

## **A Typology of Populism: Toward a Revised Theoretical Framework on the Sender Side and Receiver Side of Communication**

MICHAEL HAMELEERS

University of Amsterdam, The Netherlands

The ideational core of populism, constructing the binary opposition between the “good” people and “culprit” others, is not expressed univocally throughout the globe. Not surprisingly, scholars from different disciplines have not yet reached consensus on how to conceptualize populism on the sender side and receiver side of communication. This article aims for conceptual clarification by introducing a typology of populism on *both* sides of communication, also extrapolated to online contexts. In these online settings, populist communication can be challenged, reinforced, or negotiated by citizens. Populist messages may thus activate and prime populist interpretation frames. By introducing a revised theoretical framework of populist communication that incorporates the dynamics between the media and society, this article provides conceptual tools for future research on the content, causes, and consequences of populist communication. Practical recommendations on how to conduct such studies are discussed.

*Keywords: media populism, populist communication, populist attitudes, social network sites, social identity*

A growing number of nations around the world have witnessed the rise of influential populist movements. In recent years, populist ideas are spreading across widely dispersed countries around the globe. The essence of populism can be defined as the construction of a central opposition between the ordinary people and culprit others (e.g., Taggart, 2000). This opposition can, for example, be moral, ideological, or socioeconomic. The Hindu nationalist prime minister Narendra Modi in India, for example, constructs the populist divide between the “pure” Hindus as in-group and the “corrupt” elites and “polluted” Muslims as out-groups (Rajapogal, 2015). More recently, Donald Trump has expressed sentiments that emphasize the divide between U.S. citizens and corrupt elites that needs to be removed in order to “make America great again” (Inglehart & Norris, 2016).

Populism has sparked both scholarly and popular interest around the globe. Although scientific consensus on the ideational core of populism has been reached to a great extent (e.g., Mudde & Rovira Kaltwasser, 2017), disagreements on the ontological and epistemological underpinnings of populism still exist. To provide a few examples, some scholars have defined populism merely as a discursive style or

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Michael Hameleers: m.hameleers@uva.nl

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rhetoric (e.g., Cranmer, 2011; Jagers & Walgrave, 2007), a frame (e.g., Caiani & della Porta, 2011), a political style (e.g., Moffitt, 2016), or a strategy (e.g., Barr, 2009). The most cited conceptualization defines populism as a thin-cored ideology that can be supplemented by host ideologies (e.g., Mudde, 2004; Stanley, 2008). Although this minimal definition of populism as the antagonistic relationship between the “ordinary people” versus the “corrupt elites” has clear merits when applied to the supply side of political parties, it does not capture the fragmented ways in which populist ideas are communicated by citizens on the receiver side and the media on the sender side (Engesser, Ernst, Esser, & Büchel, 2017). In addition, it does not explain the role of social media at the *intersection* of both sides of communication. Yet the dynamics between media and society have been ascribed a pivotal role in the global electoral success of populism (e.g., Aalberg, Esser, Reinemann, Strömbäck, & de Vreese, 2017; Mudde, 2004). Therefore, this article explores how populist communication manifests itself at the intersections of the sender side and the receiver side. To what extent do receivers accept, reinforce, or negotiate the populist divide between the people and others framed in populist communication?

Specifically, to better understand how populist communication resonates in media and society, this article maps how the ideational core of populism—the antagonistic relationship between the people as in-group and different forms of opposed out-groups—can manifest in different ways as characteristic of the sender of communication (i.e., journalistic media populism); as a characteristic of receivers of messages (i.e., populist interpretation frames); and on social media, where the sender side and receiver side converge (i.e., populist mass self-communication). Applying Occam’s razor to populism theory, this article introduces a typology of populism on *both* sides of communication, independent of the political actors typically associated with populism.

The supply-side and demand-side approaches to populism have mainly developed independently, partially neglecting the interactions between both sides of communication (for exceptions, see, e.g., Andreadis & Stavrakakis, 2017; Stavrakakis, Andreadis, & Katsambekis, 2016). Contributing to this line of research, this article approaches the interaction between the supply side and the demand side from a communication perspective. Next to this, exclusionist perceptions of societal out-groups threatening the people’s in-group have not been incorporated into the receiver side of populist communication. To move research forward in this field, this article aims to enhance the understanding of populism in the current mediatized society by exploring not only different dimensions of populism but also the platforms where populism is expressed. The central aim of this endeavor is to understand how populism is played out in the current high-choice and user-driven media environment, where the perspectives of senders and receivers converge on social media platforms. The revised conceptualization of populist communication is applied to an empirical case and is translated into practical recommendations for scholars who aim to study the dynamic relationships between populism expressed in the media and society. I first present an epistemological perspective to define populism as a communicative act. Second, I explore the sender side and receiver side of populist communication. Using a relevant empirical case study, the third section provides in-depth insights into how the sender side and receiver side of populism collide on social media. Finally, empirical implications are discussed in light of the proposed typologies.

