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Scare-quoting climate

The rapid rise of climate denial in the Swedish far-right media ecosystem

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Abstract

The final years of the 2010s marked an upturn in coverage on climate change. In Sweden, legacy media wrote more on the issue than ever before, especially in connection to the drought and wildfires in the summer of 2018 and the Fridays for Future movement started by Greta Thunberg. Reporting on climate change also reached unprecedented levels in the growingly influential far-right media ecosystem; from being a topic discussed hardly at all, it became a prominent issue. In this study, we use a toolkit from critical discourse analysis (CDA) to research how three Swedish far-right digital media sites reported on climate during the years 2018–2019. We show how the use of conspiracy theories, anti-establishment rhetoric, and nationalistic arguments created an antagonistic reaction to increased demands for action on climate change. By putting climate in ironic quotation marks, a discourse was created where it was taken for granted that climate change was a hoax.

Keywords: far right, climate change denial, scare-quotes, Greta Thunberg, digital media

Introduction

The climate crisis is recognised as the defining issue of our time. Overwhelming scientific evidence has shown for three decades that rising temperatures will affect the living conditions for all life on earth (Stoddard et al., In press). However, it took until 2018 before it was extensively discussed in the growingly influential far-right media ecosystem in Sweden. As a response to increasing coverage in legacy media – both in Sweden and abroad (Nacu-Schmidt et al., 2020; Vi-skogen & Retriever, 2019, 2020) – climate change became an important issue also for the far right. But, as we show in this study, instead of taking it seriously, a discourse was created where climate change was put into ironic quotation marks, and anyone demanding action was ridiculed.

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In this article, we examine the climate change discourse on three far-right media sites during the years 2018–2019. The sites are *Fria Tider*, *Samhällsnytt*, and *Nya Tider*, which all reach between 6 and 11 per cent of Sweden’s population (Newman et al., 2020). First, we provide a background on the climate change contrarian movement in the US and discuss how denialism has spread to the European far right. We then describe the Swedish media system, comparing it with Benkler and colleagues’ (2018) idea of how the far-right media ecosystem can be understood in terms of the propaganda feedback loop, before we account for the studied media sites. We situate our qualitative reading in the critical discourse analysis (CDA) tradition of Norman Fairclough (2010) and use Stanley Cohen’s (2001) schema of denial to analyse the discourse. After presenting our empirical findings, we end with a discussion and point towards further research.

Climate change denial and a changing Swedish media system

The strategy of denouncing climate change as a hoax has roots back to the late-1980s as a tactic by extractive companies such as Exxon Mobil (Boykoff, 2011; Oreskes & Conway, 2011). In the US – and to some extent in Canada and Australia – the collaboration between fossil fuel interests and conservative think tanks in questioning climate science has been revealed in an array of studies (e.g., Brulle, 2014; Farrell, 2016; Jacques & Knox, 2016; McCright & Dunlap, 2003; Young & Coutinho, 2013). They show how what Riley Dunlap and Aaron McCright (2011) named the “climate change denial machine” was highly funded, and how it manufactured and pushed contrarian arguments into what Benkler and colleagues (2018) recently named the right-wing media ecosystem. The current sharp ideological divide between Republicans and Democrats in the US on climate science has not always existed. It is partly a function of strategic lobbying by fossil fuel interests and conservative think tanks, which has taken advantage of, and fuelled, a growing rift during the last 30 years. In Europe, recent research shows that contrarian think tanks have been active in spreading denial since the mid-1990s, and that they have increased their output in recent years (Almiron et al., 2020; Ekberg & Pressfeldt, 2021). In the UK, which has a polarised media system, climate change denial has been prominent in opinion pieces in the right-wing media (Painter & Ashe, 2012).

Since 2000, concern over climate change has generally increased in Sweden (Rönnerstrand, 2019). There was a consensus in legacy media around the science of climate change until 2006, when a marked upturn in reporting accompanied the creation of a more organised climate change denial movement in the form of the Climate Realists (formerly the Stockholm Initiative) (Anshelm & Hultman, 2014). This influenced the far-right party, the Sweden Democrats (SD), who started spreading doubt about climate science in the parliament in 2013 (Hultman et al., 2019). Since entering the parliament in 2010, SD has enjoyed increased

electoral support in every election, winning votes from both the Social Democrats and the Moderates (liberal-conservative), as well as engaging an electorate that previously did not vote. In the last election, in 2018, the party received 17.5 per cent of the vote (Aylott & Bolin, 2019). The Sweden Democrats' main focus is immigration, and they position themselves as the only opposition party, claiming the other seven parties “are all the same” (Rydgren & van der Meiden, 2019).

