but journalism research in general observes changes towards more collaboration (Lewis, 2016). Such collaboration could be especially attractive for niche media with a political mission and for a field in which we can expect that the boundaries between medium and political (movement) actor are especially blurred.

Far-right and right-wing populist online news media

Research on far-right and right-wing populist online news media focusing on a) their digital news offers (supply and demand) and b) their transnational interconnectedness across news media is quite sparse. Research is more likely to address questions of extreme right groups use of the Internet (Caiani and Kröll, 2015; Simpson and Druxes, 2015) or media populism in general (Krämer, 2017a, 2017b) than to look at right-wing media in particular.

Research on German-language media from the far right (classification, description of content and distribution, social media demand) mainly stems from civil society organizations adopting a watchdog function towards the extreme and populist right (Baldauf *et al.*, 2016, 2017; Beyersdörfer *et al.*, 2017; Jugendschutz.net, 2017). In Denmark, research on right-wing online news media is virtually non-existent, despite the fact that the few existing outlets, in particular *Den korte avis*, are a regular issue of public debate. One exception is Jønsson (2017), who has analyzed right-wing online news content to explore the level of "fake news" in Danish media. For the case of Sweden, Holt (2016a, 2016b, 2017a, 2017b) has conducted research on so-called "immigrant-critical alternative media" (ICAM). His research focuses on aspects of media criticism and media distrust as a fundament of Swedish ICAM, as well as on comparing them in content and style to mainstream media. He does however not focus specifically on online media, nor assess transnational linkages of these media outlets. For the US case, which offers a wide variety of different forms of right-wing and far right political news content, several classifications exist which characterize such forms of media, but it is difficult to maintain a stable list, as ideologies shift. A variety of watchdog organizations (rightwingwatch.org; mediamatters.org) and web-based collaborative efforts provide online material that links to and classifies such sites (wikipedia.org; mediabiasfactcheck.com). Furthermore, previous research based on partisan digital information flows has revealed degrees of interconnectedness between various sites during the 2016 presidential campaign (Benkler *et al.*, 2017). But as of yet, we are not aware of any study focused on the international or transnational connections these sites have to foreign and likeminded news providers.

Contexts of far-right and right-wing populist online news media in six countries

We are interested in far-right partisan online news media in six countries: Austria, Denmark, Germany, Sweden, United Kingdom and United States. The countries represent northern, central and western types of media systems (Brüggemann *et al.*, 2014) and they differ in their political polarization regarding the acceptance of far-right positions within politics and society.

Political context

We take electoral success of far-right and right-wing populist parties/politicians and their participation in [or support of] governments as an indicator of the overall resonance of right-wing positions within society. Sweden, Germany and the UK represent countries in which right-wing extremist or right-wing populist positions are currently comparatively marginalized. In Germany, the radical right had been comparatively weak for decades (Arzheimer, 2009). Since 2013, the newly founded right-wing party Alternative for Germany (AfD) is on the rise (Arzheimer, 2015; Berbuir, Lewandowsky and Siri, 2015), it successfully entered regional parliaments and reached a vote share of almost 13 per cent in the 2017 general election[1]. Britain's UK Independence Party (UKIP), which in the 2015 general election had still attained 12.6 per cent (Hawkins, Keen and Nakatudde, 2015), fell into insignificance afterwards (2017: 1.8 per cent[2]) and active support for organized far right groups and parties in Britain is considered being at its lowest for 25 years (HOPE not hate, 2018). However, the ruling conservative party tends relatively strongly towards the right (Polk *et al.*, 2017). In Sweden, after decades in which radical right-wing parties had been comparatively unsuccessful, the right-wing populist Sweden Democrats have been continuously rising in political importance since entering national parliament in 2010 (Strömbäck et al. 2017). They are currently shunned by the other political parties represented in parliament.

In contrast, the acceptance of right-wing and right-wing populist views is much more pronounced in Denmark and Austria. In Denmark, the liberal-conservative government depends on the support of the Dansk Folkeparti (DF, Danish Peoples Party), which had become the second strongest party in the 2015 election with around 21 per cent vote share.[3] In Austria, the FPÖ, a party with strong right-wing positions and the third strongest force in the last general election[4], is currently coalition partner of the federal government. Meanwhile, the United States presents somewhat of a challenge in terms of singling out and quantifying far-right or populist preferences among the voting public. This is partly due to the *de facto* two-party system, in which Republicans and Democrats become catch-all parties for the potentially more radical political currents. One indicator for such tendencies can be observed in the results of inter-party primary elections, in which establishment Republicans have increasingly faced strong challenges from the right-wing fringes over the last election cycles on both state and local levels. Furthermore, the success of sub-caucuses and coalitions within the existing party structure, marked, for example, by the rise of the so-called Tea Party can be seen as a gradual shift towards more extreme forms of right-wing politics in the US. As Mann and Ornstein (2012) have pointed out, the stark polarization of American politics has therefore been marked by lopsidedness as asymmetries

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[1] https://www.bundeswahlleiter.de/info/presse/mitteilungen/bundestagswahl-2017/34_17_endgueltiges_ergebnis.html (24.08.2018)
[2] http://researchbriefings.parliament.uk/ResearchBriefing/Summary/CBP-7979#fullreport. (24.08.2018)
[3] http://www.electionguide.org/elections/id/2832/. (24.08.2018)
[4] https://wahl17.bmi.gv.at/ (24.08.2018).

emerged which pushed Republicans farther to the right than Democrats have shifted to the left. Based on indicators for political ideology, they note that, "nearly 80 percent of the freshmen Republicans in the 112th Congress would have been in the right wing of the party in the 111th Congress" (Mann and Ornstein, 2012, p. 57). Arguably, the results of the 2016 election, in which Donald Trump ran on an anti-establishment platform might be seen as a further indicator for right-wing preferences among the American public. While Trump won 46,09% of the popular vote,[5] a perhaps more precise indicator for public support of this type of political agenda and style might be derived from his approval ratings, which have polled fairly consistently at around 35-40%.

Media polarization and populism

Denmark has a long tradition for an open culture of public debate that allows voicing politically incorrect issues and opinions. This has resulted in a harsh tone of debate in the media, in particular with regard to immigration that speaks to the profile of the Danish People's Party (DF) (Hellström and Hervik, 2014). Denmark's legacy media indirectly supports DF by emphasizing/conflict-framing immigration in their reporting, for which DF has issue ownership (Esser, Stepińska and Hopmann, 2016; Bächler and Hopmann, 2017). Based on information about the political leaning of news audiences of the top online news brands of the country, Denmark displays a medium degree of online news media polarization - compared to the other countries in our sample (score of 2.82 according to the Reuters Institute Digital News Report, Newman *et al.*, 2017, p. 40).[6] But trust in news overall is comparatively high (56%, 6th out of 37 countries) and quality news brands both from public service and private media have similarly high trust scores (Newman *et al.*, 2018, p. 75).

The Swedish culture of public debate is markedly different from neighboring Denmark, which leaves its marks on the level of polarization in traditional mass media as well (e.g. Hellström and Hervik, 2014). Public debate often centers around the presumed existence of a so-called "opinion corridor" (*åsiktskorridor*) limiting the range of issues and opinions that are being expressed in the public, including mass media content (e.g. Oscarsson, 2013).The Sweden Democrats (SD) have long been ostracized by Swedish mainstream media, but the "cordon sanitaire" erected by the media around SD seems to have been wearing off in the past years (Hellström and Hervik, 2014; Esser, Stepińska and Hopmann, 2016, p. 372; Strömbäck, Jungar and Dahlberg, 2017). Sweden Democrats and other right-wing groups have a hard time reaching out to a wider audience through mainstream media and have therefore resorted to building and maintaining an alternative digital infrastructure (Strömbäck, Jungar and Dahlberg, 2017, p. 76). Online news media polarization is relatively low in Sweden (score of 2.34,

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[5] https://transition.fec.gov/pubrec/fe2016/federalelections2016.pdf (24.08.2018).
[6] The online news media polarisation score for each country is the mean of the polarisation score for each of the top 15 online brands of a country (level of dispersion) multiplied by their weekly reach. See Newman et al. 2017, p. 40.

Newman *et al.*, 2017, p. 40). The audiences of alternative and partisan online news brands are however substantially further to the right of the audience of the top 15 news brands (Newman *et al.*, 2018, p. 46). Trust in news in general, however, is lower than in the neighboring northern country (41%, 23rd out of 37 countries, Newman *et al.*, 2018, p. 105).

Germany's traditional media are said to report critically on right-wing populist parties and reluctantly on small parties (Esser, Stepińska and Hopmann, 2016; Fawzi, Obermaier and Reinemann, 2016). The few available empirical analyses on public medias reporting on populist actors corroborate such a critical tenor (Reinemann, 2017), which can be traced back to the country's history. Populist parties and actors react with their own assessment of how they feel treated by the media: The slogan 'Lying press', chosen German nonword of the year 2014[7], had been revived by German Pegida demonstrators in order to deny traditional media's credibility (Geiges, Marg and Walter, 2015). Thus, Germany's traditional media landscape does not seem to leave much room for actors and positions from the far and populist right, at least in the past. Online news media polarization is lowest in Germany (score of 1.64, Newman *et al.*, 2017, p. 40), and trust in news is comparatively high. 50 per cent of respondents in the latest Reuters digital news survey (11th out of 37 countries) think they can trust most of the news most of the time (Newman *et al.*, 2018, p. 81).

Although right-wing populist actors play a considerable role in Austrian politics, research on news media's dealing with populism has been relatively neglected in the past (Schmuck, Matthes and Boomgaarden, 2016). Research ascribes various Austrian mass media a market-focused and populist newsroom logic which opens opportunity windows for right-wing and populist actors such as the FPÖ to get attention (Schmuck, Matthes and Boomgaarden, 2016, p. 91; Plasser and Ulram, 2003; Seethaler and Melischek, 2013). Online news media polarization in Austria is with a score of 2.62 considerably lower than in the US (5.92) and UK (3.18), but higher than in Germany (1.64) (Newman *et al.*, 2017, p. 40). However, while less polarized, many of the top 15 online news sources in Austria such as *Krone online* cater to more right-leaning audiences. The far-right alternative news medium *Unzensuriert* is the furthest to the right in this audience measure (Newman *et al.*, 2018, pp. 44–45). Regarding trust in news in general, only 41 per cent of respondents in the latest Reuters digital news survey think they can trust most of the news most of the time (23rd out of 37 countries, Newman *et al.*, 2018, p. 65).

