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Broadcasting the Movement and Branding Political Microcelebrities: Finnish Anti-immigration Video Practices on YouTube

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Abstract

This paper examines how the video-sharing platform YouTube was utilized by networks of anti-immigration activists that began emerging in Finland during the so-called refugee crisis in 2015. By combining network analysis with qualitative analysis, we identified three central strategies of video activism: movement building through documentation, discursive controversy generation, and personal branding practices. These strategies are firmly supported by the affordances of YouTube and by the way in which the platform enables the building of varying scales of media presence. Consequently, our findings highlight the increasingly common practice of microcelebrity branding in online political communication. This notion demonstrates the affinities between fragmented and contingently mobilized anti-immigration movements and the personalizing and performance-oriented logics of social media presence, in particular when explored from a post-movement perspective. In the algorithmic environment of YouTube, microcelebrity is a political and a platform-specific genre that occupies the post-movement political space by generating sustainable algorithmic visibility.

Keywords: *YouTube, video activism, anti-immigration, social movements, microcelebrities, platform studies*

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Across Europe, the increase in people seeking asylum has provided a key opportunity to consolidate and proliferate anti-immigration and anti-Islam networks and movements. In the current political landscape, the formation and mobilization of these actors cannot be understood without accounting for the generativity of connective media networks and their dynamics (Bennett & Segerberg, 2013; Milan, 2015). While communicative action is not the sole, or even the main factor in movement and milieu development, existing studies have emphasized the functionalist utility of the internet for disseminating information, building a presence, recruiting members, developing like-minded communities, and disseminating specific agendas and rhetoric through the search architecture and informational dynamics of the online environment (e.g., Neumayer, Mortensen, & Poell, 2018; Klein, 2012). When these possibilities are integrated into the terrain of interconnected, participative digital platforms, incessant communicative action allows movements to suggest a scale of activity and public presence beyond their material resources or active membership (Titley, 2019).

One such platform is the online video sharing site, YouTube. Research has focused on charting the networking and communicative value of Twitter and Facebook to the far-right, such as the ‘click-swarm tactics’ facilitated by Twitter’s real-time connectivity (Bartlett, 2015). It has also focused on the ‘issue movement’ mobilization and simulation staged on Facebook (Farkas, Schou, & Neumayer, 2018), and has been followed by an increasing interest in the role of far-right video activism on YouTube (Ekman, 2017; R. Lewis, 2018; Schmitt, Rieger, Rutkowski, & Ernst, 2018). This scholarly focus has overlapped with a rush of alarmist narratives in mainstream media describing the ways in which YouTube’s algorithm and recommendation engine produces extremist content loops that push forward misinformation, and hyperpartisan and hateful content (P. Lewis, 2018; Tufekci, 2018).

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Scholars have investigated the role of YouTube in electoral politics and its increasing adoption by progressive social movements and established political actors (Ridout et al., 2015; Thorson et al., 2013). We argue that in the framework of a hybrid media system in which communicative action can scale up and gain attention in unprecedented ways (Chadwick, 2013), YouTube as a space of reactionary political mobilization demands particular attention, because contingent forms of media activism can benefit from and be transformed by the opportunities provided by the platform's structure. In order to answer this call and to understand anti-immigration movements as, indeed, movements, we draw on the literature of far-right activism and politics, but also on traditional social movement literature.

Our analysis examines the YouTube presence of two major anti-immigration movements active in Finland since 2015—Close the Borders! (Rajat kiinni!, RK) and Finland First (Suomi Ensin, SE)—as well as the key figures associated with them. The 'refugee crisis' period witnessed an unprecedented proliferation of Finnish far-right movements and entrepreneurs, marked by enthusiastic YouTube adoption. These developments are significant for the broader theorization of how the far-right and social media intersect, because the centrality of YouTube emerged in a media environment that is significantly different from sites that have experienced similar growth. Recent studies have noted the ways in which YouTube activity is deeply integrated in extensive far-right media ecosystems, allowing cross-platform brand-building, relations of mutual support, linking and citation, and the maximization of audiences through the transnational register of the English language (Benkler, Faris & Roberts, 2018; Ekman, 2017; R. Lewis, 2018, 2019). The plethora of predominantly US-based right-wing channels and figureheads using YouTube as their preferred infrastructure, for example, are amplified within the multi-scalar "altered media ecology" that Benkler, Faris and Roberts document in *Network Propaganda* (2018).

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No such domestically produced ecology exists in Finland; on the contrary, YouTube channels have been founded on a comparatively barren landscape and have become the functional core of attempts to establish and cultivate a differentiated far-right media scene. While popular as the “second search engine” and for recreational use, YouTube has not gained much traction in Finland as an arena of political and societal discussion—such space has been mostly occupied by Twitter and Facebook. However, it was the only major platform that enabled live streaming in 2016 when the anti-immigration protests started, and significant, diversified media activity stemmed from this starting point. For these reasons, our research sets out to explain the interplay of specific platform affordances and dynamics with the contextual formation of an emerging set of far-right movements and entrepreneurs, by asking: *RQ1. What was the role of YouTube in the establishment and transformation of Finnish ‘anti-immigration’ movements in the aftermath of the so-called European refugee crisis?*

By combining digital methods, network analysis, and a qualitative analysis of videos, we examined how the emergent groups and individuals utilized YouTube for movement building and positioned themselves (cf. Rogers, 2018) in the public discourse burgeoning around the refugee question during a period of significant political debate. The political fragmentation in Finland’s politics in this period created political opportunities on which a shifting field of political initiatives sought to capitalize. However, the frenetic communicative work of these actors does not in itself explain why YouTube became particularly generative *of and for* far-right politics in Finland, outside of the supportive ecosystem conditions documented in comparative studies. A pronounced characteristic of this movement activity on YouTube was the shifting forms of media practices that accumulated in a relatively short period of time, offering established resources such as movement documentation and repertoires of action. Further, these practices also supported the emergence of movement-

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related figures, who played important bridging roles between ideologically resonant actors and movements, and even guaranteed a form of cultural presence as the original movements dissolved or petered out. Thus, we ask: *RQ2. How do platform specificities and political practices interact in the forms of media produced during this period?*

By asking this, we also aim to explore the tension between the agency and practices of the movement activists and the techno-commercial infrastructure offered by the YouTube platform, as suggested by Neumayer et al. (2018). In this vein, our study concludes with a discussion of the forms of ‘microcelebrity’ that took shape within this milieu, and of the relations and tensions that develop between mediated personalities and movement representation in and through this digitally mediated activity. We argue that there is a need to integrate an internet celebrity perspective (Abidin, 2018; Tufekci, 2013) into the study of mediated movements in order to understand the hybrid media–political forms that emerged at the intersection of the expansive repertoires and formations of right-wing protests. Our argument is not simply that the combination of YouTube channel-building and ideological activity produces micro-celebrities. We also argue that, under conditions of political fragmentation and media amplification, micro-celebrity is a political form, afforded by platform technology, which ‘holds the space’ after the movements that produced it dissipate.

