

ANDREJ ŠKOLKAY

School of Communication and Media, Bratislava, Slovakia



Populism and Social Media: an Introduction into Meta-Theory¹

In the introduction, we discuss theories and theoretical perspectives on social media. On the one hand, we show some problematic aspects of emerging theories and theoretical perspectives and on the other hand, we show the relative usefulness of some older communication and sociological theories. Then we briefly discuss populism from communication and sociological perspectives. In the next part, we provide an overview of theories and theoretical and empirical perspectives on the role played by social media, and in particular FB, in communication of populist political parties and leaders. We discuss structural opportunity factors for populist communication and summarise findings that confirm that different types of social media have different impacts in political communication by populists as well as among different audiences. There also is consensus that social media do not cause populism but rather create an opportunity for easier, cheap and fast dissemination of populist messages. Furthermore, we identify theories and findings related and relevant to networks in general, and political networks on social media in particular. Finally, we present an emerging theory on populism and social media.

Keywords: populism, social media, populist communication, populist networks, media and communication theories

This chapter explores theoretical thoughts and empirical findings that guided our research on social media research in general, and media sources shared on Facebook (FB) and networking on FB by populist leaders and populist parties in selected European countries' case studies in particular. We preferred a more focused analytical approach. In other words, instead of using the traditional approach that each case study discusses a bit of theory and a bit of methodology – inevitably either very superficially, or at the cost of missing broader context, or possibly contradictory or at least incoherently — we have attempted to concentrate relevant parts. Therefore, we took advantage of publishing collections of case studies and attempted to present a rela-

¹ The author is thankful for comments to Adina Marincea. This project has received funding from the European Union's Horizon 2020 research and innovation programme under grant agreement No 822590 (DEMOS). Any dissemination of results here presented reflects only the consortium's (or, if applicable, author's) view. The Agency is not responsible for any use that may be made of the information it contains.

tively complex and coherent joint theoretical framework. Fundamentally, we compare existing or rather emerging and evolving theories and theoretical perspectives with some of our empirical findings or with experiences gained while conducting research.

Khan, Lee, Park & Park (2015) analysed the networked structure of theories in social sciences represented by co-occurrences on the web. They found that there are these distinct clusters of theories of communication (some theories belong to more than just a single cluster, in particular network theory): Mass media theories (such as Uses and Gratification, Agenda Setting), Interpersonal communication and relationship theories (such as Network theory or Symbolic Interactionism), Communication process theories (e.g. Network theory, framing, priming), Language and linguistics theories (e.g. Argumentation theory), Public relations, advertising, marketing, and consumer behavior theories (central is Attribution theory), Communication and information technology theories (e.g. Computer mediated communication, Network theory, Social Presence, Conceptual Design, Adaptive Structuration theory), Media, culture, and society theories (e.g. Dependency theory, Cultivation theory) (*Khan, Lee, Park, & Park 2015*). Apparently, the network theory and analysis (they did not mention the adjective „social“) is somehow cross-fertilising across some of these clusters of theories. Moreover, Adaptive Structuration theory seems to somehow overlap with the Network Theory. Adaptive Structuration theory is focused on the types of structures that are produced by modern communication technologies and the structures that emerge when people interact through these technologies. Thus, we need to focus on Social (Media) network theory as our key analytical tool, accompanied by some relevant secondary theories such as Adaptive Structuration theory.

There are two distinct approaches to social network analysis (Himmelboim 2017). First, there is a sociocentric network approach that focuses on the quantification of ties between users within a defined group or domain. This is the key research method of our case studies, reflected in our focus on mutually shared links among selected populist leaders or parties and their affiliated „friends“ or „followers“.

Second, an egocentric (i.e., personal) network approach focused on a node and the relationships surrounding this node. This may be seen as reflected in our focus on assumed affinity among populist leaders and parties towards alternative, mainly media, sources on FB. In general, it also reflects the primary level of connections on FB. We used this approach in another research.

We shall discuss the network theories and approaches in detail in the section below. However, we shall attempt to identify relevant secondary theories that can be utilised for supporting or expanding the network theory. The overview by Kapoor, Tamilmani, Rana *et al* (2018) of 132 publications on social media and social networking² found that 17 theories were used by about 50 authors and co-authors. Relatively most frequently was used social exchange theory³ (six times). This clearly suggests that there is no consensus about the most suitable theory – maybe it is impossible, considering variety of general topics researched (from marketing to psychology) and social media types (18, with FB being relatively most frequently researched). Relatively often used social exchange theory does not seem to be relevant for us – or only at a very high level of abstraction.

² In selected information society journals on social media and social networking published between 1997 and 2017.

³ People consider the potential benefits and risks of social relationships.

Perhaps we should come back to another more general theory. Mason and Carr (2021) have suggested to apply traditional social penetration theory⁴ for developing theoretical framework related to „interpersonal relational maintenance in computer-mediated communication“. Yet the authors acknowledge differences between the experiences of face-to-face and computer mediated interactions. In our view, this theory may be useful for explaining certain psychological aspects of political or other forms of social communication. However, it also very much overlaps with further discussed and older but arguably more suitable Uses and Gratification theory.

Qi, Monod, Fang and Deng (2018) presented an interesting analysis of application of philosophy theories to social media analysis, namely Goffman's presentation of the self⁵, Bourdieu's theory of social capital⁶, Sartre's existential vision⁷, and Heidegger's "shared-world"⁸. They found that compared to Goffman and Bourdieu, the theories of Sartre and Heidegger may be more relevant for social media analysis because they were not written from an economic perspective but are more down to earth.

In contrast, for our analytical purpose, Bourdieu's theory of social capital and Goffman's presentation of the self seemed to be quite useful. In particular, Bourdieu's conceptualization is grounded in the theory of symbolic power which can be interpreted as actual *or* virtual resources. Thus, his theory is directly related to political communication in general, and populist online political communication in particular, and very much relevant for social media today.

In the case of Goffman's theory, the central idea is that people, as they interact together in social settings, are constantly engaged in the process of „impression management“ (Crossman 2019). It is difficult to imagine any other current communication tool than social media that would allow very little regulated impression management on a grand scale, at high speed and with immediate feedback.

Yet both Bourdieu's and Goffman's theories can be subsumed under one of the (broader) communication and information technology theories discussed earlier. In particular, it is Social Presence Theory,⁹ and, possibly, for Goffman's theory – also Uses and Gratification theory.

