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Where does the Indigenous Sámi news come from? The case of the Arctic Railway in Yle Sápmi

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Abstract

The Government of Finland launched Finland's Arctic strategy in August 2013. The strategy included the Arctic Railway project, which since has become a focus of public debate. The Arctic Railway is planned to be constructed from the city of Rovaniemi in Finland to the city of Kirkenes in Norway. This study analyses the media coverage of the Arctic Railway project by Yle Sápmi, the Sámi unit of the Finnish Broadcasting Company Yle (Yleisradio). The study investigates where the Indigenous Sámi news comes from, and which stakeholders, including but not limited to Sámi and non-Indigenous social actors, participate in the creation of the news surrounding the Arctic Railway project. The research builds on agenda-setting and agenda-building theories by posing the following question: who sets the agenda for the Sámi agenda setters (Auwal et al., 2020)? The goal of this research is to examine how, if in any way, the Sámi news media agenda could have been influenced by various sources of information and to what extent this media influence is transparent (Tsetsura & Kruckeberg, 2017).

Keywords

Sámi news media, Indigenous journalism, Arctic Railway, media transparency, agenda building, agenda setting

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Introduction

This study investigates where the Indigenous Sámi news produced by Yle Sápmi¹ comes from and which stakeholders, including but not limited to Sámi and non-Indigenous social actors, participate in the creation of the news surrounding the Arctic Railway project. The case at hand is Yle Sápmi's news coverage of the Arctic Railway in 2013-2020. As Gans (2003) put it, the question is "who sets the media agenda, how and for what purpose it is set" (Gans 2003, p. 266). In other words, the study examines which social actors seek to influence the Sámi news media agenda by focusing on one question: "who sets the agenda for the agenda setters?" (Auwal et al. 2020, p. 14) Specifically, this study examines who the agenda setters of Indigenous Sámi news media are. At the centre of this investigation is the emergence of the global post-war Indigenous movement that includes the establishment of Indigenous media worldwide (Wilson & Stewart 2008, p. 7). The establishment of separate Sámi media system (Rasmussen et al. 2021) forms part of the "broader pan Indigenous agenda" (Alia, 2012, p. xiii) and ideally should be based on Indigenous perspectives, interests, and voices (Meadows, 2016). Sámi activists in the 1960s and 1970s built trust relationships with mainstream media journalists. These relationships made their voices heard not only in Yle's region news but also in Finland's largest newspapers. The first Sámi television program, Saamelaisiltamat (Sámi Soiree), aired in the early 1970s and brought together leading Finnish politicians to address the concerns of live Sámi audience. (Sara, 2022)². Over time, the presence of Sámi media has become stronger. At the same time, more and more actors started to participate in constructing Sámi media narratives.

This study examines competitive processes of agenda setting and agenda building in the context of the Arctic Railway planning in Finland. Specifically, we investigate how different actors seek to mobilise the news media to advance their interests (Badham 2019) by utilising the tools of strategic communication (Myslik et al., 2019). As a previous study of the Sámi news media shows, the role of Yle Sápmi and NRK Sápmi in setting the agenda for the Arctic Railway project remains unclear (Sara et al., 2022). Therefore, the goal of this study is to examine how, if in any way, the Sámi news media agenda could have been influenced by various sources of information and to what extent this influence is transparent (Tsetsura & Kruckeberg, 2017). In addition, the aim is to better understand who generates and maintains Sámi media debate surrounding the Arctic Railway plan and whether the power of the media to set the agenda could have been transferred to other social actors outside the news organisation (Camaj, 2016). As Plaut (2017) argues in the context of the Sámi and Roman media, defining newsworthiness may be a political manifesto reflecting existing power relations.

Theoretically, the study builds on theories of agenda setting and agenda building as well as investigations of Indigenous journalism to study the agenda of the Sámi news media, which is severely understudied. Qualitative content analysis and discourse analysis are used to identify external influences on Yle Sápmi's agenda. The agenda of the Sámi news media is examined as an outcome of external influences. The next four sections present the theoretical and contextual backdrop of the study.

