Exploring *culture war* related attacks on public libraries: results from a pilot study on information activities of the far-right

Fredrik Hanell, Hanna Carlsson and Daniel Ihrmark

Abstract

Introduction. This paper reports initial findings from a research project focusing on how information activities of the far-right promoting ideologically motivated pressure and threats against cultural institutions develop, spread and unfold, the logic governing these attacks and how they affect public libraries and librarians.

Method and analysis. The project employs the theoretical framework of practice theory and a netnographic approach. The paper outlines the project and reports the outcomes of a pilot study using data-driven digital methods and content analysis to analyse digital interactions from a Swedish far-right media outlet.

Results. The findings from the pilot study indicate that online information activities of the far-right display a view of public libraries as leftist and as potential threats to the nation, echoing ethnic nationalism and authoritarian views commonly associated with the far-right.

Conclusions. Indications that librarians, as civil servants, are increasingly the target of ideologically driven threats and antagonisms warrant further scholarly attention. The pilot study reflects how quantitative procedures are necessary for the analysis of large amounts of data, but the functionality of the digital methods need to be tested and adjusted according to context, and qualitative approaches are necessary for a nuanced and contextual understanding.

Introduction

The growing influence of the far-right have turned libraries into political symbols in an emerging *culture war* (Hanell et al., 2023; Harding, 2022; Usherwood and Usherwood, 2021). These conflicts are linked to the global phenomenon described by Inglehart and Norris (2016) as a cultural backlash, wherein conservative voices resist and challenge progressive cultural change. Although the conflict between these opposing perspectives is nothing new, it has become increasingly pronounced and has adopted a more antagonistic form, arguably reinforced by the affordances of digital technology and algorithmic governance (Törnberg and Törnberg, 2024). However, whereas previous research indicates that far-right activities on digital forums and social media play a significant part in orchestrating ideologically motivated threats and confrontations directed at libraries (Carlsson et al., 2023), little is known about how these attacks develop and unfold, as well as the relations between online information activities and offline events (cf. Scrivens et al., 2020).

This paper presents initial findings from a planned research project aimed at providing in-depth insights into the development, dissemination and unfolding of practices that drive ideologically motivated pressure, hate and threats against cultural institutions, including public libraries and museums. In Sweden, which is the country of focus for the study, the above-described development is expressed in mounting political pressure, hate speech and public threats directed at these institutions and their employees, particularly when advocating for plurality, democracy and the rights of minorities (Hanell et al., 2023; Hanell et al., 2024; Engström et al., 2024). Librarians report facing demands from politicians and segments of the public to cancel LGBTQI-themed events or to limit the acquisition of books in languages other than Swedish (Carlsson et al., 2022; Alm Dahlin, 2023). Moreover, both museum employees and librarians provide accounts of harassment and threats characterised by racist and sexist undertones, in both face-to-face encounters and digital contexts (Palm, 2023). Hence, Sweden provides an interesting case for studying far-right hostility targeting libraries and museums.

The proposed project examines the sociotechnical mechanisms underpinning far-right hostilities and their implications for libraries' capacity to promote free formation of opinions and the dissemination of knowledge. Hate, harassment and abuse not only cause significant personal suffering for the individuals affected; in the long run, they also pose a threat to democracy, as fear risks leading to self-censorship. Previous research (Hanell et al., 2024) and reports from the Swedish trade union DIK indicate that public cultural institutions have, in some instances, cancelled events in response to criticism and undue pressure, while so-called *controversial* content is often excluded to avoid the risk of hate and harassment (Palm, 2023; Alm Dahlin, 2023). This situation, in which civil servants, out of fear, conform to undue pressure and threats, should be regarded as a threat to the democratic society. Sweden therefore represents an interesting case for studying the organisation of hate and threats towards professionals mandated to promote democracy and plurality, and the subsequent impact of these threats on individuals, institutions and society. These events occur at a point in time when fundamental democratic values are increasingly challenged (cf. Mounk, 2018; Norris and Inglehart, 2019), which is a matter of concern not only for Sweden but also for other countries.

The aim of the project is to understand the interplay between the far-right's antagonistic information activities online and on-site attacks on cultural institutions and their democratic consequences. While existing research has often studied these aspects separately, cultural institutions and the online *culture war* discourse offer a compelling starting point for exploring the interrelatedness of on-site experiences and hostile online information activities. To this end, we apply an innovative interdisciplinary approach that draws on perspectives from library and information science, digital humanities and linguistics, combining data-driven methods and the text analytical capabilities of large language models with qualitative approaches using practice theory as a unifying theoretical framework. Through this novel mixed-methods approach, an

important component of the project is to further the methodological development necessary for understanding the complex nexus of entangled on-site and online antagonistic activities, as well as global and local relations that both constitute and enable these attacks.

This purpose of this paper is twofold: to present and reflect on the design of the subproject *digital information activities*, exploring the utility of employing a mixed-methods approach, and to advance our understanding of how public libraries are understood in far-right online discourse by presenting tentative results from a pilot study using both data-driven digital methods and qualitative content analysis.