Van Dijk's thoughts on social media (2011) are also an influential contribution. He supported a more decentralised and democratic vision of social media. In his view, the evolution of the four information traffic patterns¹⁰ involves a shift towards local units. Yet Van Dijk saw this move towards local units as an opportunity only. In any case, the qualities of such public consultations or conversations are indeed doubtful. Furthermore, Van Dijk argued that social media causes a shift in regulation towards merger of allocution, consultation, registration and conversation. Indeed,

⁴ Social penetration theory is based on self-disclosure, reciprocal exchange, and on considering the effect of environmental and situational contexts on interpersonal interactions.

⁵ He uses the imagery of theatre in order to portray the importance of the nuances and significance of face-to-face social interactions.

⁶ Social capital enables a person to exert power on the group or individual.

⁷ Only by existing and acting a certain way do we give meaning to our lives.

⁸ In essence, that world is a context of meaningful relationships.

⁹ The ability of communication media have to transmit social cues. The level of social presence influences the quality of virtual interactions and outcomes.

¹⁰ Allocution, consultation, registration and conversation.

our research shows that this merger creates new challenges for policy makers as we discuss in the Policy Discussion Section.

Blumler (2015) has attempted at rather challenging but needed task – to provide synthesis of core theories of political communication. This could perfectly fit into our research focus. He argued, although with some doubts, that Chadwick's (2013) concept of the Hybrid Media System is the most integrative of the digital media theories. Chadwick's theory includes a political information cycle instead of traditional news cycle; change of power relations among political actors, in particular elites and non-elites (which is ideal for study of populism); and cooperation between "old" and "new" journalistic voices. Finally, there is a multivariate attention to political communications (Blumler 2015). Yet this – allegedly the most integrative theory – seems to be more description of reality than explanation of it. It is also strange that we could not identify this theory among clusters of media theories discussed above.

As can be seen, and will be discussed further, many available theories are either too general, or, when confronted with empirical findings, do not survive the test without accepting certain limitations or exceptions. There are some unifying or rather (almost) universal theories that belong to more groups or clusters such as Network Theory. There are also authors who prefer to call a theory according to an original author, while others prefer to use more generic names of theories. In general, there are perhaps too many theories. Moreover, some of them are not really theories since they do not explain but rather describe. In fact, some empirical findings discussed further allow us to create proto-theory explaining emerging relationships between populism and social media.

Anyway, the overall concept of network applied to social media analysis is certainly useful. Moreover, as mentioned, some older theories may be used for theoretical justification of social media analyses, too. These include Uses and Gratification Theory (for explaining „followers“ and „likes“), Social Presence Theory (for explaining „likes“ with regard to shared contributions and emoticons) and Cultivation Theory (from the perspective of echo chambers, fake news, hoaxes and impact in general).

In the next pages, first, we define populism. It is a widely discussed term that has different meanings.

Second, we synthesize the most recent or most important research done in this area. The key question we asked was „What role do social media play, and in particular FB, in the communication of populist political parties and politicians? What does research tell us on this topic?“

Third, we tried to summarise theories related to populists and their linking or sharing or just referring to media on FB or elsewhere on social media.

Fourth, we attempted to identify theories and findings related to political networks on social media, more specifically, networks created by political parties and politicians on social media, in particular on FB.

It should be mentioned that this is, inevitably, a limited review – there are too many studies, including books, already available, and many of them are available in local languages. This is nonetheless of the fact that, as Moffitt (2018, p.33) believes, „the first concerted and comparative effort to explicitly track populism's relationship with social media can perhaps be identified as the UK think-tank Demos' 2011 project on 'digital populism' in Europe. Thus, it is about

a decade old tradition of research on social media and populism. This first project examined and profiled the FB supporters of populist parties in several European countries. “ Their sample of the FB fans from populist parties/movements overlapped with our sample only in two, or three cases respectively, mentioned in this volume: the FB fans of (then) the Front National (‘National Front’; France), (then) Lega Nord (‘Northern League’; Italy) and CasaPound Italia – street protest movement (Italy) – the last movement is mentioned in Policy Discussion Section. We mention older findings relevant for these three cases in the section II of this chapter. Before presenting the results relevant for these three particular populist/protest movements, general findings seem to be relevant, too. Thus, it was found that online supporters of examined populist parties¹¹ (mostly from Western Europe in 2009) were „disgruntled democrats“ – they overwhelmingly believed that voting is relevant, and were against violence. However, these supporters of populists did not believe in the efficacy of current politics. Moreover, there were high levels of disillusionment with mainstream politicians, and greater trust in leaders who spoke their mind (Bartlett – Birdwell – Littler 2011, p.20). This leads us to the issue of populism.

Research Overview I – What is Populism About?

Fundamentally, the characteristics of populism manifest themselves as the co-occurrence of what is seen as the core of populism at manifest level (the unequivocal opposition between people and elite and expressing directly an alleged general will of the homogeneous people) and their articulation in a specific communication style – by definition not consensual, and seemingly rather direct, open, and allegedly fair (Wodak 2015, Kriesi 2018, Neumann-Ernst 2019). In other words, populism uses a specific discursive approach for communicating rather unorthodox (challenging) political ideas. More precisely and normatively less-value loaded, Norris (2020, p.2) considers populism as “a rhetoric about legitimate authority and where power should rightfully lie.“ This latter definition is in line with the majority of causes of populism identified, and found among claims of populists that justify their mission, in the Comparative Part of our research. However, we also added that there must be missing a clear, and relatively consistent ideology such as communist or fascist ones. Otherwise we are unable to differentiate among various ideological streams that also use populist rhetoric as defined above. Moreover, among structural conditions, there must be present (not necessarily publicly recognized and acknowledged) a general moral-political crisis. Furthermore, there may or may not be at the same time populist rhetoric, populist policies and populist party. A party may use populist rhetoric only occasionally (especially when it is in opposition, or during an election campaign). Indeed, as put by Albertini (n.d.), whether a party is populist (mainly in its rhetoric) may depend on the time span, on the media used and in the particular time span in which the detection is conducted and whether the party is in office or in opposition. It should be noted here that we actually faced an interesting

¹¹ As authors wrote, many of these groups often combined elements of left-wing and right-wing ideology, mixed with populist rhetoric. They had in common a deep concern about maintaining national (and sometimes European) identity, which they saw as under threat from high levels of immigration.

conundrum in one of our case studies. Tsipras, allegedly Greek populist leader, did not show features of populist communication rhetoric on FB.

Why is there support for populist parties?