Anti-immigration Movements in Finland

As Castelli-Gattinara (2018, p. 727) notes, a new kind of anti-immigration movement “engaged in extra-parliamentary activities and hybrid forms of mobilisation” formed in 2015 as a putative response to the unprecedented numbers of people seeking asylum across Europe. It was a patchwork emergence that threatened to pave “the way for the development of a broad, European anti-immigration movement”. In 2015, Finland received over 32,000 asylum applications—a significant increase from previous annual averages of approximately 3,500. Although the number of asylum seekers was small by international standards, refugee politics

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became a key wedge issue in a context in which migration has been relentlessly politicized in the preceding decade. For the newly formed conservative government consisting of the Centre Party, the National Coalition Party and the nationalist Finns Party, the situation provided momentum for the introduction of more restrictive asylum policies, propagated especially by the ethno-nationalist fraction of the Finns Party (Wahlbeck, 2018). Despite this, regionally dispersed and internet-mobilized anti-immigration groups denounced the government's action as insufficient and sought to occupy the political space opened up by the putative failure of the True Finns to influence it. Central, therefore, to the conflicted political response was the emergence of a “fragmented field of would-be capitalizers” (Silvennoinen, 2016) seeking to position newly formed, reinvigorated ‘anti-immigration’ movements as seemingly organic public responses to the crisis.

Finland provides a particularly interesting setting for examining the interconnections between ‘anti-immigration’ mobilization and YouTube. Whereas far-right parties and movements promoting the ethnopluralist or integralist articulations of nationalism have been pronounced as features of Western European politics since the mid-1980s (Camus & Lebourg, 2017), in comparative terms, neither had a notable presence in Finland prior to 2000. As a Nordic welfare state, Finland's political system can be defined as a multi-party democracy with a strong reliance on consensual decision-making and a democratic-corporatist media system (Hallin & Mancini, 2004). This is reflected in how the professionalism of journalism has resulted in high-level public trust in the media in Finland (Reuters Institute, 2017). Historically, Finland has been a site of outward migration, and until recently inward population flows were very limited by European standards—only 4.2% of the population were of “foreign” origin (OECD, 2017). However, the politicization of “non-European” migration is not dependent on numbers but on the context and conditions of politicization. The cumulative electoral successes of the Finns Party in the 2011 and 2015 parliamentary

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elections consolidated the centrality of ‘immigration’ as a recurring focus of politicization, and the increasing prevalence of racializing rhetoric in political debate arguably provided legitimation for the mobilizing frameworks of the anti-immigration movements that maintained close yet ambivalent relationships with the Finns Party.

The anti-immigration movements emerging since 2015 are highly contingent formations, often short-lived, and constantly shape-shifting collectives that share an ethno-nationalist identity. They mainly draw on culturally differentialist repertoires that configure “non-European” migration as an inevitable source of cultural loss. In so doing, they can be regarded as belonging to the broader heterogeneous group of “far-right collective actors” (Castelli Gattinara & Pirro, 2018) who, by focusing on the problem of what are presented as immutable cultural differences, maintain a distance of plausible deniability from the overtly hierarchical racism of the neo-Nazi and supremacist “extreme right”. In the political context under discussion, these actors established a common political frame in the contention that asylum-seeking represented a direct attack on the sovereignty of borders and the commonwealth of the Finnish nation-state. In an established grammar of radical nationalist victimhood, this invasion is held to be encouraged by weak government and an urbane, multiculturalist civil society that prioritizes the demands of refugees over the needs of native Finns (Herkman, 2017). While the movements themselves tend to use the euphemism ‘immigration-critical’, we use the broad category of ‘anti-immigration movements’, as this locates these groups in this specific political period and avoids a protracted exercise in more fine-grained categorization, while still denoting the xenophobic agendas of the actors¹.

Despite their national emphasis, far-right groups of this kind are embedded in transnational online networks of ideological and tactical exchange (e.g., Della Porta, Caiani, & Wagemann, 2012), suggesting that they are attuned to wider repertoires of practices and discourse among European and Western formations. For example, Finnish movements were

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quick to adopt the stance that their freedom of speech was limited by the political elite and mainstream media, who were silencing their “realist” criticism of immigration with accusations of racism (Krämer, 2017; Moffitt, 2017).

Of the movements under analysis, RK began organizing demonstrations in August 2015, and the activation of SE followed in 2016. While the frequency of these protests had already begun to significantly decrease by 2017, a high-profile action that year was the establishment of a long-running (February–June) sit-in demonstration camp, *Suomi Maidan*, organized by SE at Helsinki Railway Square. The camp was framed as a counter-protest against the asylum seekers’ *Right to Live* protest camp, which was established to protest what was seen as inhumane immigration policies by the Finnish Immigration Service. It was in the context of documenting this encampment that hybrid movement practices, encompassing street activity and their networked mediation, became more pronounced. Several YouTube channels and related social media accounts were established to provide regular reports from the protest site. In Finland, this turn towards YouTube represented a new repertoire of collective action and self-mediation practices for anti-immigration movements.