Regarding British mass media, research highlights a generally critical tone towards politicians and an emphasis on personalities, conflict, strategy and tactics while substantive issues attain less attention (Esser, Stepińska and Hopmann, 2016). As for UK television news, Wayne and Murray ascribe them a "populist antagonism towards politics that is personalized and anti-systemic in its focus" (2009, p. 416).

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[7] Katzenberger, Paul (2015): *Kampfbegriff gegen die Demokratie. "Lügenpresse" als Unwort des Jahres.* Sueddeutsche Zeitung. 13.01.2015. http://www.sueddeutsche.de/kultur/luegenpresse-ist-unwort-des-jahres-kampfbegriff-gegen-die-demokratie-1.2301815 (24.08.2018).

Popular newspapers, in Britain especially the most-read *The Sun*, are expected to provide a favorable platform for populist politics. However, empirical evidence on this is uncertain (Akkerman, 2011; Stanyer, Archetti and Sorensen, 2016). It seems at least that the British classical media environment offers opportunity structures for actors and positions from the far right. In the UK, the top online news brands attract mostly left-leaning audiences (for example, *Guardian Online, Huffington Post*), with *Sky News*, *Times* and *MailOnline* catering to (a lower number of) right-leaning audiences. Compared to the highest polarized country, the US (polarization score 5.93), the UK audience pattern is slightly less polarized (score 3.18), but polarization is higher than in the other countries of our sample (Newman *et al.*, 2017, p. 40). Regarding far-right alternative news media, *Westmonster* and *Breitbart UK* cater to audiences which self-identified strongest on the right (Newman *et al.*, 2018, pp. 44–45). 42 per cent of respondents in the latest Reuters digital news survey think they can trust most of the news most of the time (20th out of 37 countries, Newman *et al.*, 2018, p. 63).

The current US media environment is marked by high degrees of fragmentation and polarization processes (Mancini, 2013; Hopkins *et al.*, 2014). These have given rise to a host of niche-oriented news sources, many of which are geared towards partisan or sensationalized news reporting. This has been especially true for emergent news environments like cable television, the early blogosphere or digitally native news outlets. In 2014, even before the starkly polarizing presidential election of 2016, the Pew Research Center reported stark partisan divides within the American public and linked these to news consumption habits (Mitchell *et al.*, 2014, p. 1). The report showed that while members of the public who identified as liberal consumed a fairly diverse spectrum of news sources, 47 % of conservatives reported that they received the majority of their news only from Fox News, while being deeply distrustful of other sources. Online news media polarization is highest in the US (score 5.92, Newman *et al.*, 2017, p. 40) and the audiences of the furthest left and furthest right media are furthest apart. Alternative online news media such as *Breitbart*, *The Daily Caller* and *InfoWars* are – together with Fox News - the ones with an audience much further on the right than other websites (Newman *et al.*, 2018, pp. 45–46). Trust in news media has declined considerably in the US. The polling company Gallup reports a 20 point drop in the percentages of Americans who say they trust the mass media between 1997 (53 %) and 2016 (32 %)[8]. According to the Reuters Digital News Report 2018 only 34 % of the general population now say that they trust the news generally (putting the US at 30th out of 37 analyzed countries; Newman *et al.*, 2018, p. 113). Furthermore, the report shows stark discrepancies between news consumers who identify as left and those that identify as right. While 49 % on the left say they "trust most news most of the time," only 17 % of those on the right say the same (Newman *et al.*, 2018, p. 18).

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[8] https://news.gallup.com/poll/195542/americans-trust-mass-media-sinks-new-low.aspx. (24.08.2018)

TABLE 1: Overview Political and Media Context Factors

Political and media context	SWE	DEN	GER	AUT	UK	USA
Electoral success right-wing/ populist parties/ politicians	Relatively low SD 12,86% (2014)	Relatively strong DF 21,1% (2015)	Relatively low AfD 12,6% (2017)	Relatively strong FPÖ 26% (2017)	Relatively low UKIP 1,8% (2017)	Relatively strong Trump 46,09% (2016)
Political role	Opposition	Government support party	Opposition	Government	None	Government
Media system	Northern Type	Northern Type	Central Type	Central Type	Western Type	Western Type
Mass media & populism	Dismissal/ demarcation	(Unintended) complicity	Dismissal/ demarcation	(Unintended) complicity	(Unintended) complicity/ ideological partnership	(Unintended) complicity/ ideological partnership
Online news media polarization	2,34	2,83	1,64	2,62	3,18	5,93
Trust in news	41%	56%	50%	41%	42%	34%
Online use for news (at least once a week)	87%	82%	65%	76%	74%	73%
Social Media Usage (Almost every day)	60%	59%	32%	42%	53%	(no compara-ble data)[9]
Social Media as source of news (at least once a week)	53%	46%	31%	49%	39%	45%

Role of internet and social media

Looking at internet penetration in our countries, we do not find stark differences (all data according to the Reuters Institute Digital News Report 2018). Denmark has the highest rate with an internet penetration of 97% (Newman *et al.*, 2018, p. 74) and Austria the lowest one (85 per cent, Newman *et al.*, 2018, p. 64), all other countries are in between. Online news (incl. social media) is either the most important (Sweden, 87%; Denmark, 82%; UK, 74%; Austria, 76%; US, 73%) or second most important news source (Germany, 65%).[10] In the Nordic countries, social media play a bigger role. In Sweden and Denmark, 60% and 59% use online social networks every day or almost every day, with Sweden having the highest number among all EU member states (European Commission, 2017). 53% of Swedish users use social media as a source of news at least once a week (Newman *et al.*, 2018, p. 105). In Denmark, this applies to 46% of users, though numbers have declined significantly since 2016 (56%; Newman *et al.*, 2018, p. 75). In Germany, only 32 per cent of the general population use social media almost every

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[9] Data for US: 69% use at least one social media site site in general, http://www.pewinternet.org/fact-sheet/social-media/ (27.08.2018).
[10] Percentage respondents have used it as source of news in the past week. All data Reuters Digital News Report 2018.

day (European Commission, 2017). Fewer users than in other countries, only 31 per cent, use social media for news (Newman *et al.*, 2018, p. 81). In Austria, social media use for news grew to 49 per cent in 2018 (Newman *et al.*, 2018, p. 65), with 42 per cent of the general population using social media almost every day (European Commission, 2017). In the UK, 53 per cent of the general population use social media almost every day (European Commission, 2017) but only 39 per cent use social media for news (Newman *et al.*, 2018, p. 63). 69 % of the American population use at least one social media site in general[11], and social media use for news is at 45 per cent in 2018 (Newman *et al.*, 2018, p. 113).

Methods

Selection of alternative online news media of the far- and populist right

We examine online news media and their social media accounts on Twitter and Facebook (FB) used by far-right and right-wing populist actors as important channels of news distribution and political mobilization. By online news media we refer to digital news providers belonging to *"institutionalized journalism"* (Wolf, 2014, p. 72) in the sense that they are characterized by some form of institutionalization as media (1) (for example, self-description as media offer, legal notice, given information on editorial responsibility) and provide *current, non-fictional and text-based content with a given periodicity* (2). We focus on *alternative media* (3) understood as offers that a) deal with the opinions of small minorities, b) express attitudes which are anti-mainstream and against widely-held beliefs and c) maintain views or address subjects not regularly dealt with in general media coverage (definition as proposed by the Royal Commission on the Press, 1977, cited in Atton, 2002, p. 1). We are interested in alternative media espousing *far-right and right-wing populist views* (4). While the definition of far-right attitudes is contested, they are thought to contain multiple attitudes, including authoritarianism (a willingness to subordination to a [not legitimized] leader), nationalism (the preservation and empowerment of a nation as guiding principle), xenophobia (tendency to discriminate against other people), anti-semitism and pro-nazism (Stöss, 2000, p. 22). Right-wing populism, on the other hand, can be defined in three steps (Wolf, 2017): (1) Populism as a rhetorical style, where there is no coherent political program, but emphasis on a 'will' of the people, criticism of the government/elites, using dichotomous friend-or-foe-schemes, common sense arguments and factoids. (2) Populism as a thin ideology where elites are blamed to betray the people, governments or democracy in general are seen as bad and not responsible to the people's needs and a strong emphasis that the people's will needs to be heard. 'The people' are seen as a homogenous, monolithic group without internal differences, having a common will (Jagers and Walgrave, 2007), being hard-working and honest. (3) Right-wing populism as thick ideology, according to which the people are not

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[11] Data not directly comparable. Source http://www.pewinternet.org/fact-sheet/social-media/ (24.08.2018).

citizens of the state but defined by common ancestry/lineage. Anti-hegemonic, anti-establishment as well as protectionist positions on many issues are characteristic as well as claims to challenge power structures and to be an alternative outside of the media and party mainstream. According to this thick ideology, vertical and horizontal demarcation is necessary since outgroups (both elites and 'others' such as migrants or other minorities) harm the people (Jagers and Walgrave, 2007) which need to be protected from 'others' influence. In tendency, right-wing populism is xenophobic or even racist, anti-Semitic, authoritarian.

To select alternative online news media of the far- and populist right in our six countries we conducted an extensive literature and online search starting from well-established alternative online media of the extreme right, from monitoring organizations in our countries and other 'watchdog' lists as well as research in the field. We compiled a list of around 150 news sites and classified them according to our selection criteria as described above. In order to be considered, the sites also had to belong to one of our countries, i.e. usually have their headquarters in one of our countries. Genuinely transnational media with headquarters outside one of our countries were explicitly excluded. As a result of this procedure, 70 online media were included in this study. We additionally contacted country experts in order to validate our selection. However, we follow a case study approach and although we have tried to cover the field as comprehensively as possible, we do not claim to survey this field of alternative online media in its entirety.

Indicators and measurement supply and demand

Applying the concept of political information environment to the partisan news niche of far-right and right-wing populist online news media, we analyzed *supply- and demand-side indicators* with respect to our news sites. Our analysis includes a) the webpages of the 70 alternative online news media, b) their Twitter accounts, c) their FB accounts (b and c if applicable) and d) audience metrics data available through Alexa.com.