¹ https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Yle_S%C3%A1pmi_Radio

² Personal communication on February 15th, 2022, with Iisko Sara who was the host of the Sámi Soiree.

Agenda setting

Originally, the agenda setting theory investigated “the transfer of issue salience from the news media agenda to public agenda” (McCombs et al., 2014, p. 787) or whether the public attaches importance (McCombs & Shaw, 1993) to a few topics to be selected salient by news organisations (McCombs & Valenzuela, 2014). Agenda setting helps to direct public attention to specific issues that determine which social issues “especially deserve public attention” (Althaus & Tewksbury, 2002, p. 180). This may be the reason why some issues are discussed in the public debate and end up on the policy agenda, while others remain unexplored and do not make it to either the media or policy agenda (Dearing & Rogers, 1992). If an issue does not enter the mainstream news media agenda, it can be considered irrelevant to society at large (Carroll & McCombs, 2003). One such example is industrial development projects carried out in the Sámi region, which dominate both Sámi media and politics, but which rarely end up on the mainstream media agenda (Josefsen & Skogerbø, 2021). Previous research on Indigenous journalism highlights the role of Indigenous media in language revitalisation, in which Indigenous media act as a watchdog and as they create counter narratives (Hanusch, 2014; Markelin, 2017; Pietikäinen, 2008; Sara, 2007). This study presents the need for a shift in focus by applying the network agenda setting theory (Valenzuela, 2019) and the concept of media transparency (Tsetsura & Kruckeberg, 2017) to examine the Sámi news media agenda. The conditions for media transparency are met when opposite and conflicting truths of various news sources are presented in the news and the news consumer knows through which channels information from news sources is passed on to journalists and their news media (Tsetsura & Kruckeberg 2017).

The agenda setting power of the media is based on its ability to create salient issue combinations by “bundling different objectives and attributes and make these bundles of elements salient in the public minds simultaneously” (Guo, Vu & McCombs, 2012, p. 55). Moreover, how often these combinations of topics are repeated in the news indicates the connection between these issues (Vargo et al., 2014). The co-existence of certain topics in the news may lead to these combinations of issues being considered more relevant to society than other fragmented issues, which may produce different types of policy outcomes (Kioussis et al., 2013). On the other hand, the agenda setting may offer opportunities for the transfer of salience from the Indigenous media agenda to the mainstream media agenda in ways that are favourable to Indigenous peoples (Waller, 2010, p. 27).

Agenda building

The agenda building process, first explained by Cobb and Elder (1971), is focused on questions such as “Where public issues come from? How is an agenda built... and who participates in the process of building it?” (Cobb & Elder, 1971, p. 905). The process attracts many social actors including, but not limited to, mainstream news media and Indigenous Sámi news media, which operates in the resource-rich Arctic to influence the Sámi media agenda, shape public opinion, and ultimately influence political decision making on important matters such as industrial development (Sara et al., 2022; Sara, 2018).

The agenda building theory assumes that the news media do not act alone but in tandem with many other social actors (Boumans, 2018), such as governments, corporations, politicians, policy makers, non-government organisations (NGOs), individual citizens, other stakeholder groups; and with pressure groups who serve certain interests in society, are involved in setting the media agenda (Lee & Xu, 2017) and participate in news creation (Ragas & Tran, 2019).

The interaction between journalists and news sources offers opportunities for many social actors to transfer salience from the stakeholder agenda to the media agenda (Cheng, Golan & Kioussis, 2015). This shows how the priorities of journalists as gatekeepers and the efforts of news sources are combined and reflected in the news (Miller, 2010). For journalists, newsworthiness should be the sole basis for news gathering. However, public relations practitioners wish to appear as credible news sources and thus want to place press releases in the news (Tsetsura & Kruckeberg, 2017). Hence, the most effective way to influence news probably is to produce information subsidies that meet the news criteria and minimise costs, especially for small news organisations (Boumans, 2018).