Most explanations examining why people in general vote for populist parties in Western Europe emphasised either economic grievances, or disillusionment grievances and/or immigration grievances (Benfield – Howard – Morris 2011, p.43). However, non-representative online survey among FB fans of populist parties suggested that the vast majority of respondents supported populist parties because they identified with their policy offerings (Benfield, Howard and Morris 2011, p.55). Fundamentally, „a desire to protect national and cultural identity is a more important factor in explaining PPAM¹² support than economic grievances, and is perhaps the principal driving force behind concerns about immigration“ (Benfield – Howard – Morris 2011, p.55).

There are some regional specifications. For example, Schakel et al (2017) argue that dissatisfied voters instead of casting ballots for opposition, prefer to vote for new alternatives in Eastern Europe.

In general, support for populism is very much country and period specific. It usually reflects failure of political institutions, including major political parties, from both coalition and (at the moment) opposition) to govern the country in a proper way.

Thus, *“In other words, it appears that what matters for voters is not that much typical populist appeal as used at an abstract level (“Manichean worldview,” “indivisible people,” “general will,” “people-centrism,” and “anti-elitism”), but, rather very transparent, clearly stated, simple, and radical (in a sense, different from the mainstream at least in their rhetorical dimension) party opinions on certain topical political issues.”* (Školckay 2020, p.45).

Research Overview II – What role do social media play, and in particular FB, in communication of populist political parties and politicians?

In general, as put by Esser *et al* (2019), “a whole range of contextual factors influence [...] the use of populist communication [...]“ Similarly, Postill (2019) argued that: “to understand the link between social media and the recent rise of populism we need a global, comparative approach that carefully scrutinises claims about the effects of new media technologies on political change.” Furthermore, Lipiński (n.d.) after extensive research on this issue came to the conclusion that social media just provide a „window of opportunity“. Thus, apparently, we are still in search of answers to this fundamental question. What follows here is just a blueprint of emerging theory.

There is a consensus that we have witnessed a fundamental change in the role of intermediaries (the legacy media) between parties, governments and citizens as well as other stakeholders, after development of the Internet in general (since early 1990s), and social media in particular

¹² Populist parties and movements.

(since 2000s). The traditional gate-keeping role of legacy media has been superseded by a model that allows a direct (more often uni-directional) communication relationship between politicians and voters. In addition to direct or not that much mediated communication (keeping in mind the role of platform policies and local legislation), there is a polarisation of voters also as a result of easy and cheap simplification and amplification of messages (Moreno 2020). Dittrich (2017) has suggested that polarisation is due mainly to two factors: inadvertently, ‘polarisation by design’, due to algorithms; and ‘by manipulation’, or conscious polarisation. Neudert and Marchal (2019) add that both forms or tools of polarisation can, occasionally, merge when political (but also business and military) actors increasingly turn to ‘bot networks’ (that can be humans or machines) to amplify their propaganda, criticise adversaries or intimidate critics, often with ‘micro-targeting’. Furthermore, there is the logic of virality (‘network-enhanced word of mouth’ – a viral diffusion), competing with, or facilitated by the echo-chamber environment’ (where political attitudes are confirmed and amplified) and further created or facilitated through the filter bubbles (which pre-select consonant content). This is what Mazzoleni and Bracciale (2018, p.3) call ‘hyper-mediatisation of populist communication’. We have witnessed this impact of virality during the 2020 election campaign before general elections in Slovakia. As discussed in the country case study, at that time, two videos became viral, and, arguably, led to an unexpected and impressive victory of one of the populist challengers within an already highly polarised society.

Yet, polarisation is not necessarily a universal result in political communication, nor is it caused exclusively by social media communication. For example, there is no evidence that the mainstream parties in Germany showed a tendency to rely more strongly on populist communication on FB between 2014-2016 (Schwarzbözl – Fatke 2017). Moreover, it should be mentioned that some populists are not very keen on using social media, while others use it in highly effective and innovative ways (Moffitt 2018, p.38). As will be shown in our case studies, there are indeed more cases when populists relied heavily on social media and rather exceptions when populists did not like/use communication on social media, like the case of Jaroslaw Kaczynski in Poland. Yet social media can help to get a substantial boost by lowering costs of disseminating information for new entrants in politics (thus not only for populists) with relatively low cost and wider reach (Petrova – Sen – Yildirim 2020).

Although some may believe that social media is a easy to use tool for populists, in fact, Bracciale, Andretta & Martella (2021) found that the popularity and success of populism on social media is the result of multiple factors: political positioning (challenger vs. incumbent), platform characteristics (demographics and usage), and communication strategies. For example, Neumann-Ernst (2019, p.39) believes that in the case of the first and the last issue, ie the very fact of being a challenger party increases affinity with populism.¹³ Thus, these parties may rely more on populist communication styles to succeed in elections and gain attention from the media, argues Neumann-Ernst (2019, p.39). Moreover, Neumann-Ernst (2019, p.40) explains that ‘party extremism and challenger parties are two independent properties that are relevant ex-

¹³ Challenger parties are perceived to be a threat to the party establishment – they highlight issues that have been neglected or not solved by mainstream parties, they mobilize outside of electoral periods and traditional communication channels, and resort to innovative forms of communication.

planatory factors for populist communication.“ This thesis supports our selected or preferred party differentiation applied in the Comparative Part where we argued in line with some other researchers that there is a difference between populism as a form of communication and positive attitude towards democracy by a challenger party on the one hand, and an extremist party that just employs populist rhetoric and is anti-democratic or, in that wider sense, anti-system party, on the other hand.

Fundamentally, Bracciale, Andretta & Martella (2021) also argue that populist communication should be addressed as a whole when seeking to identify its effects on online engagement. Similarly, Neumann-Ernst (2019) found that populist communication in general is dependent on merging of opportunity structures such as communication on social media, the level of party (rhetorical) radicalism or extremism and/or a high affinity to populism related (often silent) issues such as undocumented migration. Indeed, Dittrich (2017) found that for example popularity of *Podemos* on social networks seemed to have reached its peak in March 2017 and was in steady decline since then.

Structural Opportunity Factors for Populist Communication

Neumann-Ernst (2019, p.41) identified the two structurally determined opportunity factors for populism to which we added some additional ones.

First, the lower the degree of journalistic or other (e.g. platform policies or governmental interventions) interference in a communication conditions, the greater the potential for unrestricted populism. She therefore argued that populist communication is highest in social media (channel with low level of interference), followed by talk shows (channel with medium intervention) and news media (channel with heavy intervention). One could argue that „alternative news media“ – understood as those positioned „as correctives of the mainstream news media, as expressed in editorial agendas or statements and/or are perceived as such by their audiences or third-parties“ (Holt – Ustad Figenschou – Frischlich 2019), could be in this sense located between social media and talk shows, or, at least, between talk shows and legacy news media. However, this is not true in most cases examined in this research, as we document in our national case studies. This is in itself a surprising finding, considering the seemingly natural affinity of both entities – there is “alternative” media and there also is “alternative” (populist) politics.

