Under the Digital Media Spotlight: The Entity of Rasmus Paludan

A critical discourse analysis of digital news media discourses;

uncovering narratives and disinformation surrounding Rasmus Paludan

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Foreword

First and foremost, we want to thank our supervisor Camilla Nothhaft for valuable insights and support through the process of making this study.

We would like to emphasize that both researchers have contributed equally to this thesis.

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Abstract

As a result of the digitalization and the digital era of Web 2.0, news media have undergone significant changes. Both mainstream and alternative media now have a greater opportunity to reach and influence a broader audience. Further, this allows stakeholders to exert more influence over news content, in which political actors and entities have the possibility to effectively communicate their political agendas. Rasmus Paludan, known for being a far-right political extremist, has during recent years garnered significant media attention in Sweden, strengthening his political presence and agenda. The aim of this study has critically examined whether mainstream and alternative news medias shape and construct discourses about Paludan in Swedish digital news media. Furthermore, it determines whether these discourses contain strategic narratives and disinformation. This is conducted through a critical discourse analysis as well as an analytical framework based on Pamment et.al (2018) strategic narratives influence strategies. The empirical material that has been analyzed is 18 articles, with three articles chosen randomly from the digital news media Expressen, Aftonbladet, Dagens Nyheter, Svenska Dagbladet, Nya Tider, and Dagens ETC. Through a critical discourse analysis and the conducted analytical framework, it has been identified that each digital news media shape discourses about Paludan. In the mainstream media Expressen, Aftonbladet, Dagens Nyheter, and Svenska Dagbladet a recurring negative discourse has been identified, as well as a positive strategic narrative. The negative discourse is also identified in Dagens ETC, however, positive and oblique strategic narratives as well as the disinformation category misappropriation have been detected. Nya Tider is the news media that stands out the most from the rest, as a positive discourse about Paludan is detected. Moreover, a positive, negative, and oblique strategic narrative, as well as the disinformation categories misappropriation, propaganda, and fabrication have been identified in Nya Tider. Lastly, the result also determines that Rasmus Paludan succeeds with his political agenda through the media attention that he receives, however in varying degrees in the different news media.

Keywords: Rasmus Paludan, digital news media, alternative news media, mainstream media, Easter Riots, strategic narratives, disinformation, framing, critical discourse analysis.

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Sammanfattning

Digitaliseringen och framväxten av Web 2.0 har förändrat dagens medielandskap och skapat nya förutsättningar för nyhetsmedier och dess intressenter. Till följd av det har mainstream och alternativ media större utrymme att nå och påverka en bredare publik. Detta skapar även en större möjlighet för intressenter och politiska aktörer att påverka över vad som publiceras i media. En politisk aktör som har fått medial uppmärksamhet och stärkt sin närvaro i Sverige på senare år är den högerextrema politikern Rasmus Paludan. Syftet med studien var att genom en kritisk diskursanalys undersöka hur svenska digitala nyhetsmedier med olika politisk bakgrund skapar diskurser om Paludan. Vidare, undersökte studien om diskurserna innehöll strategiska narrativ och desinformation utifrån ett analytiskt ramverk baserat på Pamment et.al (2018) modell om strategiska narrativ som påverkansstrategier. Det empiriska materialet som låg till grund för analysen var arton artiklar, med tre artiklar slumpmässigt utvalda från de digitala nyhetsmedierna Expressen, Aftonbladet, Dagens Nyheter, Svenska Dagbladet, Nya Tider, och Dagens ETC. Analysen visade att det gick att identifiera negativa diskurser om Paludan i samtliga mainstream mainstream medier, samt ett positivt strategiskt narrativ. I Dagens ETC identifierades liknande negativa diskurser som i mainstream media, däremot återfanns även ett positivt (positive) och vridet (oblique) strategiskt narrativ samt disinformationskategorin missapproriation i en av artiklarna. Diskurserna i Nya Tider utmärkte sig från resterande då de var den enda tidning som konstruerat positiva diskurser om Paludan. Det återfanns ett positivt (positive), negativt (negative) och vridet (oblique) strategiskt narrativ, samt disinformationskategorierna missapproriation, propaganda och fabrication i alla tre artiklarna. Slutsatsen som dras från resultaten är att trots diskursernas natur är all uppmärksamhet i medierna fördelaktig för Rasmus politiska agenda, däremot kan diskursens utformning påverka Paludans politiska budskap.

Nyckelord: Rasmus Paludan, digitala nyhetsmedier, alternativa nyhetsmedier, mainstream media, Påskuppploppen, strategiska narrativ, desinformation, framing, kritisk diskursanalys.

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1. Introduction

Over the last few years, the media landscape in Sweden has undergone significant changes, enabling citizens to encounter and access a variety of both mainstream and alternative news media. Today, the conditions to reach and influence a wider public have increased drastically for both mainstream and alternative media. The increased access to various news media has consequently enabled the boundaries and authority between the media, politics, and society to become even more blurred (Strömbäck, 2014). The evolution of the media landscape in Sweden has correspondingly also created shifts in the governing media logic, enabling a more organic relationship between news media and their stakeholders. Although the media still play a crucial role in shaping public opinion and regulating the discourse surrounding news reports, stakeholders now can influence the news more than ever.

As a result of the media logic that governs the current news cycle, entities, and organizations have the opportunity to take advantage of the media logic to effectively communicate their political agenda through media coverage (Strömbäck, 2014). An identified political entity that uses controversial demonstrations and statements to attract media attention is Rasmus Paludan. In recent years, Paludan has gained significant media attention by using controversial methods to communicate his political message in Sweden. Through media attention, Rasmus Paludan has been able to gain recognition in Swedish digital news media, and ultimately strengthen his party's presence and political ideology in Sweden (SVT Nyheter, 2022). The case of Paludan, therefore, evokes our interest to identify digital news media's role in constructing and perpetuating discourses about Paludan that could prove advantageous for his cause.

The digitalization of news media has not only increased the flow of information but also enabled the proliferation of disinformation. With the possibility of more extensive access to news media, disinformation is easily distributed and may

influence people's opinions on news reports (Pamment et al., 2018). Disinformation appears in many forms, where false and strategic narratives in news media are included. Strategic narratives can be understood as frames as forms of storytelling to persuade a certain perspective (Logemann et. al., 2019). As this study aims to discover discourses about Paludan, the concept of strategic narratives will be examined in order to understand how strategic narratives may affect the discourses and if these discourses can be identified as disinformation.

Further, this study will take a critical approach since it is conducted from previous assumptions about Rasmus Paludan, and the digital news media creation of strategic narratives and discourses. Therefore, the empirical material will be analyzed through a critical lens to examine if these assumptions can be verified or not.

1.1 Problem Definition

In the last decade, the world has entered a new digital era known as Web 2.0, which has enabled the distribution of information at a faster and more convenient pace than ever before. The evolution has opened up the opportunity for mainstream and alternative news media to enter the digital arena, thereby expanding their reach and engaging a greater audience, as well as increasing the possibility of further opinion formation.

Furthermore, the media logic regulates what the news media choose to report on. Today, other elements than the news phenomenon itself control what is seen in the media channels as there is a higher demand for finding stories that fit the specific media and target audience. These stories can further be shaped through discourses and narratives about the news phenomenon. Both mainstream and alternative media participates and maintain narratives and discourses governed by media logic, which in turn influence individuals' perception of reality. Therefore, the shift in the media landscape and media logic enables the possibilities for political actors and entities to utilize the new conditions to further their political agenda by gaining media attention.

Due to the increased distribution of news reports and information on the web, there is also a higher probability of encountering disinformation. Disinformation

can take different forms, in which strategic narratives can be an influence technique that distributes false information.

Therefore, the significance of the critical approach applied to this study lies in its ability to shed light on how mainstream media constructs discourses and narratives, and whether these narratives can be classified as disinformation. Considering that mainstream media has a substantial impact on public opinion and is a major information source for society, it is crucial to examine whether the narratives presented in news articles can be categorized as disinformation.

1.2 Aim & Research Question

As Rasmus Paludan receives a lot of media attention, discourses about him and his political message are also constructed. Therefore, this study will qualitatively examine the entity of Rasmus Paludan and identify the digital news media's role in constructing and perpetuating discourses about Paludan. The study intends to investigate and identify digital news media's role in shaping narratives surrounding him and if these can be perceived as disinformation. Further, this study will explore the nature of these discourses and their potential contributions to shaping an image of Paludan that could prove advantageous for his cause.

The selected digital news media which will be examined are Aftonbladet, Dagens ETC, Dagens Nyheter, Expressen, Nya Tider, and Svenska Dagbladet and their portrayal of Rasmus Paludan during the Easter Riots in 2022 between 14/4-2022 - 24/4-2022. The following research questions have been formulated to answer the aim:

1. *How does alternative and mainstream digital news media shape discourses about Rasmus Paludan to communicate about him and his political message during the Easter Riots in 2022?*
2. *Is it possible to identify strategic narratives in the discourses according to Pamment et al? If so, which strategic narratives?*
   a. *Is it possible to identify strategic narratives that could be classified as disinformation according to Pamment et al?*

1.3 Relevance & Limitation

Zerfass et al. (2018, p.487) define strategic communication as follows:

"Strategic communication encompasses all communication that is substantial for the survival and sustained success of an entity. Specifically, strategic communication is the purposeful use of communication by an organization or other entity to engage in conversations of strategic significance to its goals."

Rasmus Paludan is recognized as an entity in this study due to his symbolic representation of his political party, Stram Kurs, and its ideology. As a prominent figure, he wields influence and embodies the party's values hence, representing a part of a larger whole. Paludan strategically and purposefully uses disruption as a strategic tool to gain attention from the news media. Through media attention, Paludan manages to communicate his political message to a broader audience, successfully accomplishing his goal. Consequently, this attention contributes to the continued existence and sustained success of Paludan as an entity.

This study is relevant to the field of political strategic communication as it investigates how an entity with a political agenda strategically employs media logic to communicate its message and attract media attention. The strategic communication practitioner needs to be aware of how political entities and organizations may utilize media logic to gain media attention for their success.