Two research questions guide the inquiry:

1. How can digital methods be utilised for studying digital information activities of the far-right and their effects on the democratic mission of public libraries?
2. How can digital information activities of the far-right inform our understanding of how public libraries are understood and constructed in far-right rhetoric?

In answering these research questions, the paper seeks to contribute to method development relevant for furthering our knowledge of far-right information activities focusing on libraries, and to begin to chart how these activities unfold. By providing such knowledge, the paper contributes to empirical research and methodological advancement and practice within the library sector as well as other public institutions that uphold and promote democracy. The paper proceeds with an outline of the planned research project before results from the pilot study are presented. The paper concludes with reflections on possibilities and challenges for further studies, based on the implications of the results from the pilot study.

Situating the pilot study

In this section, we present previous research on online activities of the far-right, sociotechnical aspects of these activities, and far-right mobilisation directed at cultural institutions. Central components of the planned research project, to which the pilot study contributes, are then outlined to further explain the context of which the pilot study forms part.

Previous research

There has been considerable scholarly attention directed at the online activities of the far-right. Existing research is of an interdisciplinary character and has focused on discursive representations and rhetoric in far-right online contexts (Wahlström et al., 2021, Cervi et al., 2023); social interaction and far-right group formation in online communities (Åkerlund, 2021; Scrivens, 2021); and how far-right ideology is perpetuated, re-packaged and normalised in online environments (Tuters and Hagen, 2020; Åkerlund, 2022). While these studies make up an important foundation for the proposed project, they often remain confined to online discourse and fail to investigate wider ramifications in offline settings.
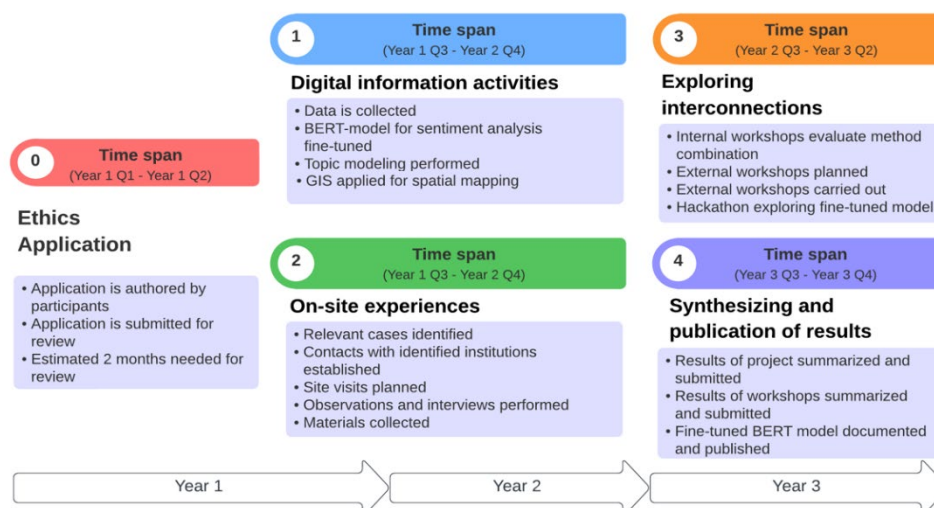
The normalisation of far-right ideology is by some researchers attributed to the sociotechnical enablement of digital technologies (Munn, 2020; Gaudette et al., 2021). Explanations for this process are then found in certain affordances of social media platforms, which provide anonymity (Urman and Katz, 2022; Törnberg and Törnberg, 2024) and enhance the creation, spread and persistence of different types of content (Sakki and Pettersson, 2016). Additionally, studies indicate the remarkable adeptness of the far-right in capitalising on these opportunities (Munn, 2020). While we build on the growing body of research pointing to the implications of this development for traditional media (Haller and Holt, 2019; Holt, 2020) and formal politics (Roberts, 2020; Heft et al., 2023), there remains a shortage of systematic investigations into the extent to which the pervasiveness of far-right discourse has ramifications for other institutional and professional contexts.

Furthermore, far-right online discourse and offline mobilisation or incidents are, with a few exceptions (Önnerfors, 2020; Wahlström and Törnberg, 2021), not studied together. Little is thus known about the relationship between far-right digital information activities and real-life incidents (Scrivens et al., 2020; Wahlström et al., 2021). Through studying far-right mobilisation focused on cultural institutions, the planned project is designed to increase our knowledge of this double dynamic.

When it comes to the nature, and implications, of far-right mobilisation directed at cultural institutions, previous research has examined far-right cultural policy programmes (Lindsköld, 2015) and the challenges that cultural policy as a political area faces as a result of the strengthened position of the far-right (Niklasson and Hølleland, 2018; Bonet and Zamorano, 2021; Hanell et al., 2023). Recent studies have also analysed the use of cultural policy and cultural institutions as ideological pawns in conflicts associated with culture war issues (Harding, 2022) and as political symbols in the establishment criticism of the far-right (Usherwood and Usherwood 2021; Hanell et al., 2023). However, there is a significant lack of research that investigates the role digital media plays in the construction of cultural institutions as ideological symbols for the far-right.