Second, Neumann-Ernst (2019) suggests that the articulation of political issues with a high affinity to populism should foster the utilization of populist communication. These issues most recently included topics such as immigration, regionalism, corruption and crime, European integration (too fast and too deep process) and/or perceived relative poverty and felt economic insecurity, persisting or only slightly shrinking regional differences in the standard of living, all the most often emphasized salient issues by populist actors, especially on social media (Neumann-Ernst 2019, Pauhofová, Stehlíková, Staněk and Páleník 2018, Sharma 2016).

Third, there is the electoral volatility in many European countries which leads to personalisation of politics (Schakel et al. 2017). For example, in the case of Poland, the conditions strengthening the populist actors include flux in voting behavior and low level of party affiliation. As

a result, there is a pool of electorate available for new political challengers with the ideological incoherence and anti-political attitudes (Lipinski and Stepinska 2019).

Moreover, there are some facilitating factors at the level of media systems or electoral systems. For example, there is a strong position of the tabloid newspaper *Fakt* in the Polish media market that provides favorable conditions for disseminating populist messages. Furthermore, there is a strong political polarization alongside a high level of political parallelism of the Polish media system. There is a journalistic culture that cherishes critical attitudes towards those in power. It covers populism but also produces such messages by some journalists and media outlets (Stepinska – Lipiński – Piontek – Hess 2020, p.211).

With regard to the electoral system, it has been argued that for example Slovakia's unique (at least regionally) electoral system (a single electoral district for all nation-wide elections) has facilitated personalisation of politics (even without considering the role of social media). As a result, leaders of political parties or their executive committees, play a decisive role in selection of candidates (Lichý 2016).

Different Types of Social Media Have Different Impacts and Purpose in Political Communication

In general, it matters whether one gets political information through social media or via more traditional sources present on the web, especially for the low educated (Fortunato and Pecoraro 2020). In that sense, McLuhan was right – the medium is (also) the message (for certain audiences).

While both FB and Twitter show several opportunity structures that enhance the potential for populist communication, in particular as mentioned, the possibility of fully circumventing traditional gatekeepers (the legacy media) and almost the full autonomy of speech and issue framing (however, as discussed further in the volume in Policy Discussion Section, there is actually increasing intervention from FB and other actors in this area), FB was the stronger predictor of populist communication. This explains the preference of populist politicians for FB in their communication (Neumann-Ernst 2019, Ernst et al 2017). Furthermore, Jacob, Sandberg and Spierings (2020) found that FB was used by populists primarily to activate anger among citizens, while Twitter was more often used to name and shame journalists or media publicly.

Interestingly, Lipiński (n.d., p.89) discusses „at least two paradoxes that emerge from research”. First, there is the “the paradox of alternative and second, “the paradox of interactivity”. By the first paradox, Lipiński understands that legacy media still remain key reference point for populist parties and movements. By the second paradox, Lipiński believes that populist entities use the social media in the same way as legacy media, preferring top-down communication. However, some country case studies, like the two Slovak populist leaders (Matovič and Kollár) show that populists, especially when in opposition, have no problem to communicate with their supporters, and, occasionally, opponents, rather actively and directly on FB.

Finally, it seems that there may be a trend that viral posts are evolving from text-based to image-based and to primarily video-based (Larsson 2020).

Examples of Utilising Social Media for Protest/Radical/Populist Movements

Moffitt (2018) identified three major ‘episodes’ of populists’ use of social media from the late 2000s onwards. These were the emergence of the US *Tea Party*, and particularly its novel usage of online forums and FB groups as organising platforms since 2009. Second, it was followed by Beppe Grillo and his virtual political movement *Movimento 5 Stelle (M5S)* in the same year. M5S could be seen as a hybrid movement-party that relies heavily on social media as a platform for organisation and ‘e-democracy’. It was actually followed by the Spanish hybrid populist movement-party *Podemos*. Yet *Podemos* went further, experimenting with participatory platforms like *Loomio* (an online decision-making platform), and embracing Reddit as a virtual ‘Plaza *Podemos*’ for online conversation. Third episode of populist social media use came with former US President Donald Trump’s campaign in 2015. As it is generally well-known, once in office, Trump relied heavily on Twitter as a communication tool. We discuss more examples of innovative use of social media further in the case studies, including examples of using virtual reality – the hologram – by Jean-Luc Mélenchon in France in 2017, or TikTok by Jaroslaw Kaczynski in Poland in 2020.

Research Overview III – Theories about populists linking or sharing or just referring to media on FB or elsewhere on social media

First, we present an alternative theoretical perspective – than those already mentioned – on the role of social media for populists – more focused on broader social impact. For this purpose, Kidd and McKintosh (2016) summarised three theoretical roles of social media in social movements (the latter can be understood for our purpose as populist political parties, or indeed, movements): techno-optimism, techno-pessimism and techno-ambivalence. Techno-optimism emphasises the potential of (social) media to contribute to solving social or political problems. It may also point at the aptness of social media to connect individuals with similar or identical goals. This latter statement provided an explanation how this categorisation fits here.

Techno-pessimism considers the perspective of (social) media to facilitate production and dissemination of hyperbolic and exaggerated messages, including echo chambers, fake news and hoaxes. It may also increasingly reflect the ability of authoritarian governments to control information flow in the online world. Finally, it may reflect gate-keeping free communication opportunity created for populist movements and individuals (if these are seen normatively negatively as is the case usually).

In techno-ambivalence, there are acknowledged the (be that positive or negative or mixed) limited impacts of (social) media. We followed this latter approach, and, indeed, we also provide evidence of such ambiguous occurrences. This latter approach can also be called cyber-realism (Morozov 2011) – the significant catalysts for social change remain social, political and economic developments, acts of individuals and groups, enabled or hampered by structural conditions and not social media alone.

Indeed, as mentioned, some older media theories (based on study of legacy media) such as Uses and Gratifications Theory – for explaining „followers“ and „likes“ (Katz – Blumler – Gurevitch 1973)¹⁴, Social Presence Theory (for explaining „likes“ with regard to shared contributions and other emoticons) and Cultivation Theory¹⁵ may be still be seen as having analytical value for general social media analysis and theoretical underpinnings. In particular, with the exception of Social Presence Theory, all these theories were found to be useful for the Facebook Influence Model (FIM) developed by Moreno and Koff (2015), one that tackles specifically FB. Moreno and Koff (2015), based on these older theories, newly developed four domains within their FIM: connection, comparison, identification, and FB as an experience (or Immersive Experience Domain). These domains may also be seen as reflecting to different degree sharing and reference experiences.