Furthermore, this study will provide the strategic communication practitioner with valuable insights into the potential impact that discourses in digital news media may have on public and political opinion. Hence, the relevance to the field of strategic communication and digital media is highly significant today due to the increasing amount of news reports in digital news media. Moreover, it is crucial to be aware of false narratives that may distort political messages in digital news reports, which this study may create awareness of whether discourses in digital news media can be classified as strategic narratives and disinformation.

1.4 Contextual Background

1.4.1 Rasmus Paludan

Rasmus Paludan is a Danish-Swedish politician and lawyer, who founded the far-right party 'Stram Kurs' in 2017. In 2016, he joined the national conservative party Nye Borgerlige but was later forced to resign after a speech was interpreted as a call to violence by the party administration (NE, n.d.a). After resigning from the Nye Borgerlige party, Paludan founded Stram Kurs the following year. Stram Kurs is known for promoting an ethnically homogeneous Denmark and is characterized as being anti-Islam (NE, n.d.a). Furthermore, Paludan and Stram Kurs aspire to an ethnically homogenous society, which can be equalized as Ethno-pluralism, which refers to the distinction between groups of people on ethnic grounds (NE, n.d.b). Stram Kurs is recognized as a right-wing populist party, perceived as authoritarian due to its advocacy for a powerful state with increased repressive authority to enforce desired behaviors among citizens (NE, n.d.c). Paludan embodies Stram Kurs and effectively spreads his message through social media and public demonstrations. These demonstrations involve Paludan and Stram Kurs burning the Koran in areas where Muslims live, which has sparked widespread debate and media attention (Switzer & Beauduin, 2023). Through their public protests, Paludan and his party have gained the attention of both mainstream and alternative media (SVT Nyheter, 2022). Paludan's statements against Muslims have resulted in two convictions for incitement against ethnic groups in Denmark (SVT Nyheter, 2022).

In 2020 Stram Kurs made its first public protest in Sweden. Supporters of the party burned a Koran in the suburb Rosengård in Malmö despite a refused demonstration permit (SVT Nyheter, 2022). The action led to violent counter-protests in Malmö. Subsequently, during Easter last year, Paludan and Stram Kurs intended to burn Korans in Linköping, Norrköping, Örebro, Landskrona, Malmö, and Rinkeby (SVT Nyheter, 2023). On April 14, 2022, Rasmus Paludan sets fire to a Koran in Jönköping. This act triggers a series of counter-protests and violent riots. These events leads to reports of 26 police officers and at least 14 civilians injured during the riots, along with 20 police vehicles that were vandalized or destroyed, five days later (SVT Nyheter, 2023).

Moreover, in recent years, there has been a growing trend of right-wing populist parties and groups gaining increased support and winning larger shares of votes in legislative elections across Europe (Pew Research Center, 2022). For instance, in the 2022 Swedish election, the far-right Sweden Democrats emerged as the second-largest party (Valmyndigheten, 2023). This suggests a clear tendency of parties and groups with right-wing populist views and ideas to gain increased support, which makes Rasmus Paludan and his party Stram Kurs a relevant phenomenon to investigate.

1.4.2 Alternative & Mainstream Media

Mainstream media, according to Nygaard (2021), can be understood as editorial-driven news media that produces news following professional and societal established ethics. Mainstream media, therefore, only intends to publish news impartially, without any political standpoint. Alternative media, on the other hand, can be identified as news media reporting with a basis in political ideologies. Moreover, Nygaard (2021, p. 1-2) explains that alternative media can be understood as; *"a proclaimed and/or (self-) perceived corrective, opposing the overall tendency of public discourse emanating from what is perceived as the dominant mainstream media in a given system"*, indicating that alternative media requires mainstream media to have something to react to. According to Nygaard (2021) mainstream media, therefore, can be perceived as a starting point when studying the phenomena and differences between mainstream and alternative media.

With the rise of Web 2.0, boundaries between alternative and mainstream media have become more blurred. Because of the digitalization of news media, the possibility for alternative media to become and seem more professional has increased, as well as the opportunity to reach a greater and more active public (Nygaard, 2021). As a result of the blurred division between mainstream and alternative media, citizens have a harder time identifying what is true and what is not in digital news media. Moreover, when citizens begin to distrust the mainstream media, they turn to alternative sources on the Internet, which may lead to that they believe intended disinformation or misinformation. Studies also show

that citizens may turn to alternative media when they receive news from mainstream media that they may not believe in or find misleading, and therefore seek to find information that they agree with elsewhere (Hameleers, et.al, 2022).

2. Previous Research

2.1 Media Logic

Strömbeck (2014) refers to media logic as the system of rules and practices that determine the selection and presentation of news content in the media. Media logic can take various forms, but its primary objective is to adapt a medium's content to fit its format, organizational structure, professional standards, and need for audience engagement (Strömbeck, 2014). Furthermore, he states that there are two perspectives from which media logic can be understood: the media themselves and their interests, and actors who require the media to communicate with the public. Strömbeck (2014) examines that the media shape news coverage based on media-specific techniques rather than solely on the objective nature of the news itself. In turn, those who rely on the media to communicate with the public must conform to media logic due to the media's influential role in shaping public opinion. As a result, political actors must adapt to media logic to generate news coverage, but also to manipulate the news in a way that conforms to media logic (Strömbeck, 2014).

Furthermore, Strömbeck (2014) states that media logic employs storytelling techniques that enable the media to condense complex information while simultaneously attracting and maintaining the audience's attention. This can involve various strategies such as framing, discourses, and simplification (Strömbäck, 2014). However, he indicates that there exists a precarious boundary between reasonable simplifications and those that exceed what is acceptable and justifiable. Frequently, media portrayals of political leaders are focused on generating public interest and attention, but may not necessarily give the leaders themselves a voice (Strömbeck, 2014).

Although there is research on how media logic influences news media coverage, we find that there is a lack in Sweden of how media logic governs digital news media coverage of entities with a political agenda. Furthermore, there is an

absence of research on how media shape discourses about political entities, which may contribute to the general and societal perception and opinion about the case. Therefore, this research will provide insights as it discovers the entity of Rasmus Paludan and the discourses that are mediated about him.

2.2 Media Framing in a Political Context

Leeper & Slothuus (2020), define frames as a way of providing a particular perspective rather than providing citizens with any new information. Frames organize, or reorganize, information that citizens already have in mind, and therefore, they can suggest and encourage individuals on how politics and events should be thought about (Leeper & Slothuus, 2020). In their research, framing effects in contemporary media has proven to have a great impact on political actors on public opinion. Research also shows that political framing in mass media usually appears to be persuasive to create public opinion (Leeper & Slothuus, 2020). However, the authors mention that framing stands in sharp contrast to traditional persuasive and influence strategies. Persuasive strategies intend to influence opinion through strategic arguments and evidence about events and politics. Framing, on the other hand, could be understood as an emphasis on a certain subject, which subconsciously affects people's opinions on political events.

In the last decade, research on media framing has discovered a deeper understanding of how political communication in news media shapes public opinion and political behavior (Leeper & Slothuus, 2020). Although, media framing in a political context has mostly been studied from a perspective where politicians and political parties use news media as a strategic tool to create narratives that may shape public opinion. Leeper and Sloothuus (2020) argue that framing is essential to understand political communication in media channels, however, they also distinguish that the framing concept needs to be refined and adapted to fit the modern political and digital sphere.

Previous research has shown that framing is apparent in media effects on public opinion, however, there is a lack of studies on how emphasis and information work together as a frame to shape public opinion (Leeper & Slothuus, 2020). As

this study aims to discover discourses about Rasmus Paludan in digital news media, it could further provide the field with information on how the appearance of frames may not be as clear as traditional arguments for persuasion. Further, it has the potential to contribute insights into how media transmits information into narratives and thus shapes public opinion.

2.3 Political Public Relations

In the realm of politics, it is essential for political actors not only to maintain good ideas but also to effectively communicate them both internally and externally. Strömbäck (2014) therefore, raises the importance of political public relations for political actors as communication serves as a means to uphold relationships with diverse audiences. Political public relationscan be defined as "t*he management process by which an actor for political purposes, through communication and action, seeks to influence and to establish, build, and maintain beneficial relationships and reputations with key publics and stakeholders to help support its mission and achieve its goals*" (Strömbäck & Kiousis, p.11, 2019).

Furthermore, when political actors communicate with news media, they usually select some aspects of the topic they are addressing to build their reasoning around the issue (Dan et.al, referred to in Strömbäck, 2019). Their perspective about the issue emphasizes the selected aspects of the issue and presents an interpretation regarding the nature of the problem, its causes, recommended solutions, responsible parties, and the implications to be drawn from it (Entman, 1993, referred to in Strömbäck, 2019). This can further be understood as strategic framing, in which political actors can take on strategic frames in order to express their views on a certain topic and advance their political agenda through news media channels (Dan et.al, referred to in Strömbäck, 2019). Strömbäck and Esser (2017, p. 75), which is referenced in Strömbeck (2019) define strategic framing as; "*Strategic framing refers to structuring the meaning and significance of a political message in order to influence the version of the story that the media will feature. This process of putting a favorable interpretation on information is intended to determine the parameters of a debate before it even begins*". Hence, when the term political public relations is used in political communication

research, it is primarily used to refer to purposeful activities by political actors to influence the media, their agendas, and how they frame events, issues, and processes (Strömbäck & Kiousis, 2019).

Another important note between political communication and public relations theory is the central role of news media (Strömbäck & Kiousis, 2019). News media have the power and influence on how the world is imagined by society. Thus, politics in modern society is mediatized, in which news media have the power to shape perceptions of political views (Strömbäck & Kiousis, 2019). Consequently, political actors, corporations, and other organizations cannot afford to disregard various forms of media, what issues they underscore, and how they frame various actors, issues, and processes since the media have such of an influence on the public perception of them (Strömbäck & Kiousis, 2019). Subsequently, this study contributes to the field as it examines political actors as entities and how they strategically can frame their political messages to manipulate the media to gain media attention.