With respect to the *webpages*, we conducted a manual content analysis based on a standardized codebook.[12]

We measured the following *static indicators* as basis for our analysis of the *supply side* of *homepage structures*. Regarding the diversity of infrastructures, we recorded the ways and platforms via which content is distributed (print, Twitter, FB, YouTube etc.). To describe the organizational transparency and capacity of each news site, we recorded the number of staff, the form of organization as well as

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[12] All webpages have been stored offline between June 21st and July 5th 2018 and processed using MaxQDA. The codebook includes all static indicators measured on webpage basis. It is available upon request from the authors. Coding was done by a team of four trained coders. Intercoder reliability tests resulted in reliability coefficients of 1.0 for print , 0.95 for platform usage, 0.90 for platform information, 0.94 for funding, 0.90 for topic categories, 0.93 for integrated multimedia features, 0.91 for interactive elements, 1.00 for languages and 0.84 for linking patterns to other homepages (4 coders, n = 10 webpages, Holsti reliability coefficient).

the location of the editorial offices, and ways of financing. With respect to platform architecture, we coded the amount and type of news categories of the websites, multimedia features and interactive elements. It is difficult to estimate the activity of these online media. We operationalize activity as the number of articles in a period of four weeks using the Media Cloud database.[13]

Regarding *demand side* information on homepage audiences, we relied on data collected by Alexa, a company providing web audiences and traffic data[14], in order to capture the attention a site is able to attract (Webster, 2014; Mukerjee, Majo-Vazquez and Gonzalez-Bailon, 2018) . Since we deal with niche media, we were not able to retrieve a number of estimated unique visitors per site. For a rough approximation on attention attracted, we rely on the rank a website has in a given country.[15]

With respect to the *Twitter* and *FB* accounts of our news sites, we operationalize user attention (demand) by the number of followers on Twitter and the number of FB subscriptions. As for Twitter, we assess the activity of a medium (supply) by the number of tweets in a period of four weeks (June 1 - July 1 2018). The Twitter data were automatically retrieved via DMI's Twitter Collection and Analysis Toolkit (TCAT) hosted at Roskilde University (Borra and Rieder, 2014).

FB subscriber data have been collected manually from the FB accounts on August 2 2018.

Indicators and measurement of transnationality

We understand transnational communication as communication that crosses and transcends borders of nation states and national cultures in the sense that those borders lose their relevance for communication processes (Wessler and Brüggemann, 2012, p. 3). To capture the *transnationality* of our digital news media, we apply static and dynamic indicators. From a *static perspective*, we consider organization-related and content-related indicators of our online media. We record whether the medium maintains an editorial office outside of the country of origin and whether the medium offers content in languages other than the official language in the respective country. Regarding the news

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[13] From the project's website, available under https://mediacloud.org: "Media Cloud is an open source platform for studying media ecosystems." The platform is a joint project by the MIT Center for Civic Media and the Berkman Klein Center for Internet & Society at Harvard University. Media Cloud collects online news stories through the RSS feeds of online media sources. We thank Annissa Pierre and Anushka Shah for support with setting up the country-based collections containing the websites we analzed. For the analysis in this paper, we take the time span from June 22 to July 22 2018 into account.

[14] Alexa is a company providing web metrix data. According to Alexa, its traffic estimates are based on data from a global traffic panel, which is a sample of millions of Internet users using one of many different browser extensions. In addition, Alexa gathers traffic data from direct sources in the form of sites that have chosen to install the Alexa script on their site and certify their metrics. However, site owners can always choose to keep their certified metrics private. Alexa data do not rely on a representative sample. For details, see https://www.alexa.com/siteinfo.

[15] The Alexa country-specific ranking is a measurement of how a website ranks in a particular country relative to other sites over the past month. The rank is calculated using a combination of average daily visitors and pageviews over the past month. For details, see https://www.alexa.com/siteinfo.

categories on the websites, we measure whether they explicitly address a domestic, national (other countries), European or international scope.[16]

With respect to *dynamic indicators* of transnationality on the *websites*, we recorded whether the news sites provided hyperlinks to partners or other 'friends' media in specific sections of their news sites, for example sections like "Free Media", "Alternative Media" or "Partners". If so, we coded those actors' name, URL and country as well as the type of actor and connection (national/transnational/international) by a manual content analysis.[17]

Regarding the *Twitter* and *FB* accounts, we use the following measures to operationalize horizontal linkages between the different nation states and media (Koopmans and Erbe, 2004, p. 101; Benkler, 2006, p. 212):

On *Twitter*, our analysis of horizontal, cross-country interconnections between our different news providers relies on two approaches. First, a connection to other Twitter users can be established by mentioning another user within a tweet, by retweeting the post of another user or by a reply to a message of another user (Jungherr, 2015; Vergeer, 2015). In our study, we conceptualize users (media) sending a tweet as sources and users they interact with via mentions or retweets as targets of a communicative connection. Second, a connection to other Twitter users can be built by hyperlinking to these users' websites within a tweet. Here, the user sending a tweet is considered as source and the user connected to via a hyperlink to their homepage is considered as target of this connection.

For both approaches, a tweet can include diverse targets. The number of tweets therefore does not equal the number of connections (edges). Our analysis includes the Twitter profiles of 66 media from our sample (4 media do not run a Twitter account and 13 media did not interact with others at least once during our time span of analysis). During that time span, altogether 41.281 tweets have been sent by our online media; among them 18.129 tweets containing mentions or retweets to other actors and 2.678 tweets that contain references to our 70 right-wing news providers via mentions or retweets. Within the tweets, among 52.901 hyperlinks we find 28.920 tweets that contain hyperlinks to our 70 online media. These references are often self-references. Repeated references are added up and represented as edge weight in the networks.

FB offers the possibility to "like" other pages. Pages' administrators can thus publicly nominate other pages as their liked pages, which in turn are shown to users on the respective page's main site. In this regard, we conceptualize our online media (and account holder) as source and the actors signaled as friend as target of the digital connection. We collected data on these page-likes and additional

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[16] See description on codebook and coding procedure as above.
[17] Coding of homepage partner links was done by one coder. Intercoder reliability had been tested beforehand by two coders. It resulted in reliability coefficients of 0.91 for the coding of the type of connection, 0.95 for the coding of actors' country and 0.95 for the coding of actor type (n=20, Holsti reliability coefficient)

descriptive metadata like page-categorization and self-descriptions, using FB's API (Application Programming Interface). To make calls to the API, we used the Python programming language and could hence compile a list of all pages that were liked by our pages of interest.

To assess national and cross-country interconnections between our online news providers from the far- and populist right, in the following analyses we focus on *direct interconnections* between the platforms included in our sample, leaving connections via bridge- and other actors outside of our sample aside. We use Gephi (Bastian, Heymann and Jacomy, 2009) to analyze the networks. Force Atlas is chosen to lay out the network graphs.

Digital News Infrastructures

Homepage Structures in Six Countries Compared

Sweden

The right-wing news landscape is quite diversified in Sweden, both in quantity and in quality. All in all, ten Swedish online news sites (i.e. 1 per 1 million inhabitants) met our criteria, ranging from neo-nazi *Nordfront*, network-based "troll factory" *Granskning Sverige* and one-man project *Ledarsidorna.se* to well-established alternative right-wing news sites such as *Fria Tider*, *Nyheter Idag*, and *Samhällsnyt* (successor to the widely known *Avpixlat)*. A special case is presented by *RedIceTV*, a media outlet founded and headquartered in Sweden that meanwhile however targets a mostly U.S. American/international audience. *Nya Tider* is the only one of the identified news sites that also exists as a print edition. *Samtiden* is published by a company owned by right-wing populist party *Sverigedemokraterna (*Sweden Democrats); this connection is however not disclosed on the homepage itself. *Svegot,* a relatively new site founded by prominent right-wing pundit Ingrid Carlqvist, has in August 2018 announced that it will close in the near future. Three of the sites (*Ledarsidorna, Nyheter Idag, Samtiden)* are registered with the Swedish Press Council, the self-disciplinary system of the Swedish press.

Organization, transparency and funding: 8 of the 10 news sites disclose information on their editorial staff; some (like *Ledarsidorna*) only disclose the page's publisher/editor-in-chief, while others (like *Samtiden)* also name columnists. While this self-disclosed information must be interpreted with caution, the majority of Swedish right-wing online news sites, though small, appear to be driven by an actual editorial team. At the same time, only four news sites disclose a full postal address, while one more site mentions that it is based in Stockholm.

In terms of funding, the Swedish news sites rely on a broad portfolio of sources of income, of which advertisement is only of secondary importance and only applies to 50 per cent of the cases. Rather,

the sites rely on their core readership for financing: 70 per cent of the sites generate income through site subscriptions, 60 per cent through donations, 50 per cent through a shop. As no funding sources can be directly identified on *Samtiden's* homepage, it can be assumed that it is in some way or the other funded through the Sweden Democrats party. As a print newspaper, *Nya Tider* additionally receives state subsidies.

Content supply on homepage: In a period of four weeks (June 22 – July 22), the Swedish homepages have on average published 213 articles, i.e. roughly seven articles per day. The lowest number of articles was published by *Ledarsidorna* (37) and *RedIce TV* (55), while *Nordfront* (496) and Fria Tider (358) have been particularly active. However, none of the Swedish news sites falls into a group of extremely inactive (less than on average one article per day) or extremely active (more than on average 30 articles per day) news sites.

Content supply through social media: The Swedish sites are quite active on different social media platforms. All sites are on Twitter, eight out of ten on FB (*Nordfront* and *Granskning Sverige*'s pages have been shut down by FB), and other social media channels such as YouTube, D-tube and VK are also being used by several sites. Focusing more closely on content supply through Twitter, nine of the ten news sites actively use their Twitter account (*Nyheter Idag* has last tweeted in August 2017), with an average of 222 tweets (including re-tweets) sent in the month of data collection (min. 18, max. 523; except for *Nya Tider*, all sites have sent 100+ tweets in one month).

User demand: Right-wing online news sites are also in Sweden not a mainstream phenomenon, but clearly in far higher demand than e.g. in neighboring Denmark. Three of the sites (*Fria Tider, Nyheter Idag, Samhällsnyt)* feature among the top 200 Swedish websites, based on the Alexa page rank, and four more – including the extremist *Nordfront* - among the top 1,000 websites (no information available for *Granskning Sverige)*.

The nine news sites active on Twitter have on average 9088 followers (min. 510, max. 35455). The eight sites still active on FB have in average 28.482 subscribers (min. 1.354, max. 91.451). The site in highest demand on both FB and Twitter is (partly US-based) *RedIceTV*, in lowest demand is (soon to be shut down) *Svegot*. Apart from these outlier cases, however, the sites in highest demand on FB are not necessarily also in highest demand on Twitter: On FB, rather "classical" news outlets *Fria Tider* (48.096) and *Nyheter Idag* (44.940) have the highest numbers of subscriptions, while *Nordfront* and *Ledarsidorna* are in highest demand on Twitter, with more than 10.000 followers each.