YouTube as a Platform for Networked Political Broadcasting

YouTube is the second most popular website in the world as well as in Finland (Pönkä, 2019). The platform has consistently advertised itself as a space for grassroots creativity and has been predominantly theorized through this lens (e.g., Arthurs, Drakopoulou, & Gandini, 2018; Burgess & Green, 2009). It is widely noted, however, that over time, an expansive commercial rationale has demoted this emphasis on a seemingly citizen-led platform, not just through the privileged promotion of global cultural industries but also through the professionalization of individual content producers, who have learned to use the logics of social networking for political and economic profit (Hou, 2019; Kim, 2012). Concomitantly, the platform has been increasingly used for politics (e.g., Ridout et al., 2015),

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social activism (Askanius, 2012; Martini, 2018; Thorson et al., 2013), and promoting alternative political realities in opposition to mainstream media (R. Lewis, 2018; Kim, 2012).

Recent research argues that YouTube has also become a dominant space for the far right (e.g., Ekman, 2014; R. Lewis, 2018). Activist communities are drawn to YouTube because it allows them to broadcast their messages globally without editorial intervention (Arthurs et al., 2018). This usage marks an extension of how the internet's political potential has been used by a range of movements to build a collective identity, shape a brand image, and connect to like-minded groups (e.g., Neumayer et al., 2018). YouTube offers the means for expansion because its search and recommendation algorithms support the serendipitous discovery of related, and increasingly extreme, content (e.g., Schmitt et al., 2018). In forging these political relationalities, YouTube seems to prefer native content over mainstream media and to reward niche entrepreneurs who stir up controversy with high levels of visibility (Rieder, Matamoros-Fernández, & Coromina, 2018).

The objective of the forms of political activism on YouTube is to gain public visibility (Neumayer et al., 2018; Ekman, 2014). With their promise of virality, YouTube and other platforms have emerged for non-mainstream actors as a tool to reach audiences and influence public opinion without having to depend on, or invest in, traditional media (Askanius & Gustafsson, 2010; Cammaerts, 2012; Thorson et al., 2013). Rebecca Lewis (2018) demonstrated how an “alternative influence network” has emerged with the aid of the YouTube infrastructure. This supports a like-minded community for those who reject established politics and mainstream media framings. Given this deep integration, as Cammaerts (2015) notes, activists' adoption and use of movement media can become *constitutive* of social movements, shape their collective identities (Milan, 2015), or create structures for self-mediation, when the movement *becomes* the media (Cammaerts, 2012).

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YouTube and the Microcelebrity Culture

More recently, the study of influence has explored the role of broadcasting individuals in the attention economy of YouTube, as the attention-seeking practices on social media have trickled down from commercial brands to individual users (Abidin, 2015; Marwick, 2013; Rogers, 2018). YouTube videos provide a malleable opportunity for self-expression and self-branding. Studies have used various terms to describe people who have become famous among a niche audience through social media performance: microcelebrity (Marwick, 2013; Senft, 2008), vlogger celebrity (Hou, 2019), and social media influencer (Abidin, 2015; Khamis, Ang, & Welling, 2017). Unlike the relationship of distance between traditional media celebrities and their audience, microcelebrities directly connect with their audiences, and display high levels of encoded authenticity to maintain their status and cultivate a sense of commonality with their audiences (Marwick, 2013; Senft, 2008; Abidin, 2015).

Most studies examining online niche celebrities concern fashion, lifestyle or technology (Berryman & Kavka, 2018; Hou, 2019; Marwick, 2013). Similar practices, however, have been gaining ground in politics and political activism. In this context, Tufekci (2013) coined the term “networked microcelebrity activism” to describe the ways in which individual actors within social movements strive to benefit from public attention and media appearances in the service of that particular movement. They are “politically motivated actor[s] who successfully uses affordances of social media to engage in a presentation of his or her political and personal self to garner attention to a cause” (p. 857).

Likewise, Castelli Gattinara (2018) highlights the role of *strategic political entrepreneurs* who took advantage of the refugee debate in Italy and managed to legitimize the discourse of the anti-immigration movement in the public sphere. To some extent, these practices have roots in the leader-centered forms of the charismatic tradition in radical right-wing politics (Krämer, 2017). However, the well-crafted layman performances associated

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with nationalist populism do not easily translate into the forms and idioms of interactive platforms. This is particularly the case in Finland, where forms of political microcelebrity emerged from movements that, from their inception, positioned themselves in opposition to professional politicians and the superficiality of managed messaging.

Data and Method

Using the theoretical apparatus explained above, we aimed to explore and explain the interplay of specific platform affordances and dynamics in the YouTube activism of Finnish anti-immigration movements during and after the ‘refugee crisis’. Our methodological approach follows the premises of digital methods (Rogers, 2013) combined with network and qualitative analysis. In order to build a bird’s eye view of the movement-related data without the interference of our YouTube profiles, we started by extracting a large set of videos that corresponds to a search query made with movement names. By doing so, we aimed to replicate the context of a YouTube user who searches for information on the movements, in an ecologically valid way. The rationale was thus to use the online device as a research tool; to simultaneously study the phenomenon and the technology on which it takes place and which lends structure to the phenomenon (Rogers, 2013; Marres & Weltevrede, 2013).

Data collection. The data were extracted in February 2018 from the YouTube API using YouTube Data Tools (YTDT; Rieder, 2015). We queried two lists of 100 videos using the names of the two anti-immigration movements (RK, SE) as search terms, ordered by relevance. Further, a major element of the YouTube user experience is the algorithmically generated list of video recommendations. To emulate this environment, we crawled a network of related videos for video lists at the depth level of two, using YTDT. Consequently, our dataset contained the initial video lists, related videos for the 200 videos on the initial list, and again related videos for the first level of related videos, as suggested by the YouTube algorithm. This generated a combined dataset of 4,530 videos.

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The resulting dataset was a compound of user-inputted keywords and the logic of the YouTube recommendation algorithm. Thus, the results of the query should not be considered a neutral ranking of the most relevant videos but a complex end result of both platform-specific algorithmic rules and learning that takes place from user input as they navigate the platform and follow video suggestions (e.g., Pietrobruno, 2016; Rieder et al., 2018). While the features of the YouTube algorithm are not fully disclosed, we know it builds on features such as view counts, watch time, the users' previous actions—aiming to recommend related videos that other people with similar tastes have watched (Covington, Adams, & Sarkin, 2016; Cooper, 2019). Consequently, our dataset contained hundreds of popular videos, such as music videos, and the most viewed videos were mostly unrelated to the search terms. Therefore, we chose to use network analysis with a clustering algorithm to identify groups of videos connected by the YouTube related videos algorithm, that is, a combination of socio-technological preferences.