The rationale of the planned research project

The planned research project aims to fill the gaps in previous scholarship identified above through three subprojects: *digital information activities*, *on-site experiences*, and *exploring interconnections* (see Figure 1). While the subprojects manifest the interdisciplinary nature of the research project, they are unified through the adoption of a joint theoretical framework: practice theory (Shove et al. 2012). This framework is suitable for the proposed project as it provides an analytical tool for approaching discourse and action, as well as knowledge, meaning and material artefacts, as a composite analytical unit of interconnected elements: practice. As a cultural theory, practice theory views practice as the main unit of analysis for studying social life, instead of studying either text, social interaction or individual thought (Reckwitz 2002). Through practice theory, the situatedness and the specifics of place, technology and culture can be considered both as a unified whole and as parts forming a practice. By analytically framing public cultural workers' experiences of hate and threats and the online information activities of the far-right as distinct yet interconnected manifestations of a singular practice, we can elucidate the various forms of interconnectedness between online discourses and physical events within cultural institutions.

Figure 1. Overview of the planned research project and the three subprojects.

The pilot study presented in this paper forms part of the first subproject, *digital information activities*, which will be further explicated below.

Digital information activities

The first subproject focuses on exploring and classifying far-right interactions online to investigate the connection to real-world events, using a netnographic approach. Netnography is a research field and a methodology with specific methods for doing ethnographic Internet research (Kozinets, 2020). It provides coherent directions for doing qualitative studies of social interactions online while also providing strong connections between quantitative and qualitative approaches (see Hanell and Severson, 2023). Netnographic material is produced in several ways: from social media traces, interactions, interviews and researcher experiences. Kozinets (2020) describes three main procedures for data collection: *investigation*, *interaction* and *immersion*. *Investigative data-collection operations*, the process of selectively saving online traces from social interactions, is combined with *interactive data-collection operations*, the result of interactions between researcher and participants, and *immersive data-collection operations*, recording comprehensive descriptions and reflections in fieldnotes. Combining these procedures, the subproject is operationalised through a netnographic study in two stages. Tentative results from a pilot study comprising these two stages are presented in this paper.

Stage 1 focuses on investigative data-collection operations. Traces from social interactions are collected from multiple digital venues to explore and analyse far-right information activities connected to cultural institutions. Sentiment analysis and topic modelling are used to analyse large quantities of interactions offering broad understandings of the activities. Topic modelling draws on the co-occurrence of terms across the interactions, using them to define recurring topics. Sentiment analysis makes use of words carrying positive or negative connotations to label interactions as expressing mainly negative or positive sentiment. Through collecting online interactions, categorised according to the expressed sentiment and the topic of said sentiment, connections between sentiment, topic and any physical space mentioned within the digital interaction can be made. This will allow insights into which topics are the targets of negative discourse directed at cultural institutions, and how those topics and sentiments relate to events taking place at physical places. Web scraping is used to gather online comments, which are then pre-processed. Both sentiment analysis and topic modelling will draw on pre-trained BERT (Bidirectional Encoder Representations from Transformers) models. The KB Lab Megatron zero-shot model (Sikora, 2023) is used for sentiment analysis. Zero-shot classification makes use of the information present in the language model to classify text according to provided labels, in this case positive or negative. This is especially useful in online language contexts, where the language used might prove difficult for more traditional methods, such as lexicon-based sentiment analysis. Lexicon-based approaches make use of a static collection of words that have been annotated with positive or negative weight, which is then used to calculate the sentiment of a text accumulatively. Due to the nature of online language use, these methods can produce problematic results if sentiment-carrying expressions from the online context are not included in the lexicon.

The BERT approach will be complemented by a more traditional method of topic modelling relying on Latent Dirichlet Allocation (LDA), which assigns topics based on frequently co-occurring words. Selected materials classified according to the distribution of re-occurring topics by the topic model are then subjected to a qualitative post-classification. The computational topic model can then be evaluated based on the qualitative post-classification in terms of which topics are of interest for the current project. The documented researcher experiences, including detailed descriptions and reflections recorded in fieldnotes by the researchers, will complement the quantitative data with qualitative and reflexive data.

In Stage 2, the netnographic data from Stage 1 is used to produce a qualitative content analysis of selected far-right information activities concerned with libraries and museums. The material and

insights from these analytical stages will be used to guide the selection of cultural institutions for the subproject *on-site experiences* focusing on interactive data-collection operations and the interplay between online information activities and offline events. Building on results from the subproject *digital information activities*, traces from digital information activities are to be collected from social media accounts of selected libraries and museums. Pride week, in June, constitutes one temporal period of this planned part of the study.