The legacy, or traditional, news media in Sweden is characterised by two large public service broadcasters in television and radio and four national and several local newspapers. The media is self-regulated through the Code of Ethics for Press, Radio and Television in Sweden, and a system of public press subsidies is designed to secure a pluralistic media system. While the legacy media outlets position themselves both to the left and right politically in their opinion pieces, they all adhere to what Benkler and colleagues (2018: 77) characterise as professional truth-seeking norms in a “reality-check dynamic”:

Outlets compete on the truth and freshness of their news, and the search for scoops and sensationalism is in tension with the internal norms and the fact that other outlets will try to build their own credibility and audience in part by policing them if they get it wrong.

The reality-check dynamic might be one of the reasons why the consensus around climate science continued in Swedish legacy media even after the formation of the Climate Realists and the rise of SD. But even if climate change was not denied, it was arguably under-reported. After the climate summit in 2009, interest dropped, and it was only in 2018 and 2019 that it again reached the same levels, when the heatwave, drought, and unprecedented wildfires in the summer of 2018 – together with Greta Thunberg's school strike movement the following autumn – marked an increase in reporting on climate (Vi-skogen & Retreiver, 2019, 2020).

During the last decade, far-right anti-immigration alternative media has become an increasingly influential phenomena in Sweden and abroad (Haller et al., 2019; Nygaard, 2019; Ylä-Anttila et al., 2019).¹ Sweden has been singled out in both national and international far-right media as the case that allegedly proves that a progressive welfare state is not compatible with open borders (Mulhall, 2020; Titley, 2019). Leading up to the national election in Sweden in 2018, far-right alternative media increased in visibility on social media platforms, with *Samhällsnytt* being especially successful in engaging readership through Facebook (Larsson, 2019; Sandberg & Ihlebäck, 2019). Parallel to the way SD position themselves as the opposition, these sites claim that legacy media, and especially the public broadcasters, echoes the voice of the political elites, rather than being a watchdog (Holt, 2019). SD supporters are also the least trustful of the public service broadcasters and legacy media (Andersson, 2020). The media sites in our study reach between 6–11 per cent of the Swedish online population (Newman et al., 2020), and until recently, none of them had signed on to the self-regulatory Code of Ethics for media.² The sites are part of a far-right media

ecosystem that can be characterised by what Benkler and colleagues (2018) call the identity-confirming propaganda feedback loop. Actors in this loop police each other not by truthfulness, but by ideology. Anyone perceived to be stepping out of line is exposed.

An empirically noted, but so far under-studied, subject is how opposition to climate change has become a core feature of the European far right (Forchtner & Kølvrå, 2015; Forchtner et al., 2018; Jeffries, 2017; Lockwood, 2018). Most studies focusing on these themes analyse the rhetoric of politicians or political parties (e.g., Forchtner, 2019; Schaller & Carius, 2019) and show how far-right anti-immigration parties such as Alternative for Deutschland, SD, and the Austrian FPÖ, to different degrees, have opposed climate change mitigation policies and spread doubt about the science. Some studies show how far-right media can send mixed messages, opposing climate change action while still being supportive of local environmental issues such as the German forest (Forchtner & Özvatan, 2019). Others have, via surveys, shown a strong correlation between climate change denialism and nationalism (Kulin et al., 2021); conspiracy theories (Lewandowsky et al., 2015); distrust in public service media (Jylhä et al., 2020); and opposition to feminism and immigration (Jylhä & Hellmer, 2020; Krange et al., 2018). The latter is also seen in a study of online groups in Germany (Kaiser & Puschmann, 2017).