Network analysis. We used the Gephi (Bastian, Heymann, & Jacomy, 2009) software to visualize the connections between the videos, to identify central nodes, and to calculate key statistics (Newman, 2008). The network was calculated from the connections made by the YouTube recommendation algorithm: if a video was shown in the related videos list for a video, a connection was formed between the two videos, identified by their IDs. A force-directed algorithm, *ForceAtlas2* (Jacomy, Venturini, Heymann, & Bastian, 2014), was applied for the layout and a modularity algorithm (Blondel, Guillaume, Lambiotte, & Lefebvre, 2008) was used to detect communities (i.e., clusters) in the network, resulting in 24 clusters. The rationale was to harness the YouTube platform to show us the video clusters produced as a combination of user activities and the machine learning rules of the algorithm. It could be considered that each of the clusters represent a set of videos that a user most likely ends up watching if they follow the given recommendations during a watch session.

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Qualitative analysis. The qualitative analysis of the clusters proceeded in two phases. First, we selected eight major network clusters, each one covering at least 5% of the network (more than 250 videos each, while the remaining clusters had less than 120 videos). From each cluster, we selected the fifteen most connected videos (highest degree value) for qualitative analysis to obtain a reasonably broad picture of the cluster content, and also to include videos from several channels in all clusters (apart from sole-author MC1). We chose to use the degree value as a measurement as it points out the most related and recommended videos as listed by the platform algorithms. Using view counts, for example, would filter generally popular videos to the top.

Next, all three authors engaged in the analysis process separately by watching and then conducting a close reading of the videos in the specific clusters. The aim was to understand the role of YouTube as a broadcasting platform for the movements (RQ1), as well to investigate how platform-related factors and the political context affected the chosen forms of communication (RQ2). Therefore, we decided to focus our analysis on the style, form and functions of the videos, an approach well covered by the concept of communicative genres (Lomborg, 2011). While analyzing the videos, we wrote descriptions of their content and recorded our observations in relation to three dimensions: genres and communication styles, branding practices and production values, and the discursive framing used in the messages.

In the next phase, we reviewed similar and divergent initial findings cluster by cluster, and reflected on our own reactions to the videos to become aware of our uncertainties in interpreting the data. The aim was to classify the videos into genre categories. Although the variety of genres and sub-genres could have been classified on a more fine-grained level, we decided to employ a high-level categorization, starting from the notion that some videos were imitating broadcast television, and others were native to YouTube or online communication more generally. Therefore, we divided the videos into three main categories based on their

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style, content and function: documentation (live-streaming, recording events and life at Maidan), vlogs, and re-cuts (re-framed content, edited compilations of other material). Next, based on our notes on the videos and the genres identified, we analyzed the discursive framings of the videos to examine the different ways in which the movement purposefully communicated, and what they potentially aimed to achieve with their chosen message strategies and video genres. We identified three overlapping but persistent communicative strategies: movement building, controversy building, and personal branding. In the following, we present our findings using these three strategies as our perspectives to the data.

Results

Network of Video Communities

The 4,530 videos were produced by 1,527 channels. The video production, however, was highly concentrated: the three most active channels produced 15.5% of the videos in our data. The eight main network clusters we selected for detailed analysis (see Figure 1) accounted for 76.98% of the network. Each cluster was named in accordance with the main theme and type of video coverage in it (Table 1). The C cluster was formed around videos criticizing anti-immigration actors and was excluded from the qualitative analysis. Presumably, the recommendation algorithm connected this content with the movement due to the repeated use of the movement names in the titles or descriptions (cf. Schmitt et al., 2018). Further, the MC4 cluster, consisting of videos posted solely by a channel named after an individual, had to be excluded because the account was suspended by YouTube by the time we engaged in the qualitative analysis. Based on the titles, the videos covered a series of demonstrations held in 2017 by SE, culminating in a larger 612 demonstration on Independence Day in the same year.

The largest cluster, as measured by video count, was RK, which was formed mostly around the coverage of “Close the Borders” demonstrations during 2015 and 2016, followed

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by the slightly smaller SE cluster around the “Finland First” demonstration camp in 2017 (aka “Suomi Maidan”). The F cluster encompassed videos published to support well-known Finns Party politicians Laura Huhtasaari and Jussi Halla-aho. The MC1, MC2, and MC3 clusters were mostly formed around one active YouTube channel each, and are examples of microcelebrity-generated activism, which featured strongly in our data. In terms of publishing times, these were more recent than the demonstration-related videos.

On average, the videos in each movement-related cluster had accumulated approximately 7,000 to 30,000 views. The average counts were most relevant for the MC1–3 clusters, formed around microcelebrities. Several of these videos had over 100,000 views. These audience numbers are relatively large in the Finnish context—the most popular Finnish vlogger receives on average 166,000 views per video. The most viewed videos in our dataset related to events that had received mass media attention.

FIGURE 1 & TABLE 1 HERE

Strategies of Movement Documentation

Self-documentation plays a crucial role in movement building by amplifying street activism (e.g., Cammaerts, 2015; Uldam, 2013). This vital entanglement of street activism and video activism is seen in the prominent role of what we call “documentation videos” (Askanius, 2012) in our material. Documentation videos reporting on street protests and other political events of interest to the anti-immigration movement—or to individual tubers—emerged in Finland in the wake of the ‘refugee crisis’. This context clearly informs the reproduction of television documentary reporting styles, grounded in the idea of observing “real” experiences and events as they happen, using a realist style. Like their televisual predecessors, these videos often include voice-over commentaries and interviews that, in addition to visual evidence, provide further experiential evidence of collective mobilization.