### **An Epistemological Stance in Defining Populism**

Currently, the dominant and most widely cited approach conceptualizes populism as a thin-cored ideology, which can be supplemented by all sorts of host ideologies (e.g., Mudde, 2004; Mudde & Rovira Kaltwasser, 2017; Stanley, 2008). In this reading, the “thin” ideology of populism revolves around the antagonistic relationship between the ordinary people and the corrupt elites. In line with this, populist ideas postulate that society is separated between hardworking ordinary citizens and corrupt elites that do not represent ordinary citizens, who *should* be central in political decision making (e.g., Laclau, 2005).

Although defining populism as a thin-cored ideology has clear conceptual merits when applied to the populism of political parties, its ideological premises become contested when conceptualizing populism as a phenomenon detached from political actors—for example, as populist attitudes (e.g., Akkerman, Mudde, & Zaslove, 2014), populist communication (e.g., Jagers & Walgrave, 2007), or online populism (e.g., Bartlett, Birdwell, & Littler, 2011). These empirical approaches fit literatures that have defined populism as a discursive frame (Aslanidis, 2016) or a political style (Moffitt, 2016). Crucially, recent content analyses have demonstrated that populist communication is highly fragmented in nature, meaning that different components of populism are spread across citizens’ interpretations and (social) media content (Engesser et al., 2017). For this reason, it is important to identify populism’s core components and to reconstruct them in populist communication on the sender side and on the receiver side of communication.

In addition, an important discrepancy in the thin-ideology rationale is that the people’s opposition to vertical out-groups is part of the thin ideological core, whereas their opposition to horizontal out-groups is not. Nevertheless, it can be argued that both phenomena are actually part of the same underlying social identity mechanism. Specifically, reasoned from social identity framing, populist ideas construct a sense of in-group deprivation and an out-group threat. The specific populist ideas communicated on the sender side and on the receiver side make this central divide explicit, and communication brings these populist ideas into being (Laclau, 2005; Moffitt & Tormey, 2014). Moreover, in its strictest sense, conceptualizing populism in ideological terms would not allow us to study its nuances. This premise contradicts a vast amount of empirical research that has studied populism as a matter of degree (e.g., Hawkins, 2009; Jagers & Walgrave, 2007; Pauwels, 2014).

To move beyond remaining inconsistencies and disagreements in definitions of populism, this article proposes to define populism by its ideational and discursive core elements (also see Aslanidis, 2016), which can be used by different actors in media and society and supplemented by a plethora of contextual factors that facilitate its expression on the sender side and receiver side of communication. The core idea of populism as a communicative act can be regarded as the construction of a moral, societal, ideological, or (socio)political divide between the ordinary people as in-group and culprit others as out-groups. This exclusionist discourse should not be confused with nativist sentiments. As argued by a growing number of scholars (e.g., Canovan, 2005; De Cleen & Stavrakakis, 2017), populism and (exclusionist) nationalism are often conflated. Nationalism, by definition, constructs a collective identity of the people as belonging to the nation-state (Sutherland, 2005). In populist discourse, in contrast, the people are seen as a united (deprived) group of ordinary citizens who do not necessarily experience a

strong attachment to the nation-state (Laclau, 2005). Rather, they feel betrayed by the corrupt elites and experience that their nation is severely damaged because of the negative impact of corrupt elites and, in case of right-wing populism, other societal out-groups.

### **The Sender Side: Communicating the Boundary Between Us and Them**

Before delving deeper into the interaction of the sender side and the receiver side of populist communication on social network sites, the manifestation of populist ideas on the sender side and receiver side is discussed first.

Irrespective of their epistemological stance, the plethora of definitions of populism foregrounded in the literature can be divided into roughly two main categories: "minimal" definitions and "complete" or "full" definitions (Akkerman et al., 2014; Jagers & Walgrave, 2007; Pauwels, 2014). People centrality is the most basic and minimal form of populism. It, for example, comprises the core idea of the centrality of the ordinary people's will, the unity of the people in terms of their socioeconomic or ideological status, or the purity of the native people's in-group.

The fuller types of populism revolve around the binary opposition between the people as in-group and the other as out-group—which this article defines as the essence of populism. This relational component can be conceptualized in different ways—structured by vertical and horizontal oppositions. In terms of the orthogonality of these dimensions, it should be noted that the condition of vertical oppositions should be satisfied to define horizontal out-group constructions as populist. To provide an example, the right-wing populist ideas communicated by Geert Wilders in the Netherlands attribute blame to the elites for not representing the native people and for prioritizing the needs of foreign elements. Only being opposed to immigrants would not count as populism. However, a single message may include only one of populism's discursive components, which makes it relevant to disentangle the various conceptual building blocks here.

### ***Vertical Oppositions***

First and foremost, the antagonistic relationship between the people and the other has been defined *vertically* (e.g., Canovan, 1999; Mudde & Rovira Kaltwasser, 2017). In this case, the people's enemy is not living among the in-group of ordinary hardworking citizens, but rather threatens this homogeneous and morally superior in-group from above. In line with this, the elites are accused of adhering to only their own interests, whether political, economic, or cultural. Importantly, minimal definitions do not specify the type of elites blamed for depriving the people, although it may be argued that the people-versus-elites divide is actually shaped in various ways in populist discourse (e.g., Rooduijn, 2017). To provide an example, during Europe's financial crisis, populist ideas that shifted blame for the ordinary people's crisis to the corrupt and self-interested managers, international companies, and banks have prevailed (e.g., Ramiro, 2017). The "extreme rich" or "wealthiest minority" have consequently been framed as a threat to ordinary, hardworking citizens. Responding to this variety in antielitism sentiments in populist discourse, four types of populist communication can be placed into this core category: *antiestablishment*, *antieconomic elites*, *antiexperts*, and *antimedia* populism.