Little research has been done regarding climate change on far-right media, and no peer-reviewed studies focus on how the Swedish far-right media ecosystem report on climate change. In a corpus collected for a study on far-right media in 2016 – which included all the sites in this study³ – neither environment nor climate change were covered at all (Holt, 2016). The issue of climate change is thus new in the reporting of the far-right media ecosystem. The yearly *Reuters Institute Digital News Report* shows an increasing reach for these sites, and the latest report also shows that the Swedish population is nearly as polarised as the US regarding opinions on climate change (Newman et al., 2020). Increasingly diverging opinions have also been noted in studies by the SOM-institute at the University of Gothenburg (Rönnerstrand, 2019). These two phenomena, a growingly influential far-right media system, and signs of an increasing divide regarding the need for action on climate change is disconcerting in a country that sees itself – and is often seen globally – as an environmental leader.

Corpus and method

In order to explore how the Swedish far-right media ecosystem reported on climate change during 2018–2019, we focused on three media sites.⁴

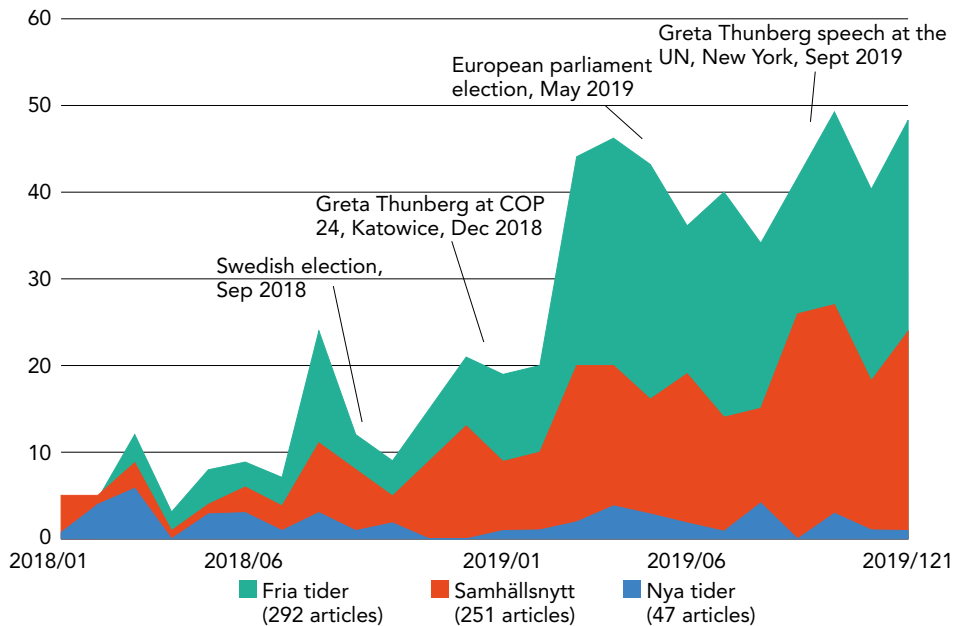
Fria Tider [*Free Times*] has the second-biggest reach of the Swedish online far-right alternative media sites. It reaches 11 per cent of the online population, and 27 per cent say they trust it as a news source (Newman et al., 2020). The

Swedish Media Council has described the site as publishing “obviously racist, xenophobic and Islamophobic” material (Statens medieråd, 2013: 60). In our corpus, *Fria Tider* is the site with the most articles about climate change ($n = 292$), and it is a topic that has become increasingly prominent during the two years (see Figure 1).

Samhällsnytt [Community/Society News] is the third-biggest of the far-right alternative media, reaching 9 per cent of the Swedish online population. The site claims to be independent of SD, but it is run by an organisation started by the party and has editorials written by SD politicians. In its coverage, clear racist stereotypes are often used. In our corpus, it has the second-highest number of articles ($n = 251$), and as with *Fria Tider*, the issue became more prominent over time (see Figure 1).

Nya Tider [New Times] has both an online and a print edition. It comes out twice weekly and reaches 6 per cent of the Swedish online population (Newman et al. 2020). According to official subscription figures, it has 6,700 subscribers. *Nya Tider* started in 2012 and has, as a printed newspaper, been eligible for public press subsidies. It now receives roughly EUR 490,000 annually (Mediestödsnämnden, 2020). In our corpus, it stands out as the only site that reported on climate change already in early 2018, but reporting did not increase during the studied period (see Figure 1). It is the site with the least number of articles ($n = 47$).

