

Getting Beyond the Bots: Understanding Disinformation

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<https://globalsecurity.asu.edu>



The threat of disinformation

Security of democratic processes

Sovereignty of democratic nations

Disruptions to citizens' expression
of political will and wisdom



(primarily)
**Cognitive security is not a technical
problem, it is a human problem**

Misconception:

disinformation is about truth vs. falsity

Misconception:

It's all about the bots

If fact-checking is not enough, and identifying inauthentic amplification is not enough, what is needed to better identify, understand, and model disinformation?

Context

Narrative and understanding

image ≠ 'truth'

World understood
contextually

Narrative provides
context



Research Challenge

Leverage narrative as systems to reveal context and sense-making framework of information environment in order to facilitate computational modeling, detection , tracking, and projection of influence

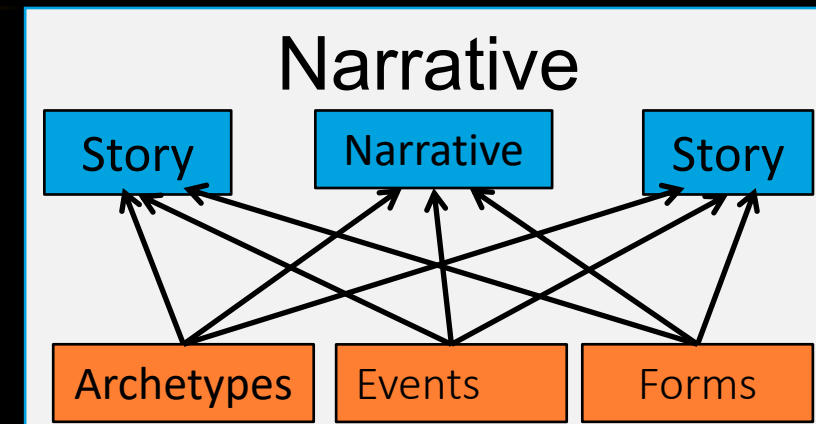
Narratives are a **process of understanding**

- We organize data – actions, actors, words, images – into consequence
- Culture provides templates for organizing this data



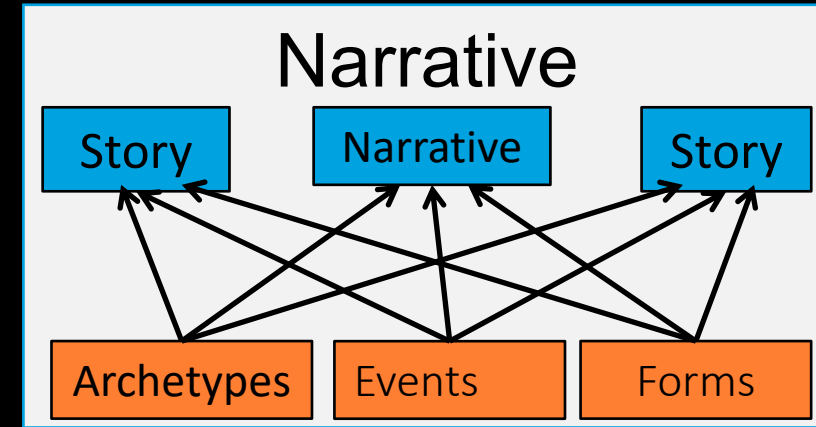
Narratives are **systems**

- Intersect at multiple levels: personal, organizational, community, societal
- Share components in a ***narrative landscape***



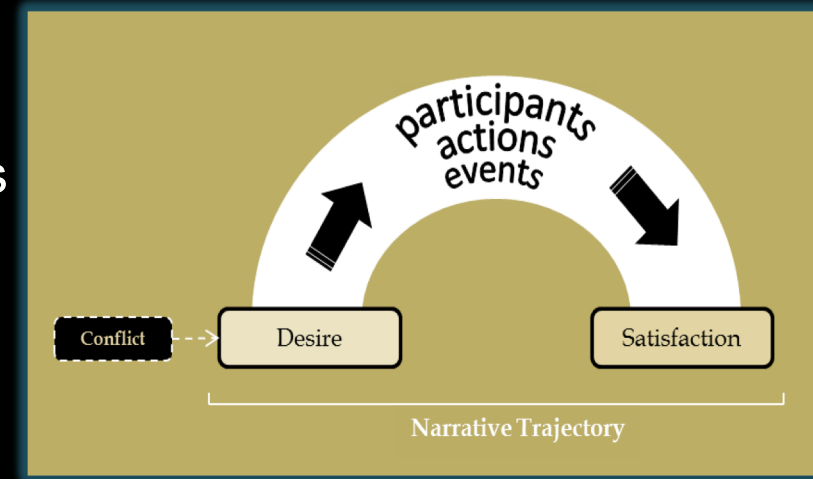
Narratives are **systems**

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Form and structure

- As important to **meaning making** as content
- Structure provided by culture and pre-existing narratives
- Content elements play **narrative functional roles**



Narrative Analysis: “Swedish culture under threat”

Protagonist: Swedish society

Antagonist: Forces eroding society

Desire/Goal: Maintain Swedish society
Stop western influences
Stop refugees, immigrants

Stories participating in system:

- Acquittal from domestic abuse charges attributed to Sharia law (COMPLICATION)
- Anti-hate-speech programs overreach and impede free speech (COMPLICATION)
- Liberalism, Political Correctness, Islam, Secularism, Far-Right & Far-Left Politics
- Refugees/Immigrants
- NATO, US, EU : Loss of Neutrality; Loss of Sovereignty