*Antiestablishment populism* describes the vertical relationship between the good people and the culprit-established political order (Jagers & Walgrave, 2007). Following the definition of this type of populism, culprit politicians are blamed for being unwilling or unable to represent the ordinary voters' will. The established political order is accused of acting only on behalf of their own interests; the political elites are consequentially framed as a deceiving, corrupt enemy.

Moving beyond scapegoating the political elites, *antieconomic elites populism* constructs the people's opposition to profit-maximizing elites who threaten the material interests of ordinary hardworking citizens. Big corporations, banks, and managers are blamed for depriving ordinary citizens of what they deserve (Elchardus & Spruyt, 2016). These populist ideas are, for example, salient in Southern European countries that experienced severe consequences of the economic recession (Ramiro, 2017; Rooduijn, 2017). By pursuing their economic interests, the economic elites widen the gap between the wealthy and the poor. This left-wing populist interpretation connects to a collective sense of losing out *because* of the negative influence of economic actors that deprive ordinary citizens of the fruits of their labor (Ramiro, 2017).

Another way in which the vertical opposition between the people and others can be expressed concerns *antiexperts populism*. Experts, such as scientists, are accused of relying on inaccurate top-down analyses of important societal issues that do not, according to the populist rationale, alleviate the people's problems. Against this backdrop, ordinary citizens are assumed to be more knowledgeable and better able than experts to come up with solutions to societal problems. Such discourse is, for example, highly visible in the direct communication of populist politicians on Twitter (e.g., Ernst, Engesser, Büchel, Blassnig, & Esser, 2017). On Twitter, politicians challenge facts that are presented by expert sources of established institutions, casting doubt on the reliability and independence of these sources. Donald Trump, for example, frequently argues that the system is "rigged," alleging the corruption of institutions. This component of populist communication links to the era of postfactual relativism, in which facts delivered by institutions have increasingly been interpreted with skepticism and distrust (Van Aelst et al., 2017).

Related to antiexperts populism, *antimedia populism* constructs the other *vertically* as belonging to a homogeneous out-group of nonpolitical elites (e.g., Pauwels, 2014). With antimedia populism, the traditional mass media are depicted as an unreliable source that should, but is unwilling to, represent the ordinary people and their needs. To provide an example, antimedia populism is highly salient in Trump's and Wilders' direct communication via Twitter, in which they frequently attribute blame to specific media outlets for disseminating "fake news" among society. This type of populist communication has been identified in nontraditional, mostly online, media outlets (e.g., Holt & Rinaldo, 2014). Hence, these media create communities that are governed by the people themselves instead of professional elites accused of being self-interested and corrupt. This component of populism links to the alleged rise of distrust in media sources accused of disseminating fake news (Van Aelst et al., 2017).

### ***Horizontal Oppositions***

Existing approaches to populism have mainly focused on vertical out-groups, neglecting the people's opposition to *horizontally* opposed others. Antielitism can, however, be supplemented with an exclusionist component, which is highly salient in the communication of right-wing populist movements in

Europe (e.g., Oesch, 2008). Immigrants, asylum seekers, ethnic minorities, and welfare-state profiteers can all be constructed as societal out-groups that live next to the people in the heartland. In left-wing populism, such groups can also be composed of the extreme-rich minority (e.g., Ramiro, 2016). This in-group can also extend national borders and exist on a transnational level (Moffitt, 2017). In line with this reasoning, populist communication can also revolve around the distinction between the ordinary people as in-group (nationally, economically, or socioculturally) and horizontally defined others. Within this core category of horizontal oppositions, three types of populist communication can be distinguished: *in-group superiority populism*, *exclusionist populism*, and *welfare state chauvinist populism*.

*In-group superiority populism* emphasizes how foreign traditions, religions, and cultures are inferior to the native people's own traditions. By referring to the out-group's cultural traditions as backward, dangerous, and disrespectful, the boundary between the in-group and the out-group is symbolically marked. These constructions of the people relate to the process of *positive distinctiveness* central in social identity theory (Tajfel, 1978), which postulates that people are motivated to maintain cognitive consonance by attributing positive qualities to their in-group. Such populist expressions can, for example, be identified in response sections of tabloid newspapers, in which people compose messages that emphasize how their own national traditions, such as culture-specific food habits, are more developed than the other's less clean and outdated traditions (e.g., Uitermark, Oudenampsen, van Heerikhuizen & van Reekum, 2012).