Figure 1 Number of articles per month, by publication



The corpus was collected through a search in the Nordic digital press archive Retriever, conducted in March 2020. By using the search string “klimat* OR uppvärmning OR *greta*” [“climate* OR warming OR *greta*”], we received a total of 750 articles from the three sites. The reason to include “*greta*” was to not miss any reporting about climate activist Greta Thunberg. One could argue that this makes any article count meaningless, as there would be no articles written about Thunberg before she started her strike. Conducting the search without “*greta*”, however, still resulted in 733 articles, meaning the term had limited effect on the number of articles, but the few included might provide insight into how the far-right media ecosystem reacted to the activist’s rise to fame. After removing 152 articles not related to climate change (mainly about the “political climate” or “the climate of debate”), two duplicates, three articles that had been removed from the sites, and three articles on *Nya Tider* where a large part of the text was behind a paywall, the corpus was reduced to 590 articles. *Nya Tider* operates a soft paywall, and if articles behind the wall were available in print, we accessed these through the archives at the Royal Library.

We see discourse as “being socially constitutive as well as socially conditioned” (Fairclough & Wodak, 1997: 258), and as such, discourses of climate change are shaped by – and help shape – societal responses to greenhouse gas emissions and rising temperatures. Discourses are also elements of social processes. Building on the work of Norman Fairclough, we see the “order of discourse” as the semiotic aspect of a relatively stable and established social practice situated in wider social structures. The order of discourse consists of genres (“ways of acting”), styles (“ways of being”), and discourses (“ways of representing”) (Fairclough, 2010: 74–75). The far-right media ecosystem can be seen as a social practice, and its order of discourse is thus made up of genres (e.g., news reporting, columns), styles (e.g., authoritarian, claiming to be corrective of legacy media) and discourses (e.g., nativist, anti-immigration/racist, anti-establishment). As we see in the article count, the discourse of climate change has recently been added, and in the remainder of the article, we are mainly concerned with *how* this is done. As we are locating our research at “the order of discourse-level”, we do a qualitative reading of a relatively large corpus, rather than a line-by-line analysis of a few selected texts.

To connect the discourse of climate change in the far-right media ecosystem with previous work on climate change denial, we follow Stanley Cohen’s (2001) classification scheme (for previous use in climate research, see, e.g., Björnberg et al., 2017; Norgaard, 2011). Cohen suggests there are three different answers to the question of what is denied. The first is literal denial – to say that something is not happening; in the climate context, these are arguments about the earth not heating up or that it is not caused by humans. The second is interpretive denial – reinterpreting the meaning of what is happening in a way that it loses significance; for example, to claim that global warming is positive. The third is implicatory denial; this is not about denying the knowledge, but rather its moral, political, and psychological implications and how individuals, institutions, or states do

not act despite knowing they should. Cohen (2001: 103) stresses that different types of denial often appear simultaneously, as their relationship is “ideological, rather than logical”.

Combining a toolkit from CDA with Cohen’s scheme, we have closely examined all articles in our corpus twice, asking two questions:

1. What types of perceived climate change knowledge are used?

This relates to the sources of information. We examine if the far-right media ecosystem is informed by the established science or by the climate change countermovement, and what tropes of denial might be used.

2. What strategies are used to spread information and disinformation?

Disinformation spreads easily in a system characterised by the propaganda feedback loop. Here we look at semiotic aspects, such as meaning-making metaphors and keywords, and at different political strategies.

Scare-quoting climate: Denial as background knowledge

The climate change discourse on the right-wing media ecosystem is dominated by literal and interpretative denial. *Nya Tider* is the site that most explicitly engages with, and denies, climate science, and it did so even before the topic rose to prominence on the other two sites. This can be highlighted by two articles, leading up to and following an international climate change contrarian conference held outside Gothenburg in February 2018, organised by the Swedish climate denial network Klimatsans [Climate Sense/Reason] (Björklund, 2018a, 2018b). The lead-up article states the following:

Climate threat-sceptics have identified a series of basic problems with climate science as it is presented by the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC). Among these are deviations from the scientific method, the accuracy of climate models, modelling of the carbon cycle and questionable data adjustments, which will be discussed at the conference. (Björklund, 2018a)⁵

Another example of how *Nya Tider* is part of the literal denial movement is when a prominent member of the movement starts contributing for the site, writing, among other articles, a favourable review of a book by the contrarian American blogger Marc Morano at *Climate Depot* (Tornvall, 2018). The Morano review is an example of literal and interpretive denial arguments being used in the same text, claiming “it is not more carbon dioxide heating the atmosphere, it is warmer oceans gassing out more carbon dioxide – with a positive effect on vegetation and yields”. Here climate change is seen as not anthropocentric (literal denial) and increasing amounts of carbon dioxide will be positive (interpretative denial).

