University of Southampton

Faculty of Social Science

School of Politics and International Relations

How do populist supporters engage online?

by

Justyna Karolina Lisińska (Jonak)

Thesis for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy

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Abstract

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Populism has recently gained momentum across the globe, with populist parties having a significant or greater presence in political systems than ever before. Although the connection between the Internet and populism was identified quite early, researchers have only recently started to be interested in populism and its relationship to the Internet. Nonetheless, substantial attention is paid to the supply-side of populism (politicians or political parties). While the Internet provided new means for populist actors to communicate with the electorate, people who support populist leaders, politicians or parties also take advantages of Internet tools. The Internet gives populist supporters the ability to connect with like-minded people and express themselves openly. To investigate the demand-side of populism from the perspective of populist online discussion, I first re-think a typology of political participation offered by Ekman & Amnå (2012). I make a distinction between *social involvement* (being attentive to politics), *political participation* (actions aimed at influencing the political outcomes) and *civic engagement* (working towards community) and argue that these three categories are not exclusive and provide different lenses through which to view political activity online. In order to explore populist supporters' political engagement online, the perspective of *social involvement* is used. *Social involvement* in this thesis is analysed by looking at the online expression of populist supporters and their mode of democratic communication. I analyse the online activity of populist supporters of the Polish civic movement Kukiz'15 between 2017 and 2018. The proliferation of different online services and features, used for many purposes, makes it impractical to study one platform in-depth, therefore, one element of Facebook was selected – Facebook Pages. Facebook Pages are a popular feature and widely used by populist supporters in many countries. The *social involvement* of supporters of Kukiz'15 was examined at micro- and macro-level. The micro-level of analysis investigated the modes of communication used in comment sections based on Freelon's (2010) conceptualisation of democratic norms of communication. The results presented differences between two analysed Facebook Pages in support of Kukiz'15. The Facebook Page entitled *Kukiz'15* tended to attract more people who engaged in insulting comments, while *Informator Kukiz'15* presented a more

informal style of communication between its supporters. It was also discovered that the context in which comments are made is very important, as forms of communication are not restricted to only one model of democratic communication. The macro-level study looked at all Pages created in support of Kukiz'15, and it was discovered that Facebook Pages supporting the same party are not homogenous. Additionally, it was learnt that the two previously analysed Pages presented unique examples when compared to other Pages.

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Research Thesis: Declaration of Authorship

Print name: Justyna Karolina Lisinska

Title of thesis: How do populist supporters engage online?

I declare that this thesis and the work presented in it are my own and has been generated by me as the result of my own original research.

I confirm that:

1. This work was done wholly or mainly while in candidature for a research degree at this University.
2. Where any part of this thesis has previously been submitted for a degree or any other qualification at this University or any other institution, this has been clearly stated.
3. Where I have consulted the published work of others, this is always clearly attributed.
4. Where I have quoted from the work of others, the source is always given. With the exception of such quotations, this thesis is entirely my own work.
5. I have acknowledged all main sources of help.
6. Where the thesis is based on work done by myself jointly with others, I have made clear exactly what was done by others and what I have contributed myself.
7. Partial results of this thesis were presented at Web Science Conference 2019, and European Consortium for Political Research in 2019. None of this work has been published before submission

Signature: Justyna Karolina Lisinska Date:21/03/2021

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With the oversight of my main supervisor, editorial and proofreading advice has been sought. No changes of intellectual content were made as a result of this advice.

Abbreviations

EU ..... European Union

JOW ..... Single-seat constituencies

K15 ..... Kukiz'15

LPR ..... League of Polish Families

NATO ..... The North Atlantic Treaty Organization

OC(s) ..... Online community/ies

OPC(s) ..... Online political community/ies

PiS ..... Law and Justice

PO ..... Civic Platform

PSL ..... Polish People's Party

SLD ..... Democratic Left Alliance

SRD ..... Self-Defence of the Republic of Poland

Chapter 1 Introduction and background

1.1 Introduction

This thesis examines the online engagement of the supporters of Kukiz'15 (K15), a relatively new populist movement that entered the political scene in 2015 in Poland. Its party leader Pawel Kukiz, known due to his musical career, came third in the Polish presidential elections, while K15 gained 8.81% of the votes in the 2015 parliamentary elections (PKW, 2015). The main policy demand of Pawel Kukiz is to change the proportional electoral system to single-member constituencies (referred to as JOW). K15 was selected as a subject of the research for several reasons. First of all, K15 actively used social media as a way of communicating to and reaching its electorate at the time of writing this thesis. Secondly, it presents an unusual case; K15's supporters were mainly young, educated people in 2015 (Centrum of Public Opinion Research CBOS, 2017). This profile does not seem to fit the general profile of voters supporting populist parties, who typically tend to be older and less educated (Norris & Inglehart, 2016). Finally, Poland as a country itself is an interesting example, as it is governed by a populist party – Law and Justice (PiS), elected in 2015 and re-elected in 2019 – which indicates substantial support for populist parties among Polish citizens.

In this chapter, I will start by presenting background information about the research, exploring why it is important to undertake this research and analyse populist supporters from the perspective of *social involvement.* I will do this by placing this topic in the broader discussion of why online discussion matters. I will also describe the selected case study, K15. Later, I will talk about the different contributions that this study is hoping to make. An overview of the chapters will also be included in this section for easier navigation.

1.2 Background

With the introduction of the Internet and declining levels of political participation across many advanced democracies, researchers started to be interested in the potential of the Internet to offer the promise of better democracy (see Dahlberg, 2001c; Freelon, 2010). The development of the Internet provided new possibilities for accessing information, discussing politics and exchanging views (Polat, 2005). As Hill & Hughes (1998) have pointed out, any changes in communication in democratic societies will have an impact on politics. It is, therefore, not surprising that technological developments have attracted the attention of many scholars. Based on the idealised concepts of deliberative, liberal or participatory democracy, academics have been

divided into two camps: those who have seen the Internet as an empowering tool for citizens (e.g. Rheingold, 2000) and those who have been critical of the Internet and its problematic infrastructure (e.g. Sunstein, 2001).