3. Theoretical Framework

3.1 Framing

3.1.1 Framing Theory

Framing theory or framing analysis is primarily derived from Erving Goffman's work "Framing Analysis" (1974, referred to in Benford & Snow, 2000). Goffman defined the concept of "framing" as where humans do not construct their reality from scratch in every encounter, but instead have sustained organizational premises in mind and activity (Lorino et.al., 2017). Framing can therefore, in broad terms, be understood as certain "frames" that shape people's reality in the subconscious. However, the concept of framing has further developed after Goffman's work and has been adapted to fit several social sciences fields, including strategic communication, political communication, and media studies (Benford & Snow, 2000).

Since the concept of framing covers several social sciences fields, it can be difficult to define when applying it to any research. However, in relation to political communication, Leeper and Sloothuus (2020) argue that as long as one applies framing by focusing on separate and particular information, it is possible to generate results. When studying media in a political context, it is therefore important to be clear about the certain information and media content one aims to investigate.

3.1.2 Media's Role in Shaping Political Reality

The power of mass media to shape citizens' thoughts and emotions by controlling the information they consume and the way it is perceived has been widely recognized (Strömbäck, 2008). The concept of framing has been extensively studied in this context. As Sweden has become an information society, the link

between political communication and mass media has become more intertwined, resulting in significant social repercussions for the way political communication is conducted within the media (Strömbäck, 2008).

Jesper Strömbäck (2008) relates framing theory to political communication, in which he proposes that political communication is a process of constructing and shaping political reality through the use of media. Strömbäck (2008) presents several approaches in which one can understand framing in relation to media portrayal in a political context.

One approach is how the media's portrayal of various aspects of reality shapes people's perceptions of those aspects (Strömbäck, 2008). Another perspective highlights how the media, through its selective portrayal of reality, reinforces and disseminates the viewpoints and ideologies of different power centers. Thirdly, the aspect of the theory is concerned with the content of the media and the representations it conveys (Strömbäck, 2008). In summary, what the theory presents is that news is inevitably influenced by the journalist's choices, such as the topic, sources, narrative perspective, and even the language used (Strömbäck, 2008). While some of these choices are conscious, Strömbäck (2008) points out that many are unconscious and stem from human nature.

Framing theory has important implications for the way political communication occurs within the realm of mass media. With the increasing integration of politics and media, a complex dynamic has emerged where the media's independence from both politics and society plays a crucial role. As a result, the media holds a significant power to shape the perceptions, attitudes, and opinions of their audience (Strömbäck, 2008). Strömbäck (2008) suggests that the media's depiction of reality is especially influential in shaping individuals' perceptions and opinions of society. Consequently, political communicators are compelled to consider the media when attempting to influence or respond to public opinion. This, in turn, may result in media logic having an impact on institutional actors, such as political parties exerting control over the media (Strömbäck, 20088).

3.1.3 Strategic Narratives as Influence Strategies

Framing can be employed to construct narratives that shape people's perceptions of reality and strategically persuade them to adopt a particular stance (Logemann et al., 2019). By utilizing various rhetorical and linguistic techniques systematically, frames can be created to project a specific narrative and interpretation of reality. Logemann et.al (2019), emphasize that these narratives are grammatical and discursive structured constructions that actors use to shape their own as well as others' comprehension of events and ideas. Narratives can further be understood when one uses frames as forms of storytelling to persuade a certain perspective (Logemann et al., 2019).

Since framing theory consists of multiple concepts, this study has chosen to analyze exclusively the concept of frames as strategic narratives. Furthermore, Pamment et.al's (2018) definition is relevant to the study as it explains narratives as false information that can appear as facts. Pamment et.al (2018, p.27) define narratives as the following: "*Narratives, i.e. the ways in which facts – and false information deliberately positioned to appear as facts – are used to support storytelling. Narratives refer to the sequencing, structure, or organization of signs, codes, and events into a coherent order. They can include both real and imaginary components.*".

Therefore, Pamment et.al (2018) argues that strategic narratives can be understood as when facts, true or false, are used to support a story. Depending on how a fact is interpreted or framed, different narratives about the same subject may appear different. By giving an attribute or meaning to the factual statement, one is therefore "framing" the fact through a narrative. When developing an alternative or "false" narrative, the aim is usually to damage or confuse the target community about the already existing mainstream narrative. Furthermore, narratives can influence people regardless if the story is true or false, as long as the story fits into their preferred narrative (Pamment et.al, 2018)

Furthermore, Pamment et.al (2018), examine strategic narratives as a type of influence strategy with three approaches: *positive or constructive, negative or disruptive, and oblique strategies.*

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Influence Strategies	Approach	Example
Positive/constructive	Establishes a coherent narrative that is on a general societal level or with a selected target audience. The narrative, therefore, correlates with existing and accepted narratives.	Rasmus Paludan and his political agenda is a more prosperous political ideology for the future than the existing one.
Negative/disruptive	Attempt to prevent the emergence of a coherent narrative or try to weaken or destroy an existing narrative. Attacks on congruent themes within the existing narrative.	It is a lie that the riots were initiated because Rasmus Paludan burned the Koran. The riots are the immigrants' fault only.
Oblique/distractive	Try to draw attention, with the intent of distracting from the key issues. The focus is on the information environment, seeking to dilute or overflow it with alternative messages.	Instead of focusing on Rasmus Plaudans impact on the riots, the focus is instead on blaming the riots on another political party ideology.

(Pamment et.al, 2018, p. 24-25).

3.2 Disinformation

Strategic narratives are also fundamental in the creation of disinformation and are used to intentionally support or distort current narratives. To theoretically conceptualize disinformation it is crucial to understand that there are several subsets and terms to define false, untrue, or half-true information (Kapantai et al., 2020). However, in this study, disinformation refers to information that is partially true and partially false and intentionally used by authorities to deceive others (Agarwal & Alsaeedi, 2021). Disinformation can further be defined as an influence technique that distributes false information intended to mislead and deceive (Pamment et al, 2018). To distinguish the various types of disinformation, Pamment et al. (2018) present seven categories which will be used alongside strategic narrative when analyzing the collected data:

Disinformation Categories	Description
Fabrication	Fabrication refers to the news with no factual basis but is published in a legitimate way to mislead the public. The premises for fabrication are the explicit intentions of misinformation and deception. For fabrication to be credible, pre-existing narratives and legitimate platforms are used to deceive the audience.
Manipulation	Refers to the use of visual information such as photos, videos, or audio clips which have been manipulated to deceive the audience to support false narratives. Manipulation indicates anything from adjustments to images through Photoshop, to generating convincing audio or video visuals of public figures. Traditional media, however, is on the lower end of the spectrum of manipulation.
Misappropriation	Misappropriation includes the use of misleading content, false context, and false connections. For instance, using unrelated information to frame an issue or an individual in a specific way to fit a narrative. It may also involve referencing sources that do not contain the alleged information, using real information in a false context, or utilizing supporting elements that are incongruent with the content. In these instances, the supporting elements can be factual in themselves but are applied deceivingly to support or create a false narrative.
Propaganda	Refers to information created with the purpose to influence public perception or public opinions to benefit a public figure, an organization, or a government Propaganda is more often transparent in its purpose and focuses on grand strategic narratives.
Satire	Satire in the context of disinformation means to ridicule, expose and critique individuals, narratives, or opinions by presenting factual information using

	humor and exaggeration. Satire can have a significant impact on public discourse, opinions, and trust. Often, satire is presented without explicit intent to cause harm, however, satire has great potential to mislead and deceive its audience nonetheless.
Parody	Parody *"plays on the ludicrousness of issues and highlights them by making up entirely fictitious (...) stories"* with vague plausibility. It builds on a shared understanding of the absurdity of its claims between the author and the audience. Thus, it is hard for the audience to distinguish parody from real information as it walks a fine line between the possible and the absurd.
Advertising	Advertising material can be detected as disinformation as the materials can be presented as genuine news, misleading the audience to disguise the commercial interest behind the information. The contemporary phenomenon of *clickbait* is another type of misleading advertisement, where the use of appealing headlines attracts readers to a commercial site. This technique is generally considered legitimate, but can easily be exploited by information influence campaigns.

(Pamment et al., 2018, p. 44-46).

4. Method

4.1 Scientific Approach

This study has its epistemological foundation in social constructivism. The approach is based on the idea that the world is created through interpersonal interaction (Winther Jørgensen & Phillips, 2000). As this study explores a phenomenon founded on interpersonal and collective interactions, the social constructivist approach helps to examine and interpret the phenomenon to uncover hidden interpretations. Furthermore, the social constructivist belief argues that language and discourses are an essential part of how we create knowledge and meaning (Winther Jørgensen & Phillips, 2000). The social constructivist ontology is, therefore, suitable to this study since it critically examines how alternative and mainstream digital news media shapes discourses about Paludan.

4.2 Research Design

A qualitative research method has been applied to this study to answer the aim. Qualitative research aims to provide an in-depth and interpreted understanding of the social world, avoiding simplistic descriptions and generalized responses (Salmons, p. 2, 2016). As this study explores language and framing, qualitative research is also suitable since it helps to detect the underlying messages through different discourses in the language (Silverman, 2017). Further, the sampled material in qualitative research is usually non-numerical data. Instead, it examines observations of visual, textual, or experienced material. In this study, the empirical material studied is digital news articles, in which the qualitative method enables to observe and analyze textual elements.

Moreover, this study intends to create a further understanding of whether discourses in digital news media can be categorized as strategic narratives and disinformation. This distinction is based on a collection of theories presented in the previous chapter, leading this study to adopt a deductive approach. A

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deductive approach implies that the conducted data operates with a theory in mind that acts as a tool to substantiate or disconfirm the existing understanding (Flick, 2014).

4.3 Selection of Data

In this study, six digital news media, which cover both alternative and mainstream media from left to right have been selected to study the aim. The selected digital news media are; Aftonbladet, Dagens ETC, Dagens Nyheter, Expressen, Nya Tider, and Svenska Dagbladet. The material has been sampled between the dates 14/4-2022 - 24/4-2022.