*Exclusionist populism* taps into the perception of a horizontal divide between the people and culprit societal out-groups (e.g., Jagers & Walgrave, 2007). Exclusionist populism blames societal out-groups, such as immigrants, for the problems experienced by the ordinary people as in-group (e.g., Oesch, 2008). Because certain out-groups are perceived as threatening the people's imagined community, they should be removed from the populist heartland. This type of populism thus stresses a treatment recommendation by emphasizing that the in-group should be purified from certain foreign elements or from other out-groups accused of depriving the people. Interpreted from a social identity perspective, the in-group of ordinary, deprived people is consolidated by finding external causes for the ordinary people's problems. Different from anti-immigration sentiments or nationalism, exclusionist populist discourse does not construct the people as a nation, but rather as an imagined community of *deprived* ordinary people who used to feel close to their nation but now experience dissent (also see De Cleen & Stavrakakis, 2017).

The third type of horizontal populism, *welfare state chauvinist populism*, is strongly related to exclusionist populism. Similar to exclusionist populism, welfare chauvinist populism stresses how society is essentially divided by the good people versus evil societal out-groups (de Koster, Achterberg, & Van Der Waal, 2013; Oesch, 2008). The difference between both types of populism is how the people and the others are defined. In welfare state chauvinist populism, the people are referred to as the hardworking tax-paying citizens (e.g., Oesch, 2008). Because this in-group is entitled to receive something in return for their efforts, it is unfair that some people are profiting from the fruits of their labor. Asylum seekers are, for example, frequently accused of coming to the heartland only to profit from the resources earned by the law-abiding native citizens and their ancestors. People who receive unemployment benefits are also blamed: They are regarded as being unwilling to work for their money and as having chosen the easy way out; they just "take" the resources collected by ordinary hardworking citizens without offering anything in return.

### **The Receiver Side: The Perceived Antagonism Between the People and Others**

Recently, scholars have started to measure populism as individual-level attitudes (e.g., Akkerman et al., 2014). Following this line of research, populist attitudes are conceptualized as the perceived antagonism between the homogeneous ordinary people as the good in-group and the corrupt elites as culprit out-group. However, there are good reasons to believe that this conceptualization of the people's populism on the receiver side of communication is in need of expansion and refinement. Most importantly, exclusionist perceptions of societal out-groups threatening the native people are not incorporated in conceptualizations of populist attitudes. On the sender side, however, such antisocietal out-groups constructions are frequently communicated to the people by different actors (e.g., Albertazzi & McDonnell, 2008). As Krämer (2014) argued, if such populist in-group versus out-group constructions are communicated by the media, schemata of social differentiation may be activated among citizens. In other words, *exclusionist* populist communication may affect people's congruent populist attitudes. In line with this, it can be proposed that two main types of populism resonate on the receiver side of interpreting citizens: antiestablishment and exclusionist populist attitudes (Hameleers, Bos, & de Vreese, 2017).

#### ***Antiestablishment Populist Attitudes***

Most research has defined populist attitudes in terms of the perceived antagonism between the good people and the culprit elites (e.g., Akkerman et al., 2014). The central components of antiestablishment populist attitudes, the people and the elites, can be conceptualized in different ways. The first people-versus-elites distinction taps into the discrepancy between the "good" people's will and the "evil" self-interested politicians. In this definition, the people are perceived of as a silenced majority whose will should be central in political decision making. The corrupt politicians, however, are responsible for silencing the majority of ordinary citizens.

Second, people can perceive a divide between their in-group and elites on an economic level. In this antagonistic relationship, the in-group of the people is constructed as a working-class majority. The out-group is perceived of as wealthy elites, such as managers or bankers. In this case, the "poor" people are opposed to the "rich" elites, who block the working-class citizens' access to economic resources and hinder an equal distribution of wealth.

A final way in which receivers can construct the vertical divide between their in-group and elites concerns their opposition to experts. In this definition, the people are perceived of as having more accurate knowledge than experts about the facts on the ground. Experts, in turn, are too far removed from the people's lifeworld: Their facts on paper do not resolve the problems the people are experiencing on the ground.

#### ***Exclusionist Populist Attitudes***

For the second main type of populism on the receiver side, exclusionist populist attitudes, it is also possible to define alternative constructions of the divide between us and them. First, the in-group can be regarded as the pure native people, whose traditions and cultures are superior to those of the out-

group. In this case, "the people" refers to the imagined community of the heartland, a homogeneous in-group that shares the same norms and values (Taggart, 2000). The out-group's cultures and traditions are inferior: They are perceived as a backward community that pollutes the purity of the in-group. If they are unable or unwilling to adjust to the people's culture, they should not be allowed access to the heartland.

The second antagonistic relationship captured in exclusionist populist attitudes constructs the boundary between the people and the other based on a perceived unfair access to resources, such as jobs, unemployment benefits, and social security (de Koster et al., 2013; Elchardus & Spruyt, 2016; Oesch, 2008). This subtype of exclusionist populism entails the perception that the in-group is naturally privileged and should therefore have more access to socioeconomic resources than others. The in-group is perceived of as the ordinary hardworking citizens who pay taxes to ensure their needs are satisfied by the government. The out-group is constructed as consisting of profiteers that left their own countries solely to deprive the in-group of their wealth. Following this exclusionist rationale, it is because of them that the heartland faces a crisis.