The rise of social media has brought another change in political communication. These changes have been utilised widely by politicians, for example Barack Obama's widely discussed presidential campaign in 2008 and his use of social media to mobilise the electorate (see, e.g., Wattal *et al.,* 2010). After more than a decade, social media and its role in politics are again highly discussed. Political events such as the election of Donald Trump as President of the USA in 2016, and the vote to leave the European Union in the 2016 UK referendum have raised concerns over social media and its contribution to these outcomes (e.g. Baer, 2016; El-Bermawy, 2016; Jackson, 2017; Parkinson, 2016). While social media was praised by journalists (e.g. Dutta & Fraser, 2008; Kiss, 2008) and academics (e.g. Katz *et al.,* 2013) for its democratic potential when Barack Obama won the election in 2008, the current debate has turned into criticism of social media for spreading incorrect information (e.g. 'fake news') or using algorithms to personalise the content and thereby limit the political views of users (e.g. El-Bermawy, 2016; Silverman, 2016). These considerations regarding social media are in line with the rise of populism across the globe.

Social media has gained incredible popularity in the last decade, changing how people communicate over a long distance, conduct business, and engage in politics. Social networking sites are also an excellent channel for populist politicians, enabling them to present messages to large audiences online and bypass traditional gatekeepers (Engesser *et al.,* 2017). However, current research into populism and social media overlooks the fact that social media platforms are also substantially used by supporters of populist actors and parties. Any approaches looking at the demand-side of populism on social media have varied in their framework driven from a range of different disciplines, and they considered specific countries – typically the USA, or those of Western Europe. The studies also looked at various aspects such as: the relationship between social media usage and the support for populist candidates (Groshek & Koc-Michalska, 2017); digital populists and their characteristics (Bartlett *et al.,* 2011; Bartlett *et al.,* 2012); characteristics of people following right-wing populists (Heiss & Matthes, 2017); populist attitudes and their association to news consumption (Stier *et al.,* 2020); and the effects of exposure to populist content (Müller *et al.,* 2017). The digital traces or user-generated content of supporters of populist parties have been less analysed. An exception is the study conducted by Hameleers (2019), which analysed the political discourse of ordinary citizens in the Netherlands on Facebook.

Clearly, the supporters of populist parties/movements can group together on social media and express their political views, share content via text, video or image, interact with other users, and

be politically engaged in many different forms. Politicians or elites do not necessarily manage these political acts; therefore, supporters can have greater independence in their communication and expression. Groups are one of the features of Facebook where this can occur; I discovered over fifty Facebook groups supporting populist parties in Poland, with some having a strong online presence (e.g. Kukiz'15 Army with 33,000 members) at the time of writing this thesis. What is interesting is that, in 2016, I did not observe a significant presence of online groups on Facebook supporting central, liberal and left-wing parties in Poland. The same phenomenon was noticed in other countries while I searched for different groups on Facebook, e.g. in the UK, there were easily noticeable Facebook groups supporting UKIP with a significant membership, but the same could not be said about the Conservative Party in 2016. In 2017, this trend seemed to change slightly, especially for Poland. For example, there were more groups and pages created for supporters of Civic Platform (PO), the central-liberal party in Poland. What is more, it seems that these groups/pages were created in imitation of groups and pages supporting K15, a populist movement (e.g. K15 has groups and pages designed for each city in Poland, and PO tried to do the same). This change could have been driven by upcoming parliamentary elections in Poland in 2019, and PO's supporters, realising the potential of the Internet, deciding to engage with new ways to attract voters.

Despite these considerations, the user-generated content of populist supporters online and what it means for a political landscape remains underexplored. This thesis aims to explore how populist supporters of K15 express themselves politically on Facebook Pages by looking at their online communication practices and utilising Freelon's (2010) three models of democratic communication. Although Facebook groups seem to be appropriate for this type of research, Facebook Pages were selected due to the Facebook API and its terms of service. Facebook groups are more private and require approval from the gatekeeper, therefore making a systematic analysis more challenging. Online communicative practices are conceptualised as *social involvement*, and they are placed in the broader typology of online political participation. Such an approach presents a departure from the conventional classification, which would view communication practices as only the activities that precede a form of formal political participation without classifying them as a legitimate form of political engagement. It also moves away from Western-oriented research by looking at Poland, a country from Eastern Europe. Eastern and Central Europe countries present a compelling case; they are significantly affected by populism and populist actors or parties enjoy great support in this region (Boros *et al.,* 2016). Although citizens' involvement in politics is a concern in Western as well as Eastern Europe democracies, in post-communist countries, political disengagement is more prominent than in countries with

more established democracies (in terms of not only voting but also party membership and protest) (Ekman *et al.,* 2016). Yet, there is visible activity of Polish populist supporters online.

This research makes two contributions: theoretical and empirical. To study populist engagement online and take into consideration their communicative practice (user-generated content), I defined what it means to be politically engaged online by re-thinking the typology of political participation and applying it to the online environment. I later incorporated the literature from communication studies to develop a framework of studying one of the categories of the offered typology of online political participation, namely *social involvement* (theoretical contribution). My empirical contribution derives from the fact that I use the framework developed by Freelon (2010) for studying political discussion online, applying it to a different context (populist supporters) with a different methodological approach (qualitative content analysis instead of quantitative content analysis) compared to other authors who have also adopted Freelon (2010)'s framework. The findings suggest that the two Facebook Pages examined show different modes of democratic communication when compared, possibly because Facebook Pages supporting K15 are not uniform and might have different roles. I later analysed this claim by developing a typology of all Facebook Pages created in support of K15. The results show that these Pages are not homogeneous, and there are variations in the way they are managed and by whom, with no uniform strategy of how the Pages should be run. This study also revealed the uniqueness of two previously analysed Pages – *Kukiz'15 and Informator Kukiz'15*. *Kukiz'15* was the only Page classified as an Official Page, while *Informator Kukiz'15* changed its role since it was last observed, and no longer supports K15.