Following, the six digital news media will be presented alongside their political stance, to provide further understanding in the subsequent discussion and analysis.

4.3.1 Right-Wing Digital News Media

Right-wing politics usually is associated with conservatism and traditional thoughts. Individualism is prioritized, which emphasizes personal responsibility over collective fellowship (NE, n.d). The right-wing political spectrum has evolved, and today includes several political stances in Sweden, including liberalism, social-conservative, and nationalism.

4.3.1.1 Nya Tider

Nya Tider is an extreme right-wing alternative digital news media and Swedish newspaper. The news media was founded by Vávra Suk in 2012, right after leaving the far-right party Nationaldemokraterna. Suk started Nya Tider to establish a platform and news media with Ethno-pluralistic and nationalistic ideology, which advocates for the separation of people with different ethnicities to avoid societal collapse. The news media have repeatedly been criticized for being racist towards immigrants in Sweden and people from foreign countries (SVT Nyheter, 2019).

Nya Tider describes itself as a newspaper that investigates the power elite and reports on the most important news from Sweden and the world. Further, they describe themselves as a digital news media directed at individuals who value

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independent thinking and are critical of the establishment press's hypocrisy, as Nya Tider offers a refreshing alternative perspective (Nya Tider, n.d).

4.3.2 Mainstream Digital News Media

As mentioned earlier, mainstream media is editorial-driven and impartial from any political stance (Nygaard, 2021). Mainstream media aim to provide the audience with objective and unbiased information about news.

Svenska Dagbladet and Dagens Nyheter are defined as mainstream media in this study, as well as Expressen and Aftonbladet. Both Expressen and Aftonbladet are editorial-driven news media that produce news, following professional and societal established ethics (Nygaard, 2021). Although they indicate that their news reporting is impartial, they still have a political stance, which is apparent in their opinion journalism. The news media, therefore, distinguish between news journalism and opinion journalism. Despite this understanding, they are still defined as mainstream media in this study, but with the knowledge, that some of the opinion journalism is still influenced by either liberal or social-democratic political perspectives.

4.3.2.1 Dagens Nyheter (DN)

Dagens Nyheter (DN), is an impartial liberal news media. Originally, DN's agenda was characterized by a strong liberal orientation, advocating for political freedom, expanded suffrage, academic freedom, free trade, and fiscal restraint regarding defense expenditures (NE, n.d.e). However, through time, their liberal political stance has decreased, and they would today be considered impartial from any political ideology, although they still describe themselves as an impartial liberal newspaper and digital news media (Dagens Nyheter, 2008).

4.3.2.2 Expressen

Expressen is an impartial liberal Swedish news media. From the beginning, their idea was to conceive counterweight towards, at the time, the German-friendly newspaper Aftonbladet (NE, n.d.f). The news media distinguish between news journalism and opinion journalism, in which their opinion and political stance are

liberal (Expressen, 2018). Today, Expressen is one of Sweden's biggest news media with national and international news reports.

4.3.2.3 Svenska Dagbladet (SvD)

Svenska Dagbladet (SvD), is an impartial, independent, and moderate news media (NE, n.d.g). SvD aims to uphold democratic freedoms and individual responsibilities that are necessary for a democratic society. It aims to promote and serve as an open forum for free debate, based on a humanistic worldview that actively defends individual privacy and inviolability. In its journalistic work, SvD adheres to the professional ethical norms and standards set by the Swedish press (SvD, 2003).

4.3.2.4 Aftonbladet

Aftonbladet identifies itself as an impartial social-democratic Swedish newspaper. Over the years, the newspaper has shifted its political stance numerous times, oscillating between the liberal, conservative, and left-leaning ends of the political spectrum. Aftonbladet describes the media as " impartial social-democratic", but indicates that their news reporting has no political color, and is therefore independent of their opinion journalism which is anchored in social-democratic thought (Aftonbladet, 2016).

4.3.3 Left-Wing Digital News Media

Left-wing traditional ideologies usually include socialism, communism, social democracy, and democratic socialism. They prioritize collective ownership, social justice, economic equality, and progressive social reforms. At its core, left-wing politics seeks to address the inherent imbalances and inequalities within society by challenging dominant power structures and promoting policies that prioritize the well-being of marginalized and disadvantaged groups (NE, n.d.h).

4.3.3.1 Dagens ETC

Dagens ETC is a political alternative news media with a radical socialist ideology and fundamental left-wing perspective. They have received attention because of their provocative journalistic approaches, including satirical imitations of leading

daily newspapers (NE, n.d.i). Dagens ETC describes itself as a left-wing news media with an environmental focus (ETC, n.d).

4.2.2 Data Collection

Digital news media platforms were used to retrieve and collect material. This included searching for "Rasmus Paludan" and "Easter Riots" using the search function and scrolling through the news feed to gather articles from specific dates related to the topic.

The material for this study was purposively sampled. Purposive sampling refers to several sampling strategies within qualitative research. In this study, the purposive strategy of criterion sampling has been used when selecting the material as it enables to explore a phenomenon in depth (Flick, p. 88, 2018). In criterion sampling, the intent is to include instances in the sampled objective that match the required profile. The instances should involve certain characteristics that specify a phenomenon. In this study, the characteristics that define the phenomenon were digital news media articles that reported about Rasmus Paludan during the Easter Riots in 2022. Moreover, the selection of news media has been purposively sampled to include both alternative and mainstream media.

A total of 298 news articles were collected from digital news media sources between the dates 14/4-2022- 24/4-2022 including news about Rasmus Paludan during the Easter Riots in 2022 through criterion sampling (*Figure 1*).

Digital News Media	Easter Weekend: 14-17 April 2022	Week 16: 18-24 April 2022	Summary
Aftonbladet	35	71	106
Dagens ETC	0	5	5
Dagens Nyheter	14	38	52
Expressen	25	30	55
Nya Tider	0	4	4
Svenska Dagbladet	19	57	76

Figure 1

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Due to the time frame, it was not possible to analyze all of the material that was detected. Thus, the sampled material was limited through a random purposive sampling strategy. When conducting a random purposive sample, the researcher randomly selects a desired number of materials from a list that were collected using other methods of purposive sampling (Omona, 2013), which in this study is criterion sampling. According to Miles & Huberman (referred to in Omona, 2013), random purposive sampling adds credibility to the sampled material when the purposeful sample is too large for the study. Therefore, 18 articles were chosen for further analysis, with three articles chosen randomly from each digital news media.

4.4 Critical Discourse Analysis

The term discourse refers to a set of ideas, concepts, and practices that shape the way people think and communicate about certain topics and are shaped by societal norms. In academic research, discourse analysis is usually used to examine how language is used in a social context to uncover underlying messages and assumptions embedded in language use (Winther-Jørgenssen, & Phillips, 2000).

Since this study aimed to identify digital news media discourses about Rasmus Paludan, a critical approach was applied through critical discourse analysis and theoretical framework when analyzing the material. The critical approach helped to disseminate the underlying messages and the media's role in reproducing discourses that could potentially be beneficial for Rasmus Paludan's cause.

Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) views language as a social practice and emphasizes the importance of considering the context in which language is used. Additionally, CDA is particularly interested in the relationship between language and power. The method is useful in communication research when analyzing discourse units of text, and therefore it was useful in this study, as it analyzed news media articles and whether these contained underlying political messages (Wodak & Meyer, 2009).

4.4.1 Fairclough's Critical Discourse Analysis

Fairclough has developed a three-dimensional model as an analytical framework for analyzing communicative practices within the context of critical discourse analysis. The model consists of three dimensions; *text, discursive practice, and social practice* (Winther Jørgenssen, & Phillips, 2000). In his model, Fairclough differentiates between the dimensions as three independent levels, which can be examined individually and analyzed separately.

When examining the textual aspect, attention is directed toward the formal attributes of the various sections comprising the text. By closely analyzing the text's characteristics, one can identify how the discourses are expressed linguistically, thereby confirming one's interpretation. Fairclough provides several analytical tools, including the grammatical concept of transitivity, which involves examining how events and processes are linked to subjects and objects. The aim is to clarify the ideological implications that different forms of presentation can have (Winther Jørgenssen, & Phillips, 2000).

The investigation of social practice involves examining the impact of discursive practices on the broader social context and determining whether they contribute to maintaining or changing the prevailing discourse (Winther Jørgensen & Phillips, 2000). In this study, we aim to identify any instances of disinformation in digital news media regarding Rasmus Paludan and have thus limited our analysis to the dimension of social practice. Due to time constraints, we will not be able to investigate the wider effects of discursive practices on society. However, we will analyze and discuss the extent to which communicative events contribute to reinforcing or transforming the existing order of discourse.

Furthermore, the analysis of the discursive practice involves examining how the producer of the communication draws upon existing discourses, and how the recipient interprets the content by utilizing corresponding discourses. By analyzing discursive practice, one can examine intertextual chains to identify the "equal texts" in various forms. Through the examination of these intertextual chains, one can see how the structure and content are transformed, and therefore,

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begin to formulate hypotheses about a phenomenon (Winther Jørgensen & Phillips, 2000).

4.5 Analytical Scheme

The concepts of discourse and strategic narratives that have been presented throughout the theoretical framework and methodology will both be identified in the following analysis. The identification of discourses will provide a further understanding of how language is used to embed underlying messages or sets of ideas. By examining whether these underlying messages can be perceived as strategic narratives, one can gain insights if discourses are framed to fit a certain storyline. Therefore, the identification of both discourses and strategic narratives is relevant to answer the aim of this study.

To identify discourses about Paludan in the digital news media, the following questions have been conducted with a basis in Fairclough's critical discourse analysis:

1. *Can transitivity be identified? How is it expressed?*
2. *Is it possible to identify an intertextual chain in the news media's articles?*
3. *Is it possible to identify any existing discourses about Rasmus Paludan in the news articles? Does the media maintain or disregard these narratives?*
4. *Is it possible to determine which news media maintains the discourse about Rasmus Paludan as positive or negative?*

Furthermore, to address whether the discourses could be classified as strategic narratives and disinformation, an analytical framework was applied, based on Pamment et al. (2018) strategic narratives influence strategies. The model helped to determine whether the discourses in digital news media about Paludan have been emphasized through a strategic narrative to distribute disinformation.