Denmark

Right-wing online news sites are only of very limited relevance in Denmark. Only three Danish news sites (*Den korte avis, 24nyt, NewSpeek Networks*) qualify as "right-wing online news sites" in accordance with the definition applied in our study and none of them takes in a particular prominent position in the Danish media landscape. Right-wing news sites generally have a rather short life span in Denmark. Only *Den korte avis*, which has existed since 2012, can be regarded as a rather established site by now, and is used weekly by 5% of the Danish respondents in the 2018 Reuters Digital News Report (Newman et al. 2018, 75). Both *24nyt* and *NewSpeek Networks* have only been in operation since 2017 and 2016, respectively and market themselves as media outlets "without hidden agendas (…), false neutrality and mock objectivity" (NewSpeek Networks 2018) that "bring(s) you the news that the mainstream media either suppresses or downgrades" (24nyt 2018). None of the three sites is registered with *Pressenævnet,* a public institution that deals with complaints about Danish mass media. Registration is otherwise mandatory for print and audiovisual media, and very common for online news sites.

Organization, transparency and funding: *Den korte avis* and *24nyt* provide information on who is behind the news site on their homepage, disclosing two staff members each. Even though such information is not disclosed on *NewSpeek Networks* homepage, it is indeed a common feature of all three websites that their content is produced by few, prominent individuals: both *24nyt* and *NewSpeek Networks* are founded and driven by Jeppe Juhl, a former award-winning journalist for the tabloid *Ekstra Bladet,* whereas the people behind *Den korte avis* are two former high-profile (social democratic) politicians. Only *Den korte avis* also discloses a postal address. All sites are – as judged by the information available on their homepages – funded through a mix of advertisement and user donations. None of them exists as a print edition.

Content supply on homepage: Based on the data provided by the Media Cloud database, the three Danish news sites published on average 134 articles in the month of data collection, i.e. somewhat more than on average four articles per day. *24nyt* is by far the most active one with 322 articles, whereas *Den korte avis* published 72 and *NewSpeek Info* only 9 articles on their homepages in the same time period[18].

Content supply through social media: All Danish sites have a Twitter account and a FB page. However, only *24nyt* flags their social media platforms consistently on the homepage. Social media activity

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[18] It appears that in particular NewSpeeks extremely low number may have been affected by Danish summer vacation. Numbers will be verified by cross-checking with another month for a revised version of this paper.

beyond Twitter and FB is very limited, only *NewSpeek Networks* additionally entertains a YouTube channel.

Of the three news sites, only *24nyt* and *NewSpeek Networks* have been active on Twitter in the month of data collection. *24nyt* has been far more active with 313 tweets, whereas *NewSpeek Networks* sent only 13 tweets (mean: 163).

User demand: At the time of data collection, none of the three Danish news sites investigated was in very high demand by the Danish audience. None of the homepages is ranked among the top 2,000 Danish homepages, based on the Alexa site rank (*24nyt*: 2.349; *Den korte avis*: 2.681; no rank given for *NewSpeek Networks*).

On Twitter, the two active sites are followed by only 28 (!) and 158 users respectively (mean = 93). Curiously, the inactive site (*Den korte avis*) has the most followers (503), despite the fact that it has only sent 53 tweets in total, the latest one in May 2017. User demand for Danish righ-wing news sites is somewhat more substantial on FB: all three news sites are active on FB and have between 11.494 (*NewSpeek Networks*) and 47.881 (*Den korte avis*) subscribers (mean: 31.134).

Germany

In Germany, our search resulted in ten alternative online news sites that can be classified as extreme right or right-wing populist. Among the best-known media are *Junge Freiheit*, *Compact online*, and *PI News*. Around ten per cent of German internet users report that they have heard about those media (11 per cent *Junge Freiheit*, 9 *Compact*, 7 *PI News*), three (JF) to two per cent (CO, PI-News) report they have used the sites in the last week (Hoelig/Hasebrink 2018). Some have a history as print offer, such as *Junge Freiheit* which had been published first in 1986 and went online in 1996. Others, such as *PI-News*, started as an online blog in 2004 to, as the founder puts it, uncover topics that others don't mention, while critics speak of racist propaganda (Reinle 2007). *Politically Incorrect* (*PI-News*) promotes itself with the slogan „News against the mainstream".[19]

Organization, transparency and funding: German right-wing online news sites are rather transparent about their organization. Only two sites do neither provide a full postal address nor information on staff (*PI News, Politikstube*); *Zuerst!* does not list staff members. In contrast, *Freie Welt* extensively discloses all contributors of the medium (167), while *Compact* (7), *Junge Freiheit* (15) and *Sezession* (15) list classical editorial teams.

Most (9 out of 10) of the included German news sites rely on advertisement as a form of funding. 80% of the sites additionally rely on donations. The most noticeable exception to this funding model is

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[19] http://www.pi-news.net/leitlinien/ (06.08.2018).

Zuerst!, an offer that finances itself (according to their homepage) exclusively by subscriptions. As a registered voluntary association, *Journalistenwatch* in principle can seek public funding and is furthermore financially supported by an American conservative think tank, *Middle East Forum*. Two of the most prominent news sites, *Compact online* and *Junge Freiheit*, stand out by a diverse funding strategy, relying on ads, subscriptions, donations as well as their own shop.

Content supply on homepage: The ten German news sites have on average published 220 articles in the month of data collection, i.e. about seven articles per day. While the majority of homepages published within 150 and 300 articles in the course of a month (i.e. about 5-10 articles per day), some homepages stick out by their high level of activity (*Journalistenwatch* with 762 articles) or inactivity (*Blaue Narzisse, Frauenpanorama* and *Sezession* have all published less than 30 articles).

Content supply through social media: All German right-wing online news sites are active on social media, most of them on FB (all but *Politikstube*) and Twitter (all but *Blaue Narzisse*). Some of the news sites are moreover present on a variety of other social media platforms (such as Instagram, YouTube, but also Russia-based VK), in particular *Compact Online*, *Journalistenwatch* and *Junge Freiheit*.
Although nine of the news sites thus maintain a Twitter account, only seven make actively use of it; *Freie Welt* and *Zuerst!* last used it in 2015/2016. *Journalistenwatch* stands out by tweeting (and re-tweeting) to an astonishingly high degree (1046 tweets in our month of data collection), while *PI News* (1 tweet[20]) and *Sezession* were least active (mean: 321).

User demand: Measured on the basis of Alexa page rank, three German sites feature among the top 1.000 of German news sites: *PI News* (rank 214), *Journalistenwatch* (263) and *Junge Freiheit* (768). Three more sites (*Politikstube*, *Compact* and *Freie Welt*) are among the top 2.000. At the other end of the scale, *Blaue Narzisse* and *Frauenpanorama* are extreme niche media, featuring on rank 49.972 and 136.322, respectively.
On social media, user demand for the German right-wing news sites varies substantially, as well. On Twitter, *Junge Freiheit* (29277 followers) and *Compact* (14515 followers) stand out as the two news sites attracting most attention. The other sites draw between about 1500 to 5000 followers, while *Frauenpanorama* has less than 200 followers (mean: 8359). By far the most relevant site on FB is the account of *Junge Freiheit* with 133.396 subscribers, followed by *Compact online* with roughly 100.000 subscribers (93.604). All other FB pages have between circa 1.600 (*Freie Welt*) and 28.000 (*Journalistenwatch)* subscribers (mean: 33.335). In contrast to e.g. Sweden, where popularity of

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[20] According to this latest tweet, PI News' Twitter administrator has stopped by May 31st and a new one needs yet to be found – the site has previously been quite active on Twitter.

platforms varied between FB and Twitter, two sites (*Junge Freiheit* and *Compact)* thus dominate the social media presence of right-wing online news sites in Germany.

Austria

In Austria, eight news sites (*Alles Roger?, Alpenschau, Info Direkt, Unzensuriert, Wochenblick, Zur Zeit, Contra Magazin*, *Unser Mitteleuropa*) met our selection criteria for alternative online media on the extreme and populist right. The best known among them are, according to the latest Reuters Digital News Report, *Unzensuriert*, *Info Direkt* and *Contra Magazin*. 19 per cent of respondents have heard of *Unzensuriert*, but only 7 per cent of *Info Direkt* and 5 per cent of *Contra Magazin* (Newman et al. 2018: 65). *Unzensuriert* describes itself as medium offering "news about topics that the mainstream does not cover at all or only one-sidedly"[21]. *Info Direkt* sees itself as "magazine for a free world" which is "not interested in supporting consensus but wants to fuel dissent and discussion". [22] *Unser Mitteleuropa* presents a somewhat special case, as it is not only geared towards Austria, but also focuses on Germany and Hungary.

Organization, transparency and funding: The Austrian news sites are very transparent in disclosing information about their organization. All eight online news sites provide information on their organization (name, type) and a postal address for their editorial office. 6 (out of 8) are transparent with regard to their staff. *Info Direct* provides an extensive list of contributors (82), whereas *Alles Roger?* (8), *Wochenblick* (10), *Contra Magazin* (6), *Zur Zeit* (2) and *Unser Mitteleuropa* (1) only list core staff or even only editors in chief. *Alpenschau* and *Unzensuriert* provide no information. In terms of funding, all Austrian news sites rely on a combination of advertisement with subscriptions (4 out of 8) and/or donations (6 out of 8). *Unzensuriert* and *Zur Zeit* additionally offer an online shop.

Content supply on homepage: The eight Austrian news sites have on average published 104 articles in the month of data collection and are thus - together with the UK – overall the least active ones among the countries included in this study. Only *Contra Magazin* (216) and *Wochenblick* (186) publish more than on average five articles per day. In turn, only one of the Austrian news sites, *InfoDirekt*, qualifies as extremely inactive with less than on average one article per day (29).

Content supply through social media: All Austrian news sites are active on FB, and six out of eight (all but *Alles Roger* and *Zur Zeit*) also on Twitter. While some of the sites (such as *Info Direkt*, *Contra Magazin*, *Zur Zeit*) flag their social media presence extensively on their homepage, others (such as

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[21] https://www.unzensuriert.at/impressum (06.08.2018).
[22] https://www.info-direkt.eu/ueber-info-direkt/ (06.08.2018).

Unzensuriert and *Alpenschau*) do not promote them at all. *Wochenblick*, *Info Direkt*, *Contra Magazin* and *Zur Zeit* are also active on 1-3 other social media platforms, such as Google Plus, Instagram, YouTube or VK.