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The documentation video was the most prevalent genre in the two largest clusters. The RK cluster was formed around live broadcasts from various reactive anti-immigration events—mostly rallies organized by the movement. The SE cluster mainly comprised videos documenting the daily life of the *Suomi Maidan* sit-in counter-demonstration. In the MC1 cluster, videos documenting nationalist events, marches and speeches, and the participation of anti-immigration actors in various election-related events were prominent; they were published by a single active channel that we named the Documentarist. The videos were typically live-streamed broadcasts ranging from 30-minute clips to over five-hour feeds, sometimes documenting an event in its entirety. Aesthetically, anti-immigration documentation videos can be described as amateurish, lacking the stylized imagery and symbolism of neo-fascist videos (Ekman, 2017). Filmed as long, unedited segments and lacking post-production elements such as captions or a soundtrack, the videos did not give the impression of having premeditated affective intentions to cater to the audience.

The performance of these journalism-like functions of gathering and disseminating information is embedded by casting these reports as compensating for news ignored or distorted by mainstream sources. However, documentation videos, in their modality, also aim to extend the space and time of street action (Ekman, 2014; Milan, 2015). Live-streaming and documentation allows those participating in street protests to connect with protest event sympathizers, who may also comment and participate discursively and affectively (cf. Uldam, 2013). Self-documentation, in other words, is formative to the collective identity of movements organized around what rarely amount to more than small-scale street protests and which have very limited visibility in the mainstream media, as it the genre enhances a sense of continuous action (Della Porta & Diani, 2006). The video recording of movement events and the testimonies of those involved has similarly been identified as a valuable resource—a visual archive—for building collective identities (Askanius, 2012; Thorson et al., 2013).

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Although these videos do not actively forge narrative-historical links with previous anti-immigration mobilizations (cf. Mattoni & Teune, 2014), they are nevertheless clearly understood as history documents, which, by archiving present events and reactions, work to construct a collective memory of recent movements. Tellingly, after YouTube closed down the channel of the active MC1 Documentarist, another activist re-defined it as a history channel containing an archive of the nationalists' recent street protests in Finland.

While forging these links in time and space, documentation videos also extend the anti-immigration scene ideologically and affectively, connecting the emergent Finnish movements to the transnational, polymorphous galaxy (Mammone, Godin, & Jenkins, 2013) of gradated nationalist movements; neo-fascist and supremacist groups; and think tanks, groups, and figures associated with radical right political parties. A key instance was the convergence of nominally quite different movements through events on Finland's Independence Day, December 6, 2017. One five-hour documentation video covered the events: the nationalist "Finnish People First" rally, the neo-fascist Nordic Resistance Movement's "Toward Freedom" march, and the annual "612" torchlight procession for various far-right groups. Thus, while these groups may dissociate from each other's ideologies or activities in mainstream publicity, the videos demonstrate the potential for wider (inter)national mobilization around a common anti-immigration cause (cf. Della Porta et al., 2012).

Discursive Strategies of Controversy and Victimization

According to Ekman (2013), the key elements of far-right online communication include mediating collective experiences of violence and hate on the one hand and negotiating the internal cohesion of the movement on the other. Our data also exhibited an aim to cultivate engagement with the movement by representing anti-immigration actors engaged in a political struggle against perceived enemies. An overarching discursive strategy of the

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movement's videos was to create antagonism, resentment, and a sense of injustice by constructing common enemies. Central to this controversy-building was a concerted attempt to present the anti-immigration activists themselves as victimized, misunderstood, and oppressed actors in society. Hence, while the practice of live streaming street protests and political events served to enhance the historical importance and affective intensity of these events, it also served to circulate anti-immigration and anti-establishment discourses.

The discursive strategies of claiming victimization and projecting destructive others are deeply embedded in the rhetoric and narrative construction of the anti-immigration protests, whether the others are “dangerous anarchists,” “naive liberals,” “biased police,” or “illegal migrants”. The refugee protest in the railway square, for instance, was framed as an illegal encampment by “illegal” immigrants, and several videos covered the encounters in the square, referring to “harassing liberals.” The MC2 cluster includes several videos in which the video maker speaks with the police, and subsequently frames them as partisan “social justice warrior police”. In the videos, any action by adversaries could be marshalled to give affective force to this positioning; for example, a video entitled “Immigrants brawling at the railway square” showed a demonstration involving only some shouting and scuffling. These frames also connect to documentation and history-making, elaborating the discursively constructed controversial positions of the actors, the victimization discourse, and even clear incitements to violence. A video of the dismantling of the SE camp showed an activist talking straight into the camera, saying that the refugees’ camp will not last for long and that there are Finns who are “not as calm as we are, so please come and burn that fucking camp.”

Finally, the genre with the sole aim of arousing controversy is that of re-cut videos, which forms the core of the F cluster, half of the videos posted by the same channel. The re-cut videos were mostly re-contextualized and re-framed versions of Finnish far-right politicians being interviewed on television, re-posted to challenge the frame offered by the

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news media and provide an alternative framing, through titles, subtitles, and description fields as afforded by YouTube. An example of re-framed television content is a video reworking of an interview with the Finns Party presidential candidate Laura Huhtasaari, in which the sarcastic subtitles offered a critical reading of the reporter's "gross grilling" of the candidate, such as "And then it starts again: the nag nag naggity nag..." Alternatively, some re-cut videos were mixed from different sources to form a new text: A video entitled "Best pieces on Jussi Halla-aho" presented a montage showing the anti-immigration hardliner and leader of the Finns Party in various television programs and in the Parliament. These clips amplify the message and profile of the politicians admired by the movements, and work to undermine the trustworthiness of traditional media by questioning their fairness and professionalism. At the same time, however, they indicate the importance of traditional media content for the movements' practices.

Self-Mediation and Personal Branding

While the documentation and controversy-building mostly focused on the movement level, some videos embraced the prevalent personality-centered genres of YouTube. Video blogs, or vlogs, have become the emblematic genre of YouTube, embodying the platform's cultural logic of authenticity, intimacy and liveness (Burgess & Green, 2009). Vlogs were prominent in the MC2 and MC3 clusters and partly also in the MC1 and SE clusters, produced by branded channels formed around microcelebrity figures. The videos were typically associated with a domestic setting, low production value, and a monologue style featuring an individual speaking to the camera. However, they varied in their ways of addressing the audience, topics, settings, and style. Some vloggers streamed mobile to share a contextualized view of their encounters with supporters and adversaries. Vlogs by MC2—whom we named Investigator—were filmed in his car or at the scene of an event. In some

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videos, he walked around and explained his point to the camera while also showing his surroundings. Hence, the functions of vlogs partly overlapped with the documentation videos.