1.3 The importance of studying political discourse online

Right-wing populism has gained significant prominence around the globe (e.g. Boulianne, *et al.,* 2020; Hameleers, 2019). In 2015, Law and Justice (PiS) became the ruling party in Poland, winning a majority in the Polish Sejm. In August 2018, Viktor Orbán became the second longest-serving Prime Minister in Hungary. In Sweden, in September 2018, Democrats became the third-largest party in the Riksdag. In Brazil, far-right politician Jair Bolsonaro became President in January 2019. These political events, as well as seeing populist supporters engaged on social platforms and my interest in how they communicate, led me to this research. I decided that it is crucial not only to understand their online communication but also to place them in a wider typology of online political participation to make richer conclusions for future research. If the communicative practices of citizens cause alarm in the context of a healthy functioning democracy (and if that concerns other political groups), it may be necessary to consider what solutions could be implemented to reverse this trend without restricting ourselves only to technological approaches.

The Web Science programme that enabled me to undertake this research emphasises avoiding investigating the Internet through the lens of social or technological determinism. Instead, it views technology as a social-technical construct, where technical and social factors influence each other. Its unique design required me to finish MSc in Web Science before starting my PhD journey, undertaking a combination of Computer Science and Sociology modules.

In 2002, The Boston Globe published an article titled *"Freedom to Flame. Online Political Chat is an Insult to Democracy"*. The author of the article expressed his disapproval of online political talks filled with "flames" that endanger democracy (Stromer-Galley & Wichowski, 2011: 168). It is generally believed that through political discussion, citizens can clarify their views and opinions, learn about political issues, and therefore make informed choices while voting and/or being critical about political parties and elected politicians (ibid.: 169). However, research on political discussion has shown that discussing politics online can only meet some of the criteria of Habermas' idealised vision (e.g. see Freelon, 2010), which assumed rational and reasonable debate to reach a common ground.

In the age of social media, personalised content, campaigns targeted at certain political groups, and the spread of content with simplified or untrue information, we need a reasonable discussion more than ever. It is essential to encourage people to reflect on the shared content, try to understand opposing views, and engage in a debate rather than looking for ways to attack a person who holds different opinions. Social media platforms are becoming a crucial tool for learning about politics. For example, in Hungary, Facebook is the first choice of young people for sourcing political information (Bene, 2017). A recent study conducted in the USA showed that in 2018, around "half of Americans […] engaged in some form of political or social-minded activity on social media" (Pew Research Centre, 2018). In Poland, a study conducted by sociologists from the University of Social Sciences and Humanities (SWPS) found that 75% of participants (1,005 adults) indicated that Facebook was their primary source of information (Reporterzy, 2018). However, social media use for political purposes does not necessarily translate into political knowledge for users. Research in this area is still catching up with current trends and, so far, the results have been mixed. As Shehata & Strömbäck (2018) noticed, different conclusions produced by studies in relation to political knowledge and social media use result from the fact that political knowledge is measured in distinct ways. Nonetheless, Gottfried *et al.* (2017) pointed out that in the political communication research domain, there is general agreement that debate viewing (observing debates, listening to different arguments) is beneficial for knowledge gain by citizens. The development of the Internet has facilitated debating politics, and it is not only limited to citizens listening to or watching an exchange of arguments between politicians. The way social media content is consumed might differ from person to person. Nevertheless, those who are

more likely to comment and engage in a discussion might have an impact on people who passively learn by just observing and being exposed to political content. Therefore, if political discussion online has more characteristics of uncivil responses, then I suggest that we start thinking about ways of educating people to be digitally literate, to able to critically evaluate information, and to conduct a reasonable discussion. This kind of thinking puts a stronger emphasis on users' contributions while discussing politics, rather than just thinking about social media's design.

1.4 K15 as an example of online populist engagement

Before explaining why K15 was selected as a case study, I will first justify studying online populist engagement from the demand-side perspective. Over the last decade, there has been a noticeable increase in support for populist parties (Gil de Zúñiga *et al.,* 2020: 586). Although it has been previously established by Engesser *et al.* (2017) that social media enables populist politicians to reach a wider audience online and bypass traditional gatekeepers, the potential for online engagement of people who support populist actors/parties has often been overlooked. As Bartlett *et al.* (2011: 33) notes, levels of Facebook membership of populist supporters can be much higher than official party membership. What is more, the recent study conducted by Pirro & Portos (2021) showed that populist party voters engage politically more than non-populist party voters. In addition to this, right-wing populist voters are more likely to engage in non-institutional participation than non-populist right and left-wing voters. The analysis was based at the level of non-electoral participation, which took into consideration activities such as contacting politicians, signing petitions, demonstrating, striking, damaging public goods, and using social media for political purposes (e.g. searching for political information, visiting political websites). The study also considered nine European countries, including Poland.

As established in the previous section (Background), Poland represents an interesting case for the investigation of populist engagement as it is a country where a populist party is in government and its politics are significantly affected by populism. Moreover, the level of political disengagement (in terms of voting, party membership and protest activities) is greater in post-communist countries such as Poland compared to more established democracies (Boros *et al.,* 2016). In 2015, one year before I started my PhD journey, PiS – a populist right-wing party – won a majority in the Sejm, while the newcomer, populist movement, K15 (also with a right-wing orientation) came third in the parliamentary election (PKW, 2015).

Out of these two cases, K15 was selected for several reasons. Firstly, PiS is an established party that attracted support from mainly older people with lower levels of education living in small villages (Maliszewski, 2015). The profile of PiS voters fits the description provided by Norris &

Inglehart (2016) as to who tends to support authoritative populist parties. According to Norris & Inglehart (2016), supporters of populist parties tend to be older, male and less educated. Similar studies showed that that radical right-wing voters also tend to be unemployed (Lubbers *et al.,* 2002; Van der Brug *et al.,* 2000) and uneducated (e.g. Arzheimer, 2009; Lubbers *et al.,* 2002). However, this profile does not correspond to the socio-demographic of K15 supporters. In 2015, K15 attracted mainly young people aged 18-24 (19%) and 25-34 (38%) (CBOS, 2017). What is more, the K15 electorate typically had a least a high school degree or higher (Maliszewski, 2015). Secondly, the success of K15 presents an example of a loosely organised grass-roots movement that heavily relied on social media.