While *Nya Tider* engages with contrarian climate science, the idea of climate change as a hoax becomes taken-for-granted, background knowledge on

Sambällsnytt and *Fria Tider* (for previous research on background knowledge in CDA, see Fairclough, 2010: 31–36). These sites seldom discuss the actual science of climate change, and when they do, it is often with a link to the contrarian YouTube channel *SwebbTV*. This can be exemplified in an article on *Fria Tider* about the meeting between Thunberg and UN Secretary-General Antonio Guterres (Fria Tider, 2018c). In the article, there is a short recap and a link to a *SwebbTV* interview with the well-known climate contrarian Lars Bern (Ekberg & Pressfeldt, 2021), who claims climate change is a hoax pushed by globalists aiming to create supra-national governance. With this reference, the meeting between Thunberg and Guterres is ridiculed. When climate science is discussed more in-depth, mainly in opinion pieces, common denialist tropes of religion, globalism, and a threat to free speech are used (e.g., R. Malm, 2018; Dagerlind, 2019; Tullberg, 2019; for previous research on these tropes, see, e.g., Anshelm & Hultman, 2014).

The literal denial on *SwebbTV* helps create the background knowledge that *Fria Tider* and *Sambällsnytt* lean on. In the discourse on these sites, the IPCC is considered an unscientific, politically correct organisation producing alarmist reports, while *SwebbTV* is seen to produce in-depth interviews with prominent climate scientists exposing the truth about climate hysteria (e.g., Fria Tider, 2018d; R. Malm, 2019). A similar role is served by a non-peer-reviewed manuscript about climate change by two Finnish scientists (Kauppinen & Malmi, 2019), which was uploaded to arXiv, an open archive for scholarly articles. The manuscript claimed there was no anthropogenic cause for global warming and was widely circulated on denialist blogs, despite the fact that its findings had been thoroughly dismissed (see, e.g., Climate Feedback, 2019). *Fria Tider* reference it several times in short sentences (e.g., Fria Tider, 2019c) to provide fodder for the background knowledge of climate change as a hoax.

The argument about climate change as a hoax is a clear contrast to legacy media where climate science is taken as real. The reinterpretation of climate change as hoax is marked in *Fria Tider*'s and *Sambällsnytt*'s reporting by the use of quotation marks and terms such as “so-called” or “alleged” (e.g., Nilsson, 2018; Sambällsnytt, 2018). In this way, “climate” and associated terms such as “climate activism” and “greenhouse gas emission” become semiotically important keywords, as discussed in previous scholarship (Boréus & Seiler Brylla, 2018). We first find this practice in July 2018, when several wildfires were raging in Sweden, in a response to an opinion piece in the Swedish national tabloid *Expressen*, which connects the fires with climate change and the carbon-intensive lifestyles of white men. Ridiculing the connection, *Fria Tider* wrote that *Expressen* claimed “it is elderly white men who deny so-called climate change” (Fria Tider, 2018a). After this, the use of quotation marks and the term so-called to denote climate change became modus operandi for *Fria Tider* and important for *Sambällsnytt*. *Fria Tider* used these 146 times in 116 articles (e.g., Fria Tider, 2018b, 2019b, 2019d). To create antagonisms towards climate change policy, it is often juxtaposed to

welfare and security, which are perceived to be serious and worthy of attention (e.g., Fria Tider, 2019e).

This denotation of climate change becomes a core discursive feature on the right-wing media ecosystem. In dialectical relation to the mainstream media discourse, where climate is seen as a serious issue, the keywords here are distanced to provoke ridicule and irony. The quotation marks are used in two related but slightly different ways. The first is to pick out specific words from a longer quotation. An example is when *Sambällsnytt* comments on a news item on *SVT*, saying that “the state-television uses the word ‘climate’ as many as eight times in its article” (Kristoffersson, 2019c). Here, the quotation marks around climate references what was said on *SVT* and is thus a factually correct statement, but by singling out one word from its wider context, it is given an ironic meaning. Formally, this technique is similar to irony in legacy media, which can signal critical distance while staying truthful to the objective, official facts (Glasser & Ettema, 1993).

