# Does brain research provide insights in teaching media literacy?

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## Research background and questions

- Misinformation is spreading (particularly in social media)
  - false news spread farther, faster and deeper than the truth.
    - Vosoughi S., et al. (2018) The spread of true and false news online. *Science* 09 Mar 2018: Vol. 359, Issue 6380, pp. 1146-1151
- Can we learn something from brain mechanisms about it?
- Can we develop specific strategies to support students' media literacy with educating about brain mechanisms?

## Aim of the research project

- Use neurobiological methods such as brain imaging to examine questions of human social group behaviour.
- Examine news evaluation and sharing
  - the influence of peer feedback
  - on the behavioral and neurocognitive level
- Developing educational interventions to support adolescents' critical media literacy.



### Background: Human's social nature

- Humans are social creatures; we evolved to live in groups and our brains have developed to thrive in social environments.
- Humans wish to synchronize with others, to understand other's thoughts, emotions, opinions and values, and to be understood and respected.



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Background: Information perception

- Social and neurocognitive target points to propagate information
  - novelty seeking,
  - awareness for potential dangers,
  - the need to belong.







## Background: Social media

Particularly, social media exploit these mechanisms:

- tools for social interaction: liking, commenting and sharing,
- the information is more directly and instantly accessible,
- the sheer amount of easily available information, makes it difficult to select relevant information.
- Easy production and wide access facilitate rapid information sharing and can powerfully increase the spread of misinformation.



### Background: the adolescent brain

- Adolescents are exposed to a multitude of news, while their brains are still maturing.
- Adolescents are still developing metalizing skills; i.e., the ability to infer the intentions of others and are more influenced by their peer group.



### Background: Need for teaching "critical media literacy"

- to enable learning children and teenagers to understand, cope and responsibly act in the media world;
- involving skills to evaluate media content, to interpret meanings and messages, be aware of interactions, influences and manipulation and developing own production skills.





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### Background: Need for teaching "critical media literacy"

- Key concept: critical and reflective thinking.
- We can't stop our neurocognitive processing from happening, but we can be conscious about it.
- Teach students (and teachers) to realize and recognize such patterns and strategies, to be aware of them and react rationally.





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# Two complementary experiments

- Brain imaging:
  - functional magnetic resonance imaging



- Experiment in 9th grade
  - -Video recordings
  - -Field notes
  - -Behavioral questionnaires



## Using brain imaging

- Exposing the brain to multiple magnetic fields (in the scanner).
- Hydrogen protons respond by emitting a electromagnetic signal.
- The scanner receives the signal and uses it to create a high-resolution image of the brain.





## Brain imaging: *functional* MRI

- In *functional* MRI, blood oxygenation level dependent changes are measured: The oxygenation of haemoglobin is recorded and thus the signal reflects *active* neural networks.
- fMRI can identify ongoing neural activity during cognitive tasks with spatial resolution of millimetres.



### News Evaluation: Experimental design for Study 1



# 3 stories 2 different styles 3 media

### News Evaluation: Texts neutral and emotional

### **HELSINGIN SANOMAT**

Uutinen on julkaistu *Helsingin Sanomissa* 26.11.2016

#### Tutkimus: Hammasharjasta löytyi jopa 100 miljoonaa bakteeria

### "Research: Up to 100 million bacteria were found in the toothbrush"

Hammasharjassa voi elää jopa 100 miljoonaa bakteeria, selviää tanskalaisen Suuhygienian Instituutin viime viikolla julkaisemasta tutkimuksesta, jossa tutkittiin viikon käytössä olleita hammasharjoja. Pohjoismaiden suurimman hygieniatuotteita valmistavan yrityksen, tanskalaisen Sundin tuotepäällikkö **Lasse Lindquist** on samaa mieltä siitä, että hammasharja tulee vaihtaa

Harjaksistaja harjan var: pleurokokki-ja kepikokki ientulehdusta, hampaide hengitystä.

Tutkija **Sven Olsonin** mu suotuisan kasvualustan ł "Mikrobiologisesta näköł kannattaisi vaihtaa viikor organismien määrän rajc

### **HELSINGIN SANOMAT**

Uutinen on julkaistu *Helsingin Sanomissa* 26.11.2016

"Yuck - Even diarrhea bacteria inhabit the toothbrushes!"