Today, NGOs build mutually beneficial relationships with journalists on issues such as human rights and the environment. This can be viewed as a “cooperative rather than power-distance perspective” (Camaj, 2016, p. 1), allowing NGOs to become “influential actors” (Camaj, 2016, p. 2) in creating a news agenda and in bringing about societal change (Camaj, 2016, p. 13). Similarly, alternative media seek to build reciprocal relations with NGOs and social movements (Haas, 2004). Likewise, the Sámi news media need the support of the Sámi civil society to cover controversial issues (Sara et al., 2022).

Media non-transparency and opacity

In this article, we use the concept of incomplete truth to define and analyse media non-transparency and opacity, and to examine the ethical foundations of journalism. When disseminating information as “truth”, most western media do not outright lie, nor do they tell the full truth. (Tsetsura & Kruckeberg, 2017). Still, the ethics of journalism requires the discloser of the truth to use several sources, allowing the consumer of the news to decide what the truth is in each case.

News media transparency and its opposites, news media non-transparency and opacity, relate to the processes of gathering and disseminating information in which that information is presented as truth to news consumers. News media transparency is achieved when no hidden influences exist or when such influences are clearly and directly presented in the media. On the other hand, media opacity assumes that hidden influences on the media exist, and such influences affect the outcome of the processes. In other words, news is not communicated to consumer to the full extent. (Tsetsura & Kruckeberg, 2017)

Tsetsura and Kruckeberg (2017, p. 6) coined the term “incomplete truth”, defined as presented news information in which the presenter of the information “intentionally omitted contextualizing or purposefully failed to identify influences that have altered the presentation” of the news, to highlight hidden media influences. The concept of the incomplete truth helps to explain media opacity and the information presented in the news

as mainly true and accurate. However, when media opacity is present, some of the information is not placed in context, or some known influences are intentionally left unidentified. (Tsetsura & Kruckeberg, 2017)

Study background

The three-billion-euro Arctic Railway project has been called one of Finland's top projects (Liikennevirasto, 2018). However, the railway would have a major impact on the Sámi and the local communities in Northern Finland and Norway because it would pave the way for further construction of mines and wind power. Indeed, the Arctic Railway is planned to be built from the city of Roavvenjárga/Rovaniemi, Finland to the city of Kirkonjárga/Kirkenes, Norway. It would have impact on six Sámi reindeer herding cooperatives in Finland and affect the Sámi region in Norway by dividing one reindeer herding district and influencing another. In addition, it would connect Arctic Europe to the Northeast Passage and cut down the supply line from the Asian market to Europe by 24 days. In the South, the Arctic Railway would open a direct connection from Central Europe through the planned Helsinki-Tallinn tunnel to the shore of the Arctic Ocean. In doing so, this large-scale project will have a significant impact on the environment, local and Sámi communities and traditional industries, as well as the social economy of Northern Finland.

Research data and method

The study utilises a combination of qualitative content analysis and discourse analysis to examine how various stakeholders are presented as news sources in coverage of the Arctic Railway project in the Sámi media broadcaster Yle Sápmi. In this study, discourses are investigated as "socially constructed knowledge" and seen as embedded in everyday practices to serve the interests of those who promote them (Machin & Van Leeuwen, 2007, p. 44). Therefore, it is important to ask whose interests they serve, and how the media agenda is formed. As part of this investigation, the study looks at Yle Sápmi's role as the Sámi unit of the Finnish Broadcasting Company, Yle, in informing the Sámi and in providing an arena for the Sámi to publicly debate social issues important to them (Sara, 2007).

The study examined 65 online news articles by Yle Sápmi, which were collected between 2013 and 2020 by monitoring Yle Sápmi's news coverage. The period for collecting the data is divided into three stages:

- 1) in 2013-2016, the Arctic Railway was the subject of political debate in Finland;
- 2) in 2017, the planning of the Arctic Railway was transferred from the Council of State of Finland to the Ministry of Transport and Communications of Finland; and
- 3) in 2018-2019, both opposition to and promotion of the Arctic Railway intensify. In this study, those promoting the Arctic Railway are referred to as pro-railway news sources and those opposing the project are referred to as contra-railway news sources.