The following framework has been applied to establish whether discourses about Paludan can be contained as strategic narratives and if these narratives can be detected as disinformation:

Example: Questions	Operationalization	Strategic Narrative
Are there narratives that establish Rasmus Paludan and his actions in a way that resonates with the selected target audience?	Establishes a coherent narrative that is on a general societal level or with a selected target audience. The narrative, therefore, correlates with existing and accepted narratives.	Positive/constructive
Are there narratives that try to weaken Rasmus Paludan and his actions to destroy the existing narrative?	Attempt to prevent the emergence of a coherent narrative or try to weaken or destroy an existing narrative. Attacks on congruent themes within the existing narrative.	Negative/disruptive
Are there narratives that distract from the key issue - Rasmus Paludan?	Try to draw attention, with the intent of distracting from the key issues. The focus is on the information environment, seeking to dilute or overflow it with alternative messages.	Oblique/distractive
Questions	**Operationalization**	**Disinformation**
Which type of disinformation is used?	Fabrication - No factual basis, published in a way that seems legitimate. Manipulation - Visuals that have been manipulated to deceive the audience to support false narratives. Misappropriation - The use of misleading content, false context, and false connections.	Disinformation category

| | Propaganda
- Information created with the purpose to influence public perception or public opinions to benefit a certain event.
Satire
- To ridicule, expose and critique individuals, narratives, or opinions by presenting factual information using humor and exaggeration.
Parody
- *plays on the ludicrousness of issues and highlights them by making up entirely fictitious (...) stories"* with vague plausibility.

Advertising
- Presented as genuine news, misleading the audience to disguise the commercial interest behind the information. | |

Figure 2

4.6 Methodology Reflections

Winther Jørgensen & Phillips (2000) raise criticism against both Fairclough's approach to critical discourse analysis and critical discourse analysis as a whole. Although Winther Jørgensen & Phillips (2000) indicates that Fairclough proposes the most sophisticated model between language use and societal practices, there are some limitations. There are some uncertainties about the consequences of the lack of distinction between discourse analysis and analysis of social practice (Winther Jørgensen & Phillips, 2000). Consequently, there may be confusion

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about the causal relationships between different factors and their sequence. Furthermore, another limitation within this study is the limitation of analysis regarding the more comprehensive effects of discursive practices on society, as emphasized by Winther Jørgensen & Phillips (2000). There is a common shortcoming of all forms of critical discourse analysis as they focus on the analysis of text production but lack empirical research on the consumption of texts (Winther Jørgensen & Phillips, 2000). Unfortunately, given the time constraints, this study is not able to explore the wider effects of the discourses. Nevertheless, it is worth acknowledging that the broader effects of the discourses surrounding Rasmus Paludan could be subject to analysis in future research.

Since critical discourse analysis is based on interpretations and primarily relies on a smaller and non-random sample, the study does not produce scientific evidence (Winther Jørgensen & Phillips, 2000). Therefore, the reader should consider that the analysis is built on the researchers' previous assumptions and interpretations, thereby limiting the ability to generalize the results. Additionally, the outcomes of critical discourse analysis are influenced by elements such as the surrounding context, power dynamics, and social construction (Winther Jørgensen & Phillips, 2000). Hence, due to the study's sole focus on a particular political entity, the discourses identified cannot be extended to another political entity with safety. Nevertheless, the study still generates knowledge on the identified patterns in how digital media linguistically shapes discourses about a political entity. Additionally, it is possible to make inferences on the discourses shaped about a political entity that will exhibit variations across different news media platforms, influenced by their political ideologies.

However, the deductive approach in this study can contribute to increased generalizability (Flick, 2014). By employing purposive sampling of digital news media, a broad political spectrum was represented, aiming to encompass a larger segment of the population. Moreover, the collected data answers our theories in order to substantiate the existing understanding (Flick, 2014). Consequently, the results can provide insights and draw certain conclusions regarding the distinct news media and the outcomes aligned with the theories.

4.6.1 Reflections on Conducted Analytical Scheme

With the objective of the study in mind, it is crucial to employ a theoretical framework that can help the process of detecting narratives and disinformation. To be able to sift through and identify which articles contained narratives, and categories with a basis in Pamment et.al (2018) definition of strategic narratives as influence strategies have been implemented. However, the definition of strategic narratives is only a part of a larger model, which may decrease the reliability of the framework. Furthermore, as the study is interpretive, the identified narratives as positive, negative, or oblique are based on the researchers' interpretation of the strategic narratives in the news media articles which entails the research cannot be transferred with certainty to other phenomena.

4.6.2 Previous Assumptions

A general perception of mainstream news media such as SvD, DN, Expressen, and Aftonbladet is that they are politically impartial and independent. On the other hand, alternative news media, such as Nya Tider and Dagens ETC are usually considered to be more politically engaged in their news reports. With this in mind, the researchers held certain preconceptions of alternative and mainstream digital news media and their political and ideological stances. The assumptions and preexisting beliefs were therefore that alternative digital news media had a higher likelihood of employing strategic narratives and disinformation.

Consequently, due to the preconceived notions regarding the news media's political ideologies and assumptions about Rasmus Paludan, the credibility of the study hence the confidence in the accuracy of our findings may be considered questionable.

Therefore, the research takes a critical approach since the findings of the collected material are based on their truth, but it does not mean it has to be the truth for everyone. However, the findings can still contribute with important implications, as the critical approach can create awareness of how discourses in digital news media may entrench strategic narratives, and further create disinformation.

4.6.3 Ethical Dilemmas

Since this study takes a qualitative approach, the data collection can be somewhat complicated due to ethical reasons. Qualitative research includes an integral aspect of interpersonal reflections, it is crucial that the researchers have a legitimate ethical approach throughout the study, especially when collecting data (Flick, 2018).

The digital news media articles used as empirical data are gathered in their original form without any alterations. The articles are examined in their existing state on the various news media's digital platforms. It should be noted that certain articles are restricted by paywalls, while others are publicly accessible. Furthermore, ethical dilemmas taken into account in our research are excluding the journalist's name. To protect the integrity of journalists, the analysis will solely focus on analyzing the text itself. However, the digital news media's ideological stance will be commented on in the analysis as it may provide insights into the interpretation of discourses.

5. Analysis & Findings

The 18 articles discussed in the analysis have been assigned with a shortened headline. Each article's headline, along with its corresponding URL, can be found in the attached appendix.

As presented in the methodology, the 18 articles have been analyzed through the conducted questions based on Fairclough's critical discourse analysis as well as the analytical framework, to identify whether the detected discourses can be identified as disinformation. The critical discourse analysis together with the analytical framework has resulted in three main findings. The results show that mainstream media shape a rather negative discourse about Paludan, which results in a positive constructivist strategic narrative. However, disinformation categories have not been able to be identified in the mainstream media. Further, the findings show that the alternative media shapes discourses and strategic narratives that align with their political ideology. The disinformation category misappropriation has been identified in both alternative news media and the disinformation categories propaganda, and fabrication have been identified in one. Moreover, a common finding in all of the digital news media is the absence of Paludan's voice.

5.1 Mainstream Digital Media's Negative Discourse on Paludan

The identified main discourses about Paludan in the mainstream digital news media Aftonbladet, Expressen, Svenska Dagbladet, and Dagens Nyheter is that he is violent, criminal, unaccompanied, rowdy, inappropriate, and provocative. Therefore, it is possible to identify an overall negative discourse of Rasmus in the mainstream media. By closely analyzing the text's characteristics, and searching for transitivity and intertextuality, it has been possible to detect how the discourses are expressed.

For example, it is possible to identify transitivity in the article "*The Father's words about Paludan*" in the following excerpt; *"On the way there, the Danish-Swedish burns Korans and provokes Muslims. His last visit to Sweden ended in riots. The result was: 26 injured police officers, 20 injured police vehicles and at least 14 injured civilians"* (*På vägen dit bränner dansk-svensken koraner och provocerar muslimer. Hans senaste besök i Sverige slutade i upplopp. Facit blev: 26 skadade poliser, 20 skadade polisfordon och minst 14 skadade civila personer).* The subject of the discourse is that Paludan is "danish-swedish", whose provocative "event" of burning the object, the Koran, led to injuries sustained by multiple individuals. This transitivity is also possible to identify in the article "*New unrest*" in Expressen, the article "*Paludan left alone*" in Aftonbladet, the article "*Paludan gatherings may be stopped* " in DN, as well as in the article "*Paludan is in Sweden because he can*" in SvD. The discourse about him, therefore, becomes that he is rowdy and criminal as he aims to provoke incitement against Muslims through his political actions.

The discourse of Paludan as unaccompanied has been detected through the use of words and phrases describing Paludan and his party's support in Svenska Dagbladet, Aftonbladet, and Expressen. For instance, when describing Stram Kurs, Svenska Dagbladet refer to it as a party that has lost support, using the Swedish expression; "*who has shrunk in popularity/public opinion*" (*krympt ihop i opinionen*). Moreover, Svenska Dagbladet presents his followers as; "*a handful of followers*" (*handfull anhängare*) in the article "*Paludan - who is he?*". Furthermore, this discourse can be detected in Expressen as they present Rasmus in the article "*Paludan halfway into the heat*" as;" *the leader of the far-right party Stram Kurs and currently has zero percent voter support in Denmark.*"(*Han är ledare för det högerextrema partiet Stram Kurs och har i skrivande stund noll procent i väljarstöd i Danmark).* Aftonbladet further demonstrates this discourse as they use phrases such as; "*Paludan was left alone in the square*" (*Paludan lämnades ensam på torget*). Overall, these excerpts can be seen as examples of how mainstream media, through words and phrases, creates a discourse of Paludan as unaccompanied. These recurring words and phrases perpetuate an image of him as lonely and that his political message has no support.