#### Yöks – hammasharjoissa asustelee jopa ripulibakteereita!

Käytämme hammasharjaa, jotta pääsemme eroon suussamme asustelevista bakteereista. Mutta nimenomaan hammasharja itse on se pahin bakteeripesäke! Vain viikon käytön jälkeen hammasharjassa on jo jopa 100 miljoonaa bakteeria, selviää tanskalaisen Suuhygienian Instituutin tutkimuksesta. Bakteereita asustelee sekä harjaksissa että harjan varressa.

Bakteerit voivat aiheuttaa ientulehdusta, hampaiden reikiintymistä ja mädäntymistä sekä pahanhajuista hengitystä. Mutta ei siinä vielä kaikki.

"Löysimme kolibakteereita, jotka aiheuttavat ripulia, ja stafylokokkibakteereita, jotka aiheuttavat ihotulehduksia", kertoo tutkimusta johtanut tutkimuspäällikkö **Sven Olson**. "Nämä löydökset viittaavat siihen, että hammasharjaa on säilytetty liian lähellä vessanpönttöä. Jokainen vessan vetäminen nimittäin suihkuttaa bakteereja ilmaan", hän kertoo. Lisäksi löysimme myös suurempia ruokajäämiä, ho sienikasvustoaja muita itiöitä."

Olson kertoo, että kosteaan hammasharjaan, erityisesti harjasten tyveen, voi muodostua limakerroksen ympäröimää biofilmiä, joka toimii bakteerien kasvualustana. Edes asianmukainen puhdistus ja harjan kuivuminen käyttökertojen välissä ei sitä kokonaan estä.

"Mikrobiologisesta näkökulmasta katsottuna hammasharjaa kannattaisi vaihtaa viikon tai parin välein bakteerien ja mikroorganismien määrän rajoittamiseksi."

Lisäksi on hyvä tietää, ettei useampaa hammasharjaa kannata säilyttää samassa mukissa, sillä bakteerit voivat helposti siirtyä harjasta toiseen.

Vaikka ajatus hammasharjassa asustavista bakteereista on etova, paniikkiin ei Olsonin mukaan ole syytä: Ihmisen suu ei ole steriili paikka, mutta ongelmia bakteereista aiheutuu vasta silloin, jos suun bakteeritasapaino muuttuu epäterveelliseksi.

### News Evaluation: Sources

A blog post

# PE-IN MATKASSA

Juttu on julkaistu Panu "Pexi" Markkasen blogissa 27.4.2018

#### TUTKIMUS: HAMMASHARJASTA LÖYTYI JOPA 100 MILJOONAA BAKTEERIA

"Research: Up to 100 million bacteria were found in the toothbrush"

Hammasharjassa voi elää jopa 100 miljoonaa bakteeria, selviää tanskalaisen Suuhygienian Instituutin viime viikolla julkaisemasta tutkimuksesta, jossa tutkittiin viikon käytössä olleita hammasharjoja.

Harjaksista ja harjan varsista löytyi muun muassa fonokokki-, pleurokokki- ja kepikokkibakteereita, jotka voivat aiheuttaa ientulehdusta, hampaiden reikiintymistä ja pahanhajuista hengitystä.

Tutkija **Sven Olsonin** mukaan kostea hammasharja tarjoaa suotuisan kasvualustan bakteereille ja monenlaisille homeille. "Mikrobiologisesta näkökulmasta katsottuna hammasharjaa kannattaisi vaihtaa viikon tai parin välein bakteerien ja mikroorganismien määrän rajoittamiseksi." Pohjoismaiden suurimman hygieniatuotteita yrityksen, tanskalaisen Sundin tuotepäällikkö on samaa mieltä siitä, että hammasharja tulee vaihtaa säännöllisesti uuteen, vähintään parin kuukauden välein.

Lisäksi hän korostaa hammasharjan oikeanlaista säilytystä. "Hammasharja tulee puhdistaa hyvin jokaisen käyttökerran jälkeen, ja sitä tulee säilyttää pystyasennossa ja ilmavasti, jotta se pääsee kuivumaan."

Vaikka bakteerien määrät kuulostavat suurilta, tutkija Olsonin mukaan syytä paniikkiin ei ole.

"Ihmisen suu ei ole alun alkaenkaan steriili. Kehon oma vastustuskykyon kyllin voimakastorjumaan hammasharjasta lähtöisin olevat, tauteja aiheuttavat bakteerit. Niistä voi aiheutua ongelmia vasta silloin, jos suun bakteeritasapaino jostain syystä muuttuu epäterveelliseksi."