People encouraged by the success of the movement's leader Pawel Kukiz in the presidential election in 2014 registered themselves for the Electoral Committee (Kukiz'15, 2017). Because Kukiz decided not to register his movement as a political party, he did not receive any financial support to run the party. However, Kukiz and his supporters used social media to disseminate their content through groups of like-minded people. For example, I observed while writing my dissertation that more than fifty different Facebook groups supported K15 in 2017 (Jonak, 2017: 19). I also noticed that over 100 Facebook Pages were set up for different districts in Poland. In their 'About' section, some of these pages indicated the purpose of enabling direct contact with local representatives in a given district (e.g. Kukiz'15 Sławno https://www.facebook.com/Kukiz15Slawno).

K15's use of social media and loose organisational structure can be compared to the populist Five Star Movement (M5S) in Italy, founded by former TV comedian Beppe Grillo and the late Gianroberto Casaleggio, an IT expert (Bock, 2021). Grillo launched a blog in 2005 which "became one of the most influential websites in Italy" (Vittori, 2017: 330). Apart from using online tools and anti-establishment rhetoric, the M5S is also loosely organised. According to Kitschelt (2006: 280), populist movement parties lack a clear organisational structure, meaning that everyone can enter and exit them. They also "lack an institutionalised system of aggregating interests through designated organs" (ibid.: 280) and engage in a variety of different activities, ranging from discussing bills in the Parliament and participating in protest activities (ibid.: 280-281). The rhetoric of M5S rejected any form of formal hierarchy. In 2009, text on Beppe Grillo's blog suggested that the role of governing and leading should be in the hands of Internet users (Bailo, 2017: 306). In turn, Pawel Kukiz, in his Facebook posts and other statements, very often highlights the belief that citizens that should be in the centre of the decision-making process. In K15's programme Strategia Zmiany (n.d), the first chapter was titled "giving control over our country back to citizens".

K15, therefore, represents an idiographic case study. That means the "aim is to describe, explain, interpret, and/or understand a single case as an end in itself rather than as a vehicle for developing broader theoretical generalisations" (Levy, 2008: 4). The analysis of K15 is guided by a theoretical framework (Chapter 2) and by mainly deductive (Chapter 6) and inductive studies (Chapter 7).

1.5 Research aims and questions

The main research question for this study is ***"How do populist supporters engage online?"***. The study aims to understand the political engagement of populist supporters through the lens of their communicative practices. In order to do so, theoretical and empirical aims were formulated:

Theoretical aims:

- *To place online communication practices in a wider political landscape*
- *To develop a framework for studying online political behaviour which takes into account the Internet's communication and information capabilities*

Empirical aims*:*

Based on a literature review, and theoretical considerations of what it means to be politically active, two empirical aims have been defined:

- *To examine populist supporters' communication online by adopting Freelon (2010)'s three models of democratic communication*
- *To examine the homogeneity of Facebook Pages supporting K15*

Research questions:

The following research questions emerged from the primary motivation on how to view, classify and analyse online discussion spaces. RQ1 and RQ2 relate to theoretical aims, how to investigate online activities and account for communication capabilities enabled by the Internet. RQ3 and RQ4 consider empirical aims, where RQ3 applies Freelon's (2010) framework to the comment section on two Facebook Pages supporting K15, while RQ4 classifies Facebook Pages to assess their homogeneity.

RQ1: What does it mean to be politically active online?

RQ2: How to analyse populist's political engagement by considering their online communication?

Study One:

RQ3: How do populist supporters communicate online based on three modes of democratic communication?

a) What type of democratic communication do populist supporters present on Facebook Pages?

b) Is there any dominant mode of democratic communication?

c) Are there any differences in modes of communication between two political Pages supporting K15 on the same platform?

Study Two:

RQ4: Are Facebook Pages created in support of K15 homogenous?

a) What are the types of Facebook Pages supporting K15?

b) What are the roles of the Facebook Pages supporting K15?

c) How are the analysed Pages (*Kukiz'15* and *Informator Kukiz'15*) positioned within the broader environment of Facebook Pages created in support of K15? Are there any differences between the attributes of *Kukiz'15* and *Informator Kukiz'15*?

The results from Study One informed further questions to be investigated for Study Two. Study One looked at the communication style and differences in the discourse between these two Pages that have the same technological design. The findings showed that there are indeed variances in communication when comparing both Pages. Study Two then confirmed that Facebook Pages created for K15, although they might seem similar in terms of their aims, vary in terms of who manages them and the type of Page that is presented. What is more, it has been observed that these Pages are very dynamic, with fluctuating and changing roles.

1.6 The contribution to the literature

This thesis contributes to three domains of research: populism and social media, online political participation and online political discussion. For the research on populism and social media, it draws attention to the fact that the demand-side of populism on social media should be explored further, not only in relation to users, but also their ability to spread populist messages, their communication style, and their political knowledge resulting from online participation. It also presents a complex relationship between demand- and supply-side division of populism on social

media. In terms of online political participation, this paper accounts for communicative activities enabled on the Internet and shows how they can be studied by utilising an existing framework. Lastly, it provides an area for further exploration in terms of online discussion spaces. It indicates that technological platforms should not be seen as fixed designs, but rather as constancy evolving artefacts influenced by both technological development and users' usage.