All six news sites that entertained a Twitter account also used it actively in the month of data collection, however to varying degrees. *Contra Magazin* and *Unzensuriert* were most active on Twitter (235 and 234 tweets, respectively), while *Info Direkt* only tweeted 6 times in the course of a month. On average, the sites tweeted and re-tweeted 139 times from June 1st to July 1st 2018.

User demand: Measured on the basis of Alexa page rank within Austria, only one of the identified news sites ranks among the top 1,000 homepages in Austria: *Unzensuriert* (page rank 486). *Wochenblick* (3.075) and *Contra Magazin* (3.642) feature among the top 5.000 Austrian homepages, while the remaining four sites rank substantially lower (no Alexa information is available for *Zur Zeit).* According to Alexa page rank, many of the Austrian news sites actually rank substantially higher in Germany than they do in their country of origin, indicating a substantial degree of transnationality that will be analyzed in more detail in the course of this paper.

On average, the six active Austrian Twitter pages are followed by 1321 users. Most popular are Unzensuriert (3827) and Contra Magazin (2091), whereas *Unser Mitteleuropa* only has 178 followers. *Unzensuriert* finally also draws the highest number of FB subscriptions (59.431), but also *Wochenblick* reaches more than 50.000 people. On average, the FB pages of Austrian right-wing online news sites have 23.661 subscribers (minimum: 3.309).

UK

In Britain, we included three cases of alternative media on the extreme or populist right: *Westmonster*, *Spiked*, *Heritage and Destiny*. *Westmonster*, a pro-Brexit site which is partly funded by Arron Banks, a right-wing businessman (Newman, 2018), is heard of by 6 per cent and used weekly by 2 per cent of respondents in the latest round of Reuters Digital News report (Newman et al. 2018: 63). According to this report, it is the second most important alternative news offer on the political far right, after Breitbart UK (heard of 19 per cent, weekly use 2 per cent), in our sample included as a subsite to Breitbart US. *Spiked*, which was originally located on the left of the political spectrum, describes itself as "metaphorical missile against misanthropy"[23]. *Heritage and Destiny* is primarily a printed magazine with an online news section offering content in a blog like style. In contrast to the low number of institutionalized alternative online media in the UK, reports from watchdog organizations suggest that the social media accounts of numerous right-wing activists and pundits on FB, Twitter and YouTube

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[23] http://www.spiked-online.com/newsite/about/336/ (08.08.2018).

successfully serve this spectrum, apparently in lieu of dedicated online news sites (HOPE not hate, 2018).

Organization, transparency and funding: All three online news media provide information on their organization (at least name) and a postal address for their editorial office. *Westmonster* refrains from giving information on staff. All three news sites are financed via a combination of advertisement and donations. *Westmonster* and *Heritage and Destiny* also finance themselves through an online shop.

Content supply on homepage: Overall, the UK news sites are equally inactive as the Austrian ones, with on average 105 articles published in the month of data collection. Differences between the three news sites are however far more pronounced than in the Austrian case. Similar to Denmark, we can account for one rather active homepage, *Westmonster* (248), one site that publishes little, but fairly regularly, *Spiked* (72), and one largely inactive site, *Heritage & Destiny* (6). The low amount of content provided by *Heritage & Destiny* is hereby also a result of the fact that most content production still appears to feed into the print paper version.

Content supply through social media: All three UK news sites are active on Twitter. Two of them (*Westmonster* and *Spiked*) are also on FB, as well as a third social media platform (*Westmonster* on YouTube, Spiked on Google Plus). In the month of data collection (June 1st – July 1st), *Heritage and Destiny* only sent 3 tweets, whereas *Spiked* and *Westmonster* used the account more regularly (*Westmonster* 682, *Spiked* 431 tweets; mean: 372).

User demand: Judged by their Alexa page rank, none of the UK sites is in very high user demand. None of the sites ranks within the top 5.000 homepages in the UK (*Spiked*: 5.360; *Westmonste*r: 5.228; no rank given to *Heritage and Destiny*).
In contrast to the other European countries studied, at least two of the UK sites do attract a significant user base on social media. On both Twitter and FB, *Westmonster* attracts the widest userbase with 45.156 followers on Twitter and 26.131 FB subscriptions. *Spiked* is almost equally popular with 28918 followers on Twitter and 22.801 FB subscriptions. *Heritage and Destiny*, in contrast, is an insignificant factor on social media with only 164 followers on Twitter and no FB page.

US
Based on our criteria, we included a total of 36 cases for the US. The perhaps most well-known examples among our list include *Breitbart*, *The Daily Caller*, *The Blaze*, *Townhall* and *RedState*. The first of these three were also included as examples of alternative, partisan brands in the questionnaire for

the Reuters Digital News Report 2018: 45 % of the US population recognized *Breitbart*, 25 % were familiar with the *Daily Caller*, 32 % with *The Blaze* (Newman et al 2018, 20). However, only 4-7 % indicated that they used one of the sites on a weekly basis.

On its "About" page, *Breitbart* portrays itself as "the largest source of breaking news, analysis, thought-leading commentary, and original reporting curated and written specifically for the new generation of independent and conservative thinkers." Meanwhile, via its Twitter profile's about section, *Breitbart* announces that it offers, "News, commentary, and destruction of the political/media establishment." Meanwhile, the second highest ranking website in our sample, *The Western Journal*," presents itself as "a news company that drives positive cultural change by equipping readers with truth" by offering a platform to "conservative, libertarian, free market and pro-family writers and broadcasters." This blend of conservative values, infused with anti-establishment attitudes is a prevalent theme throughout many of the self-descriptions of sites included in the US sample. While it acknowledges being founded by figureheads of US conservative / right-wing punditry, *The Daily Caller* takes a slightly different approach in presenting itself as impartial and "tough on members of both political parties". Other key themes along these lines are authenticity (*The Blaze* on Twitter: "Authentic. Unfiltered. Fearless."), as well as self-governance and liberty. *World Net Daily*, for example, seeks "to stimulate a free-and-open debate about the great moral and political ideas facing the world and to promote freedom and self-government by encouraging personal virtue and good character."

Organization, transparency and funding: 26 (72 %) of the included news sites indicated who their staff was as part of their homepage structure. Around half (n=17) named a postal address for their main office, while three more at least listed a city in which they were located. Out of our 36 cases in the US sample, 32 featured ads on their website. Four offered subscriptions and 11 listed a possibility for donations. As far as we could tell from the information provided via the sites, none of them indicated that they received state funding or subsidies. 14 linked to an online shop.

Content supply on homepage: With an average of 690 articles in the course of one month, i.e. more than 22 articles per day, the US sites are by far the most active ones in our sample. Despite the high average number of articles, we can still account for a number of extremely inactive sites with on average less than one article published per day (*gotnews.com, FrontPageMag, Disobedient Media* and *The Federalist*). 11 sites have on average published 2-10 articles per day and 14 sites between on average 11 and 30 articles. Six homepages fall into the category of extremely active homepages (more than 30 articles per day): *Townhall* (4537), *The Daily Caller* (3514), *Breitbart* (2482), *NewsMax* (1412), *Daily Wire* (1114), and *WorldNet Daily* (1077).

Content supply through social media: US right-wing online news sites are predominantly present on FB (36 out of 36) and Twitter (35 out of 36, all but *Conservative Base).* Other social media platforms are – assessed based on links on the homepage – less universal. 15 sites linked to a YouTube channel, four of them to an Instagram account, and one (*The Teaparty Tribune*) to the Russian social network VK. Within the month of Twitter activity that we recorded for the 35 accounts we identified, the combined total of tweets we recorded for the US cases was 34.137. This puts the average amount at 975 tweets per month per account – by far the highest value for any of our six countries. The most active account, *DailyCaller*, sent out a total of 6.989 tweets – almost twice as many as the next most active handle, *CDNnow*. Other highly active accounts were *realDailyWire* (n=2.310) and *bigleaguepol* (2.433). Meanwhile, *BasedOps* only tweeted twice during the timespan analyzed, while the *TeaPartyTribune* only sent out seven tweets.

User demand: According to the Alexa page ranking, Breitbart is the most visited site within our sample, coming in at rank 65 for all US websites. The top ten within our sample are all ranked below the 2.000 mark for popular websites. At the bottom end, five of the websites rank below the top 50.000 of most visited sites in the US: The least visited sites, *Politchicks, Tea Party Tribune*, and *Conservative base* are past the 400.000 mark when it comes to their rank within the US market. *Opslens* and *gotnews* are just above that at around 200.000 and 275.000.

On average, the Twitter accounts for the 35 handles included in our analysis have a follower base of 102.888 users. The most popular account based on followers is *Breitbart News*, with a value of about 950k. Ranking next highest are *theblaze, DailyCaller, RedState* and *realDailyWire* at around 150k and upwards. Only eight sites have 10.000 followers or less.

The average amount of subscriptions on FB for the 36 pages included in our US sample was 858.815. The highest-ranking site based on numbers of subscription was the *Daily Caller* with around five million followers. *The Western Journal, Breitbart, the political insider, CNS News, the Daily Wire, Townhall, Newsmax*, and *Lifezette* all ranked at above one million followers. The lowest ranked sites within our sample were the *College Fix, Liberty Nation, Big League Politics, gotnews, Disobediant Media*, and *Information Liberation* – all of which had under 10.000 followers. Noticeably, except for two news sites (*Information Liberation* and *Liberty Nation*), the groups of sites with less than 10.000 subscriptions/followers on FB and on Twitter, respectively, do not overlap. The numbers of FB subscriptions and Twitter followers do thus not only provide information of a site's popularity with users, but also indicates a site's social media platform preference from a user perspective.