From the perspective of Connection, FB provides and enhances peer communication, networking and connection (Moreno and Koff 2015). In that sense it best reflects Uses and Gratification theory because there are already at least three key theoretical benefits for users. This also brings it closest to our research goals – namely to map the connections between populists and different types of media sources.

The Comparison Domain merges both Uses and Gratification Theory as well as Cultivation theory. However, it is perhaps less relevant here. It is relevant only in a sense that followers of leaders and parties may find emotional support and mutual ideological or negative emotional affinity – as it has indeed been proven in the case of using FB.

Identification Domain reflects on user’s identity through a profile. This is relevant for us from the perspective of assessing identity or the profiles of populist leaders and their movements/parties. This can be interesting to explore in the case of more permanent “liking” of some persons, events, or institutions.

FB as experience, or Immersive Experience Domain is close to Media Ecology Theory.¹⁶ It should be perhaps noted that this theory is in some countries better known as Media Dependency Theory.¹⁷ This domain is useful for qualitative analysis, in particular for political psychology. It may have some relevance for studies of electoral campaigns, too.

Plume and Slade (2016) suggested that already discussed Uses and Gratifications theory and Self-construal theory (based on Hofstede’s individualist-collectivist scale) are the best suited to research motivations of sharing in social media. Fundamentally, they claim that the theories that have been used have all elements that can be classified under the Uses and Gratifications theory (Plume – Slade 2016, p.3).

In general, peer influence in online and offline social networks is known to affect opinions and attitude (Williams, McMurray, Kurz, Lambert 2015). In social networks of all types there is the clustering – so called ‘homophily’ – based on similar or identical attributes (McPherson et al

¹⁴ It discusses using the media by consumers and satisfaction or not of their needs as a result, see <https://www.communicationtheory.org/uses-and-gratification-theory/>

¹⁵ It sees media having either positive or negative impact on audiences or users, including misperceptions of reality, see Cultivation Theory, <https://www.communicationtheory.org/cultivation-theory/>

¹⁶ The study of media, technology, and communication and how they affect human environments

¹⁷ In a nutshell, an extensive use of media generates dependent relation in the audience, see Media Dependency Theory, <https://www.communicationtheory.org/media-dependency-theory/>

2001). Within social networks, this homophilic interactions aggregate to create partisan groupings also known as already discussed ‘echo-chambers’ (Weaver et al 2018).

It should be mentioned that populist communication is very context sensitive (Rooduijn 2014). There is a lot of research on this topic from different perspectives, e.g. sharing fake news by populists on FB from a legal point (Monti 2018), micro-targeted political ads (Liberini, Redoano, Russo, Cuevas, and Cuevas 2020), content of internet memes posted by Dutch right-wing populist FB (Klein 2019). If we focus on Italy and France, these were among populist parties/movements that have been explored from the perspective of their FB fans in 2009 by Bartlett, Birdwell, & Littler (2011). This exploration targeted sociodemographic and ideological motivations of online fans only.

Research Overview IV – Networks and Networking Theories

We use and discuss here the concept of network, understood as a set of relationships or ties (which exist with or without social media) between different subjects (like people’s profiles on social media, or offline groups, persons or objects). Typically, in network analysis, the subjects of the analysis are called “nodes” while the ties between them are termed “edges” and they are represented as lines connecting two or more dots, creating a “network” of relations which can be mutual or not, directed or undirected.

If we are interested in who shared a certain news source (for example URL, post, profile), we can build a network around it. The news source will be the node, as well as users who shared it will be represented as individual nodes, and between the two there is a direct connection starting from the sharer and leading to the shared. If the respective news source shares news or posts about the persons who shared it, this is labelled as a mutual relation. The totality of such ties between specific nodes that are subject to analysis form a network. Therefore, it is possible to study the “density” of networks – the amount of direct connections that a node has divided by the total number of possible connections. The more connections a node has, the bigger “centrality” it has in the network. An interesting analogy in this regard is presented by Kadushin (2012) when writing about political actors. If two clusters are connected via a central point – an “ego” and the “ego” leaves, then the clusters don’t have a connection anymore (Kadushin 2012).

Definition of social media networks includes four essential features: users (1) have a unique digital profiles; (2) access digital content through a search tool provided by the platform; (3) there are relational ties; and (4) there is network transparency (Kane, Alavi, Labianca and Borgatti 2014, p.280). It should be noted that rather popular Castell’s (2011) theory of network power¹⁸ has been criticised by Anttiroiko (2015) as problematic since Castell in Anttiroiko’s view

¹⁸ Castells defined the power in the networking four different categories: 1) Networking Power (focusing on the power of members or organisations within the specific network); 2) Network Power (focusing on the power coming from social interaction process); 3) Networked Power (focusing on a group of specific actors’ power upon other group of other social actors within the network); and, 4) Network-making Power (focusing on the power to programme specific network and the power to switch different networks or forming alliances between dominant actors of various networks).

remained “laconic” about the concept itself. Therefore, Anttiroiko (2015) argues that ‘network’ in Castells’ social theory is not an analytical concept but rather a powerful metaphor. As such, it has no analytical value. There is some additional criticism of Castell’s theory related to his technological determinism and for replacing people or citizens as political agents with the concept of users (Deller 2016).

In contrast, Kane, Alavi, Labianca and Borgatti (2014) contributed by pointing at two key differences between traditional social networks and social media networks. First, the latter technological novelty raised the issue of platform design and related algorithms. Second, there are opportunities that are far above opportunities present in traditional social networks such as visualizing network structure and searching for content in a network without using relational ties.

There are obviously two basic types of fora – open fora and echo chambers (Williams – McMurray, Kurz, Lambert 2015). However, especially in the case of FB there are many so-called „*Latent ties*“. These are the FB friend lists, or „like“ button, but in fact these are not actively used in case of „friends“ lists (Brown – Michinov 2019). This was indeed found in two case studies – neither Hungarian leader Viktor Orbán, nor Slovak leader Boris Kollár used this tool for more or less permanently „liking“ some persons, events or institutions. Moreover, there is quite a consistent pattern: populists’ online communication is often one-sided, with very little interaction with either followers – or friends (Moffitt 2018, p.37). Some findings suggest that the echo chambers can be challenged by major political events, ideology, and intra-party tension that transcend party affiliations (Weaver, Williams, Cioroianu, Williams, Coan, Banducci 2018).