1.6.1 Populism and the Internet

There is a growing interest in populism and social media (sometimes called digital populism). Until recently, it was more common for populism to be analysed by looking at the supply-side (politicians or political parties) rather than the demand-side (people who tend to vote for populist actors/parties or support them). The same division can be noted in the research considering populism and the Internet, with researchers paying more attention to the supply-side of Internet populism (e.g. Bracciale & Martella, 2017; Ernst *et al.,* 2017). Nonetheless, the Internet is a platform which is utilised by citizens as well as politicians/parties. By investigating the communicative practices of populist supporters on the Internet, it is hoped that this thesis will make an individual contribution towards populism on the Internet from the demand-side perspective and draw the attention of researchers to the fact that user-generated content by people who endorse populist parties is equally important. The findings from the analysis of all discovered Facebook Pages reinforcing K15 indicated that the interconnectedness of the demand- and supply-side might be more complex than at first anticipated. Pages created by people who show an interest in the party can very easily transform into the Pages of candidates/politicians. Once engaged, people can turn themselves into more official roles associated with the parties.

1.6.2 Online political participation

This thesis aims to contribute to the literature regarding digital populism, and seeks to extend the current knowledge in relation to online political participation. The early studies interested in political participation and the Internet were measuring the effects of the Internet use on traditional forms of political participation (e.g. Valenzuela *et al.,* 2009). Although more studies are now interested in political behaviour on the Internet, researchers have been inconsistent in their approach towards the definition of online political participation, classifying different online activities as online political participation (Lutz *et al.,* 2014). Apart from this, Lutz *et al.* (2014) noticed in their systematic overview that online political participation is very often combined with a definition of civic engagement. Civic engagement itself is a fuzzy term, with scholars adopting a definition of civic engagement that fits their research purpose (ibid.). Undoubtedly, the development of the Internet and the rise of different forms of political engagement that cannot

be captured by a traditional definition of political participation have posed further problems, raising questions of what should and should not be assigned to the category of political participation. Nonetheless, scholars should pay greater attention to defining political participation since adopting different approaches contributes to the terminological confusion and it becomes impossible to draw conclusions (see Lutz *et al.,* 2014).

I address this terminological issue by utilising a typology of political participation provided by Ekman & Amnå (2012) and applying it to the online environment. Ekman & Amnå (2012) have made a distinction between latent (*civic engagement* and *social involvement*) and manifest forms of political participation (*formal* and *informal political participation*). I suggest that this division applies to the online environment, and in fact can be viewed as matching perspectives that other researchers have presented while considering political participation on the Internet. In this paper, I focus on one element of online political participation, namely, *social involvement*. *Social involvement* is one of the dimensions of political participation offered by Ekman & Amnå (2012), conceptualised as being attentive to politics and political issues. The attention to politics can be manifested online in many ways. However, I focus on the Internet's communication and information capabilities rather than specific features of online services and the interactions which they enable. By applying the research from political communication, I later map out different approaches towards online political participation, which fall under the category of *social involvement*. These approaches are *deliberation*, *expressivity* and *building a community*. I claim these perspectives focus on different affordances of the Internet, and that they co-exist in online spaces. Adopting Freelon's (2010) three-democratic communication model, I hope to learn about populist supporters' online behaviour. The original contribution will be driven mainly from the fact that communicative practices are viewed as a form of political participation. However, this view does not reject the idea that communicative practices are the precursor of political participation. Communicative practices might still have a positive effect on traditional forms of political participation (e.g. voting). Nonetheless, the crucial difference is that this type of research might draw the attention of scholars interested in the effects of political behaviour online to look closely at expression online, rather than rely solely on self-reported Internet political activities and measuring them against offline political activity (for example, researchers who examined if certain political activities such as liking Facebook Pages or being a member of a politically orientated group on Facebook are linked with other forms of offline political participation).

1.6.3 Online political discussion

Political discussion has been studied for decades by media and communication scholars. The idea of political talk being essential for democracy goes back to the writings of John Dewey (1946),

Harold Lasswell (1941), Jürgen Habermas (1962/1989; 1984) or Benjamin Barber (1984). John Dewey (1946) suggested that American democracy is at risk; one of his suggestions to improve the situation was to discuss politics with others who do not necessarily agree and create a public sphere. A similar idea is echoed in the work of Jürgen Habermas (1962/1989; 1984), although he mainly referred to the role of elites in politics by suggesting that they need to be engaged in rational-critical debate to hold the government accountable. Benjamin Barber (1984) further enhanced these approaches towards creating a public sphere by suggesting that all citizens should be engaged in discussing politics to create a healthy democracy where informed decisions influence politics.

Interest in the political discussion online can be linked to two trends. The first trend is related to Putnam's (2000) book, *Bowling Alone*, suggesting that citizens are less and less involved in politics in America, linking this trend with the increase in watching television. The second event involves the birth of the World Wide Web and new forms of being politically active. Although there were pessimistic views of the democratic potential of the Internet (e.g. Sunstein, 2001), most of the research in this terrain has focused on the potential of the Internet to be a space where rational debate between citizens can happen, facilitating opinion formation. Because of the problematic infrastructure of some online spaces, most of the research devoted attention to what extent the online political areas meet the criteria of deliberative democracy (Freelon, 2010). Nonetheless, as Freelon (2010) suggested, there are other models of democratic communication apart from deliberation: the *liberal individualist* and *communitarian* models. Freelon (2010)'s framework is advantageous in portraying that different modes of democratic communication can co-exist. The author's three models of democratic communication have been applied to Twitter and newspaper comment sections (Freelon, 2015), non-political spaces such as online cricket forums (Yan *et al.,* 2018), and more recently to Facebook Pages for political parties in Spain (Valera-Ordaz, 2019). This thesis applied the three models of democratic communication to Facebook Pages that support the K15 populist movement. It also adopted a methodology where some of the shortcomings of these previous studies are addressed. First, I looked at posts and comments by analysing the underlying meaning of the communication between users, reviewing the comments in the context in which they were posted in order to interpret them. What is more, by analysing the same discussion space (Facebook Pages) and the same political formation (supporters of K15), I suggested that technological design is not the only factor influencing the discussion. The individual users who post and comment will also have a significant impact on the type of democratic communication used. Therefore, technology is not viewed as a fixed product but as a social-technological construct. Based on this argument, I claim that online spaces should not be

viewed as homogenous, which was later confirmed by the second study and the classification of Facebook Pages supporting K15.