Direct responses from other vloggers and audiences are central to vlogging genre conventions. Vloggers ask for audience feedback, read aloud chat and superchat messages from viewers of live streams, and conduct live Q&A sessions. In our data, we encountered both traditional, low-key versions of such interactive broadcasts and more planned sessions with formats that emerged over time. The Documentarist in the MC1 cluster broadcasted two-and-a-half-hour sessions in real time. He would start by opening a can of beer and telling his audience to ask questions in the chat (“otherwise this broadcast will be short”). He would then read chat messages aloud and respond to them laconically in his slow-paced vlog. Other vlogs featuring one host often included interviews with guests, and some had several participants in the discussion, talking via Skype in a roundtable format.

Vloggers also dedicate time to following the actions of movements and the focal political issues. They review social media content; pinpoint selected posts by supporters or critics and reframe and re-emphasize certain points, such as unanswered questions. These practices work to build controversy and loyalty among movement members. By following a semi-regular schedule, they act as a kind of “movement media” (Atton, 2006), which enables the movement supporters or audiences interested in anti-immigration discourse to follow their activities. The MC1 Documentarist, for example, acts as a kind of foot soldier for the movement, emphasizing collective action while also incorporating his personal voice and political aspirations. These efforts are quite successful, as the sum of the Documentarist’s video views in our data exceeds two million. Simultaneously, the material that they produce adds to the pool of arguments, thus becoming a discursive resource for the movement and its supporters (Baym & Shah, 2011; Klein, 2012).

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Further, the actors build networking activities in their videos through mentions and cross-appearances: the recurrent, prominent actors identified in our data also appeared as guests on each other's videos. The Documentarist (MC1) invited other SE members to join his "night-time live stream" to promote their channels and personal brands. Vlogs, then, are used to connect with members of the network through videos, enhancing a sense of belonging to a like-minded community, and building connective friendships on the movement level. However, while to some extent our material shows united movement action, the videos produced by the microcelebrities reveal the critical discourses and internal tensions of the anti-immigration movement. A vlogger in the SE cluster published what he called "therapy videos," in which he discussed his experiences of unfairness within the movement, hence working to promote his personal political views and position in the movement.

Perhaps the most central media-type channel that emerged from vlogging practices is the channel branded "Hate Speech FM," which predominantly constituted the MC3 cluster. The channel features two hosts in a domestic setting, discussing current issues and commenting on national and international mainstream media reports in a talk show style, following a weekly schedule with a fixed time. The shows included elements of all the broadcasting strategies depicted above: live visitors, recurring themes, references to offline and online events during the past week, news reviews, and calls to action for viewers. For example, they aimed to manipulate a podcast competition by inviting their viewers to vote for them even though YouTube channels were not allowed to take part in the competition.

The branded talk show of the MC3 cluster highlights the strategic and wider public orientation of the branding activities. Their importance on the YouTube scene is highlighted by network statistics: the channels emerged as the central connecting nodes in the network measured by the highest average eigenvector centrality values (Table 1; Newman, 2008). The shift in orientation is evidenced by the extension of their branded activism to include a

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separate English-speaking channel, thus exhibiting a growing interest in transnational right-wing networking and building brands beyond the movement and its immediate national context. Whereas the foot soldiers broadcast long, uncut, unedited videos, the emerging talk show genre has differentiated itself with a clear broadcast schedule, show segments, and branded visuals. Although the hosts have shifted from movement-building toward audience-building, rhetorically there has been little attempt to produce a sleek performance that differentiates the genre from the rough, rude, and “authentic” language of documentary videos, such as the livestreamed clips from the railway square. Arguably, the intensity of the aggressive language, name-calling, and open hostility toward progressive activists, journalists, and other public persons all work toward generating controversy—a celebrity logic that overlaps with movement goals while having particular currency for brand-building.

Discussion: Between the Movement and its Stars

In their own overlapping ways, these various forms and genres of video activism potentially contribute to movement building. Existing research has discussed how video activism enables movements to broadcast in real time, from their own point of view and unconstrained by mainstream media, hence amplifying the ideological and emotional investment of street activism to online spaces (Askanius, 2012; Cammaerts, 2015; Ekman, 2014; Uldam, 2013; Della Porta & Diani, 2006). The prevalence of documentation videos in our data suggests that the anti-immigration movement understood them not only as an immediate tactic for gaining protest visibility, but as a resource that required archiving to inform further political mobilization. An equally important discursive feature of this mobilization is the strategy of controversy building, which is relevant to the re-cut videos but also cuts across other genres. The cultivation of controversy works to secure the internal cohesion of the movement, as shown in other studies of extremist actors (e.g., Ekman, 2014), by using a strong rhetoric of inclusion and exclusion.

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Anti-immigration movements have generally adapted to the characteristics and affordances of online video activism (Askanius, 2012; Ekman, 2014). Our data reveal that this is complemented by an attempt to mirror and adapt established media formats and conventions, to adopt journalistic conventions and interactive features to resemble established media formats. Further, movement videos re-purpose mainstream media coverage, distorting the original message and context by reframing it with the options offered by YouTube or basic video editing tools. In light of these data, the relationship forged with traditional media goes significantly beyond the established conception in social movement research that movements aim to generate media coverage (e.g., Cammaerts, 2012). The movements examined in this study demonstrated no attempt to seek mainstream media coverage; the mainstream media functioned as a structuring enemy for their media narratives of truth-telling and victimhood. YouTube is an indispensable platform for this positioning, as it enables scaling up audiences through channel and brand development, as well as direct appeals to potential audiences who might not have strong relations with the established media that these movements are seeking to replace.

Most importantly, our findings demonstrate how an emerging strategy of personal micro-branding among anti-immigration actors had become persistent enough to form its own clusters in the video network, as breakaways from the main movements. Such personality-centered movement practices have also been highlighted by authors such as Tufekci (2013) and Castelli Gattinara (2018). This form of activism often begins on a small scale, like when emerging activist figures (MC1, MC2) publish their own political views at regular intervals, using their real names. As this developed, the political content was integrated with the mix of practices associated with general natively digital celebrities for instance, engaging in direct interaction with their audience (MC1, MC3). These notions are in line with previous literature that discusses celebrities and microcelebrities (Abidin, 2015; Tufekci, 2013; Lewis, 2019); a

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person charismatically presents their views and draws attention to the political cause. The mix of political commentary and personal disclosure is a practice to which YouTube's developed repertoire of genres is particularly well suited.