TABLE 2: Supply and Demand Indicators by Country

		SWE	DEN	GER	AUT	UK	USA
Supply	Number of homepages included	10	3	10	8	3	36
	Homepages per 1 million inhabitants[1]	1	0.5	0.1	0.9	0.05	0.1
	Average number of articles per month (Mediacloud)	213	134	220	104	105	690
	Homepages with on average less than 1 article/ more than 30 articles per day (Mediacloud)	0/0	1/0	3/0	1/0	1/0	4/6
	Average number of tweets per month (sites active on Twitter) [2]	222 (9)	163 (2)	321 (7)	139 (6)	372 (3)	975 (35)
Demand	Share of sites among the top 1000/5000 sites (Alexa rank) [3]	8/8 (9)	0/2 (2)	3/6 (9)	1/3 (7)	0/0 (2)	4/16 (36)
	Twitter followers [2]	9088 (9)	163 (2)	8359 (7)	1321 (6)	24.746 (3)	102.888 (35)
	Facebook subscriptions (average) [2]	28.482 (8)	31.134 (3)	33.335 (9)	23.661 (8)	24.466 (2)	858.815 (36)

[1] For the US, overall supply of right-wing news content online may be higher when including regional media, as well; [2] Twitter and Facebook data are based on homepages active in the month of data collection; number of active sites in brackets; [3] Alexa data is not available for all included news sites; number of sites included in Alexa in brackets

Homepage Categories

As the assessment of the supply and demand of news content has shown, the different online media vary substantially in their news infrastructure, both within and in between countries. How right-wing online news sites are positioned - and seek to position themselves - in a given political and media context can moreover be observed through the topical categories the news site itself has established to structure its news content for its readership. While the formulation of topical categories on a homepage does of course not directly translate to how the actual thematic priorities and focus of a given homepage are, it gives a rather direct indication of how the news site wants to present itself to its audience in terms of content.

In this sense, we distinguish two aspects to classify homepages based on their topical categories[24]:

- In terms of quantity, we look at the number of categories and sub-categories specified on the homepage, based on the assumption that this number gives a reasonable approximation of the broadness of topics covered on the homepage.

- In terms of thematic priority, we distinguish between classical news categories (such as Politics, International News, Culture, Commentary/Opinion, Sports, Business etc.), news categories that are particular to alternative right-wing media (such as Immigration, Crime, Freedom of Opinion, Terror, Mass Media), and non-classical news categories with no clear

[24] Categories not referring to news content (such as About Us, Login, Store etc) are not coded.

right-wing slant (e.g. Congress, Animal Rights, Military, Survival etc.) [25]. For each category on the homepage, we assign a value of -10 for right-wing categories, a value of 0 for non-classical, but not definite right-wing categories and +10 for classical categories.

Figure 1 presents a scatterplot of all news sites in our study, indicating the total number of categories and subcategories on the y-axis (displayed as a potency scale for reasons of visibility) and the average score of all topic categories of a given site on the classical-to-right-wing axis (-10 to +10). Country of origin of a given news site is indicated by color and shape of the markings in the scatterplot.

FIGURE 1: Classification of News Media based on Topical Categories
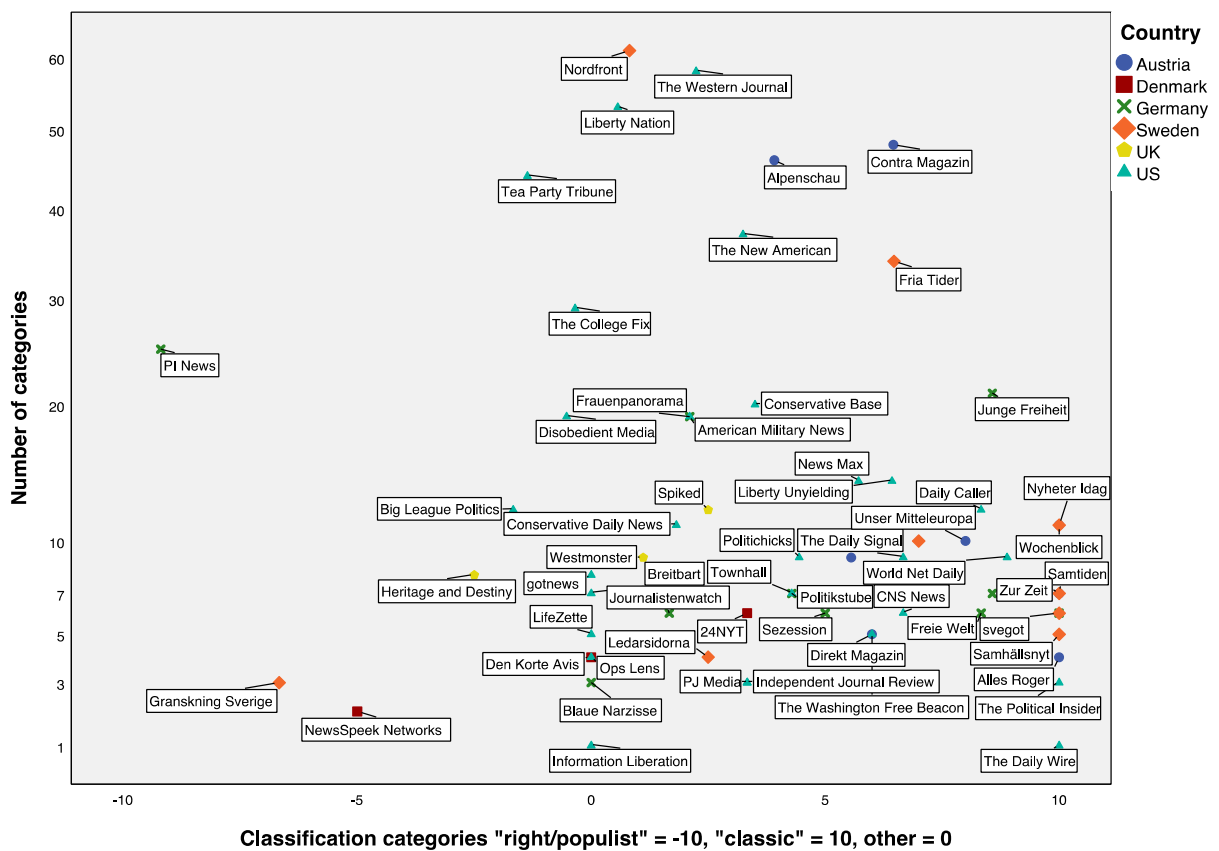
As can be seen in figure 1, only few news sites in our sample include enough topical categories with a right-wing slant to outweigh classical and other non-traditional news categories (indicated by a negative score on the x-axis). Rather than hailing from one country, these sites represent exceptional cases in all countries: *PI News* in Germany, *Granskning Sverige* in Sweden, *NewSpeek Networks* in Denmark, *Heritage & Destiny* in the UK and *Big League Politics* in the US. With the exception of *PI news*, such right-wing slant is the result of few, focused topic categories.

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[25] We have moreover analyzed these topical categories with regard to their transnational focus. This aspect will be taken up in the following section.

A significant proportion of our news sites can be described as non-traditional judged by the topical categories on their website, roughly indicated by a score of 0 to 5 on the x-axis. Such a non-traditional appeal can both be the result of a mix of classical and explicit right-wing categories, or simply a preference for non-traditional news categories. In both cases, the site hereby signals an alternative approach to the classical news site architecture. Many of the US American news sites, as well as the remaining sites from Denmark and the UK fall into this category. The non-traditional sites can both be focused and broad in their presentation of news topics. Indeed, it is particularly in this middle group where we can find sites with an "excessive" number of topical categories (40+), such as Swedish *Nordfront* (which is also the only site with outright Nazist categories), Austrian *Alpenschau* or US based *The Western Journal* and *Liberty Nation*.

Finally, a significant share of our news sites presents its topical categories in (almost) classical format, especially the Swedish, Austrian, as well as the largest German news sites. Eight of the US sites also fall into this group. Only two of them have more than 20 topic categories (*Fria Tider* and *Compact)*, whereas especially the US American sites with classical topical categories also feature a very reduced range of categories (as e.g. 'News' as the only content-based category in the case of *The Daily Wire*).

Transnational structures homepages

One base assumption pursued in this paper is that news sites in some countries have a more transnational outlook than others, given the political and media context they operate in. One expectation is that such transnationality will become manifest in the formation of transnational networks; this will be analyzed in the following paragraphs. However, one can also expect that the homepage's site architecture already provides indications of the transnationality of a news site.

The transnational potential of a given news site can become visible in different forms. At the most basic level, online news sites can feature elements of transnationality by including news from abroad as at least one specific topical category or sub-category on their site. It is important to note that despite the absence of such categories, the news site may of course feature international news content. Yet, the introduction of a category specifically dedicated to non-national news indicates a more permanent outlook beyond the nation state. Second, transnationality can become visible in news categories bundling news from specific individual countries. Some of these categories are indeed simply more detailed international news categories (e.g. Middle East, North Korea etc.), whereas others that specifically refer to neighboring and otherwise culturally related countries indicate a multi-national target audience. Third, the multi- and transnationality of a presumed target audience can also become evident in the use of foreign languages on the website. Finally, online news sites may transcend the realm of the nation-state by a) entertaining editorial offices abroad or b) placing their main editorial office outside their (main) country of operation. Despite the fact that the latter may often also be due

to legal considerations (such as bypassing national hate-speech laws), it nevertheless provides an element of transnationality.

For each of the countries studied, table 3 displays the number and share of news sites, for which the aforementioned criteria of transnationality apply. It becomes immediately visible that right-wing online news sites can only be described as transnational in their outlook in two of the countries under study: Austria and Sweden.

TABLE 3: Transnationality Indicators by Country

	SWE (n=10)	DEN (n=3)	GER (n=10)	AUT (n=8)	UK (n=3)	USA (n=36)
Location (main or second editorial office abroad)	2 (20%)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	5 (63%)	0 (0%)	1 (3%)
Foreign language	4 (40%)	0 (0%)	2 (20%)	2 (25%)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)
News category: neighboring/ related country	1 (10%)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	5 (63%)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)
News category: international	7 (70%)	1 (33%)	4 (40%)	6 (75%)	1 (33%)	10 (28%)

In Austria, many of the news sites feature both international news categories, as well as categories pertaining to neighboring countries, in particular Germany, but also central European regions that have historically formed part of the Austro-Hungarian Empire. A substantial part of the transnationality of Austrian homepages is thus attributed to the fact that they are (also) geared towards a German audience. Inded, as Alexa Webmetrics data shows, 6 out of 7 Austrian right-wing news sites (no information available for *Zur Zeit*) are primarily visited by users based in Germany. Only *unzensuriert.at* has a substantial Austrian user base, but even in this case 45% of visits are registered in Germany. In line with these findings, the Austrian homepages are not particular transnational when it comes to foreign-language content. Strikingly, two thirds of Austrian homepages are either based entirely abroad (in Uruguay, the Philippines and Hungary) or entertain editorial offices abroad (in Germany and the Czech Republic).