Apart from applying Freelon (2010) to a different context and online space, as well as adopting a different methodological approach, this research maps online political discussion to the typology of political participation. Online political talk was only briefly mentioned by suggesting that it is important for a democracy to have informed debate without providing any reason as to why it is important for a democracy and how (e.g. Stromer-Galley, 2014; Stromer-Galley & Wichowski, 2011). Putnam's (2000) work on declining forms of civic engagement was often mentioned as to why it is important to study online spaces (e.g. Freelon, 2010; Stromer-Galley, 2014). In this way, it is possible to see why political talk online has been treated as a form of civic engagement or pre-activity that can foster civic engagement by allowing exposure to different political issues and ways to get involved (Zhou *et al.,* 2008). However, political communication scholars were ignoring the research from political science, which was interested in the new forms of being politically engaged. By combining both fields, it is possible to draw more fruitful conclusions about political participation. Through knowing the modes of democratic communication of certain groups, it is possible to see if there is a correlation with other forms of political participation (e.g. voting). This could be further expanded to see if there is any relation between the mode of democratic communication presented by a particular group, their political knowledge, and their voting.

1.7 Overview of the chapters

Chapter 1 sets the study in a wider context, providing a description of this research as well as the theoretical and empirical contributions that this first phase of research was trying to achieve (Background). Later, the study's aims and questions are listed (Research Aims and Questions). The description as to why it is important to study *social involvement* from a perceptive of discussing politics online is provided (The importance of this study). It also provides the descriptions of different contributions to the literature that this study is trying to add by noting that this is a continuously evolving process (The contribution to the literature). These three different possible contributions to the literature are:

- **Populism on the Internet** (it considers the demand-side of populism, focusing on supporters and their engagement online rather than politicians or political parties).

- **Online political participation** (by utilising the political participation typology offered by Ekman & Amnå (2012) and applying it to the online environment as well as conducting communication research to investigate one of the categories of online political participation – *social involvement*).

- **Online political discussion** (by applying the framework of three modes of democratic communication provided by Freelon (2010) to a different online space – *Facebook* – and to a specific political group – *populist supporters*. The methodology is also enhanced by conducting a qualitative content analysis. As the online political discussion is placed in the typology of online political participation, it is possible for other studies to draw more fruitful conclusions and see the relation between the discussion type and other forms of being politically active).

Chapter 2 provides an overview of populism, an ideology that divides society into two separate camps: *pure people* and *corrupt elite* (Mudde, 2004). It also reviews the broader literature on political participation and suggests a typology of online political participation. In later parts, one specific element of political participation online – *social involvement* – is brought to the literature from communication studies, and three different approaches to the democratic potential of the Internet are presented (*the deliberative*, *communitarian* and *liberal individualist* modes). These approaches are suggested to be used for the empirical measures of *social involvement* and referred to as modes of democratic communication.

Chapter 3 describes the political-historical context in Poland, describes K15 and its supporters, and presents a short description of populism in Poland.

Chapter 4 develops the theoretical framework for analysing the engagement of populists online through the lens of their communicative practices. This framework heavily draws on Dahlberg's (2001a) three distinct models of democracy (*liberal individualist*, *communitarian* and *deliberative)* and Freelon's (2010) indicative characteristics of these models. I explain the origins of the concept of three modes of democratic communication and suggest what mode of democratic communication is expected to be seen in online spaces that gather populist supporters. While analysing the discussion spaces, it needs to be considered that technology, as well as users, will be influencing the mode of democratic communication. While other scholars have acknowledged that technological design is not the only significant factor influencing discussion, the argument that technology and users shape each other has not been developed further.

Chapter 5 presents an overview of the chosen research framework. To investigate populist engagement online, qualitative research was chosen. First, the approach towards research on the Internet and the assumptions of qualitative research tradition are explained. As this study seeks to combine the insights from political science and communication studies, this chapter addresses how interdisciplinarity can be achieved throughout this study. In this chapter, the method of qualitative content analysis is described with its disadvantages and advantages.

Chapter 6 describes the findings from the first study. First, some descriptive counts and percentages are presented. Later, the qualitative content analysis results are described. The summary suggests that although the most dominant mode of democratic communication used by populist supporters was the *communitarian* mode, it cannot be assumed that they necessarily form a community. Some part of their identity was revealed, such as attacking others (parties, politicians, celebrities), but this was not a significant feature, and conversational talk between users was also present. There were also differences in the modes of communication between the analysed Pages when compared. The limitations of this study are suggested.

Chapter 7 shows the findings from the second study, which aimed at building a typology of Facebook Pages supporting K15 in order to explore further the differences between two analysed Facebook Pages. The results suggest Pages created to support K15 are not homogenous. These Pages are very dynamic with shifting roles, including the fact that they might no longer support K15. Two previously analysed in-depth Pages (*Kukiz'15* and *Informator Kukiz'15*) present unique examples. *Kukiz'15* is the only Page that was identified as a formal type, while *Informator Kukiz'15* changed its role by suggesting that it no longer endorses K15 following the party leader's decision to make a coalition with another party. An interesting observation has also been made concerning the demand- and supply-side division of populism. There was a sign that this division might not apply in the online world, as people who manage Pages or websites as *ordinary* citizens can become official members of the party by running, for example, in the election.

Chapter 8 summarises the key arguments of the thesis in relation to the research questions it set out to answer. It also provides recommendations and areas for further research.