Results from the pilot study

The pilot study, focusing on far-right information activities connected to public libraries, applies a data-driven approach informed by Sentiment Analysis (SA) and Topic Modelling (TM) based on BERT models made available by the Swedish Royal Library. Following previous studies of user comments on online news websites (Landert, 2014), the dataset of the pilot study was created in August of 2023 and contains 561 comments taken from 138 different articles published between 2019 and 2023 on the SamNytt website, the main media outlet for the Swedish far-right (Palmgren et al., 2023). The articles were selected by using the search term *bibliotek* (Swedish for library) in the site's search function. The comments were made by 338 different user accounts, with a low number of individual accounts making more than five comments. The quantitative analyses, reflecting the data-collection operations of Stage 1 described above, were then followed by a small-scale content analysis as outlined in Stage 2. In this analysis, the comments from the most commented article were structured in themes through a conventional qualitative content analysis (Hsieh and Shannon, 2005). Adding confidentiality for users (franzke et al., 2020), all quotations have been translated from Swedish into English by the authors. However, it is important to note that the methods used are relying on the original Swedish for producing results such as the topic representations, meaning that the translations must be understood as interpretations made by the authors rather than direct representations of the actual output.

In the following, we present some key findings from the pilot study that indicate both challenges and opportunities of the selected approaches. While it is important to emphasise that the data and analyses are tentative, as accurate results with BERT require several iterations including manual assessment, the preliminary results still provide interesting findings. The results also point to several issues in need of further attention before the study can be scaled up.

Topic	Title	Preamble
0	Malmö's government refuses to comply with the obligation to report illegal immigrants	The government and the Sweden Democrats announced this week that they are moving forward with the proposal to require authorities and municipalities to report illegal immigrants, and no exceptions will be made. In addition, they are investigating possible measures against those who refuse to follow such a law. In a press release, Malmö's government made it clear that it will not comply with such an obligation. ...
1	Liberal promised to crack down on gangs - now dresses up as a drag queen	Prior to last year's election, he was identified as '*the gangs' worst enemy*' by the Liberals. Now he dresses up in women's clothing and heavy makeup to promote drag queens who read stories to young children. It was in September 2022 that the Liberal Party's campaign ad was spread on Stockholm buses. This is what he looks like. ...
2	Sweden Democrat wants to ban story hour sessions with drag queens for children	For some time now, Swedish municipalities have adopted the controversial American phenomenon of so-called drag queens, men who dress up as women, holding story hour sessions for children. A Sweden Democrat believes this is inappropriate and wants to stop more children from being exposed. At Kalmar City Library, *Lady Busty* and *Miss Shameless* hold story hour sessions for children ...

Table 1. Topic, title and preamble of most commented articles (translated from Swedish)

Table 1 shows the three most commented articles, attracting 37-38 comments each. The most commented article (Topic 0) concerns how leading politicians in the South-Swedish city of Malmö, governed by a centre-left coalition led by the Social Democrats, have requested that professions that work in healthcare, schools, libraries and social services should be excluded from the nationally proposed law that would require all public servants to report unauthorised immigrants to the authorities. The proposed legislation is part of the political platform of the right-wing coalition that has governed the country since the national elections in 2022 with support from the Sweden Democrats, a far-right party known for a strong anti-immigration position (Dal Bó et al., 2023). Table 2 shows the BERTopic key with the generated topics and their representations translated into English, and the number of comments. The TM shows that several relevant descriptive words have been identified, but additional work is needed to create stable topic categories based on both the terms included in each topic as well as the articles indicated as representative for each individual topic.

Topic	Count	Name	Representation
0	38	0_they_will_such_obligation to report	['they', 'will', 'such', 'obligation to report', 'comply', 'possible', 'in addition', 'those', 'moving', 'measures']
1	37	1_he_up_2022_heavy	['he', 'up', '2022', 'heavy', 'buses', 'enemy', 'last year's', 'gangs", 'worst', 'campaign ad']
2	37	2_holding_story hour sessions_children_American	['holding', 'story hour sessions', 'children', 'American', ' phenomenon', 'adopted', 'Kalmar', 'for some', 'time', 'controversial']

Table 2. BERTopic Key, key terms (translated from Swedish; see Appendix I for original output in Swedish)

Table 3 shows the most upvoted comments per topic (Topic 0-2), showcasing what comments have received the most tangible positive feedback from other users of the comment section of the respective article.

Topic	Comment	Upvotes
0	Ok? I think that it is unethical to pay such high taxes ... Can I then just skip paying them? Would be nice! MP [The Green Party] a party for idiots led by idiots!	9
1	When reality surpasses fiction. How the h*** can any normally functioning person in Sweden vote for the Liberals? No, I thought so. But there are apparently about 4 per cent mentally retarded people who think it's a good idea to vote for these freaks of politicians.	9
1	I expect him to go to the suburbs dressed up and 'educate' the newly arrived Swedish children in LGBTQ tolerance.	9
2	Children should not be subjected to sexualisation at all.	8

Table 3. Most upvoted comments per topic (translated from Swedish)

In Table 4, a selection of the SA of user comments for Topic 0 is shown, with the four strongest positive sentiments first and the four strongest negative sentiments below (see Appendix II for the full table). This analysis, utilising the KB Lab Megatron zero-shot model (Sikora, 2023), indicates that the model suffers from a lack of contextual understanding associated with previous lexicon-based approaches. For example, the comment from User 15, '*If you have certain values then it is apparently something positive to break the law*', is assigned the sentiment '*positive*' with a very high probability. Irony and sarcasm, which appear frequently in the material, prove difficult to the BERT model. The top three positive sentiments are all assigned to comments thematically categorised as *Irony* (see Table 4).