Research questions

The study is guided by the following research questions:

- RQ1: What types of discourses were presented in Yle Sápmi's news coverage of the Arctic Railway?
- RQ2: What news sources influenced Yle Sápmi's news coverage of the Arctic Railway plan and how transparent was that influence?

Discourses in Yle Sápmi's news coverage

Six discourses were identified in RQ1. Out of the six, three were pro-railway and three were contra-railway discourses. The pro-railway discourses were: 1) progress and natural resource, 2) it is not current now, and 3) assessing the impact on Sámi culture. The contra-railway discourses were: 1) destruction, 2) consultation with the Sámi, and 3) everything has been taken away from. In what follows, the details of each discourse are discussed.

Pro-discourses

The progress and natural resource discourse highlighted the development of the Arctic through the exploitation of natural resources. It emphasised the accessibility of the Arctic region for tourism and the transport of natural resources, such as fish, timber, and minerals. It required urgent decision-making and Nordic co-operation, especially with Norway, so that Finland could compete for global development projects in the Arctic. The Arctic Railway would connect Arctic Europe with markets of Central Europe and Asia.

The it is not current now discourse pointed out that the construction of the Arctic Railway should not be rushed and its impact on public finances and transport needed to be thoroughly assessed. It encouraged the evaluation of the Arctic Railway as part of a larger whole that might open opportunities. Although there was enough transport capacity for now, the situation might change in the future. The discourse calls for an assessment of impact of the Arctic Railway on the mining industry, energy demand and tourism.

The assessing the impact on Sámi culture discourse stated that the Arctic Railway would have a major impact on the Sámi culture, therefore, its effects on the environment, the Sámi as an indigenous people, and Sámi reindeer herding should be thoroughly assessed. The discourse stated that the Arctic Railway should be constructed in a way that would minimise damage to reindeer herding. It emphasised the benefits of the Arctic Railway in line with the green shift and pointed out that it was not always possible to reconcile environmental and climate considerations.

Contra-discourses

The destruction discourse highlighted the negative effects of the Arctic Railway, such as expansion of the mining, oil, and forestry industries, which would increase pollution and accelerate climate change. It referred to industrial development and the destruction of the

Sámi culture, whose industries were built on northern forests and fishing waters. The Arctic Railway would fragment pastures and would disrupt reindeers' natural routes.

The consultation with the Sámi discourse required an assessment of cultural, social, and economic impact of the Arctic Railway on the Sámi people. In addition to Sámi reindeer herding, the railway would have cumulative effects on the Sámi languages, fishing, handicrafts, and the rights of the Sámi to pursue their traditional livelihoods. With the disappearance of traditional land use, the associated use of language and traditional knowledge of the Sámi people would disappear.

The everything has been taken away from discourse referred to the centuries-old history of colonialism, when Sámi religion and languages were destroyed by the church and authorities. That colonial influence is still present was a major focus of this discourse. The question that was asked as part of this discourse was "Isn't anything enough to the Finnish state?" The discourse referred to the earlier forced relocations of the Skolt Sámi from Russia and the Vuohčču/Vuotso Sámi in the Southern part of the Sámi homeland.

Altogether, the identified discourses were present in the media agenda unequally. Pro-discourses were often presented by Finnish government authorities and members of parliament. Sámi people, representatives, and activities were the main stakeholders who presented contra-discourses. Together, these discourses shaped the Yle Sápmi's media agenda and guided discussions around the construction of the Arctic Railway between 2013 and 2021.

Sources of influence on Yle Sápmi's coverage

RQ2 asked what news sources influenced Yle Sápmi's news coverage of the Arctic Railway plan and how transparent that influence was. To answer this question, authors organised the Yle Sápmi's news coverage of the Arctic Railway chronologically to demonstrate how news source selection took place and what changes and shifts happened between the initial coverage of the debate in 2013 and the 2021 coverage. In what follows, the study presents the topics of the debate and discusses news source selection and presence (or absence) from coverage during these periods: 1) 2013-2016; 2) 2017; 3) 2018-2019; 4) 2019; and 5) 2020.