Chapter 2 Populism and Online Political Participation

2.1 Introduction

The recent rise of populism across the globe has coincided with technological changes in communication and media systems. Passive receivers of content have become active, engaged creators, while news media firms have started producing material to reach a niche audience, very often presenting facts ideologically contested on either the political right or left (Crilley & Gillespie, 2019). In addition to this, the proliferation of news services online enables more selectivity of information for audience tailored to their beliefs. Although these trends are alarming in the context of political knowledge based on facts rather than political predispositions, political scientist scholars were initially more invested in participatory outcomes influenced by the Internet. I will challenge this approach by answering the question "*what does it mean to be politically active online?"* while accounting for communicative practices online. By distinguishing between latent and manifest forms of political participation, I will suggest that online political activity can take interchangeably different forms, such as *political participation*, *civic engagement* or/and *social involvement*. Focusing specifically on one element of online political activity, namely *social involvement,* I will try to show that there are three distinct ways of looking at *social involvement.* These three forms are linked with the informative and communicative potential offered by the Internet. The first perspective is looking at discussion online to create a public sphere by having a rational, reasonable debate *(the deliberative mode)*. The second point of view suggests that the Internet allows people to express their opinions without being interested in having a debate to reach a common ground (*the liberal individualist mode*). The last viewpoint sees people of shared values grouping together over computer-mediated technology (*the communitarian mode)*. As Freelon (2010) noticed, these three forms co-exist in an online environment. In fact, these three visions present divergent ideas about the democratic potential of the Internet.

2.2 The rise of populism

Populism is not a new phenomenon. Its emergence can be traced back to the late 19th century. It was strongly associated with the peasant movement in the USA and the *Narodniki* movement in Russia, which appealed to *the people* (Bos & Brants, 2014). Initially, populism was considered as something unnatural that endangered democracy, whereas currently, we are experiencing "a populist Zeitgeist" with populism being more part of mainstream politics (Engesser *et al.,* 2017;

Mudde, 2004). Political parties that did not have a significant presence before are now more noticeable in political systems, for example the Freedom Party in Austria and the Lega Nord (Northern League) in Italy, while in Central and Eastern European countries such as Poland or Hungary, populist parties are in power (Boros *et al.,* 2016; Durant *et al.,* 2013). These factors indicate that populism is more than just a trend, and broader cultural, political changes may have occurred. Although populist actors tend to address political issues that they feel are silenced in mainstream debate, their solutions are very often simplified and questioned in terms of liberal democratic values (Mudde, 2004; Mudde & Kaltwasser, 2017). For example, the Polish populist government proposed reform of the courts, undermining the independence of the judiciary. It is important to point out that because populism manifests itself differently in different contexts, it should not be always viewed in negative terms, endangering democracy (Gerbaudo, 2014). Nonetheless, right-wing populism in Europe tends to be fuelled by stereotypes and anti-immigration rhetoric, while mainstream parties adopting populist ideas for fear of losing their electorate poses questions about the future of liberal democracy (e.g. Mudde & Kaltwasser, 2017; Wodak, 2015). The threat to democratic systems can be best portrayed based through the examples of countries where populists govern and implement their policies. For instance, in Poland, the populist governing party has made attempts, with varying degrees of success, to regulate democratic institutions (e.g. media or courts), breaking the constitutional principles of the democratic systems (for further comment on this, see Sobczak & Goclowski, 2018). In addition to this, liberal democracy, in general, promotes diversity of views and beliefs, tolerance, and the protection of minority rights. Right-wing populism, however, usually defines who belongs to the category of *"the people*, often excluding minority groups (e.g. the LGBT community or other sub-groups). In Poland, an increase in racist and xenophobic behaviours has been observed; the number of legal proceedings in relation to ethical, religious and racial crimes rose from 400 incidents in 2009 - 2010 to 954 in 2015 (Labedz, 2015: 152). Taking into consideration that the populist party PiS took power in 2015, and their campaign presented xenophobic messages mainly towards refugees, an increase in these attitudes can be linked to the success of PiS (Flückiger, 2017; Labedz, 2015). What is more, PiS abolished anti-racist bodies and suggested that there will be no laws implemented against hate speech because, they argue, this goes against freedom of speech (Labedz, 2015: 152-153).

2.2.1 Defining populism

Populism is a highly contested term with no agreed definition. The term is used to describe politicians from the left and right side of the political spectrum, as well as various events happening across the globe embedded in different contexts (e.g. Latin America, USA and Europe)

(Mudde & Kaltwasser, 2017: 1-2). Nonetheless, regardless of the approach towards the definition, there is agreement between scholars on one of the core features of populism, which is to divide society into two separate groups: *pure people* and *the corrupt elite* (see Bonikowski, 2017; Bonikowski & Gidron, 2016: 7; Engesser *et al.*, 2017):

- "Pure people" (e.g. working-class man, common person); and
- "Corrupt elite" (e.g. government, politicians, corporations, or established parties).

Studies interested in populism developed distinct approaches on how these two core features can be measured (ibid.). In this way, three of the most influential approaches towards the definition can be distinguished: *populism as an ideology*, *populism as a discourse*, and *populism as a strategy* (Bonikowski & Gidron, 2016).

Populism as an ideology is linked with the influential work of Mudde (2004), who provided a thin-centred definition of populism:

> **"Ideology that considers society to be ultimately separated into two homogeneous and antagonistic camps, "the pure people" versus "the corrupt elite," and which argues that politics should be an expression of the volonté générale (general will) of the people'" (Mudde, 2004: 543).**

Considering that populism can take different forms depending on the context, this minimalist definition allows the application of other sets of ideas or ideologies (Mudde & Kaltwasser, 2017: 2). In addition to this, the ideological definition is broad enough that it can be applied to different actors, parties or movements (ibid.). It also captures the "pure people" versus "corrupt elite" feature of populism, mostly agreed upon by scholars despite their distinct approaches.

Although Mudde's (2004) definition is criticised by scholars who have different thoughts on how populism should be investigated (e.g. Moffitt & Tormey, 2014), the ideological approach towards populism "has recently won ground in the definitional debate" (Pauwels, 2011: 99). Once they have established who can be considered as a populist actor, academics who approach populism from the ideological perspective usually investigate the attributes of political leaders, depending on who is visible in the political arena in specific countries (Bonikowski & Gidron, 2016).