Transnationality for the Swedish homepages is primarily based on a comparatively high share of sites with foreign language content (primarily English, though *Nordfront* additionally features content in the Nordic languages and Russian) and the systematic inclusion of international news. The two remaining criteria (location and focus on neighboring/culturally related countries) only apply to selected homepages. Except for English-language and partly US-based *RedIceTV*, which has an international readership of which only 3% actually hail from Sweden, all news sites are predominantly, but by no means exclusively read by a Swedish audience. Other significant groups of users include users from other Nordic countries (in some of which, in particular Finland, there exists a significant Swedish minority), the US, as well as Spain (Swedish vacationers and exile pensioners?). Curiously, with the exception of *Nordfront*, the sites featuring English language content are almost exclusively used by people based in Sweden (Source: Alexa).

In the remaining countries, the inter/transnational focus of the analyzed homepages is only present in the (minimal) requirement of an international news category, and even such category is found on less than half of the homepages. While two German sites offer foreign language content (*Compact*: Russian, *Journalistenwatch:* English, French, Spanish), such content is completely absent for the sites in Denmark, the UK, and the US. All right-wing online news sites in Denmark and the UK are moreover based exclusively in their country of origin. For the US, in turn, *Breitbart* represents the one prominent example of a transnational news site based on its location, as it entertains editorial offices in the UK and Israel, for which it also features separate subsites on the homepage.

In all four countries, all homepages are predominantly visited by users from the country of origin. Some of the German sites are also visited by users from Switzerland and Austria, whereas many US sites, as well as UK based *Spiked* additionally attract a rather international audience. However, even for globally known *Breitbart*, US American users make up almost 80% of site visits (Source: Alexa).

Transnational Networking

Next, we sought to find out to what extent our alternative online media on the political right interact within and across countries using the unique possibilities of digital technologies to form a (trans-) nationally networked ecosystem for spreading right-wing and populist positions. We start our analysis with the websites and examine to what extent our alternative online news media refer directly to each other as 'friends' or 'partners'. Figure 2 shows that such direct and public linking is rarely the case. Roughly a third of our online media does not provide a special section with links to 'friends' and other related offers at all (22 out of 70 cases). Especially in the two Nordic countries, this is not a homepage feature regularly used. The sites with hyperlinks (in total, n=892 links) do only occasionally link directly to the other media in our sample (n=46 links). Direct (and sometimes reciprocal) connections between media outlets can only be found in the US.

Transnational references can be traced back exclusively to German *Journalistenwatch*. *Journalistenwatch*, operating as non-profit organization under the heading "Verein für Medienkritik und Gegenöffentlichkeit e. V.," acts as hub for other media in this alternative spectrum. With respect to our cross-national sample, it can be seen as an integrator of at least the German-language alternative media we scrutinized.

Regarding FB, we find more or less the same picture. In FB, the administrators of our alternative medias' FB accounts can publicly nominate other FB pages as their liked pages, what they in general do quite often (66 media run a FB account, 40 point to liked pages, those media establish 615 connections to other FB accounts). However, direct connections between our alternative media are extremely rare, limited to 15 connections, only one of them transnational.
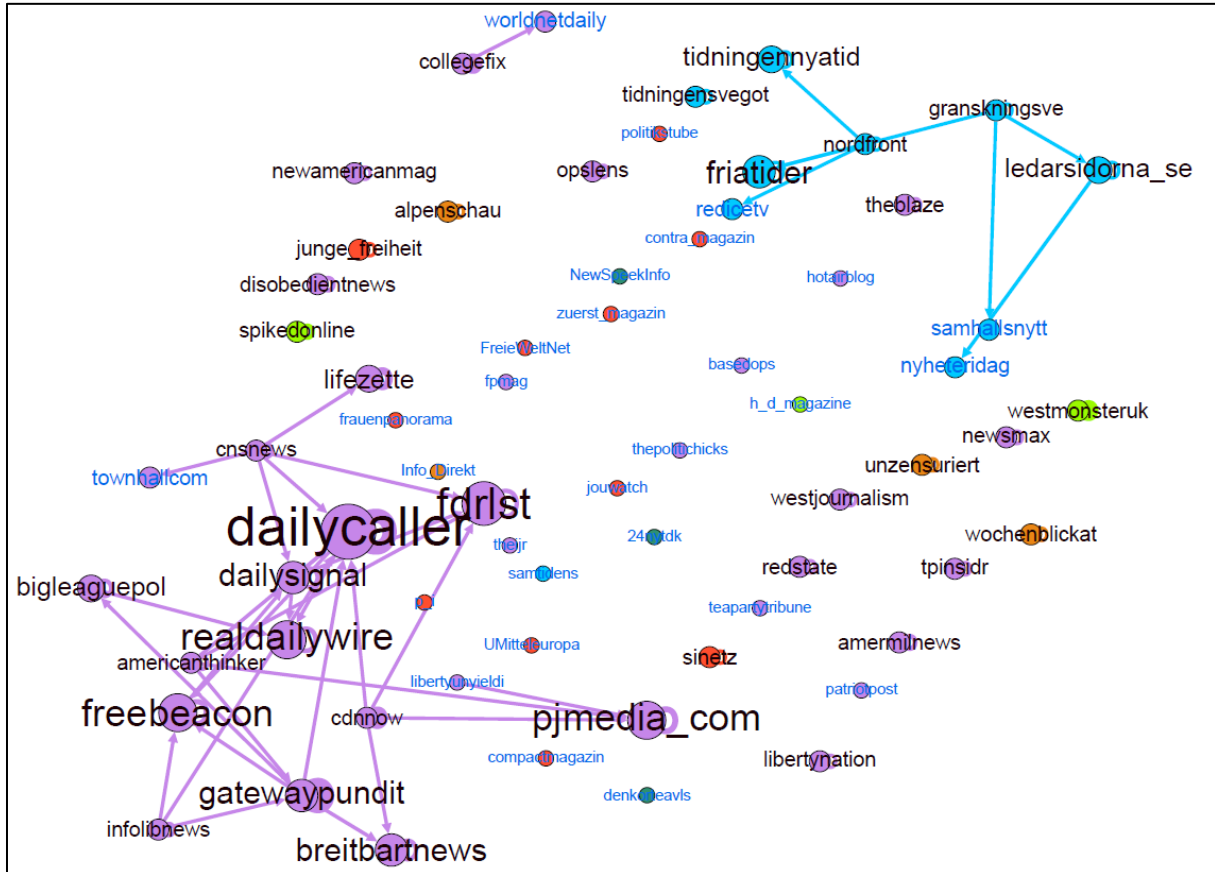
FIGURE 2: Homepage Partner Links Among our News Media
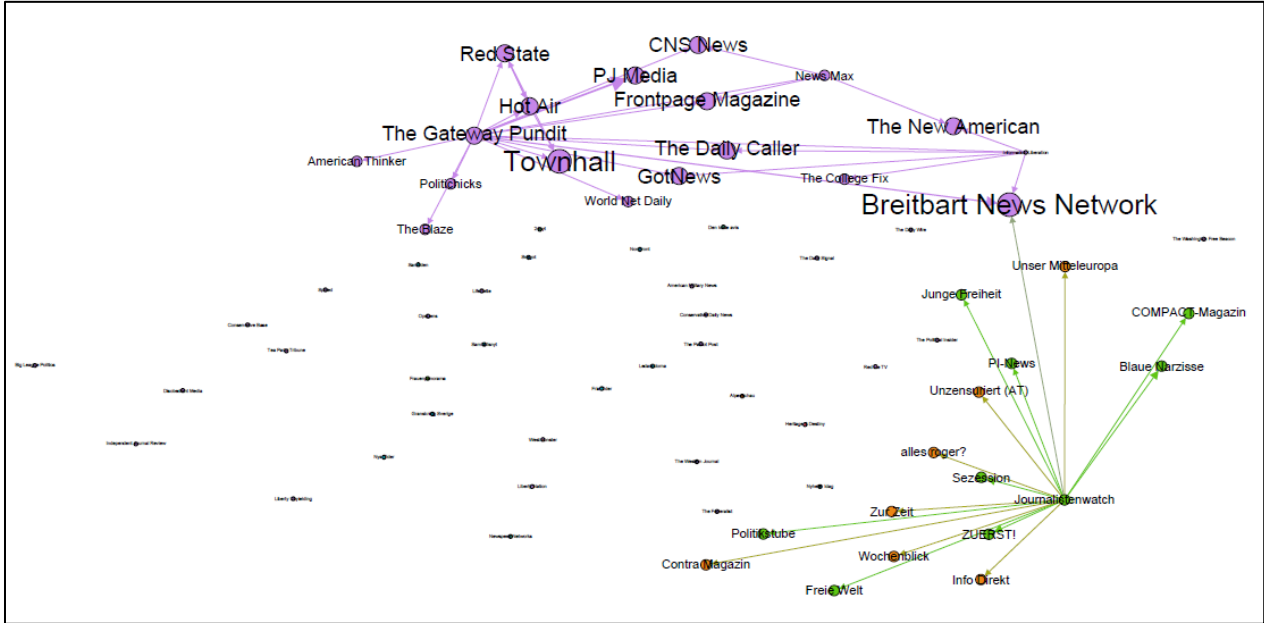
Homepage-network, n=70 news media, created with Force Atlas by Gephi. Node size represents in-degree. Colored by country: US (pink), Germany (green), Austria (orange), Sweden (blue), UK (green), Denmark (brown).