Conclusion

We explored arguably four key components of studies on social media and populism. First, we explored the substance of populism and populist communication in general. Second, we investigated the role played by social media, and in particular by FB, in communication of populist political parties and politicians. Third, we discussed relevant theories and selected empirical findings on populists linking or sharing or just referring to different media on FB or elsewhere on social media. Finally, we inspected basics about networks and networking theory that is the backbone methodology of our case studies.

We found that there are quite many available theories and theoretical thoughts that, however, do not seem to explain much of the substance of populism and social media (or populist communication in general) but rather describe what is visible. Moreover, some of these theories rely very much on older theories from legacy media field.

We found only one theoretical model – FIM – developed by Moreno and Koff that tackles specifically FB. Yet even these authors based their model on older theories. The FIM conceptualisation may be seen as reflecting to different degree sharing and reference experiences. Moreover, it is still by and large descriptive rather than explanatory.

Nonetheless, there seems to be emerging theory explaining success of populist communication based on empirical research. This theory, based on research by Bracciale, Andretta & Mar-

tella, Neumann-Ernst, Lipinski, Stepinska and others, suggests following basic conditions and structural limitations of populist communication on social media.

First, political positioning of a party/leader: a) challenger vs. Incumbent: being a challenger party increases affinity with populism), b) level of radicalism/extremism: a populist leader must gain attention. Therefore, radicalism combined with demagoguery in rhetoric is the key. Typically, a successful populist leader embodies and unifies major silent worries and wishes of a relevant part of audiences. The test is whether democracy and the rule of law are still seen as the only alternative. Similarly, c) a party that moves into opposition, or that faces election campaign, may turn to populist rhetoric.

Second, platform or social media as well as legacy media characteristics and policies (demographics and usage and platform policies – algorithms, regulations). FB is not accidentally the major populist communication tool in quite many countries. In general, it matters how social media is regulated (if at all), and what are algorithms used by social media (usually, these are market-driven). Surprisingly, alternative media do not play here a crucial role but it seems that alternative media may be replaced by some tabloid media or by captured Public Service media (Hungary, Poland). FB is usually a more suitable tool for populist messages than e.g. Twitter (but there are countries where Twitter is more popular than FB), but in some cases it can be a blog that can serve as populist nucleus (Italy), or even a newsportal (USA) can take such role.

Third, communication strategies: as mentioned, challenger parties or leaders usually rely more on populist communication styles. In that regard, social media or talk-shows remove to a large degree gate-keeping role (although this is changing, e.g. ban on former US president Trump on FB and Twitter). Similarly, party or leader that is ignored by mainstream media (e.g. in Greece both private and public media were captured before Syriza came to power), may try to develop alternative communication strategies and use alternative media. However, these alternative media are usually not those that define themselves as “alternative” but rather e.g. “standard” social media.

It is obvious that the factor of communication strategies may closely overlap with the first factor (political positioning of a party/leader). Similarly, communication strategies may reflect or be impacted by local media policies, i.e. second factor (e.g. already mentioned conundrum faced by Tsipras and Syriza).

Fourth, the degree of electoral volatility and voting patterns, as well as characteristics of electoral system (a single electoral district pushes towards a few personalities instead of more balanced representation and stronger role of more internally democratic party system). Some studies also note differences in voting trends and specific criteria based on regions (e.g. Western Europe and Eastern Europe, see for example Santana, Zagórski & Rama 2020).

Fifth, presence and (a lack of) communication of silent policy issues in a society (such as relative poverty, captured state, undocumented migration, grand corruption, etc). Without this fundamental condition, populism has no chance to succeed.

This can be called the BIG FIVE Factors Theory of Populism and Social Media.

In conclusion, social media do not cause populism but rather create an opportunity for easier, cheaper and faster dissemination of populist messages.

Bibliography

- ALBERTINI, Alessandro (n.d.). *Are Syriza and Podemos populist on Facebook? An analysis of political communication of the first three months of 2016* [online]. Available at: https://www.psa.ac.uk/sites/default/files/conference/papers/2017/Are-Syriza-and-Podemos-populist-on-Facebook_definitivodocx_0.pdf.
- ANTTIROIKO, Ari-Veikko (2015). Networks in Manuel Castells' theory of the network society. MPRA Paper 65617.
- BARTLETT, Jamie – BIRDWELL, Jonathan – LITTLER, Mark (2011). *The new face of digital populism* [online]. London: Demos Available at: https://www.demos.co.uk/files/Demos_OSIPOP_Book-web_03.pdf?1320601634.
- BENFIELD, Jack – HOWARD Jeff – MORRIS Marley (2011). Why do people join? In BARTLETT, Jamie – BIRDWELL, Jonathan – LITTLER, Mark (eds.) *The new face of digital populism*. London: Demos, pp.43-56
- BLUMLER, Jay G. (2015). Core Theories of Political Communication: Foundational and Freshly Minted In *Communication Theory*, 25, 4, p. 426–438, <https://doi.org/10.1111/comt.12077>
- BRACCIALE, Roberta – ANDRETTA, Massimiliano – MARTELLA, Antonio (2021). Does populism go viral? How Italian leaders engage citizens through social media In *Information, Communication & Society*, Latest Articles: 24:10, p. 1477-1494. DOI: 10.1080/1369118X.2021.1874472.
- BROWN, Genavee – MICHINOV Nicolas (2019). Measuring latent ties on Facebook: A novel approach to studying their prevalence and relationship with bridging social capital In *Technology in Society*, 59, 101176. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.techsoc.2019.101176>.
- CASTELLS, Manuel (2011). A Network Theory of Power In *International Journal of Communication*, 5, p.773-87.
- CROSSMAN, Ashley (2019 July 01). *The Presentation of Self in Everyday Life* [online]. Available at: <https://www.thoughtco.com/the-presentation-of-self-in-everyday-life-3026754>.
- DELLER, Rose (2016). *Book Review: Networks of Outrage and Hope: Social Movements in the Internet Age by Manuel Castells*, [online]. Available at: <https://blogs.lse.ac.uk/lsereviewofbooks/2016/01/04/book-review-networks-of-outrage-and-hope-social-movements-in-the-internet-age-by-manuel-castells/>.
- DIJK, Jan A.G.V. Van (2006). *The Network Society: Social Aspects of New Media*, London: Sage
- DITTRICH, Paul-Jasper (2017). *Social Networks and Populism in the Eufour Things You Should Know. Policy Paper 192* [online] Berlin: Jacques Delors Institute. Available at: https://hertieschool-f4e6.kxcdn.com/fileadmin/user_upload/20170419_SocialNetworksandPopulism-Dittrich.pdf.
- ERNST, Nicole et al. (2017). Extreme parties and populism: an analysis of Facebook and Twitter across six countries In *Information in Communication & Society*, 20, 9, p. 1347-1364, DOI: 10.1080/1369118X.2017.1329333.
- ESSER, Frank et al. (2019). Event-, Politics-, and Audience-Driven News: A Two-Year Comparison of Populism in European Media Coverage In REINEMANN, Carsten et al. (eds.) *Communicating Populism. Comparing Actor Perceptions, Media Coverage, and Effects on Citizens in Europe*. London: Routledge, p.123-140.
- ESSER, Frank – STEPÍŇSKA, Agnieszka – HOPMANN, David (2017). Populism and the media: Cross-national findings and perspectives. In T. Aalberg, F. Esser, C. Reinemann, J. Strömbäck, & C. H. de Vreese (Eds.), *Populist political communication in Europe* (pp. 365-380). New York: Routledge
- FALASCA, Kajsa – DYMEK, Mikolaj – GRANDIEN, Christina (2019). Social media election campaigning: who is working for whom? A conceptual exploration of digital political labour In *Contemporary Social Science*, 14, 1, p. 89-101. DOI: 10.1080/21582041.2017.1400089.
- FORTUNATO, Piergiuseppe – PECORARO, Marco (2020). *Yes, The Medium Matters: How Facebook and Twitter boost Populism in Europe* [online]. Available at: <ftp://sitelftp.unine.ch/RePEc/irrn/pdfs/WP20-01.pdf>
- HALLER, André (2020). Populist online communication. In KRÄMER, Benjamin and Christina HOLTZ-BACHA (eds.) *Perspectives on Populism and the Media: Avenues for Research*. Baden-Baden: Nomos Verlag, p.161-180.
- HENRY, Emeric – ZHURAVSKAYA, Ekaterina and GURIEV, Sergei (2020). Checking and Sharing Alt-Facts (May 9, 2020). Available at: <https://ssrn.com/abstract=3597191> or <http://dx.doi.org/10.2139/ssrn.3597191>.
- HIMELBOIM, Itai (2017). Social Network Analysis (Social Media) In *The International Encyclopedia of Communication Research Methods*. <https://doi.org/10.1002/9781118901731.iecrm.0236>.
- HOLT, Kristoffer (2020). Populism and Alternative Media. In KRÄMER, Benjamin – HOLTZ-BACHA, Christina (eds.) *Perspectives on Populism and the Media: Avenues for Research*. Baden-Baden: Nomos Verlag, p.201-214.