User code	Comment	Sentiment label
User 32	'Victory is Here' says Stefan the Ass !!! hohohoho	(positive, 0.9880883097648621)
User 38	Open your hearts and don't build any walls around Sweden ! Immigrants enrichens Sweden and raises Sweden's standard and economy. Everyone who has immigrated to Sweden are well-educated and create new jobs. It has never been more safe living in Sweden than now. Regards The Politically Correct Elite. The batik witches The idiots	(positive, 0.9095330238342285)
User 15	If you have certain values then it is apparently something positive to break the law.	(positive, 0.8953573107719421)
User 20	Let's withdraw all the equalisation subsidies to Malmö. Then they can rely on themselves.	(positive, 0.812720775604248)
User 21	Now the shamed big driveller Stjernfeldt Jammeh is at it again. It is not reporting crimes/illegal immigrants that increases the shadow society, it is the pouring-in politics in Sweden and Malmö that increases the shadow society. Without the pouring-in we wouldn't have had any illegal shadow society. As long as the formerly Swedish city Malmö is led by the law-rattling, enemy to the people, and islamist activist Katrin the city will bathe in social misery, crime, Islamism and antisemitism.	(negative, 0.9636296033859253)
User 14	All of Malmö is an asshole that really would need to be cleaned up from all the shit but instead the leaders want to do the opposite and at every cost remain a slum city.	(negative, 0.9629205465316772)
User 18	If Malmö was a flowering city with law and order and low criminality then they would maybe have a point with their soft method, but Malmö is the direct opposite to good order, a shocking example plain and simple.	(negative, 0.9592908024787903)
User 32	Then just GETINTO THE UNEMPLOYMENT LINE !!! FIRE THEM AT ONCE, refusal to work !!! Without any f*** severance pay or similar parachutes	(negative, 0.9540340304374695)

Table 4. Selection of Megatron model sentiment analysis of user comments for Topic 0 (translated from Swedish).

Despite the considerable advancements that BERT models have brought to natural language processing tasks, applying them to informal and colloquial language found on social media and online discussion forums poses significant challenges, as indicated by the generated topics (see Table 2) and the strong positive sentiments assigned to sarcastic comments (see Table 4). Models like BERT, primarily trained on formal and grammatically correct text, may struggle to appropriately interpret and extract meaning from informal and dynamic language. In the present case, additional challenges are presented by the scarcity of models trained on Swedish. To address these issues, it is necessary to incorporate robust post-classification analysis, to identify and rectify misinterpretations or misclassifications. Post-classification analysis may involve the integration of additional layers of context-specific fine-tuning or the implementation of ensemble techniques to enhance model performance in capturing the intricacies of colloquial expression. Adding a robust post-classification analysis will be an important part of the planned research project as a whole.

Moving from quantitative procedures to qualitative, the content analysis of the pilot study (see Appendix II) is focused on the comments from the most commented article (Topic 0). This stage of the analysis serves to complement the quantitative analyses with a qualitative sample of how far-right information activities concerned with issues related to public libraries unfold, and connects to the second research question concerning how digital information activities of the far-right can inform our understanding of how public libraries are understood and constructed in far-right rhetoric. Table 5 shows an overview of the identified themes, indicating different categories of information activities.

Theme	Number of comments
Law and order	18
Malmö as a symbol	14
Critique of *mainstream* politics	11
Resentment against politicians	10
The cost of immigration	9
Irony	7
Penalise public servants	5
Nationalism	4

Table 5. Overview of identified themes.

Given the topic of the article, concerning how '*Malmö's government refuses to comply with the obligation to report illegal immigrants*', it is not surprising that the themes collecting the highest number of comments are *Law and order* and *Malmö as a symbol*. In the comments, Malmö, a city with a large part of the population having an immigrant background, is often used as a symbol for what is believed to be wrong with Sweden today, and the comments categorised as *Malmö as a symbol* are in most cases also categorised as *The cost of immigration*. *Critique of* 'mainstream' *politics* is another theme collecting high numbers of comments, and the theme often overlaps with *Resentment against politicians* and *Law and order*. The most upvoted comment (see Table 3) combines these three themes, as well as *Irony*:

> *Ok? I think that it is unethical to pay such high taxes … Can I then just skip paying them? Would be nice! MP [The Green Party] a party for idiots led by idiots! (User 37)*

Penalise public servants is the theme that most clearly relates to public libraries, as librarians is one of the professions discussed in relation to the proposed legislation, something that has been criticised by both professional organisations (DIK, 2023) and researchers (Engström et al., 2022). Not surprisingly, the theme collects comments that are also labelled *Law and order*, as exemplified in the following comments:

> *Very simple, fire all the communists that refuse to follow the law. (User 33)*

> *Then we'll just have to bring out the boots in Malmö, boot them out, there are lots of people who can replace this cadre. (User 27)*

In the former comment, the common trope that librarians, as well as other professions associated with the welfare state, are left-leaning is echoed (see Carlsson et al., 2023). The latter comment reflects a tendency in far-right discourse to invoke violent imagery as a counterpoint to mainstream political rhetoric, a practice that can instil fear in political opponents and perceived enemies (cf. Engström et al., 2024). For some comments, the theme *Penalise public servants* also overlaps with *Nationalism*, as well as *Law and order*, as shown in these two examples:

> *Put them in prison so they can think about their crimes, I believe these people are dangerous for Sweden and the Swedes (User 5)*

> *But then it's just a matter of locking them up for disobedience and betraying our country! (User 7)*

These comments connect to nationalistic ideas often found in far-right discourse where nations are seen as the main arenas for collective identity and culture, and where Sweden as a nation and Swedish culture are believed to be threatened by the quick, unnatural change attributed to multicultural society (Håkansson 2023). In this rhetoric, representatives of the state and the political elite are considered to be agents working for a multicultural and globalised society, in strong opposition to the interests and wishes of *the people*. For these reasons, the overlapping of the themes *Penalise public servants* and *Nationalism* is not surprising, as librarians are framed as representatives of misguided politically correct governance at odds with popular opinion.

Concluding remarks

There is a significant lack of research that investigates how cultural institutions are constructed as ideological symbols for the far-right through use of digital media. By showcasing results from a pilot study conducted as part of the subproject *digital information activities*, this paper has answered the first research question by showing how digital methods can be utilised for studying digital information activities of the far-right, paving the way for further studies of how these interactions may affect the democratic mission of public libraries, an area in need of further studies as suggested by previous research (Carlsson et al., 2023). Contributing to method development relevant for advancing our understanding of antagonistic information activities of the far-right focusing on libraries, this paper has shown examples of how digital technologies mediate the interactions that are the object of our inquiry, but these technologies are also important actors in the netnographic research process. Several methodological issues remain to be solved; for example the issue of how BERT models can be applied to Swedish data comprising rapidly evolving and informal Internet language. Issues related to how BERT models, primarily trained on formal and grammatically correct text, struggle with data including irony and sarcasm as well as colloquial language call for robust post-classification analysis to be developed as the scale of the study is increased. Additional trials using other models, such as the multilingual large multimodal model GPT4-o, will also be relevant to consider.

Ethical issues warrant consideration; for example, the collection and analysis of digital interactions and the confidentiality of participants. For the pilot study, we have added confidentiality for users through translating quotations from the original language (cf. franzke et al., 2020). For the next stage of the project, where the interconnectedness between online discourse and physical events at cultural institutions will be explored, additional layers of ethical considerations are added, for example concerning the confidentiality and safety of public servants tasked with promoting certain aspects of democratic society. However, we argue that an investigation concerned with how digitally mediated hatred and threats against cultural institutions interact with public servants' work to promote democracy call for research strategies combining data-driven digital methods and qualitative case-studies of selected institutions in their specific local settings, dealing with specific issues, such as promoting the rights of minorities.

As suggested above, previous studies have shown that digital forums and social media are key components when ideologically driven threats and antagonisms are directed towards public libraries (Carlsson et al., 2023). Through an analysis of comments from the SamNytt website, utilising both quantitative approaches and qualitative content analysis, we are offered new insights into how public libraries are currently understood and constructed in digital discourse from comments written on articles of the main media outlet for the Swedish far-right. When it comes to the second research question and the effort to begin to chart how far-right information activities focusing on libraries unfold, the findings from the pilot study indicate that online information activities of the far-right display a view of public libraries as leftist and as potential threats to the nation. This view of public libraries echoes ethnic nationalism and authoritarian views commonly associated with the far-right (Rydgren and Van der Meiden, 2019; cf. Inglehart and Norris, 2016). The far-right framing of public institutions as part of a perceived elite is well-known (cf. Usherwood and Usherwood, 2021). However, analysing comments from the most commented article shows how librarians are more explicitly drawn into this framing. The theme most directly related to public libraries is *Penalise civil servants*, relating to librarians' protesting against a proposed law requiring civil servants to report unauthorised immigrants. This indicates that librarians are increasingly targeted in their capacity as civil servants using arguments that may fuel both online and on-site hostility and induce self-censorship among librarians. This development is concerning and warrants further scholarly attention.

Furthermore, until recently, previous research has shown a high degree of correspondence between national cultural policies and local politics (Harding, 2022), and that opposition between local and national political levels in the context of libraries concerns national policies protecting the rights of national minorities and persons with a native language other than Swedish (Hanell et al., 2022). These previously identified instances of opposition between political levels have been related to political discussions on the local political level conflicting with national policy. The findings from the pilot study presented in this paper suggest a new type of political tension between national policy and local politics, reflecting how Sweden since the national elections in 2022 has been governed by a right-wing coalition depending on support from the Sweden Democrats, a far-right party associated with nationalism and anti-immigration politics (Dal Bó et al., 2023).

To conclude, the pilot study reflects how quantitative procedures are necessary for the analysis of large amounts of data (Kozinets, 2020), but the functionality of the digital methods need to be tested and adjusted according to context. Furthermore, qualitative approaches are also essential, as shown by the results from the pilot study where irony and sarcasm, as well as the nature of specific contested topics such as the proposed legislation that would require public servants to report unauthorised immigrants to the authorities, call for methods that offer a nuanced and contextual understanding.