As mentioned, a consistent negative discourse regarding Paludan has been detected across all mainstream media outlets, as they use the same linguistics and facts to frame Paludan. Intertextuality has been difficult to detect within the news media articles, however, it is possible to find intertextual chains between the mainstream media articles. Words that all of the media often use to describe him are; *provocative (provokativ), violent (våldsam), controversial (kontroversiell), and extreme-right (högerextrem).* For example, in article *"Paludan appeals"* Aftonbladet refers to a quote from the police *"Rasmus Paludan has a rhetoric that aims to create disorder and chaos" (Rasmus Paludan har en retorik som går ut på att skapa oordning och kaos)* as well as in article *"Paludan halfway into the heat"* in which Expressen state *"It can be concluded that this is what he wishes to get out of his provocative manifestations" (Man kan konstatera att det här är här vad han önskar att få ut av sina provocerande manifestationer).* Further, in the article *"Paludan is in Sweden because he can"* from SvD it can be identified in the excerpt; *"(. . .) after all, he has an overarching ideological goal and that is to create a situation that arouses emotions (. . .)" (. . .) sedan har han ju ett övergripande ideologiskt mål och det är att skapa en situation som väcker känslor (. . .).* Consequently, these intertextual chains demonstrate that it is possible to find recurring quotes and descriptions of Paludan's provocative nature. Occasionally they explicitly use the word provoke, while in other articles it is visible through other synonyms. However, all of the mainstream media use factual and objective information to remain impartial and politically independent. Despite that negative discourses are recurring throughout the articles, objective information about Paludan is also identified, for example, that he has received an approved demonstration permit. The objective nature of the mainstream media could therefore be the reason why it has been difficult to identify intertextual chains within the articles. However, it has been possible to detect intertextual chains between the mainstream media articles and therefore, the identified negative discourse is established, even though factual and objective information is submitted.

Furthermore, another finding in the mainstream digital media articles is submitting factual information about Rasmus Paludan that is not linked to the Easter Riots. This identified pattern illustrates how mainstream media use factual information to further build on the already established negative discourse as presented above. For instance, this pattern can be identified in Expressen and Svenska Dagbladet where the media presents and emphasizes previous scandals involving Rasmus. For instance, in the article "*The Father's words about Paludan",* and in the article "*Paludan halfway into the Heat"* Expressen presents that Rasmus is "*blacklisted*" (*svartlistad*) from politics in Denmark and that he was singled out for *"rough sex chats with minors, as young as 13*" (*grova sexchattar med minderåriga, så unga som 13 år*), which has led to a police investigation. Svenska Dagbladet also highlights this scandal in the article "*Paludan - who is he?"* and in the article "*Paludan is in Sweden because he can".* They put further emphasis on the scandal as they also suggest that the Swedish Extreme Rights, which are presented as rather controversial, also have separated from him following these scandals and controversies. By emphasizing this, the negative discourse about him is further highlighted. Furthermore, in the article "*The Father's Words about Paludan" Article K,* Expressen mentions that his wife is a twenty-one-year-old woman who is the ex-girlfriend of the convicted murderer Peter Madsen, which also contributes to the negative discourse about him as he is framed as inappropriate and scandalous.

It is evident that mainstream media outlets employ factual information while reporting on Paludan. However, the selection of these facts, including his past scandals, contributes to the establishment and perpetuation of a negative narrative surrounding Paludan. As mentioned in the theoretical framework, strategic narratives can be understood as when facts, true or false, are used to support a story (Pamment et.al, 2018). Depending on how these facts are framed, narratives can vary significantly. In the case of Paludan, the mainstream media frames him in a negative light by highlighting facts that reinforce the narrative of his inappropriate behavior, thus reinforcing the negative discourse surrounding him.

Furthermore, this also aligns with the identified positive constructivist strategic narrative in the mainstream media. The negative discourse that is created about

Paludan in all of the four mainstream media, contributes to an established and societal general discourse about him. Since these news media are some of Sweden's most influential newspapers, their news reporting is also generally and socially accepted. The negative discourse about Paludan that is presented in the media can, therefore, be detected as an established coherent narrative that is on a general and societal level or with a selected target audience (Pamment et.al, 2018). The identified narrative in the mainstream media is, therefore, a positive constructivist strategic narrative since the mainstream media takes part in maintaining the existing and accepted general narrative. It is possible to argue that the rather constructivist narrative about him, therefore, helps to reinforce the general negative discourse.

Nonetheless, disinformation categories are not identified as the submitted facts that build the discourse about Paludan are true. Despite the negative discourse they present, they provide factual information that is not connected to any false context or misleading connections. Their use of facts is primarily focused on presenting the event rather than distorting the truth. It is possible to conclude that the four mainstream media shape a rather negative discourse about Paludan, which constructs a positive constructivist strategic narrative in the mainstream media. The frames surrounding him, therefore, shape a discourse and a narrative that becomes the mainstream and societal perception of him.

5.2 Alternative Media's Oblique Nature: Shaping Discourses and Creating Disinformation

The identified findings from the alternative news media Dagens ETC and Nya Tider examine that they use similar strategic narrative strategies, however, the news media's discourses about Paludan diverge significantly. The main finding is that both Nya Tider and Dagens ETC emphasize another subject than Paludan to confuse the target audience about the mainstream discourse. Moreover, both news media use discourses about Paludan, as well as strategic narratives, that align with their political background. By closely analyzing the articles' characteristics, and searching for transitivity and intertextuality, it has been possible to detect how the discourses are expressed in the alternative news media.

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Both Nya Tider and Dagens ETC emphasize another subject than Paludan to confuse the target audience about the general mainstream discourse that is constructed in mainstream media. Transitivity is detected in the article *"The Koran Chaos"* in Nya Tider; *"The Koran Chaos: The fault of the police or immigration? (Korankaoset: Polisens eller invandringens fel?),* as they present Muslims and Paludan as objects to the event, the Easter Riots. The Muslims are portrayed in a way where they are linked to violence, for instance in this sentence; *"Hundreds of Muslims threw stones, burned cars and, according to the national police chief, tried to kill policemen when they made an effort to curb the riots"* *(Hundratals muslimer kastade sten, brände bilar och försökte enligt rikspolischefen döda poliser då de gjorde en insats för att stävja upploppen.).* The subjects that are identified are throwing stones, burning cars, and efforts of trying to kill the police. This transitivity is also identified in the article *"Immigrant Riots"* and *"The Muslim Riots"*.

Paludan, on the other hand, is not linked to any violence. However, they do mention that he aimed to burn the Koran as he was out on his campaign tour, such as in the following quote; *"Riots broke out in several Swedish cities when the Danish politician Rasmus Paludan carried out an election tour where he would burn the Koran"* *(Kravaller bröt ut i flera svenska städer då den danske politikern Rasmus Paludan genomförde en valturné där han skulle bränna Koranen.).* Paludan is identified as the subject, the Koran as the object, and the burning of it as the process or event that started the riots. However, Nya Tider portrays his actions as a "campaign tour", which makes the connotations of his actions credible. The riots are therefore portrayed in a way where the escalations of the violence are the Muslims' fault and not because of Paludan's actions of burning the Koran.

Furthermore, it is possible to identify intertextual chains in all of the sampled articles from Nya Tider. For instance, Muslims are repetitively characterized as violent, and the connotations are that they are burning cars, being violent against the police, and throwing stones. Another intertextual chain identified is the

characteristics presented by Rasmus Paludan as a Danish-Swedish politician that does a campaign tour in Sweden.

Therefore, an overall discourse that is identified in Nya Tider is that Pauldan is innocent in the escalation of the Easter Riots. The violence that occurred as an aftermath is therefore only the Muslims' fault as they are portrayed as criminal and violent. Nya Tider is the only digital news media where a distinct positive discourse about Paludan has been detected. The identified discourse of Paludan in Nya Tider is that he is an honorable and law-abiding politician, but what stands out the most is the negative discourse about Muslims as violent and criminal.

Strategic narratives that are identified in Nya Tider are positive, negative, and oblique narratives (Pamment et.al, 2018). Positive narratives are identified as Nya Tider establishes Paludan as a politician that aimed to burn the Koran on his political campaign tour. As mentioned, Nya Tider is an extreme right-wing digital news media, with an audience that usually is more receptive to the news with such a perspective. To burn the Koran is, therefore, a positive narrative as it resonates and maintains their already established narrative within Nya Tider and their audience. They do not mention that his actions are extreme or provoking against Muslims, however, the focus instead is that Muslims are violent and dangerous, which makes the strategic narrative rather oblique as the article draws attention from Paludan who is a part of the escalation of the riots. The negative strategic narrative can be detected in the way that Nya Tider attempts to destroy the existing mainstream narrative about Paludan that is created in mainstream news media. Nya Tider shapes a negative narrative by depicting Paludan as a law-abiding politician while assigning blame to Muslims for the Easter Riots. By doing so, Nya Tider not only destroys the established narrative about Paludan that is shaped by mainstream news media but also portrays Muslims as the cause of the riots, fostering a negative perception of them.

Furthermore, disinformation categories that have been identified in Nya Tider are misappropriation, fabrication, and propaganda. For instance, misappropriation can be detected in the articles "*The Koran Chaos*", *"The Muslim Riots",* and *"Immigrant Riots"* as they use unrelated information to frame an issue or

individual in a specific way to fit a narrative (Pamment et.al, 2018). In these three articles from Nya Tider, it is possible to identify factual information, for example, that stones were thrown at the police. However, it is possible to argue that Nya Tider use this factual information to frame the group of Muslims as violent and criminal to fit Nya Tider's narrative about immigrants as dangerous. Compared to mainstream media Nya Tider particularly states that Muslims are the ones who throw stones at the police and not just "people", as it is presented in mainstream media. Furthermore, the disinformation category propaganda can also be recognized in the article *"The Koran Chaos"," The Muslim Riots",* and *"Immigrant Riots"* as Nya Tider creates a positive discourse about Paludan and frames Muslims as the main cause of the riots. Nya Tider is repeatedly presenting Paludan as a law-abiding politician which shapes him as a credible public figure. Therefore, it is possible to identify that Nya Tider implements information that is created to influence public perception or public opinions to benefit a public figure, an organization, or a government (Pamment et.al, 2018).