The sender side and the receiver side do not exist in isolation. Hence, the populist ideas of the media, defined as *media populism* or *populism by the media* (e.g., Krämer, 2014; Mazzoleni, 2008), can activate or augment the populist interpretations of citizens. Moreover, the populist ideas of the sender and receiver come together on social media platforms, where all actors can simultaneously and interchangeably take on the role of a sender and receiver of populist ideas. For this reason, it is important to shift our focus to populism as a communicative act shaped on social media.

### **Online Populism: The Convergence of the Sender Side and the Receiver Side**

In online communities, people have become both senders and receivers of messages that emphasize the populist divide between their in-group of ordinary people and allegedly evil, dangerous, corrupt, or threatening out-groups (e.g., Bartlett et al., 2011). Hence, the receiver side and the sender side of populist communication converge on social media (Pingree, 2007). But how can we arrive at a typology of populism in an online context where the boundaries between senders and receivers are blurring? Because populist communication at the intersections of the sender side and receiver side remains understudied, this section reports the results of three qualitative content analyses of online populist communication in the United States, United Kingdom, and the Netherlands ( $N = 4,934$ ). Specifically, these content analyses are based on in-depth analyses of direct communication via the social network profiles of politicians and messages posted on social media by ordinary citizens. All material was analyzed in line with the grounded theory approach.

### ***An Empirical Analysis of Online Populist Communication***

In the empirical study, the sender side of populist communication incorporates the perspectives of politicians and ordinary citizens who use Twitter and Facebook to directly communicate to their audience. Crucially, this audience (the receiver side) exists of the same actors: Citizens can thus both send and receive populist messages via the same platforms. These sides of communication are therefore entangled in the posts and comments analyzed here. Based on the empirical findings, it can be concluded

that the identified typology of online populism links to the typology of populism distinguished on the sender side. Specifically, five types of populism identified on the sender side have been identified in online contexts: *antiestablishment populism*, *antieconomic elites populism*, *antimedia populism*, *in-group-superiority populism*, *exclusionist populism*, and *welfare state chauvinist populism*. The most salient types of online populist communication by citizens are described here.

First, in online contexts, antiestablishment populism emphasizes the large distances between politicians and ordinary hardworking citizens. The people-versus-an-out-group divide was not always morally consolidated. The elites were also blamed for depriving the people of economic, social, and political resources. Such online populist sentiments were extremely hostile in tone, which can be illustrated by the following quote: "It would be a fantastic day if someone would hit this nation's traitor [the prime minister] with a bullet through his head." Second, exclusionist populism clearly reflected the boundary between ordinary deprived people and societal out-groups that are viewed as threatening the ordinary people: "These rats get everything for free, while we have to work until we die. Everything needs to go back. Their houses will need to be disinfected, but we will do this with pleasure." Importantly, this quote illustrates the linkage of populist sentiments and nativism or exclusionist nationalism. The ordinary people do not identify with the nation-state, but rather express that their in-group of hardworking, ordinary people is threatened by foreign elements that need to be removed (e.g., De Cleen & Stavrakakis, 2017). In this context, they do experience belonging to a certain imagined community of the nativist heartland, while at the same time experiencing disassociation because of the presence of dangerous others.

In addition, *nostalgic* and nationalist sentiments were expressed online. Such nostalgic constructions can be illustrated by the following quote: "We used to fight for our country because it was our country. Now, we allow everyone to enter the Netherlands." In the online setting, people experienced closeness to a like-minded imagined community of citizens belonging to a deprived heartland that used to belong to the ordinary people. On social network sites, they could constantly and effortlessly share and negotiate community membership and boundaries with their in-group. The nostalgic sentiments expanded the (exclusionist) populist sentiments in online settings. Because of the negative influence of the out-groups constructed in opposition to the people (the corrupt elites, profiting migrants), the purity and prosperity of the heartland's past cannot be regained.

Reasoned from the affordances of social network sites, the online context allows for a constant comparison and symbolic expression of the boundary between the favored in-group and the opposed out-group (Hampton, 2016). These media created communities in which citizens felt safe to share their nostalgic sentiments related to the in-group's past and their grievances and fears regarding the present and future. Based on the empirical results presented here, it can be concluded that social media provide a context for both ordinary citizens and politicians to directly express their populist sentiments to other community members (e.g., Engesser et al., 2017). Online, they can take on the roles of sender and receiver, potentially reinforcing populist sentiments in society by many-to-many communication. The most important distinguishing features of online contexts are the absence of gatekeepers and the presence of *interactivity*: The types of populism communicated on the sender side are reinforced, challenged, or supported by the people's responses on the receiver side. This interactivity also entails that online contexts enable people to share their thoughts with like-minded others: They feel that their voices are

heard and welcomed on social media (Habermas, 2006; Pingree, 2007). Moreover, the technological affordances of social network sites contribute to the perception of anonymity and asynchronicity (Ellison & boyd, 2013). Because of these features, social network sites create a disinhibited online space, in which citizens and politicians feel free to disseminate hostile populist ideas that may not be accepted by all members of society. In other words, social media provide citizens with a safe space to express their closeness to the in-group and their disdain of vertically and horizontally constructed out-groups. Against this backdrop, social media may spark the expression of populist ideas by different actors.