Subject of Finland's political debate in 2013-2016

An analysis of 15 news items published between 2013 and 2016 showed that the Government of Finland, several members of the Finnish Parliament, and some Lapland's³ business sector representatives dominated news coverage by Yle Sápmi. During this period, 80% of news sources used by Yle Sápmi expressed support for the Arctic Railway; 20% represented the view of those who opposed. These news sources included some Sámi reindeer herders and the President of the Sámi Parliament of Finland. In addition, the intermedia agenda setting was evident, as other news media, such as Yle Lappi, NRK Sápmi, and the Barents Observer, were used as news sources.

³ Lapland is the northernmost province of Finland. The Sámi homeland of Finland is the northernmost part of the province of Lapland. The provinces are part of the Finnish administrative system and both Sámi and Finns live in the province of Lapland.

The overall picture for this period is that the Finnish government, leading politicians, and businesses are considered “influential news sources that make the news” (Foster 2012, p. 306) by Yle Sápmi. These sources were able to transfer salience from the stakeholder agenda to Yle Sápmi’s agenda, while Sámi news sources were almost completely excluded.

Most of the news articles between 2013 and 2016 were based on information subsidies by ministers, the Council of State of Finland, and some MPs. In 2013, some leading Finnish politicians enter Yle Sápmi’s agenda to discuss the pros and cons of building the Arctic Railway. However, media opacity and hidden influences in the process of gathering and disseminating news were also found in some news articles (Tsetsura & Kruckeberg 2017). For instance, one news item from 2013 stated that “Finnish MP’s underpin the construction of the Arctic Railway from Finland to the shore of the Arctic Ocean⁴.” However, it remained unclear which MPs were the news sources and whether they had, in fact, been interviewed for the article.

In 2014, the Barents Observer’s news on the inclusion of the Arctic Railway in Finland’s top projects and the Confederation of Finnish Industries’ surveying the Arctic Railway project was covered by Yle Sápmi. However, the consumer of the news does not know who has been interviewed and whose truths are presented in the comments included in the articles. All in all, it remains unclear whether news sources have been interviewed or whether information subsidies have been reproduced and disseminated by Yle Sápmi. In addition, the inclusion of merely one news source in each news item indicates “non-transparent media practices and the dissemination of news, in which incomplete truths are presented as truth” (Tsetsura & Kruckeberg 2017, p. 56). In another example, a Yle Sápmi’s news publication in 2015 was based on information subsidies issued by the Council of State and the then prime ministers of Finland, Norway, and Sweden on business opportunities that would follow the construction of the Arctic Railway. Media opacity was evident in that example as well, as only the ‘truths’ of the then Nordic prime ministers were collected and disseminated.

The dialogue between the ministry and the Sámi Parliament dominates in 2017

An analysis of five news articles from 2017 showed they mainly focused on the dialogue between the Ministry of Transport and Communications of Finland and the President of the Sámi Parliament of Finland. Although, the news coverage by Yle Sápmi was more balanced, 60% of Yle Sápmi’s sources were still those in favour of the Arctic Railway. Information subsidies produced by the Ministry of Transport and Communications of Finland and related interviews on the profitability of the Arctic Railway, the needs of users and different track options get covered. The President of the Sámi Parliament was the only contra news source selected by Yle Sápmi. (cf. Sara et al. 2022) In addition, Yle Sápmi’s news was produced based on information subsidies issued by the Lapland’s regional council on Lapland’s regional land use plan 2040, which included the Arctic Railway track. As in previous years, non-transparent media practices and opacity occurred (Tsetsura & Kruckeberg 2017), as the President of the Sámi Parliament of

⁴ ‘Riikkabeaivvit háliidit oktavuoda Jieknamerrii’ by Yle Sapmi October 4, 2013. <https://yle.fi/sapmi/3-6863300>

Finland and the Ministry of Transport and Communications of Finland were the only news sources whose truths were gathered and disseminated by Yle Sápmi.