In the article *"Immigrant Riots"* fabrication is identified as Nya Tider referring to a journalist's statement from the news media Exakt24, which is another extreme right-wing alternative news media (Sveriges Radio, 2023). Fabrication is therefore identified because of the illegitimate source, but it seems legitimate in the way it is presented (Pamment et.al, 2018). Fabrication is identified in the following quote; *"During Good Friday's immigrant riot in Rinkeby, which followed the Danish-Swedish Islamic critic Rasmus Paludan's Koran-burning demonstration, a reporter from the news channel Exakt24 almost got into trouble by having his camera spat at and stones thrown at him." (Under långfredagens invandrarupplopp i Rinkeby som följde på den dansk-svenske islamkritikern Rasmus Paludans koranbränningsmanifestation höll reportern från nyhetskanalen Exakt24 på att råka illa ut genom att han både fick sin kamera bespottad och stenar kastade mot sig).* It is possible to argue that the source lacks objectivity and carries a political bias, given the history of both Nya Tider and Exakt24 displaying racism toward Muslims. Consequently, the credibility of the source becomes somewhat questionable, lacking concrete evidence. However, Nya Tider utilizes this source to construct and support their narrative surrounding the event.

In contrast, the alternative news media Dagens ETC constructs identical negative discourses of Paludan as the mainstream media. The discourse about Paludan in Dagens ETC is predominantly negative as they shape Paludan as violent, provocative, and rowdy. Transitivity is identified in the articles as they present Paludan as the subject which triggered the riots, as seen in the article "*Paludan rejected to demonstrate*"; "*The trigger for the riots was the Danish-Swedish right-wing extremist Rasmus Paludan, who had applied for and been granted a demonstration permit for a tour in which he promised to burn a copy of Islam's holy text, the Koran, in each of these Swedish cities*" (*Den utlösande faktorn bakom upploppen var den dansk-svenske högerextremisten Rasmus Paludan som sökt och beviljats demonstrationstillstånd för en turné där han utlovat att bränna ett exemplar av islams heliga skrift Koranen i alla dessa svenska städer*). In this excerpt, Dagens ETC attributes the subject Rasmus Paludan and his act of burning the object, the Koran, as the catalyst for the violent riots. In this excerpt, it is possible to identify that Paludans' actions are the starting event that triggered civilians to protest. Intertextual chains are recognized in all of the articles from Dagens ETC as they characterize him as a right-wing extremist. The overall discourse that can be identified about Paludan in the article is rather negative, as they portray him as an extremist whose aim is to burn the holy scripture of Islams, the Koran. The riots are therefore, according to Dagens ETC, Paludans fault as he is the provoking cause of the escalated riots.

Strategic narratives that are identified in Dagens ETC are oblique and positive. The positive constructive narrative arises due to the publication's typical target audience, which consists of citizens leaning toward left-wing political ideologies. Consequently, the narrative that portrays Paludan as the instigator of riots, a right-wing extremist deliberately provoking Muslims, already aligns with the preexisting beliefs of the target audience, thus being perceived as positive. Furthermore, it is also possible to identify a comparable pattern in Dagens ETC where they attribute blame to another group as seen in Nya Tider. An oblique strategic narrative is identified in one of Dagens ETC's articles as they blame the right-wing politics in Sweden for the Easter Riots. This is expressed in how they emphasize that right-wing politics and political parties in Sweden have created a narrative about the Swedish suburb, where most immigrants live, as a warzone

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full of criminals. In the article "*The Swedish right-wing want to implement water cannons*" Paludan falls into obscurity, as Dagens ETC mostly blames the riots on right-wing politics as in the following quote; *"In its eagerness to appear decisive by talking to the media about the military and tougher measures, the Swedish right has over the years created a narrative of Sweden as a country in a state of war." (I ivern att framstå som handlingskraftiga genom att prata med media om militärer och hårdare tag har svensk höger genom åren skapat en berättelse som Sverige som ett land i något slags krigstillstånd).* Misappropriation has also been identified in the article *"The Swedish right-wing want to implement water cannons"* by Dagens ETC as they use factual information in a way that is incoherent with the content and used in a false context to fit a narrative. They are including factual information about the right-wing parties in Sweden to equalize them with Paludan as seen in the excerpt above. Furthermore, with the presented findings in mind, it can be argued that Nya Tider and Dagens ETC, as alternative news media outlets with explicit political biases, are utilizing strategic narratives and disinformation categories to further their political agenda, however, to varying degrees.

5.3 Paludan's Silent Presence in Digital News Media

Through the identified discourses and strategic narratives about Paludan in both mainstream and alternative media, it has been possible to examine how these discourses and narratives shape him and his political messages in digital news media. An interesting finding and pattern that has been identified in both mainstream and alternative news media is the absence of Paludan´s voice.

Across all 18 articles analyzed, any interviews or statements are absent directly from Paludan. This indicates that the discourse surrounding his political message is solely constructed by the media's framing.

As mentioned in the findings in mainstream media, the discourse about Paludan is rather negative as they often portray him as violent, criminal, unaccompanied, rowdy, inappropriate, and provocative. Being among Sweden's most influential newspapers, these four mainstream media's news reporting is widely accepted by

the public. Consequently, the prevalent negative discourse regarding Paludan can be observed as an established and cohesive narrative on a general and societal level. The absence of Paludan´s voice, therefore, becomes apparent as the news media chose to frame his political message without his presence.

However, Paludan manages to convey his political message to some extent in the mainstream media, as some of his actions involve provocation to generate attention, which benefits Paludan as an entity. Nevertheless, he doesn't fully succeed in delivering his complete political message because the established narrative about him in the mainstream media is negative. As a result, the political message he aims to disseminate isn't framed in the manner Paludan might desire, as the intent is to show that Muslims are violent and aggressive. For example, this is evident in, the article *"Malmö City reports Paludan "* in DN in the following excerpt; *"The police's mission is to ensure security and we must do that, but all good forces need to help each other to maintain peace and order. Rasmus Paludan has a rhetoric that is about creating disorder and chaos. We need help in order to strike stop that rhetoric"* (*Polisens uppdrag är att trygga säkerheten och det ska vi göra, men alla goda krafter behöver hjälpas åt för att behålla lugn och ordning. Rasmus Paludan har en retorik som går ut på att skapa oordning och kaos. Vi behöver hjälpas åt att för att slå hål på den retoriken).* Another example of this is the following excerpt from the article *"Paludan - who is he?" in* SvD; *"He calls himself an ethno-nationalist and believes that there are genetic differences that contribute to multiculturalism creating conflicts."* (*Själv kallar han sig etnonationalist och menar att det finns genetiska skillnader som bidrar till att mångkultur skapar konflikter).* This pattern is evident across all four mainstream media platforms, suggesting that the negative narrative and discussions surrounding him are the primary reasons behind his portrayal as the instigator of the Easter riots.

As mentioned in the previous section, Dagens ETC has an oblique narrative, as well as a negative discourse about Paludan. Therefore, neither his actions nor political messages are put forward in the articles. Instead, Dagens ETC focuses on Swedish right-wing political parties and their involvement in why the Easter Riots started. It can therefore be argued that their primary focus lies in associating

Swedish right-wing politics with Paludan, emphasizing their shared beliefs and connecting the right-wing ideology to him. As a result, Paludan's beliefs remain unexpressed, while the attention is directed towards the policies of other parties. Hence, through the absence of Paludan presence in Dagens ETC, he receives neither media attention nor the opportunity to convey his political message.

Unlike the mainstream media, the extreme right-wing digital news media Nya Tider manages to construct a narrative that aligns with Paludan's political message, despite the absence of his own voice. As previously mentioned, the identified discourse of Paludan in Nya Tider is positive as it shapes him as a law-abiding politician. Consequently, it becomes evident that Nya Tider effectively shapes and maintains Paludan's political message, successfully conveying the exact message he intends, even in the absence of his own voice. Paludan's objective is to provoke Muslims through Koran burnings to shape a societal perception of the group as violent. As previously identified, the discourses and strategic narratives in Nya Tider confirm precisely that intention. They construct the discourse and frame the event in a way that explicitly portrays Muslims as violent. For instance, as seen in the article "The Muslim Riots"*;* *"Örebro, Linköping, Norrköping, Stockholm, Landskrona, and Malmö are all cities affected by violent riots where Muslim immigrants attacked the police after the Danish-Swedish politician Rasmus Paludan applied for a demonstration permit to burn the Koran. An action that provokes Muslims, but which is perfectly legal in Sweden under the protection of our constitutional freedom of expression."* *(Örebro, Linköping, Norrköping , Stockholm, Landskrona och Malmö är alla städer som drabbats av våldsamma upplopp där muslimska invandrare gått till attack mot polisen efter att den dansk-svenske politikern Rasmus Paludan ansökt om demonstrationstillstånd för att bränna koranen. Ett agerade som provocerar muslimer, men som är fullt lagligt i Sverige under skydd av vår grundlagsstadgade yttrandefrihet).* Therefore, his political message can be identified in the manner they have built the discourse around him, as they uphold his purpose to shape Muslims as violent.

6. Discussion

To answer the study's aim and research questions, the critical discourse analysis has examined how digital news media shape discourses about Paludan. The findings and analysis provide valuable insights into how political entities can strategically communicate their message and manipulate digital news media to receive media attention. Discourses shaped about Rasmus Paludan during the Easter Riots in 2022 have been identified in both mainstream and alternative media. However, the findings in the analysis have revealed significant differences between the discourses in the digital news media. Most apparently, Nya Tider's discourses about Paludan differ the most from the other digital news media.