Acknowledgements

About the authors

Fredrik Hanell holds a PhD in Library and Information Studies and is Associate Professor in Library and Information Science at the Department of Cultural Sciences, Linnaeus University, Sweden. His research interests include the societal role of public libraries, digital education and digital method development. He can be contacted at: fredrik.hanell@lnu.se

Hanna Carlsson holds a PhD in Library and Information Studies and is Associate Professor in Library and Information Science at the Department of Cultural Sciences, Linnaeus University, Sweden. Her research interests include critical policy research, digital cultures and public libraries in democratic governance. She can be contacted at: hanna.carlsson@lnu.se

Daniel Ihrmark holds a PhD in English Linguistics and is Senior Lecturer in Digital Humanities at the Department of Cultural Sciences at Linnaeus University, Sweden. His research interests include text analysis, stylistics and digital methods in the humanities. He can be contacted at: daniel.o.sundberg@lnu.se

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Appendix I: BERTopic Key, key terms in Swedish

Topic	Count	Name	Representation
0	38	0_man_kommer_sådan_anmälningsplikt	['man', 'kommer', 'sådan', 'anmälningsplikt', 'efterleva', 'eventuella', 'dessutom', 'dem', 'går', 'åtgärder']
1	37	1_han_ut_2022_kraftigt	['han', 'ut', '2022', 'kraftigt', 'bussar', 'fiende', 'fjol', 'gängens', 'värsta', 'valreklam']
2	37	2_håller_sagostunder_barn_amerikanska	['håller', 'sagostunder', 'barn', 'amerikanska', 'företeelsen', 'anammat', 'kalmars', 'tillbaka', 'tid', 'utskällda']

Appendix II: Conventional qualitative content analysis of comments from Topic 0

Theme	User code	Comment	Sentiment label
Resentment against politicians; Irony	User 32	'Victory is Here' says Stefan the Ass !!! hohohoho	(positive, 0.9880883097648621)
Critique of *mainstream* politics; Irony	User 38	Open your hearts and don't build any walls around Sweden ! Immigrants enrichens Sweden and raises Sweden's standard and economy. Everyone who has immigrated to Sweden are well-educated and create new jobs. It has never been more safe living in Sweden than now. Regards The Politically Correct Elite. The batik witches The idiots	(positive, 0.9095330238342285)
Law and order; Irony	User 15	If you have certain values then it is apparently something positive to break the law.	(positive, 0.8953573107719421)
Malmö as a symbol;	User 20	Let's withdraw all the equalisation subsidies to Malmö.	(positive, 0.812720775604248)

The cost of immigration		Then they can rely on themselves.	
Resentment against politicians;	User 10	A striped blimp and a pink cloth sheet are pining after young immigrant boys or what?	(positive, 0.72750324010849)
Law and order; Irony	User 36	One exception after another for mena [Middle Eastern and North African] people. Why not skip laws also for us Swedes?	(positive, 0.6458326578140259)
Malmö as a symbol; The cost of immigration	User 28	Perhaps Malmö wants more equalisation subsidies from the state.	(positive, 0.6160332560539246)
Malmö as a symbol; The cost of immigration; Law and order	User 30	I don't feel like financing Malmö and other 'do good' municipalities through the tax sheet. Since Malmö does not 'want to' approve the new law I suppose it is OK if I deduct 5–10 % as tax deduction for things I don't 'want to' pay! Or another sum that is waaaaay higher that is about financing the oo so cherished multiculturalism.	(positive, 0.59110426902771)
Law and order; Penalise public servants	User 27	Then we'll just have to bring out the boots in Malmö, boot them out, there are lots of people who can replace this cadre.	(positive, 0.5768081545829773)
Critique of mainstream politics; Law and order	User 2	Sweden should be a decent country, the MP-politican says. Out with illegal immigrants perhaps would be a route to try then.	(positive, 0.5206326842308044)
Resentment against politicians; Critique of mainstream politics; Law and order	User 21	Now the shamed big driveller Stjernfeldt Jammeh is at it again. It is not reporting crimes/illegal immigrants that increases the shadow society, it is the pouring-in politics in Sweden and Malmö that increases the shadow society. Without the pouring-in we wouldn't have had any illegal shadow society. As long as the formerly Swedish city Malmö is led by the law-rattling, enemy to the people, and islamist activist Katrin the city will bathe in social misery, crime, Islamism and antisemitism.	(negative, 0.9636296033859253)
Malmö as a symbol	User 14	All of Malmö is an asshole that really would need to be cleaned up from all the shit but instead the leaders want to do the opposite and at every cost remain a slum city.	(negative, 0.9629205465316772)