### Brain imaging: Experimental design

- The aim was to investigate the neural correlates of news' evaluation and the influence of the peer group.
- In the study, the subjects evaluate news and report their willingness to share them while measuring their brain activity with fMRI. Still in the scanner, the subjects get feedback and are asked if they wish to change their evaluation.



#### HELSINGIN SANOMAT

#### Yöks - hammasharjoissa asustelee jopa ripulibakteereita! shariaa jotta nääsemme eroon harja itse on se pahin bakteeripesäke ceen hammasharjassa.on jo jopa 100 aria, selviää tanskalaisen Suuhygienia esta Bakteereita asustelee sekä

kkā Sum Ok

ofilmiä jokatoimii bakteerien kasvualustana Edes

Lisäksi löysimme myös suurempia ruokajää



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## Results brain imaging

### **Preliminary findings:**

- Attention is paid to the source.
- Emotional news are perceived as more emotional than neutral.

### Brain activation could be hypothesized in areas of

- content evaluation (e.g. emotionality)
- formation of opinion,
- social learning,
- mentalising,
- reward.

### Class experiment (Part I): Group discussion about



- 1. Reliability of the news
- 2. Different Sources
- 3. Different versions

### Class experiment (Part II): Debriefing

**Neurocognitive bases** 



**Social bases** 



**Computational bases** 





Journalistic bases

# Class experiment: Part I

Part I took one school lesson

### Round 1. Reliability of the news

 The students discussed the news text stimuli as introduced before. In three rounds of discussions they discussed about the credibility of the news in general. They were discussing why (or not) they find the news credible, if (or not) they found them interesting and if (or not) they would share them to others, e.g., in social media.

# Class experiment: Part I

### Round 2. Different sources

 The students specifically analysed the different sources. They compared the national newspaper (Helsingin Sanomat HS), which is well known and well reputed in Finland, with the "regional" newspaper ("Itä-Suomen Uutiset IT" - in reality this was an invention by us, so it is fictious) and the blog of an individual person (Pexin Matkassa PM).

# Class experiment: Part I

### Round 3. Different versions

 In the third round the students analysed the writing style. They got emotionally written and neutrally written versions of the news and should compare what (different) impression they got by the two versions.

# Class experiment: Part II

Part II took two school lesson

Teaching units of 25 minutes were created as group work (6-8 participants).

Four working stations of news evaluation

The neurocognitive bases, the social bases (group dynamics), the psychological and computational bases (e.g., what happens in a Google search) and the journalistic bases (how does a journalist work in difference to a lay person posting a comment in social media, journalistic ethos, practice, etc.).

Each working station had an interactive "fun" activity, as a small experiment in order to let the students experience the effects at themselves.

# Class experiment: Part II

- In the *neurocognitive station* we did the "stroop test" which included naming of colours instead of reading the letters, i.e. an exercise to inhibit the automatic urge to read letters when we see them.
- In the *social work station*, there was a game as a group competition to experience the idea of "we against them".
- In the *journalistic work station* the students did a Google search with different terms to see differences in results.
- In the *psychological station* students answered questions from the "gapminder test" to show that many things are better than we believe, to show that we have biases in thinking.

Further, there was specific information about the topics (e.g. brain areas, filter bubbles, polarization, work ethos of a journalist) as well as interactive discussions with the students.

### Results from the class experiment

### News evaluation

News style and medium makes a difference for the evaluation of the news. The students based their evaluation a lot on the source. For example, they rated news from the national newspaper (Helsingin Sanomat) as very credible and the blog as less credible ("what is in HS, is credible, because HS is a very trustable source").

### • Group discussion

Group discussion evokes reflection on the media and writing style related to the reliability of the news.

### Debriefing

Debriefing is experienced as positive, it offers new insights and learning.

### Benefits for students

- The program will improve the student's media literacy.
- The teaching units on different underlying bases of information perception, evaluation and production, enables them to understand the topic in depth.
- Focusing on involved brain mechanisms might sharpen their sensitivity and enable them to make conscious decisions of media use.



### Expectations

- The program will improve the student's media literacy.
- Input and insights from neuroscience could provide some valuable aspects to educational research and students could benefit from acquired knowledge.