A consistent pattern in all digital news media is that it is possible to identify transitivity and intertextual chains. Further, transitivity and intertextual chains can be understood as frames, that through grammatical and discursive structured constructions can project a specific narrative. These narratives can further persuade or influence a certain audience (Logemann et al., 2019). For instance, in the mainstream media, these linguistic tools are used to create a negative discourse about Paludan. As previously mentioned, these four mainstream media are some of Sweden's most influential newspapers and are generally and socially accepted. Hence, the negative discourse observed in these digital news media can be comprehended in line with Pamment's et.al (2018) influence strategies, in which the positive constructive narrative is detected in the mainstream news media. Therefore, the negative discourse about him can be seen as the established coherent narrative that is on a general and societal level.

As mentioned in the findings, the mainstream media uses factual information to support their strategic narratives which according to Pamment et.al (2018) can influence people regardless if the story is true or false as long as it fits into the narrative. Therefore, one could argue that the narrative is persuasive in the way

they use strategic arguments and evidence about events and politics to establish the negative discourse about Paludan (Leeper & Slothuus, 2020). However, disinformation categories have not been identified in the mainstream media which indicates that they still are impartial and independent. Although a strategic narrative concerning Paludan has been identified, it is not misleading or based on false contexts. However, it does present Paludan in a negative light, yet the information itself remains true.

Furthermore, it is possible to identify transitivity and intertextual chains to create discourses about Paludan in the alternative media as well. However, they appear different as they provide other frames about Paludan than the mainstream media. Both Nya Tider and Dagens ETC emphasize another subject than Paludan in order to confuse the target audience about the mainstream discourse (Pamment et.al, 2018). Negative, positive, and oblique strategic narratives are therefore identified in some or all of the articles to create disinformation. This aligns with Leeper & Slothuus's (2020) explanation of framing, as Nya Tider and Dagens ETC put emphasis on a certain subject to affect people's opinions on political events. Given that Nya Tider and Dagens ETC are alternative news media outlets with explicit political stances, it can be argued that the identified strategic narratives and disinformation categories can be perceived as a means for the news media to advance their political agenda to influence people's opinions about the event.

The systematic negative discourse about Paludan in the mainstream media can further be explained by how media logic functions. As mentioned in the previous research, it can be understood from two perspectives; the media themselves, and the actors who require the media to communicate with the public (Strömbeck, 2014). An explanation of this could be the system and rules of media logic, as news media shapes news coverage based on audience engagement. Because of media logic, the media themselves employs storytelling techniques such as discourses and strategic narratives to condense complex information while simultaneously attracting and maintaining the audience's attention (Strömbeck, 2014). The negative discourse and positive constructive narrative that is detected in the four mainstream media could therefore be explained as a way of gaining audience engagement. As Paludan is an extremely controversial politician whose

actions evoke reactions, the media logic can also answer why all news media want to report about him as they gain public interaction. Furthermore, how the alternative news media shape discourses and narratives about Paludan could also be explained by this logic, as they want to receive engagement from their target audience. This logic of audience engagement could eventually threaten the future of objective news reports, as digital news media are constantly searching for news that evokes public interest rather than focusing on the importance of the news itself.

As previously mentioned, the absence of Paludan´s own voice in the articles is observed in all digital news media. The limited quotes and comments attributed to him in the articles are predominantly from sources other than Paludan himself. This finding, aligns with that media portrayals of political leaders are focused on generating public interest and attention, and may not necessarily give the leader themselves a voice (Strömbäck, 2014). Thus, it can be argued that both mainstream and alternative hold a certain power over the narratives attributed to Paludan to the public. By constructing frames around him, the media holds the capacity to influence the public perception of Paludan.

Moreover, political actors must adapt to media logic to generate news coverage but also has the opportunity to manipulate the news in a way that conforms to media logic (Strömbeck, 2014). Through his actions and political statements, Paludan has conformed to media logic and therefore receives the media attention that he wants, even though discourses about him may appear differently. One could therefore argue that Paludan has succeeded to manipulate the news media through his political strategic communication.

This can further be understood as strategic framing, in which political actors can take on strategic frames to express their views on a certain topic and advance their political agenda through news media channels (Dan et.al, referred to in Strömbäck & Kiousis, 2019). Paludan's strategic political communication involves provocative actions, such as burning the Koran, to effectively convey his political message and influence the media's portrayal of the story. His actions can, therefore, be perceived as a strategic frame to express his political agenda in news

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media channels. However, the version of the political message is expressed differently in the digital news media channels, as the discourses surrounding him vary. Nonetheless, the common outcome is that Paludan manages to attract media attention from all digital media channels. For instance, in the sampling process, 298 articles about Paludan were identified during a two-week period, which makes it apparent that he succeeds with his strategic frame in order to attract media attention.

To summarize, it is evident that Paludan gets a lot of attention in all digital news media. Nevertheless, the discourses surrounding him vary notably between mainstream and alternative media outlets, with Nya Tider exhibiting the most distinct approach. Nya Tider, being an alternative media outlet known for its Ethno-pluralistic and nationalistic ideology, aligns closely with Paludan's own political stance. Consequently, the discourse about Paludan in Nya Tider benefits him as an entity, as their reader base is more receptive to his politics as they have actively chosen to consume such alternative media. The discourse about Paludan in Nya Tider is therefore beneficial for his political agenda, as it strengthens his political messages among a target audience that resonates with him and his party. Moreover, the identified disinformation categories can be beneficial for his cause as Nya Tider helps derive his political messages in which they accuse another group of the riots.

In contrast, the negative discourses identified in mainstream media do not benefit Rasmus as an entity as they shape negative connotations surrounding him. However, it is possible to argue that his political agenda still benefits as he receives media attention from mass media. For instance, a discourse that is presented about him is that he is unaccompanied, which can be seen as an attempt to diminish his influence and undermine the impact of his message. Consequently, framing him as insignificant can be dangerous, especially considering the increasing prevalence of right-wing populist ideologies and movements in Sweden and Europe in recent years (Pew Research Center, 2022). Such a portrayal of Paludan as relatively harmless fails to accurately represent the reality that his views align with those held by many members of society (Valmyndigheten, 2023). Additionally, this portrayal and discourse could further establish him and his

political agenda. As Rasmus explicitly is against the mainstream establishment, undermining him, unintentionally creates the image of Rasmus as an underdog. This, in turn, can fuel his political agenda, as it serves as evidence that the establishment he opposes is once again attempting to suppress his presence.

7. Conclusion

This study has investigated how digital news media shape discourses surrounding Rasmus Paludan and identified the presence of strategic narratives and potential disinformation within them. Furthermore, the study has investigated and identified how these discourses and narratives affect Paludan's political agenda.

The result shows that all media, both mainstream and alternative create some sort of discourse around him, which benefits his political agenda as he receives the media attention that he wants. The discourses appear different in the alternative and mainstream media, however, there are more similarities between Dagens ETC and mainstream media than with Nya Tider. Nya Tider stands out the most from the rest, which also confirms our previous assumptions about alternative news media. In addition, the alternative news media are also those where disinformation has been detected, which also confirms our assumptions.

The findings also show that in the mainstream media Expressen, Aftonbladet, Dagens Nyheter, and Svenska Dagbladet shape a rather negative discourse and a positive constructive narrative about Paludan. However, disinformation has not been identified in the mainstream media. With this in mind and with the increased accessibility of news media through digitalization, it is important to be critical and observant when gathering information from digital news media. Consequently, it is crucial to exercise critical judgment when evaluating sources and to seek information from multiple sources to detect strategic narratives and disinformation in all digital news media.

Due to the media logic, it is also important to recognize the instances that govern what is published in the media. For instance, news reports often prioritize generating public interest rather than publishing objective news in itself. This emphasis on capturing attention poses a potential threat, as it opens the door for

political entities to exploit and manipulate media logic to gain more visibility and exposure.

To conclude, it is possible to argue that Paludan succeeds to communicate his political agenda in the digital news media, as he aims to provoke to receive media attention. Additionally, in Nya Tider, Paludan experiences the advantage of a positive discourse that supports his political ideology, a benefit that he does not achieve in mainstream media or Dagens ETC as the discourse about him in those media is negative.

7.1 Suggestions for Further Research

As this research adopts a critical approach, it is important to acknowledge that the findings may differ when examined from alternative perspectives. However, considering the specific objective of this study, the critical approach has the opportunity to contribute with important findings and implications.

Future research on the topic of Rasmus Paludan and the Easter Riots in 2022 could delve into the dissemination of discourses about him on social media platforms. Additionally, alternative research methods could be employed to investigate how these discourses are perceived by the audience that consumes them, and whether people perceive the identified discourses in our study as disinformation.

Moreover, it would also be interesting to explore the discourses surrounding a different public figure, one who may not carry the same level of controversy as Paludan, within the same digital news media that has been examined in this study. This comparative analysis would allow for the identification of potential variations in how the news media frame and shape discourses about public figures.

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Appendix

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Article: The Koran Chaos

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Article: The Muslim Riots

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Dagens ETC:

Article: Paludan rejected to demonstrate

https://www.etc.se/inrikes/expert-daerfoer-kan-paludan-nekas-nya-demonstrationstillstaand

Article: The Swedish right-wing want to implement water cannons

https://www.etc.se/ledare/vattenkanonens-globala-historia-aer-omgaerdad-av-doedsfall-och-skador

Article: It wasn't Paludan we were supposed to defend

https://www.etc.se/kommentar/det-var-aldrig-paludan-som-vi-skulle-foersvara

Aftonbladet:

Article: Paludan left alone

https://www.aftonbladet.se/nyheter/a/G3L50x/paludan-skapade-kaos-men-har-lamnades-han-ensam

Article: New police report against Paludan

https://www.aftonbladet.se/nyheter/a/a7Qzv5/ny-polisanmalan-mot-paludan

Article: Paludan appeals

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Article: Paludan halfway into the heat

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Article: The father's words about Paludan

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Article: New unrest

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Article: Paludan is running for parliament

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Article: Paludan gatherings may be stopped

https://www.dn.se/sverige/experter-tror-att-paludans-moten-kan-stoppas/

Article: Malmö city reports Paludan

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Article: Paludan - who is he?

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Article: Extremist gathering rescheduled

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Article: Paludan is in Sweden because he can

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