### **Effects of Populist Communication**

After proposing an extensive typology of populism on both the sender side and the receiver side, the next step is to explore how the expression of populism's ideational core on both sides of communication can be causally related. It has been argued that populism on the sender side activates populist frames of interpretation among receivers (Krämer, 2014). Populism's effects may operate through the activation of stereotypes of the in-group and the out-group (e.g., Dixon, 2008). If populism on the sender side repeatedly exposes receivers to positive stereotypes of the people as good and the other as evil, the antagonist perception of reality propagated by populist communication may become highly accessible in the minds of citizens. These stereotypes are activated when citizens form an opinion on the causes and consequences of crises, such as the economic crisis, the spread of Islamic State, and the influx of political or economic refugees into Europe.

Indeed, a large body of literature has argued that crisis situations provide a fertile breeding ground for populism to root in society (e.g., Mazzoleni, 2008; Mudde, 2007; Taggart, 2004; Vasilopoulou, Halikiopoulou, & Exadaktylos, 2013). These crisis situations lend themselves to the populist polarization of us versus them. Although it is difficult for people to understand who is responsible for the causes and treatment of the crisis situation, people want to maintain a positive self-concept (Tajfel, 1978). To do so, they construct a scapegoat that can be attributed blame for their in-group's situation. By explicitly constructing the boundary between us and them, populist communication drives this process of social differentiation.

Because populist communication frames the in-group of the people as victims and the out-groups of the establishment as perpetrators, accepting this populist blame frame enables people to maintain their positive self-concept. Therefore, it can be expected that, after repeated exposure to populist communication, receivers will accept the populist divide between the people and others. As an effect of exposure to populist communication, they will absolve their imagined community of blame and point their fingers at the elites, immigrants, or other out-groups that different types of populist communication identified as candidates for responsibility.

The potential of populist communication to activate populist frames of interpretation among receivers can be specified along the lines of the proposed typologies. In general, the message communicated on the sender side is expected to be congruent with people's perceptions on the receiver side. If the media frame issues in an exclusionist populist way—for example, stereotypes of the in-group as the pure people and the out-group as a threat to the purity of this in-group—the message should be

activated among receivers. Alternatively, if populist communication constructs the populist divide as the antagonism between innocent citizens as in-group and the corrupt elites as the enemy of this in-group, receivers may think about the elites as culprit and ordinary citizens as innocent themselves as well. In other words, antiestablishment populist communication should activate antiestablishment attitudes on the receiver side.

Online populism provides a more challenging and diffuse context to study the causal relationship between the sender side and the receiver side. Because people participating in online communities can take on the roles of sender and receiver simultaneously, it is difficult to disentangle the causal order of the relationship between the sender side and the receiver side. People who post populist messages in online communities may prime certain types of populism among the readers they are appealing to. People are consequentially invited to respond in a populist way to the posts of others. If a citizen, for example, stresses that the refugee crisis is caused by the failing policy of the European Union, people who read this post can respond in a congruent populist way by stressing the binary divide between the in-group of the hardworking citizens and the corrupt politicians in the European Union. Such online expressions may thus be circular: People who express themselves in populist ways may be primed by the populist responses of others.

The causal order between populism on the sender side and populism on the receiver side of citizens may be questioned not only in online settings. Traditional off-line media may use populist communication as a strategy to appeal to an audience that interprets societal issues in a populist way themselves. Journalists may perceive that a large proportion of society, their imagined audience, blames certain out-groups for their experienced problems. To appeal to this populist audience, they may strategically engage in populist news coverage. Social media may act as a catalyst by reinforcing such people-driven expressions of populism. To respond to this populist discontent resonating in society and reinforced on social media, journalists may engage in populist coverage. Specifically, some scholars have argued that especially tabloid and entertainment outlets respond to popular tastes by using populist frames to cover societal issues (e.g., Mazzoleni, 2008).

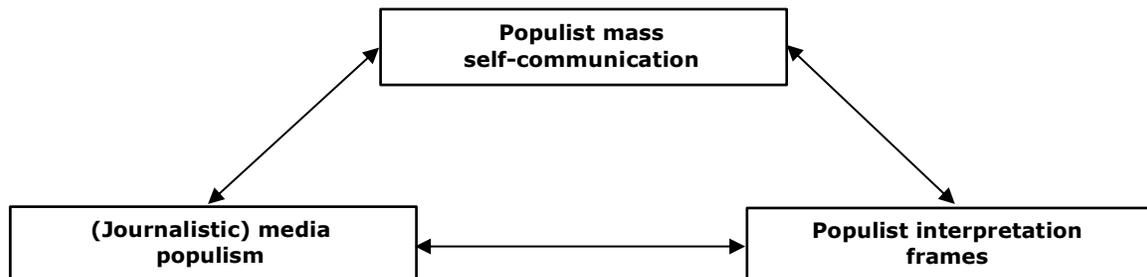
### **Toward a Revised Theoretical Framework for the Study of Populist Communication**

Understanding that populism can be detached from its ideological core and politically charged meanings, one could argue that the concept may have become too empty and diffuse, a loose set of ideas disconnected from any conceptual core or framework. To contribute to the construction of a new theoretical framework, it is important to rebuild populism as a meaningful theory at the intersections of different sides of communication. In doing so, this article foregrounds a threefold theoretical model, for which the different typologies can be attached to the different key concepts described here.