Opposition and promotion of the Arctic Railway increase in 2018-2019

Significantly more Sámi news sources were included in the Yle Sápmi's news coverage, as 65% of the sources were contra and 35% were pro railway news sources. In 2018, 32 available news articles were analysed. During this time, Yle Sápmi's news coverage looks similar to previous years, as the President of the Sámi Parliament of Finland and the minister/Ministry of Transport and Communications of Finland dominate. Information statements issued by MPs and regional authorities were also present in the articles.

In 2018, Yle Sápmi's news production on the Arctic Railway was driven by information subsidies of the Ministry of Transport and Communications of Finland. The President of the Sámi Parliament of Finland was systematically selected as a news source commenting on the ministry's actions. Media opacity seemed to be present because only the points of view of the President of the Sámi Parliament of Finland and the Ministry of Transport and Communications of Finland were disseminated.

The turnaround in Yle Sápmi's news production occurred in February-March 2018, when the Ministry of Transport and Communications of Finland announced the final route for the Arctic Railway from the city of Roavvenjárga/Rovaniemi, Finland to the city of Kirkonjárga/Kirkenes, Norway at the shore of the Arctic Ocean. During that time, members of the Sámi parliament, and of Sámi organisations, as well as several Sámi reindeer herders, including young Sámi reindeer herders, and citizens who either supported or opposed the plan to build the Arctic Railway, were chosen as news sources. In addition, Yle Sápmi's news was not only a reproduction of information provided, news sources were also interviewed. Moreover, the President of the Sámi Parliament no longer unilaterally dominated the news agenda, but other Sámi actors were chosen as news sources. Media opacity and presentation of "incomplete truth"⁵ were noticeable in the coverage. Some of the selected news sources, and thus the truths they present, were close to the President of the Sámi Parliament or the selected news sources represented the same interests, industry, and organisation as the president. Likewise, news sources representing the truths of other traditional Sámi industries, such as fishing, tourism, and hunting, were not presented in Yle Sápmi's media agenda (cf. Sara et al. 2022). Unlike in previous years, other members of the Sámi Parliament and some individuals who were either in favour of the project or concerned about its polluting effects and the loss of traditional lands were chosen as news sources. However, the points of view of these sources (or their truths), according to Tsetsura & Kruckeberg (2017) were not linked to other traditional Sámi industries or stakeholder groups. Their truths were presented just as truths of some individuals who may or may not be related to Sámi industries or stakeholders.

⁵ Tsetsura and Kruckeberg (2017) use the term "incomplete truth" to highlight external influences. The concept of an incomplete truth is defined as presented news information in which the presenter of the information "intentionally omitted contextualizing or purposefully failed to identify influences that have altered the presentation" of the news (p. 6).

Through the process of media relations, journalists can build mutually beneficial relationships with social movements and NGOs. This ensures that the media have access to news sources and the opportunity for news sources to influence the news. In 2018, several Sámi and other non-Indigenous actors who opposed the Arctic Railway plan built such mutually beneficial relations with each other and by doing so managed to push issues from their stakeholder agenda to the Sámi media agenda. These groups organised 'Red Line, No Consent, No Access' demonstrations by utilising strategic framing, networking and agenda building tactics. Some less powerful Sámi actors, such as Suohpanterror Art group⁶, Sámi Reindeer Herding Cooperatives⁷, the Finnish Sámi Youth⁸ (SSN) and local Sámi communities, allied with the more powerful Greenpeace organisation to challenge the promoters of the Arctic Railway and to promote their own interests. Framing was used to create salience by including issues important both for Greenpeace and the Sámi groups involved, such as deforestation, pasture fragmentation, industrial development, pollution, climate change and the rights of the Sámi, to attract the attention of Sámi media.