- HOLT, Kristoffer – FIGENSCHOU Tine Ustad – FRISCHLICH Lena (2019). Key Dimensions of Alternative News Media In *Digital Journalism*, 7, 7, p. 860-869. DOI: 10.1080/21670811.2019.1625715.
- JACOBS, Kristof – SANDBERG, Linn – SPIERINGS, Niels (2020). Twitter and Facebook: Populists' double-barreled gun? In *New Media & Society*, 22, 4, p. 611–633. doi: 10.1177/1461444819893991.
- KADUSHIN, Charles. (2012). *Understanding Social Networks: Theories, Concepts, and Findings*. New York: Oxford Univ. Press.
- KANE, Gerald C. et al. (2014). What's Different About Social Media Networks? A Framework and Research Agenda [online] In *MIS Quarterly*, 38, 1, p. 275-30. Available at: https://www.researchgate.net/profile/Stephen-Borgatti/publication/307958345_What%27_different_about_social_media_networks_A_framework_and_research_agenda/links/5c489d57458515a4c73b18f5/What-different-about-social-media-networks-A-framework-and-research-agenda.pdf
- KALTZ, Elihu – BLUMLER, Jay G. – GUREWITCH, Michael (1973). Uses and Gratifications Research In *The Public Opinion Quarterly*, 37, 4, P. 509-523. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/2747854>.
- KAPOOR, K.K., TAMILMANI, K., RANA, N.P. et al. (2018). Advances in Social Media Research: Past, Present and Future In *Inf Syst Front* 20, p.531–558, <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10796-017-9810-y>
- KHAN, G., LEE, S., PARK, J., & PARK, H. (2015). Theories in communication science: a structural analysis using webometrics and social network approach In *Scientometrics*, 108, 531-557.
- KIDD, Dustin – MCINTOSH Keith (2016). Social Media and Social Movements In *Sociology Compass*, 10, p.785-94.
- KLEIN, Ofra (2019). LOLitics: The Content and Impact of Dutch Populist Internet Memes In *SSRN*. <https://ssrn.com/abstract=3371224> or <http://dx.doi.org/10.2139/ssrn.3371224>
- KRIESI, Hanspeter (2018). Revisiting the populist challenge In *Politologický časopis; Czech journal of political science*, 25, 1, p. 5–27.
- LARSON, Anders Olaf (2020). Fear and loathing on Facebook? Tracking the rise of populism and platformization in viral political Facebook posts In *First Monday*, 25, 2. <https://doi.org/10.5210/fm.v25i2.10123>
- LIBERINI, Federica et al. (2020). Politics in the Facebook Era – Evidence from the 2016 US Presidential Elections. CESifo Working Paper No. 8235 In *SSRN*. <https://ssrn.com/abstract=3584086>.
- LICHÝ, Martin (2016). Omyl jedného volebného obvodu (The Mistake of A Single Electoral District) [online] In *Dennik N*, 3.3.2016. Available at: <https://dennikn.sk/blog/401603/omyl-1-volebneho-obvodu/>.
- LIPÍŃSKI, Artur and STĘPIŃSKA Agnieszka (2019). Polish Right-Wing Populism in the Era of Social Media. The Unexpected Careers of Paweł Kukiz and Janusz Korwin-Mikke In *Problems of Post-communism*, 66, 1, p. 71-82.
- LIPÍŃSKI, Artur (n.d.). Populizm a medialne struktury możliwości. Przypadek nowych mediów (Populism and media opportunity structures. The case of new media) In *Obywatele/Intelekt*, pp.75-96.
- MASON, Adam J. – CARR, Caleb T. (2021). Toward a Theoretical Framework of Relational Maintenance in Computer-Mediated Communication In *Communication Theory*, qtaa035. <https://doi.org/10.1093/ct/qtaa035>.
- MAZZOLENI, Gianpietro – BRACCIALE, Roberta (2018). Socially Mediated Populism: The Communicative Strategies of Political Leaders on Facebook In *Palgrave Communications*, 4, 1, p. 50-50, <https://ssrn.com/abstract=3169223> or <http://dx.doi.org/10.1057/s41599-018-0104-x>
- MCPHERSON, Miller – Smith-Lovin, Lynn – Cook James M. (2001). Birds of a Feather: Homophily in Social Networks In *Annual Review of Sociology*, 27, pp. 415-444
- MOFFITT, Ben (2019). Populism 2.0: social media and the false allure of „unmediated“ representation. In FITZI, Gregor – MACKERT, Jurgen – TURNER, Bryan S. (Eds.). *Populism and the Crisis of Democracy: Politics, Social Movements and Extremism*, Routledge pp. 30 - 46
- MOROZOV, Evgeny (2011). *The Net Delusion: The Dark Side of Internet Freedom*. New York: Public Affair
- MONTI, Matteo (2018). The New Populism and Fake News on the Internet: How Populism Along with Internet New Media is Transforming the Fourth Estate. Stals Research Paper 4 In *SSRN*: <https://ssrn.com/abstract=3175280>.
- MORENO, Megan – KOFF, Rosalind (2015). Media Theories and the Facebook Influence Model. In *The Psychology of Social Networking*, 1. <https://doi.org/10.1515/9783110473780-013>.
- MORENO, José A. Sanz (2020). *Transformation of public space due to the use and abuse of social platforms* [online]. Available at: <https://www.minsait.com/ideasfordemocracy/en/social-media-platforms-political-communication-full>