To begin, the expression of populist ideas on the supply side of online and off-line media can be considered an integral part of *media populism*: the ways in which professional communicators draw on their agency to frame societal issues using populism's ideational core of blame attribution (e.g., Krämer, 2014). This ideational core can then be enriched by all sorts of contextual factors used to frame media content, such as affective framing and interpretative journalism.

Next, on the demand-side, citizens may also interpret societal issues as more or less independent from political actors using their populist interpretation frames. This ideational notion of populism refers to the proposed multidimensional structure of populist attitudes. Populist attitudes can also be connected to contextual factors salient in the sociopolitical context of interpreting citizens. Perceptions of relative deprivation, for example, provide an important contextual factor surrounding citizens' populist interpretations on the two dimensions.

At the intersection of the supply side and the demand side, citizens can be perceived of as mass self-communicators, shifting between populist communicators and populist receivers (e.g., Castells, 2007). Hence, in online communities, the lines between citizens as senders and receivers are blurring. The introduced conceptual building blocks on the supply side and the demand side and the interactive context of online media can be integrated in a theoretical framework of populist communication that describes populist ideas as part of the expressions and interpretations of all involved actors—and the crossroads connecting these various vehicles carrying the ideational core of populism (see Figure 1).



**Figure 1. Theoretical framework for populist communication at the intersections of the sender side and the receiver side of communication.**

The traditional media's role in articulating populist interpretations is labeled *journalistic media populism*. This concept describes the process by which professional communicators actively engage in the expression of populist ideas by constructing the people-versus-out-group divide. The citizens' *populist interpretation frames* entail the populist frames of references that citizens can use to interpret all sorts of societal issues.

With the rise of social media, citizens are no longer passive receivers of one-sided messages. Rather, they become simultaneous consumers and producers of information, a process that has been described as prosumption (Ritzer & Jurgenson, 2010) or mass self-communication (Castells, 2007). This development has important ramifications for how citizens can express their populist views, being empowered to share their populist ideas with like-minded others on social network sites (Bartlett et al., 2011). Against this backdrop, the last concept in the theoretical model, which has both supply-side and demand-side components, is labeled *populist mass self-communication*.

Although most research has empirically focused on the media effects of populist ideas, one could argue that this causal pathway can move in both directions (as depicted in Figure 1 by the double-headed arrows are drawn between all three key concepts). As argued by Rooduijn, van der Brug, and de Lange (2016), people vote for populist parties not only because they are unsatisfied with politics; they *become* more discontented because of the rise of populist political parties. In a similar vein, the theoretical framework presented here allows the supply side and demand side of the populist discourse to influence each other.

To provide an example, media populism may affect not only the populist attitudes of voters; journalists can also express populist ideas as a consequence of the perceived salience of populist attitudes in society. Because they want to cater to the needs of their audience, journalists may frame societal issues in populist ways as they envision a congruence of these views in society. For populist self-communication, citizens may not develop their populist ideas independently from the media or society. It is highly likely that they engage in online populism as an extension of the views they picked up in traditional media or among other citizens.

It could be argued that this model omits a large number of potential actors involved in the expression of populism—most importantly, the political actors that are assumed to be populist. However, these other actors can be placed on the different sides of the model. It has, for example, been found that politicians frequently express their populist ideas on social media (e.g., Engesser et al., 2017). In that case, they engage in populist mass self-communication. When politicians use populist ideas in opinionated articles or party programs, they may be understood as practicing journalistic media populism (the left side of Figure 1): They become professional communicators who disseminate a populist view to the receiving audience. Contextual factors, such as the perception of a crisis situation, relative deprivation, or identity attachment can be connected to the different paths of the model, acting as a catalyst to facilitate the relationships between the different expressions of populist ideas on the supply side and the demand side.

### **How Should We Study the Dynamics Between Sender-Side and Receiver-Side Populisms?**

The comprehensive study of populist communication—its effects, consequences, and underlying mechanisms and meanings—requires a mixed-method approach of both qualitative and quantitative studies. Qualitative interviews with journalists may, for example, reveal whether, and for what reasons, they engage in populist coverage of societal issues. This may shed light on the important question of whether populist communication on the sender side can be perceived as a strategy to appeal to citizens with populist attitudes, as some scholars have assumed (e.g., Barr, 2009). In any case, foundational qualitative research may offer insights into the direction of the relationships described in the theoretical model introduced here: Are journalists actually driven by the populism they encounter on social media and in public opinion, or do they operate in a vacuum?