These groups voice their strong opposition to the construction of the Arctic Railway. They had much to lose but little to win in this case, and thus they were highly motivated to stop the construction process. Greenpeace had the necessary economic, social, legal, and political resources as well as strategic communication skills that the less powerful Sámi actors lacked. However, to increase its legitimacy and gain momentum for its forest protections requirements, Greenpeace allied with the less powerful Sámi actors. By doing so, these groups were able to push their interests onto Yle Sápmi's media agenda and participate in the creation of news.

In 2019, the Arctic Railway is found unprofitable, but its design continues

In 2019, a total of 10 available news articles were analysed, with 60% opposing the Arctic Railway and 40% supporting it. Breaking news events on the Arctic Railway in 2019 were: the Arctic Railway was found unprofitable by the Finnish-Norwegian working group established the Ministry of Transport and Communications of Finland; and the Regional Council of Lapland requested statements on the Northern Lapland's regional land use plan 2040, including the Arctic Railway.

2019 began with newly identified news sources as the chairmen of nine youth organisations of Finnish parties, municipal politicians in Ohcejohka/Utsjoki and individual citizens were selected as news sources and interviewed on the Arctic Railway plan. Still, Yle Sápmi's news coverage lacked media transparency as the truths of the same news sources were collected and disseminated as in previous years. Information provided by the Ministry of Transport and Communications of Finland and the officials and politicians of the Regional Council of Lapland was reproduced and disseminated by Yle Sápmi and dominated coverage. Also, the Chairman of the Sámi Parliament of Finland, the Chairman of the Skolt Village Administration, other members of the Sámi Parliament of Finland, a

⁶ <https://www.instagram.com/suohpanterror/>, <https://we-make-money-not-art.com/suohpanterror/>, https://www.youtube.com/channel/UC739NzytXZEBFTvJEcoHZVQ/videos?app=desktop&view=0&sort=dd&shelf_id=0

⁷ <https://paliskunnat.fi/reindeer-herders-association/>; <https://paliskunnat.fi/reindeer-herders-association/cooperatives/>

⁸ <https://ssn.fi/en/>

young Sámi reindeer herder, and the then prime minister of Finland, who had been selected as news sources in previous years, were interviewed again. In addition, some Sámi activists set the agenda for Yle Sápmi by opposing one well-known businessman who was promoting the Arctic Railway and by transferring his points of view from the Twitter debate to Yle Sápmi's agenda. The Twitter debate⁹ became more salient as a result of its media coverage. (cf. Sara et al. 2020)

In 2020, Arctic Railway news decreases

In 2020, news on the Arctic Railway plan decreased significantly. Statements on Lapland's regional land use plan 2040, including the Arctic Railway plan, were submitted to the Regional Council of Lapland and there were delays in its planning. Nevertheless, the same sources as in previous years, such as the Council of Lapland, the President of the Sámi Parliament of Finland, Lapland's MPs, and a businessman promoting the Arctic Railway, were selected as news sources. By now, these actors had achieved the status of credible news sources, and they were able to place their points of view on Yle Sápmi's media agenda and their truths were disseminated as the truth by Yle Sápmi.

Discussion and recommendations for future studies

In the global study of media transparency, Finnish media was ranked first as the world's least corrupt news media (Tsetsura, & Kruckeberg, 2017). However, the results of this study showed that even the most transparent country in the world, Finland, faces issues with media transparency. The news coverage surrounding the Arctic Railway plan by Yle Sápmi, the Sámi unit of the Finnish National Broadcasting Company Yle, included non-transparent media practices, such as hidden influences and incomplete truths resulting in what Tsetsura and Kruckeberg call media opacity.

The Finnish political elite, including the Finnish government, the Council of State, several MPs, and the business sector, maintained a heated public debate on the pros and cons of the Arctic Railway between 2013 and 2016. The press releases produced by those powerful agents were classified as credible news sources by Yle Sápmi. This showed that state bodies and other organisations with financial power and access to other resources were better positioned to provide information to the media and were utilised as more reliable news sources. As a result, their voices, and truths (following the terminology offered by Tsetsura and Kruckeberg, 2017) were more often reflected in Yle Sápmi's news agenda. Between 2013 and 2016, the truths of well-resourced actors were more likely to get on the Yle Sápmi's airwaves than the truths of less-resourced actors. This finding indicates that Indigenous Sámi news media maintained similar practices as mainstream news media as it considered the government to be a more credible news source than local stakeholders and activists.