- NEUDERT, Lisa Maria – NAHEMA, Marchal (2019). *Polarisation and the use of technology in political campaigns and communication* [online]. Available at: [https://www.europarl.europa.eu/RegData/etudes/STUD/2019/634414/EPRS_STU\(2019\)634414_EN.pdf](https://www.europarl.europa.eu/RegData/etudes/STUD/2019/634414/EPRS_STU(2019)634414_EN.pdf).
- NEUMANN-ERNST, Nicole (2019). *Comparing populist communication across media channels: how political actors utilize populist messages and styles*. Zurich Open Repository and Archive. Dissertation [online]. Available at: <https://www.zora.uzh.ch/id/eprint/170929/1/170929.pdf>
- NORRIS, Pippa (2020). *Measuring Populism Worldwide*. Faculty Research Working Paper Series, HKS Working Paper No. RWP20-002 [online]. Available at: https://papers.ssrn.com/sol3/papers.cfm?abstract_id=3541314.
- PAUHOFOVÁ, Iveta et al. (2018). *Súvislosti príjmovej polarizácie na Slovensku III (The Context of Income Polarisation in Slovakia III)* [online]. Available at: http://www.ekonom.sav.sk/uploads/journals/387_suvvislosti_prijmovej_polarizacie_na_slovensku_iii_-_od_doc_pauhofovej.pdf
- PETROVA, Maria – Sen, Ananya – YILDIRIM, Pinar (2020). Social Media and Political Contributions: The Impact of New Technology on Political Competition (May 14, 2020). In *SSRN*. <https://ssrn.com/abstract=2836323> or <http://dx.doi.org/10.2139/ssrn.2836323>.
- PLUME, Cherie J. – SLADE, Emma L. (2016). Exploring Theoretical Concepts for Explaining Sharing in the Social Media Environment In: Dwivedi Y. et al. (eds.) *Social Media: The Good, the Bad, and the Ugly. 13E 2016. Lecture Notes in Computer Science*, vol 9844. Springer, Cham. https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-319-45234-0_29.
- PONDER, James – HARIDAKIS, Paul (2018). Social Media and Social Networking in Political Campaigns/Movements. In Alhajj R., Rokne J. (eds.) *Encyclopedia of Social Network Analysis and Mining*. Springer, New York, NY. https://doi.org/10.1007/978-1-4939-7131-2_110213.
- POSTILL, John (2019). *Populism and Social Media: A Global Perspective* [online]. Available at: <https://www.oxfordresearchgroup.org.uk/blog/populism-and-social-media-a-global-perspective>.
- ROODUIJN, Matthijs (2014). The nucleus of populism: In search of the lowest common denominator In *Government and Opposition*, 49, 4, pp. 573-599.
- SANTANA, Andreas, ZAGÓRSKI, Piotr & José RAMA (2020). At odds with Europe: explaining populist radical right voting in Central and Eastern Europe, *East European Politics*, 36:2, pp.288-309, DOI: 10.1080/21599165.2020.1737523
- SCOLARI, Carlos A. (2012). Media Ecology: Exploring the Metaphor to Expand the Theory, *Communication Theory*, (22)2, pp.204–225, <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1468-2885.2012.01404.x>.
- SHARMA, Ruchir (2016). *The Rise and Fall of Nations: Ten Rules of Change in the Post-Crisis World*, Penguin, UK.
- SCHWARZBÖZL, Tobias – FATKE, Matthias (2017). Identifying Populist Party Communication on Social Media (September 7, 2017). ECPR General Conference in Oslo, 6 – 9, September 2017, In *SSRN*. <https://ssrn.com/abstract=3062606> or <http://dx.doi.org/10.2139/ssrn.3062606>.
- SCHAKEL, Arjan H. et al. (2017). *Regional and National Elections in Eastern Europe: Territoriality of the Vote in Ten Countries*. London: Palgrave Macmillan.
- STEPINSKA, Agnieszka – LIPiŃSKI Artur – PIONTEK Dorota – HESS Agnieszka (2020). *Populist political communication in Poland. Political actors – media – citizens*, Berlin: LOGOS VERLAG.
- ŠKOLKAY, Andrej (2021). Impact of Populism on the Party System in Slovakia 2000–2020. Background Study for DEMOS H2020 Project. Manuscript, Version 02, 59 pages.
- VEPSÄLÄINEN, Tapio – LI, Hongxiu – SUOMI, Reima (2017). Facebook likes and public opinion: Predicting the 2015 Finnish parliamentary elections In *Government Information Quarterly*, 34, 3, p. 524-532. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.giq.2017.05.004>.
- WEAVER, Iain S. et al. (2018). Dynamic social media affiliations among UK politicians In *Social Networks*, 54, p.132-144. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.socnet.2018.01.008>.
- WILLIAMS, Hywel T. P. et al. (2015). Network analysis reveals open forums and echo chambers in social media discussions of climate change In *Global Environmental Change*, 32, p. 26-138. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.gloenvcha.2015.03.006>.
- WODAK, Ruth (2015). *The politics of fear. What right-wing populist discourses mean*. London: Sage.
- QI, Jiayin et al. (2018). Theories of Social Media: Philosophical Foundations In *Engineering*, 4, 1, p.94-102. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.eng.2018.02.009>.