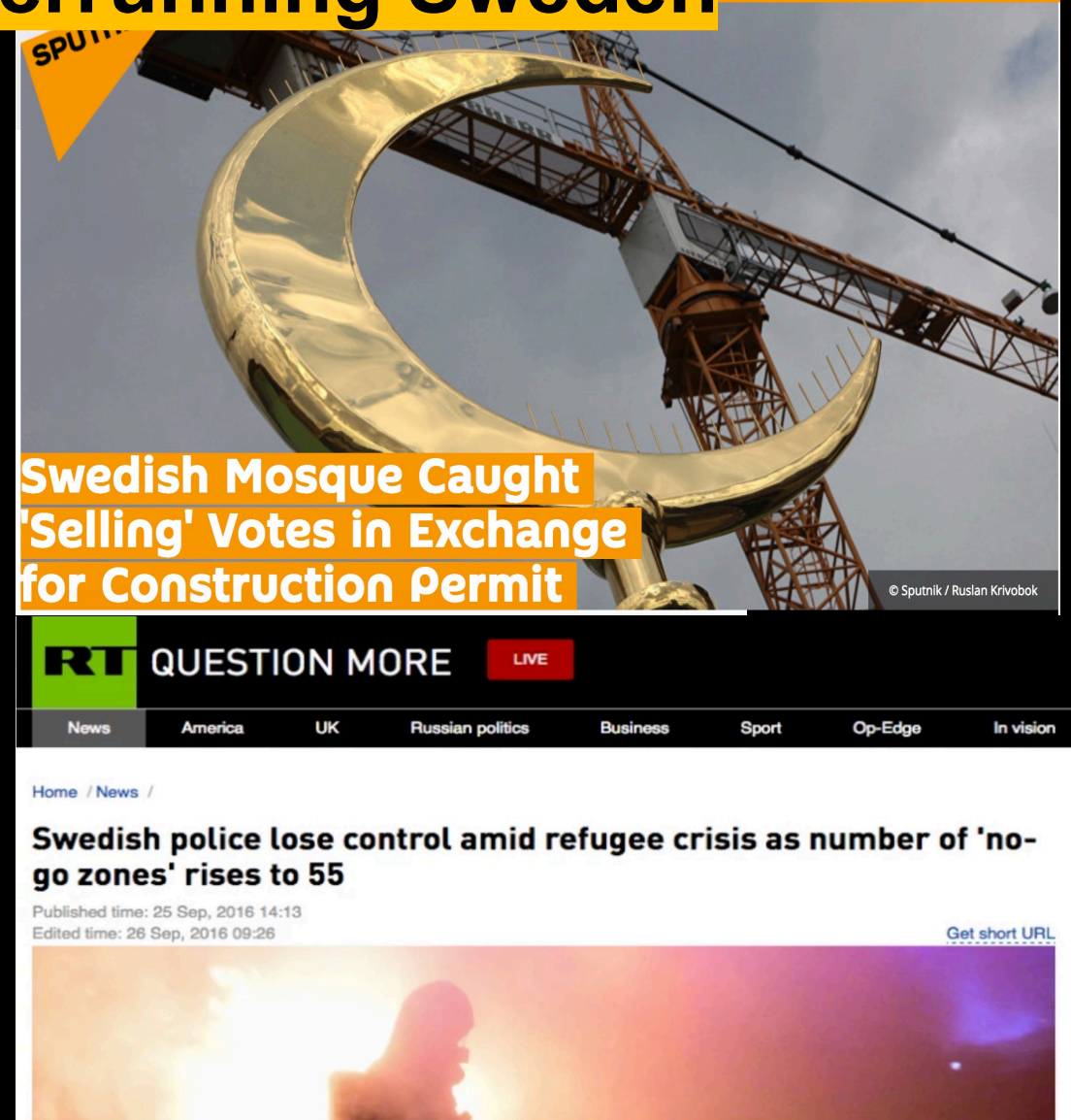
Narrative's proposed **resolution**: Sweden insulate/retreat from external engagement.

Narrative Analysis: Violence overrunning Sweden

Protagonist: Swedish society
Antagonist: Criminals
Desire/Goal: safe and secure Sweden

Stories participating in system:

- Ineffectiveness or incompetence of Swedish police to control crime (COMPLICATION)
- misrepresented crime statistics used as evidence that Sweden is unsafe and violent (CONFLICT)
- Stories of everyday citizens intervening to douse fires, obstruct crime (PROGRESSING)



Narrative's implied resolution: new government with new policies.
(Note how this narrative system erodes faith in government, celebrates individuals).

Narrative Analysis: Sweden and Russia relationship

Core Conflict: collaborators or competitors
Protagonist: Sweden
Antagonist: Uncertainty
Desire/Goal: stable relationship with Russia

Stories participating in system:

- Swedish participation in NATO activities (COMPLICATION)
- Stories of Russophobia and misinformation about Russia (COMPLICATION)
- Cooperation on Arctic Treaty (PROGRESSING)
- Stories of economic activity, such as Swedish business in Krasnodar



Narrative's **resolution**: close economic relations with Russia: rejection of NATO

Conclusion

Engaging with disinformation as a national security threat requires expanding computational analysis from social network analysis, topic modeling, media forensics and approaches rooted in distinguishing truth from falsehood and detecting inauthentic behavior, to modeling contexts and the framework in which information may be understood.