We argue that the vlogging genre and personal branding strategies in particular underline how the affordances and user cultures existing in YouTube favor certain forms of movement development. Platforms push activists to produce more personalized connections and content. They invite them to work with dynamics of temporality, visibility, and virality that produce moments of collectivity (Neumayer et al., 2018; Milan, 2015; Benkler et al., 2018), while also encouraging them to adapt their actions to vanity metrics (Rogers, 2018). The mediated and platformed practices of microcelebrity, streaming, and attention-seeking, combined with the recommendation algorithm, support forms of mediated movement activism with their own commercial logics. This may foster visibility and mobilization, while concomitantly, the emphasis on performativity and individual personalities may hinder collective action (Neumayer et al., 2018; Milan, 2015).

In the context of movement building, however, these microcelebrities play an important role. They act as bridging nodes between actors, audiences and movements that resonate ideologically. But most importantly, they channel attention and temporal duration to the movement. Some personal branding practices were clearly more inclined to support the goals of the movement, for example, those of the Documentarist. His videos were a form of emotional labor for the movement—a mission to sustain and archive it in the digital realm. Others, like the Talk show hosts, strived more clearly to build their personal brands and audiences. In both types, however, rather than relying on the classical movement's media type of activism (cf. Atton, 2006), it was the political microcelebrities who make the movement endure over time. When the street politics fade out, the legacy of the movement proliferates on YouTube and provided a lingering public presence.

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However, as our analysis shows, microcelebrity—and the development of even more professionally produced and branded talk shows—can reach a point where it can no longer be contained within even the most capacious movements. Our data demonstrate how mediating movement unity as opposed to common enemies co-exists uneasily with controversies inside the movement, and vlogging microcelebrities publicly discussing inconsistencies in the movements' political aims. A media ecosystem that rewards personal branding also rewards a form of transparency, as internal movement politics are made public in order to build celebrity profiles. Arguably, it is this dynamic between movement mediation and the gradual exposure of differences and tensions that gives shape to the emerging strategy of personal branding utilized by the anti-immigration actors. In an algorithmic media environment such as YouTube, such internal conflicts can also attract potential outside viewers to the political drama—an audience that may not be political supporters of the movement, but who become part of a public exposed to the political messages. The self-narrated views also seemed to feed the algorithm: While the view counts for microcelebrity channels were not always high, the statistics measuring node centrality were, meaning that they efficiently tapped into the YouTube publicity on the anti-immigration issue. However, for the movements, the shift to reveal differing viewpoints could be argued to have ultimately contributed to the fragmentation of the movement's core message.

Our findings highlight the fluidity and contingency of the anti-immigration movements in terms of forms and political goals. This patterning is furthered by the ways in which online spaces and networks dilute the categorical distinctions between radical right parties, street movements, nationalist group movements, online figures, and political celebrities. Such dilution is evident in our network analysis, which shows how through the algorithmic media environment a *post-movement space* has emerged specific to YouTube, one in which microcelebrities maintain the mediated sensibility of an anti-immigration movement

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after the dissipation of organized protests and political mobilization. As Neumayer and others (2018) argue, when movements adopt platforms and related practices, the platforms themselves also become enacted as agents in the movement. This is apparent in the ways in which the YouTube algorithms intervene in the movement structure suggested by the original channels and actors, which in turn affects how the post-movement space of anti-immigration protests is formed. As Milan (2015) discusses, platforms steer collective action to certain forms of organizing and narration, such as real-time streaming, building performances and interpellation of actors and opponents—all which are visible in our data. However, our argument goes further, contending that the platformed media ecosystem gives shape to a post-movement space, in which politics becomes imbricated with the platforms on which it has been forced to act (cf. Nelimarkka et al., *in press*).

Conclusion

This study examined the broadcasting practices and strategies of Finnish anti-immigration movements on YouTube and analyzed the construction of movement media and the intersecting emergence of individual political personalities. We used digital methods and network analysis to identify video clusters and then conducted a qualitative analysis of the most central videos. We identified three main genres of broadcasting—documentation, vlogging and re-cuts—and showed how the utilization of these genres allowed the anti-immigration actors to mediate and archive street protests, to disseminate discourses of victimization, and to create controversy. Furthermore, we highlighted the role of microcelebrities and their branded channels, movement legacies that arguably now attract more interest than the movements that gestated them.

Overall, our findings suggest that Finnish anti-immigration actors are aware of how YouTube has come to constitute a transnationally generative space for anti-immigration movements; one in which the consolidation of media brands and personalities has become

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politically productive. While the movements in question have faltered in terms of both street mobilization and media productivity, the branded personalities, channels and figures that have emerged from them are of potential significance. Some remain politically active, trading on their celebrity to attempt to build electoral political careers as candidates in the Parliamentary Elections as part of the newly-founded ethno-nationalist *Suomen Kansa Ensin* (Finnish People First) party. This further demonstrates the fluidity of political direction and roles within this milieu, and drives the attempted formation of political parties from the collective action that began during the street protests. On the other hand, after being banned from YouTube, some actors (including the Documentarists of MC1 and MC4) have continued broadcasting on the Russian platform Vkontakte, where content is moderated less.

This political traction is afforded by platform logics (Milan, 2015) in general, as well as the platform and algorithms of YouTube in particular. Indeed, it is not clear how visible these movements would have been without their streaming practices and personal brand figures. And how would we regard YouTube had it not been marked as the extremists' platform? After political debate on the 'refugee crisis' dissipated, the political issue space for anti-immigration mobilization significantly diminished. However, the algorithmic media environment has generated a singularly productive space to connect with ongoing political discussions and to keep the anti-immigration discourse alive through the active broadcasting of post-movement microcelebrities. We argue that in the case of YouTube, the intervening effect of the platform is mediated through the platform-specific genre of vlogging, which invites activists to engage in more personal forms of communication beyond the movement. Hence, on a broader level, we suggest that under conditions of political fragmentation and media amplification, microcelebrity is a political form that occupies the political space generated by the movements after the original cause and movement activism has dissipated, generating sustainable algorithmic visibility by adopting platform-specific genre logics.