⁹ For example: Tweet: "Angry Birds vs. Angry Sámi - @pvesterbacka is planning to destroy the Sámi culture and destroy the village of the Skolt Sámi, who have already lost their land once during the war with his #Arctic Railway - plan. The climate, Lapland's nature and tourism are at risk" (May 10th, 2019).

Moreover, hidden influences created media opacity as Sámi news consumers did not always know who had been interviewed for the news stories and whose truths were presented in the comments found to be newsworthy by Yle Sápmi. In addition, Indigenous truths were not always proffered since the information that came from Sámi actors was not placed in the context of Indigenous concerns. As a result, key influences were left unidentified.

When the planning of the Arctic Railway was transferred to the Ministry of Transport and Communications of Finland, media opacity that hides influences continued to create an incomplete truth (Tsetsura & Kruckeberg, 2017) in the news coverage surrounding the Arctic Railway by Yle Sápmi. Yle Sápmi did not seek to earn the trust of Sámi news consumers as merely the truths of the President of the Sámi Parliament of Finland and the Ministry of the Transport and Communications of Finland were gathered and disseminated. For example, the experts who could discuss, among other issues, the consequences of railway construction on the environment were not selected as news sources by Yle Sápmi to be included in the coverage of the Arctic Railway construction.

In 2018, other Sámi organisations and actors, such as other interest groups, Sámi NGO, other members of the Sámi parliament, and individual citizens, were selected as news sources by Yle Sápmi. Still, the truths were very selective: only those who represented reindeer herding were often selected as news sources, while those who represented other Sámi industries, including fishing and tourism, were not selected. Interestingly, only individuals close to the President of the Sámi Parliament of Finland or persons and organisations who represented the same interests as the president were selected as news sources. Hence, the incomplete truths or the truths of a single source were presented as the truth.

Despite the lack of representation in earlier years of coverage, some less powerful Sámi actors in 2018 were able to transfer salience from their stakeholder agenda to Yle Sápmi's agenda by allying with powerful and well-resourced organisations with the financial and other resources. By doing so, those Sámi actors became credible news sources who were able to place their truths on the agenda of Yle Sápmi. In 2019, news coverage of the transfer of the Arctic Railway planning to developers sparked a hot Twitter debate among its opponents. Some Sámi activists opposing the Arctic Railway plan were able to transfer salience from Twitter to the Yle Sápmi's news agenda. Thus, activists were able to set the agenda for Yle Sápmi regarding the Arctic Railway plan.

Over time, many actors were able to influence the Yle Sápmi's news agenda on the Arctic Railway plan and, in the process, to present themselves as credible news sources. At the same time, the lack of balanced coverage and transparency in gathering multiple sources of information resulted in dissemination of incomplete truths as one truth. Yle Sápmi media outlet was unable to fully function as a truly Indigenous media outlet that should provide opportunities for all Indigenous actors to participate in public discourse related to the Arctic Railway construction.

This study demonstrated that future research is warranted to examine in more detail this and other cases and examples of potential media opacity, enacted by the Indigenous media outlets, in the process of gathering and covering news on controversial topics that

are of interest to Indigenous communities. Theoretically, such examination will propel our understanding of media opacity and its effects on the credibility and quality of the Indigenous media around the world. Future studies can focus on uncovering everyday journalistic practices and processes that Indigenous journalists use to gather and disseminate information to develop professional guidelines guarding against media opacity in Indigenous media. Researchers can also investigate decision-making processes inside Indigenous media outlets to better understand how media opacity can be minimised. Finally, practically speaking, investigation of perceptions of media coverage of debatable topics among various Indigenous stakeholders, through participant observations and in-depth interviews, would help crystalise effective and efficacious ways to present Indigenous truths to Indigenous as well as mainstream media.

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