Malmö as a symbol; Law and order	User 18	If Malmö was a flowering city with law and order and low criminality then they would maybe have a point with their soft method, but Malmö is the direct opposite to good order, a shocking example plain and simple.	(negative, 0.9592908024787903)
Law and order; Penalise public servants	User 32	Then just GETINTO THE UNEMPLOYMENT LINE !!! FIRE THEM AT ONCE, refusal to work !!! Without any f*** severance pay or similar parachutes	(negative, 0.9540340304374695)
Resentment against politicians; Critique of mainstream politics; Nationalism	User 9	All these d**** values-women… So d**** inadequate for the task and lost in historyless, crackpot ideas of the day. Appearance, idiocy, and treachery to the nation.	(negative, 0.9473562240600586)
Malmö as a symbol; Critique of mainstream politics	User 17	Malmö is the stronghold of criminality and rabble You know the reason That's right quisling parties rule	(negative, 0.9468349814414978)
Resentment against politicians; Critique of mainstream politics;	User 23	And then these parasite politicians/people ask why the situation and state of Sweden is as it is.	(negative, 0.9417688846588135)
Law and order; Penalise public servants; Nationalism	User 5	Put them in prison so they can think about their crimes, I believe these people are dangerous for Sweden and the Swedes	(negative, 0.9165231585502625)
Resentment against politicians	User 3	Childless ugly women who believe refugees are their children.	(negative, 0.9134753942489624)
Malmö as a symbol; The cost of immigration;	User 24	No, they certainly don't have to!!! Not a penny in equalisation subsidies!!!	(negative, 0.887950599193573)

Law and order; Penalise public servants; Nationalism	User 7	But then it's just a matter of locking them up for disobedience and betraying our country!	(negative, 0.8879429697990417)
Malmö as a symbol; The cost of immigration;	User 34	Malmö wants more money from other municipalities. Can a municipality be declared bankrupt or under guardianship, the current government apparently does not have what it takes	(negative, 0.8579277992248535)
Malmö as a symbol; The cost of immigration;	User 13	Build a wall around Malmö, it's already like a third-world country …	(negative, 0.8512347936630249)
Law and order; Nationalism	User 16	If it doesn't suit you to follow Swedish law, then you can go with those whom you so eagerly want to protect, WHEN WE SEND THE SCUM HOME.	(negative, 0.840070903301239)
Critique of mainstream politics; Law and order	User 11	Sweden cannot continue on the same path with incompetent politicians who are out of touch with their voters. Politicians should not be allowed to obstruct law and order by helping illegal immigrants in the country to stay and hide in Sweden. If they cannot handle the task, they need to resign, like Åsa Romson.	(negative, 0.8290839791297913)
Resentment against politicians; Critique of mainstream politics; Law and order	User 6	But Jammeh, no one should have any kind of work relationship with an illegal immigrant? A trust relationship should not even be able to arise? Only the apprehension of the person concerned and guidance during the deportation process can involve law-abiding Swedes.	(negative, 0.808050811290741)
Critique of mainstream politics;	User 29	[The Liberal Party], aren't they in the government? Don't they have a party leader who can tell how things should be done?	(negative, 0.7992346286773682)
Malmö as a symbol; The cost of immigration;	User 25	For Malmö's socialist leadership, 'multiculturalism' is much more important than Swedish senior citizens. This is evident when they, despite the fact that the municipality is actually bankrupt, repeatedly spend millions on various Muslim cultural projects!!! Then economically prosperous and well-managed	(negative, 0.7756912708282471)

Critique of mainstream politics		municipalities are forced to pay for Malmö's multicultural excesses!!!	
Critique of mainstream politics; Law and order; Resentment against politicians; Irony	User 37	Ok? I think that it is unethical to pay such high taxes … Can I then just skip paying them? Would be nice! MP [The Green Party] a party for idiots led by idiots!	(negative, 0.757798969745636)
Malmö as a symbol; Resentment against politicians;	User 26	No wonder Malmö would rather take care of the crap from MENA than Swedish senior citizens in need. For crying out loud, the chairman of the municipal board herself has brought home a --------- from Ghana or wherever she found the sorriness.	(negative, 0.7526752352714539)
Law and order; Irony	User 22	Why doesn't the police authority stop reporting crimes as well, then they save some money so they can hire more staff. Alternatively, evict a few thousand cellmates.	(negative, 0.6925574541091919)
Resentment against politicians;	User 8	Fire the batik witches, they have destroyed Sweden enough.	(negative, 0.6610947251319885)
Malmö as a symbol; The cost of immigration;	User 12	Form a ring of armor around Malmö. Cut off all economic aid. No one in, no one out.	(negative, 0.6454769372940063)
Law and order	User 19	An illegal immigrant does not belong to the weak in society, he does not exist in society.	(negative, 0.6361880302429199)
Penalise public servants; Law and order	User 33	Very simple, fire all the communists that refuse to follow the law.	(negative, 0.6219813227653503)
Irony	User 31	OTC Some people write books, while others burn books. August wrote The Red Room. Fjodor wrote The Dead House. So what? I don't know …	(negative, 0.5626118183135986)
Malmö as a symbol;	User 35	In Malmö's case, the answer is simple: reduce the municipal equalisation. Every fourth crown comes	(negative, 0.5285810828208923)

The cost of immigration;		from somewhere else, they can afford an opera house for a billion, unicorns for 300,000. The list can be made long.	
Malmö as a symbol; Law and order	User 4	I think more than half of Malmö's population should be reported.	(negative, 0.5120136141777039)