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Cluster	Main coverage	Size	Videos (n)	Average Degree	Average EC	Average View count (top 15)	Main genres
RK	Events and demonstrations of RK movement; A few vlogs by RK activists	14.70%	666	46.32	0.018	22,142.27	Documentation
SE	Documentation and live-streamed coverage of SE demonstrations	14.02%	635	27.01	0.011	92,583.73	Documentation
F	Fan coverage of politicians on TV	11.02%	499	58.14	0.060	30,777.4	Re-cuts
C	Content criticizing demonstrations; videos from Antifa movement	10.75%	487	37.54	0.011	16,493	-
MC1	Documentarist	8.52%	386	67.12	0.038	7,313.53	Documentation, Vlog
MC2	Investigator	6.34%	287	61.62	0.032	27,554.67	Vlog
MC3	Talk show hosts	5.87%	266	75.53	0.107	7,399.8	Vlog
MC4	Documentarist 2	5.76%	261	72.92	0.044	5,601.27	-
Total		76.98%	3486				

Table 1. Eight major clusters in the video network and their network statistics. EC = Eigenvector centrality, RK = *Rajat Kiinni!* movement, SE = *Suomi Ensin* movement, MC = microcelebrity. The average view count of the SE cluster was affected by two very popular, non-related videos. The C and MC4 clusters were excluded from the qualitative analysis.

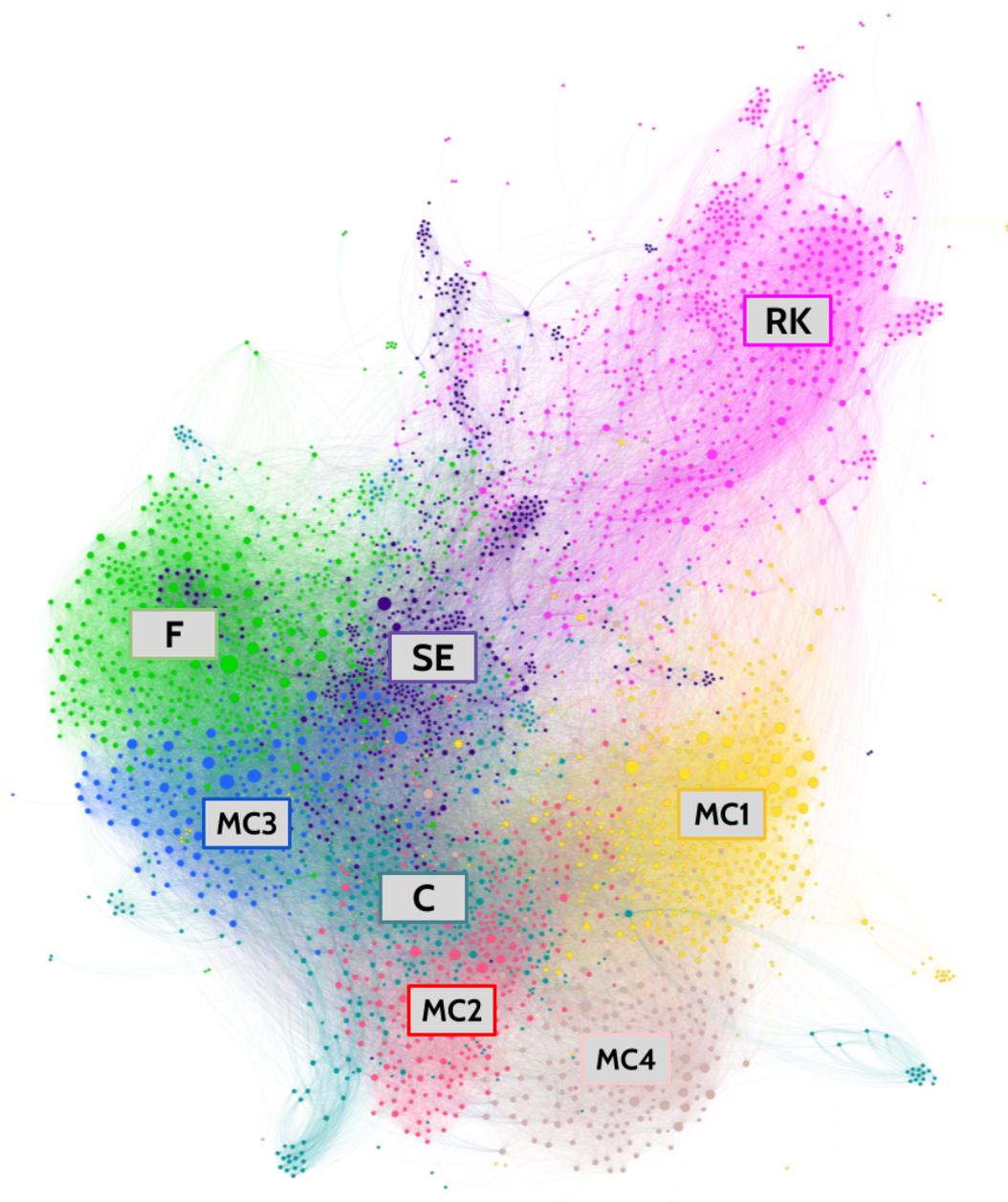


Figure 1. Network of 4,530 videos queried with the search terms “suomi ensin” and “rajat kiinni” from the first 200 seeds. Number of network communities: 24, filtered here to show the eight largest clusters. Average Degree: 22.221, Modularity: 0.581. RK = Rajat Kiinni movement, SE = Suomi Ensin movement, MC = microcelebrity.

ⁱ For stylistic reasons we have not reproduced the phrase in inverted commas in what follows, however we understand it as suspended within them. While this choice is pragmatic, we do not consider immigration a discrete issue that can be politically or analytically abstracted in this fashion, and the xenophobic and racializing agendas these actors vest in a discrete focus on ‘immigration’ are clear.