The second way to use quotation marks is the so-called scare quotes. Scare quotes do not refer to someone else’s words, but signal that the word has a different meaning than its literal interpretation. This is a way of quoting that the German philologist Victor Klemperer acknowledged in the language of the Third Reich, commenting that the “excessive use of what I would call ironic quotation marks [...] does not restrict itself to quoting, but questions instead the truth of what is quoted and declares the quoted content a lie” (Klemperer, 1947, cited in Vandergriff, 2012). The use of scare quotes has been noted in recent scholarship on the present far-right in regard to refugees (Kreis, 2017), and in passing in connection to the climate (Forchtner et al., 2018). It was also used by the Sweden Democrats who put climate in scare quotes in their 2016 budget (Hultman et al., 2019). In our corpus, scare-quoting is used extensively, one example is when *Fria Tider* refers to the former Swedish Minister of Environment and Climate Isabella Lövin as “‘Minister of climate’ Isabella Lövin” (Fria Tider, 2019a). By scare-quoting her official title, *Fria Tider* implies that Isabella Lövin is a fraudulent politician. It is an echo of the way scare quotes were used by the far right nearly a century ago, when Klemperer noticed how “Chamberlain and Churchill and Roosevelt are always only ‘statesmen’ in ironic inverted commas, Einstein is a ‘research scientist’, Rathenau a ‘German’ and Heine a ‘German writer’” (Klemperer, 2000, cited in Vandergriff, 2012).

Oppositional strategies: Averting blame and attacking political elites

One way of opposing action on climate is to avert the blame. The claim that the actions of a small country like Sweden are negligible in a global context is a form of implicatory denial that is repeatedly used, for example, in an opinion piece claiming that “even if we closed Sweden completely our reduced carbon dioxide

emissions would be eaten up in a few weeks by China's rising emissions. Sweden is responsible for 1 permille of the global emissions of greenhouse gases" (R. Malm, 2019). This is a framing of the problem implying that nothing can be done nationally. As part of the Global North, Sweden has a large historic carbon footprint, and is obliged by the Paris Agreement to cut its emissions faster (Anderson et al., 2020), so by pointing the finger of blame elsewhere, the moral and political implications are being denied.

Another strategy is to attack anyone promoting action on climate change, which is done mainly in two different ways. The first is by portraying politicians and other climate change leaders as a greedy, hypocritical elite. An example is when *Fria Tider* (2019f) reported on a study which shows that celebrities are the most frequent flyers (Gössling, 2019). While still scare-quoting climate change, *Fria Tider* quoted the scientist in a sincere manner to legitimate its own anti-establishment rhetoric. The portrayed elite is often depicted with unflattering images. One article about how the former president of the European Commission Jean-Claude Juncker uses a private jet, is noteworthy for the picture collage (Kristoffersson, 2019a). Two images are pasted together, one showing a luxury airplane seat with a bottle of champagne, the other an extreme close-up of Juncker laughing with an open mouth, with the nose being a central part of the image. Another article uses a similar collage, where a picture of new Volvo cars is pasted next to an extreme close-up of Swedish Prime Minister Stefan Löfven (Kristoffersson, 2019b). The prime minister is laughing with an open mouth with no interaction between Stefan Löfven and the camera. It is worth noting that the exact same image of Stefan Löfven has appeared several times on *Klimatupplysningen*, a denialist blog run by the Climate Realists (e.g., Welander, 2018). These repetitive images resemble caricatures, similar to the antisemitic images common in pre-second world war Europe.

The second type of attack is the spreading of conspiracy theories. This is most clearly articulated in *Nya Tider*, which picked up and articulated a conspiracy theory linking Greta Thunberg to George Soros. In April 2019, *Nya Tider* posted an article in English titled "George Soros behind Greta Thunberg" (Persson, 2019), which was illustrated with a manipulated photo where Soros's face was pasted over Greta Thunberg's. The article was shared more than 36,000 times in social media, according to *Nya Tider*'s own statistics, and in our corpus, we see the conspiracy theory spread to both *Samhällsnytt* and *Fria Tider* (Fria Tider, 2019g; Westlund, 2019). In connection with Greta Thunberg's speech at the UN Climate Action Summit in New York in September 2019, it also gained international traction and was circling in the propaganda feedback loop of the international far-right media ecosystem (Dave et al., 2020). This time, it was illustrated with another fake image, where Soros's face had been pasted over Al Gore's, in a photo where Gore is standing next to Greta Thunberg.