We considered Twitter use as another possibility to establish horizontal digital interconnections both between our different alternative news media within countries and transnationally across country borders. Thus, our partisan news providers could align with the other alternative media on the far and populist right by mentioning them within their tweet or by retweeting their posts in order to increase visibility and attention. 66 of our partisan niche media run a Twitter account, 53 interacted with others at least once during our time span of analysis (18.129 tweets with mentions or retweets in total). Less than one fifth (15 %) of the connections directly align our news ecosystem on the far and populist right, and most of them (97 %) are self-references to promote the own news offer. In only two of our countries - Sweden and the US, the news media directly connect to each other by mentioning or retweeting the other medias' content, and as figure 3 shows, those direct interconnections are entirely within the domestic realm.
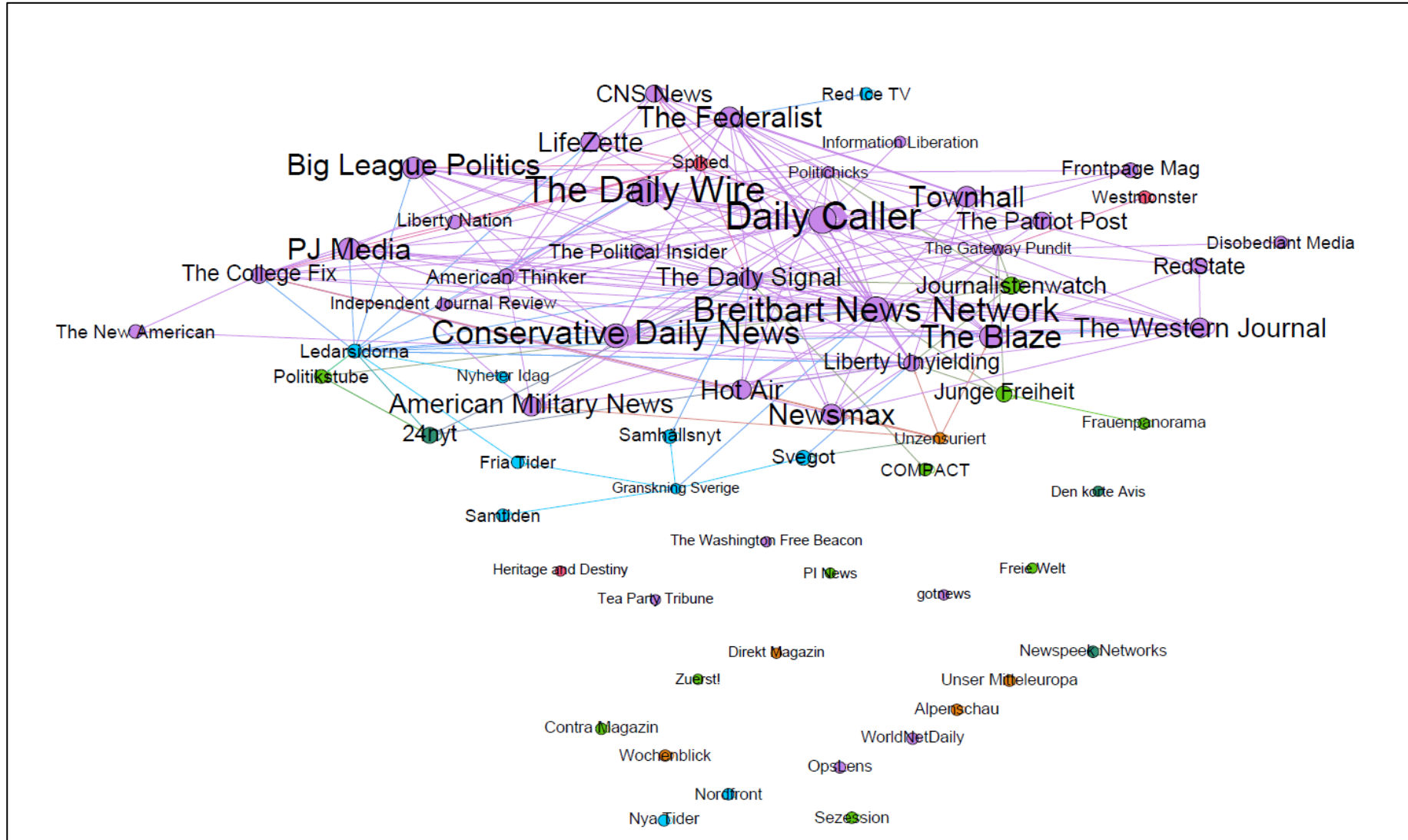
FIGURE 3: Twitter Direct Mention- and Retweet Connections Among our News Media

Interaction network, n=66 news media, created with Force Atlas by Gephi. Node size represents in-degree. Colored by country: US (pink), Germany (red), Austria (orange), Sweden (blue), UK (light green), Denmark (dark green). Color of node label indicates self-references (black) or no self-references (blue).

Another way to interconnect the alternative news media ecosystem on the political right is to hyperlink directly to other medias' websites within a tweet. Hyperlinking to websites is a quite prominent feature: the 41.281 tweets of our media contain 52.901 hyperlinks altogether. In 28.920 tweets, the accounts we analyzed establish connections amongst each other (figure 4). We find a strongly interconnected network of the American partisan news providers, with *Breitbart*, *The Daily Wire* and *Daily Caller*, for example, occupying a central position. Interestingly, we also find some British, Swedish, Danish and German-language media integrated in this network. For example, the British *Spiked* is quite often linked to by American media and it equally points its followers to American partisan news media. The Swedish media establish domestic connections but also point to the American news ecosystem on the political right. Especially *Ledarsidorna* is active in this regard. The German *Journalistenwatch* appears well integrated in this ecosystem, attracting transnational attention from various American media. German *Politikstube* is interesting for being connected to Swedish, Danish and American media. From Austria, *Unzensuriert* is the one establishing transnational links. However, the majority of the Austrian, German and Danish media is not connected to the other alternative media by direct hyperlinks during the time span we analyzed.

FIGURE 4: Twitter Direct Interconnections Among our News Media via Hyperlinks to Websites

Network of hyperlink connections, n=66 news media, created with Force Atlas by Gephi. Node size represents in-degree. Colored by country: US (pink), Germany (green), Austria (orange), Sweden (blue), UK (red), Denmark (dark green).

Conclusion

Our paper set out to assess commonalities and differences in the architectures of right-wing and populist digital news infrastructures in five European countries and the US, as well as to explore to what extent this digital information environment is interconnected within and across countries. The countries we selected differ in terms of political context. Sweden, Germany and the UK represent countries in which the electoral success and political acceptance of right-wing populist parties or politicians has – at least until recently - been comparatively low, while the acceptance of right-wing and right-wing populist views is much more pronounced in Denmark, Austria and the US. In Sweden and Germany, the mass media strive for demarcation and dismissal of far right and populist positions, and audience polarization of 'mainstream' online media is comparatively low. This makes Sweden and Germany a context in which niche media on the far- and populist right might be more likely to flourish, as well as to have an incentive to establish transnational connections with like-minded sites, both nationally and transnationally. In Denmark and Austria, the legacy media might be seen as at least indirectly supporting and featuring actors and positions on the far and populist right. Together with a more polarized online news environment, which provides room for right-wing positions within the 'mainstream' media landscape, the 'need' for alternative niche media and (trans-)national interconnections might be less pronounced. In the UK and US we observe highly polarized media contexts, where some legacy media are seen as more or less directly supporting right-wing populist views, and where at the same time levels of trust in news in general are extremely low. All in all, we therefore expected the alternative right-wing news infrastructure to be flourishing – both within the national and transnational sphere - in Sweden and Germany, followed by the UK and US, whereas we expected less activity in Denmark and Austria.

Our analysis of the digital news infrastructures on the far and populist right shows that the right-wing online news landscape in Sweden as expected appears well-established and differentiated. Despite their different user profiles, the identified sites have in common that they are largely geared towards a stable, committed user base, rather than to random snippets of a broader audience, as illustrated by a funding structure that not primarily rests on advertisement revenues. User rates, as well as the classical news built-up of many of the sites moreover suggest that they are being used as a regular source of general news consumption for many of these users. Equally, the right-wing online news ecosystem in Germany is well-developed and diverse, with a mixture of longstanding and digital-only news providers and of thematically focused niche media on one side versus very active and thematically diversified media on the other. The German media are transparent about their organizational structures and financially based on a diversified funding strategy. Overall, supply and demand data indicate a stable supply structure and a broad and regular user base, although the

German sites vary substantially with regard to the number of users they can attract and with two sites dominating the social media presence of right-wing media in Germany.

As expected, both supply and demand of right-wing online news sites are extremely limited in Denmark. The existing sites are rather homogeneous with regard to the people behind (former mainstream politicians/journalists), the overall political stand-point (none of them belongs to the extreme right), and their limited social media use. Despite their limited relevance and size, all homepages have a rather professional make-up (except for the underdeveloped topic categories).

The Austrian news infrastructure is in contrast more established than we would have expected judged by the significant number of news media that met our criteria. In terms of content supply, they are however - together with the UK - overall the least active ones among our countries. User demand in Austria seems also comparatively low. However, we find a substantial degree of user attention for many Austrian sites in Germany. The fact that the Austrian sites thus largely also cater to a German audience, for which we expected a higher level of demand for alternative right-wing news, thus 'conflates' our results for the Austrian supply-side – while at the same time underlining the importance of a transnational perspective in the study of right-wing news architectures.

For the UK, in contrast, supply and demand of the right-wing news homepages are very limited and lower than expected, whereas demand and supply on social media are relatively high. Three factors may come into play here: for one, a rather polarized legacy media that allows for the expression of right-wing positions, for the other a strong pull of US based and international right-wing news sites (as best illustrated by the prominence of *Breitbart UK*, which in our study judged by the organization and homepage structure features as a US site), and finally the important role of right-wing pundits in the UK that possibly saturate the market for right-wing content online.

The US represents a stark outlier in many ways, the most obvious of which is the relative enormity of both the demand and supply sides, marked first and foremost by the sheer amount and the broad spectrum of online news providers that meet the selection criteria defined for this project. Here we certainly need to account for the country's size and population numbers which provides a much larger market for news consumption than any of the other countries analyzed (or all of them put together, for that matter). While the total figures we get for the criteria of supply and demand may thus seem much higher at first glance, when it comes to their relative value based on population numbers, they are in fact lower than in Sweden or Austria and Germany (when it comes to sites per million inhabitants or relative share of sites among the top 5000). So while population size may account for some of the deviation in terms of how many variations of this type of medium seem to flourish in the US, it is unlikely to be the only explanation. And we should note that in terms of the collective content these sites produce, as measured via social media activity and averages of articles, this group maintains its status of clear outlier. The US sample also stands out in regard to how well the various sites appear to

be networked within the national context. This might point towards a more ideologically coherent right-wing public sphere, that appear more established and better networked than in countries where such a phenomenon might be considered relatively recent (e.g. Germany). Another indicator for this might certainly be the central role that populist right-wing politics currently plays in the US as well as the high levels of polarization among the voting public and media consumers. In contrast to examples like the UK, where individual pundits with extreme views might still engage via the same forms of more media venues, the US market might be more fragmented when it comes to an alternative ecosystem on the political right.

In the final part of the study, we focused on the transnational networking of the analyzed right-wing news sites. Overall and across the three digital platforms (Homepage, FB, Twitter) analyzed in detail in our study, *direct* transnational linkages between our alternative online media are quite sparse. However, the established horizontal interconnections across countries often connect Swedish and German media with a domestically networked American news ecosystem on the far right. Moreover, we can account for interconnections across borders between news sites with the same language (Germany-Austria, UK-US). However, the low degree of (trans-)national interconnectedness of our media sample by *direct* links among our cases should not be interpreted as a lack of horizontal networking overall. It might well be that our media are interconnected through longer ties, intermediaries and bridge actors - a question that shall be addressed in a next step, taking the complete network data into account.

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