On the receiver side, qualitative interviews and focus group discussions with citizens may reveal in-depth understandings of how people interpret populist messages. Specifically, exposing citizens to populist messages and asking them how they interpret these messages may shed important light on what populism means for the people. Alternatively, qualitative studies that do not expose citizens to populist

messages before measuring their perceptions should result in an unobtrusive understanding of whether and how people think about societal issues using populist frames of references.

Quantitative research that aims to identify a causal relationship between populist messages and populist interpretations may draw on experiments or panel survey data paired with extensive content analyses of the media's populism. Employing this approach would enable the relationship between citizens' media use and their populist attitudes to be measured at different time points. By connecting citizens' media use to the populism of the media outlets they were exposed to, it will be possible to explore the effects of media populism on the sender side on citizens' populist attitudes on the receiver side.

Future research that investigates populism's media effects should also consider selective exposure (Bennett & Iyengar, 2008). Populist media content should appeal most to citizens with congruent frames of interpretation, whereas populist content may be opposed by those with incongruent interpretation frames. Hence, traditional studies that expose people only to populist content may find a net effect of zero, because issue publics and non-issue publics cancel each other out.

The study of online populism may be quite challenging for future research. The content of online media is fluid, changing with every new contribution. To complicate matters, it is unclear who is exposed to what content at different times. Still, both qualitative and quantitative methods can be used to analyze populism online. For example, a qualitative content analysis could be conducted of online communities in social media or comments in the online editions of traditional newspapers. Drawing on quantitative research, scholars may collect all responses to all online articles of a selected number of online newspapers in a specified period. This sample could, for example, be saved and analyzed with automatic content analysis sensitive to different references to the people, societal out-groups, and elites.

### **Discussion**

Around the globe, vastly diverse political movements have been identified with a similar populist label. This one-size-fits-all approach to populism may not be accurate, considering the large differences among and within continents. In Latin America, populism mainly revolves around the centrality and (failed) representation of the people. In Europe, the essence of populism strongly differs with regard to the people's oppositional stances, against both the establishment and societal out-groups. In the United States, populism predominately entails the construction of the opposition between the discontented people and the culprit government and the media.

The societal and scientific relevance of the diversified phenomenon emphasizes the importance of the scholarly task to clarify the ways in which populism can manifest itself on the sender side of communication and on the receiver side of the interpreting audience. Striving toward such conceptual and empirical refinement, this article proposes a typology of populism in different contexts: on the sender side, on the receiver side, and in online settings. Table 1 provides an overview of these typologies.

**Table 1. Overview of the Proposed Typologies of Populism on the Sender Side, in Online Contexts, and on the Receiver Side of Communication.**

<b>Definitions</b>	<b>Populist opposition</b>	<b>Sender side</b>	<b>Interactive (social) media</b>	<b>Receiver side</b>
<b>Minimal</b>	—	People centrality	—	—
<b>Complete</b>	Vertical	Antiestablishment Antieconomic elites Antiexperts Antimedia	Antiestablishment Antieconomic elites Antimedia	Antiestablishment (subtypes link to sender side)
	Horizontal	In-group superiority	In-group superiority	Exclusionism (subtypes link to sender side)

On the sender side of communication, this article proposes a typology of eight populisms, for which people centrality provides the minimal condition that needs to be satisfied for the other types of populism to be defined. The seven fuller types of populism can roughly be divided into horizontal and vertical people-versus-others oppositions. On the receiver side of communication, a distinction is made between the two core fuller types of populism: antiestablishment and exclusionism. The dynamics between senders and receivers can most comprehensively be identified in online contexts, where ordinary people are empowered to be both senders and receivers of populist messages. Based on empirical data, this article argues that the typology of the sender side of communication can largely be translated to online contexts.

The study of different types of populism in three different locations of the communication process, as explicated in the revised theoretical framework of populist communication, may provide important opportunities and challenges for future research. On the receiver side, this article identifies the most salient media effects of exposure to populist communication. This article further proposes some theses concerning the mechanisms underlying these effects, of which selective exposure, social differentiation, and relative deprivation are the most important. Practically, both quantitative and qualitative methods suitable to study the dynamics of populism in different stages of the communication process are proposed and evaluated for their value.

This exploration of the multifaceted concept of populism has some limitations. First, the typologies proposed are mostly based on theoretical rather than empirical work. However, we hope that the proposed typologies will spark future research to empirically validate their existence in different contexts around the world. Second, the balance between the proposed typologies on the sender side and receiver side is, concerning its richness, skewed toward the sender side. This is mainly due to the observed imbalance of existing research: Most research has focused on the multivocality of populism on the sender side and assumed that populist interpretations on the receiver side are unidimensional. This

article proposes a typology consisting of two core populisms. Again, future research should investigate whether this structure is in need of further refinement. For now, the empirical evidence points to the existence of two main types that can theoretically be subdivided in the rich typology proposed on the sender side.

Overall, this article aims to provide a conceptual clarification of mediatized populism propagated on different sides of both off-line and online communication processes. The typologies, the exploration of effects and underlying mechanisms, and the specific recommendations on how these can be incorporated in future research should provide scholars from interdisciplinary backgrounds with a comprehensive theoretical framework to study the dynamics between populism and the media in a more thorough and precise way.

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