Discussion

The climate change discourse on the Swedish far-right media ecosystem in the years 2018–2019 can be summed up as being *antagonistic* towards action on climate change. As we have seen, climate change became a prominent issue for *Sambällsnytt* and *Fria Tider* during these years, especially after the climate change justice movement gained increasing visibility with Greta Thunberg's school strike. In early 2018, it was a topic seldom reported, and it could be argued that the far-right media ecosystem was agnostic about climate change: it was a topic that didn't deserve their attention. But when it became increasingly visible in legacy media, it could no longer be ignored. The agnostic attitude turned antagonistic: by using scare quotes and creating a discourse where climate change was perceived of as a hoax, as well as spreading conspiracy theories, using anti-establishment rhetoric and imagery and pointing the finger of blame elsewhere, the right-wing media ecosystem went on the attack.

Turning to our research questions, we can see the following:

1. It is mainly *Nya Tider* who discusses the science of climate change and engages with the international contrarian movement by covering conferences and reviewing books. On *Fria Tider* and *Sambällsnytt*, the idea of climate change as a hoax becomes taken-for-granted background knowledge that only occasionally needs to be justified through references to contrarian material.
2. The far-media ecosystem uses the strategies of scare-quoting climate, recircling conspiracy theories, and using anti-establishment rhetoric to oppose any action on climate change. These strategies are based on the literal denial of climate change, but implicatory denial is used to avert blame. The propaganda feedback helps to propel and amplify these strategies.

One point of note is that very few articles – and only from *Nya Tider* – take an eco-fascist stance. It has been suggested that positions on climate change might be changing within the European far right. As the consequences of rising temperatures are felt, the argument is that denialism will be untenable, and far-right actors will move to green nationalism or even eco-fascism (Dyett & Thomas, 2019). Our study shows this is not inevitable. When climate change is discussed more broadly in society, it can instead fuel an angry backlash among actors opposing action.

On the basis of our results, we suggest that further studies are needed of YouTube material (*SwebbTV* in the case of Sweden), since many sites refer to such material, as well as the ideological underpinnings to the hostility against Greta Thunberg and other activists, researchers, and politicians taking action based on climate science. A third suggestion is to study the international dimensions of the far-right media ecosystem; for example, Russia has substantial and reciprocal relations with the European far right, not least regarding media initiatives (Shekhovtsov, 2018).

Sweden is often touted, both nationally and internationally, as a climate-progressive country, but the Swedish climate law does not, for example, comply with the Paris Agreement (Anderson et al., 2020). On a societal level, this constitutes a form of implicatory denial, to accept the facts but not act accordingly, but we know little about how this might interact with the discourses of the far right to create inertia. A final suggestion for further research is then to investigate how the climate denial discourse in the far-right media ecosystem connects to climate discourse in legacy media.

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Notes

1. The term “alternative media” has traditionally been used for media initiatives on the left side of the political spectrum. Holt and colleagues (2019) argue that an umbrella definition of alternative media is needed to connect present research with the previous body of literature. The essence is that alternative media perceive itself in opposition to a hegemonic media discourse “corrupted by, dependent on and uncritical of the establishment” (Holt et al., 2019: 861). Nygaard (2019) and Holt (2018) distinguish “immigration-critical alternative media” but this term does not capture the ideological questions that affect their reporting on climate change. A similar term is “counter-media” (Ylä-Anttila et al., 2019), which highlights the oppositional character but misses the ideological dimension. Instead, we use the term far-right alternative media, but we acknowledge that this is a broad characterisation that includes ideological variance.
2. Changes in the public press subsidy system in 2020, making digital media eligible for subsidies if they follow professional norms, led to *Sambällsnytt* and *Nya tider* signing up to the ethical code. It remains to be seen how this might affect their reporting.
3. *Sambällsnytt* was included in the shape of its predecessor *Avpixlat*.
4. *Nyheter Idag* is the alternative media site with the largest reach. Having been part of the ethical code since 2014, however, it can be argued that it has an in-between position between the far-right media ecosystem and the legacy media. Therefore, it has been left out of the present study.
5. All quotes from the empirical material are translated by Kjell Vowles.

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