The second approach towards the definition of populism focuses on the communicative practices and discourse of populist actors (*populism as a discourse*). As Panizza has suggested:

> **"This approach considers populism to be 'an anti-status quo discourse that simplifies the political space by symbolically dividing society between 'the people' (as the 'underdogs') and its 'other'" (2005: 3)**

Even though both perspectives – ideological and discursive – see populism as the division of the society into two different camps, *"the people"* and *"the other"*, the crucial difference lies in their empirical measures. Thus, those who prefer the discursive approach look at the discourse of political actors and to what extent they present a level of populism in their communication rather than the attributes of populist actors themselves (Bonikowski & Gidron, 2016; Moffitt & Tormey, 2014).

The last approach – *populism as a political strategy* – is mainly used among researchers interested in the Latin American region (Bonikowski & Gidron, 2016: 8). This definition is more concerned with the strategy of political parties or actors that use populist rhetoric to mobilise their electorate. Weyland provides a definition of populism seen as a political strategy:

> **"Populism is best defined as a political strategy through which a personalistic leader seeks or exercise the movement power based on direct, unmediated, uninstitutionalized support from large numbers of mostly unorganised followers." (Weyland, 2001: 4).**

This perspective looks more at the relationship between political leaders and their supporters, and it is more interested in the abilities or strategies of a political leader to build and maintain political power (Barr, 2018; Weyland, 2017). In comparison to the ideological and discursive view, the supporters of this perspective tend to investigate political actors and the political strategies they use to gain support (Weyland, 2017).

It must be stressed that these approaches towards populism are not exclusive, and sometimes can be combined, e.g. the discursive with ideological approach (e.g. Pauwels, 2011). In this thesis, I subscribe to the ideological definition of populism, and analyse the communication of populist supporters by utilising Freelon's (2010) framework. Therefore, the focus is not on finding populist elements in populist supporters' communication but on understanding better their communication within different modes of democratic communication. The ideological approach allows me to identify the key features of populism and make assumptions about different modes of communication.

In the following sections, as this thesis focuses on the online engagement of K15 populist supporters, I will talk more about research on online populism from the demand-side perspective.

2.2.2 The demand-side of populism and the Internet

With the growing popularity of social media, which is becoming more embedded in citizens' lives, political actors have started realising its potential and taking advantage of the digital tool (Klinger,

2013). Social media platforms are Internet-based technologies that enable users to be both receivers and producers of content (Macnamara, 2010; Macnamara, 2010a). Social media are also referred to as Web.2.0 or the Read and Write Web. This naming relates to the second phase of the development of the Web. In the first phase, users were passive receivers of content with only a few people being producers, while in the second stage, every user has become more empowered by being able to read and produce the content on the Web simultaneously (Hall & Tiropanis, 2012).

It is worth mentioning that social media are quite often used interchangeably with the word *Internet*. From a technological perspective, the Internet can be defined as computers connected to each other enabling transmission of data, and while this definition is correct, it leaves behind the social aspect of individuals utilising this technology and shaping their usage (Breindl, 2010; Hill & Hughes, 1998). In this paper, I refer to the Internet as the Internet-based applications enabling access to it, and I use *the Internet* interchangeably with the terms *social media* and *the Web.*

The connection between populism and the Internet was identified relatively early, before social media was even introduced (see Bimber, 1998). Although these early claims suggested the direction in which the Internet might develop (e.g. it would change the traditional relationships between politicians and citizens, who would rely less on professional institutions), the extent of the relationship between populism and the Internet was still neglected by scholars for a long time (see: Krämer, 2017). However, recently, a growing number of studies have investigated populism on the Internet (e.g. Boulianne *et al.,* 2020; Engesser *et al.,* 2017; Groshek & Koc-Michalska, 2017; Hameleers & Schmuck, 2017; Heiss & Matthes, 2017; Jacobs & Spierings, 2018; Stier *et al.,* 2017). This small field of empirical research has shown that social media platforms fit well with populist messages. Social media (such as Twitter and Facebook) enable politicians to have direct contact with potential supporters and provide the possibility of posting unfiltered messages (Ernst *et al.,* 2017; van Kessel & Castelein, 2016). Traditional research focusing on populism (without reference to the Internet) can be divided into two categories: *supply-side* and *demand-side* (Muis & Immerzeel, 2017; Mudde & Kaltwasser, 2017). The *supply-side* of research looks at political parties, actors and their strategy (Mudde & Kaltwasser, 2017) or the conditions that enable populist formation (see Golder, 2016) and definitions of populism (e.g. Bonikowski & Gidron, 2016; Muller, 2016). *The demand-side*, in turn, looks at the attitudes of people voting for populist actors (Akkerman *et al.,* 2014; Spruyt *et al.,* 2016). The same *demand-* and *supply-*side division can be noted in the emerging research on populism and the Internet. Researchers have started to look at populist actors and their communication strategies online *(the supply-side*) or people who are following them, their characteristics and/or social media usage (*the demand-side*). These classifications are very useful when we want to understand who the online supporters of populist

parties are, or communication strategies used by populist actors. Nevertheless, it has been overlooked that *supply*- and *demand-side* distinctions might not be relevant in the digital age. Krämer (2017), in his theoretical consideration, pointed out that the Internet is not only used by organised groups or populist actors but also by *ordinary* citizens. Therefore, the Internet is also a powerful tool for the general population to express themselves and bypass traditional gatekeepers (ibid.: 1304). According to Krämer (2017: 1304), a "considerable number of right-wing populists closed groups can be found where members can talk openly, vent their anger, and organize without fearing rejection or sanctions". However, it must be pointed out that this freedom of expression can be also performed on open groups or public platforms. While there might be a noticeable difference in the behaviour of people using distinct social media services – especially when posted messages are public, and there are country-specific regulations towards speech that might be respected by others when engaging in the discussion – social media provides the possibility to get one's own perspective heard. Therefore, while analysing communication online, it might be worth considering the communicative activities of *ordinary* citizens. In the following paragraphs, I will try to define what it means to be politically active online by accounting for those communicative practices.

2.3 Defining online political activity

2.3.1 Introduction

In the previous sections, it has been argued that the Internet has become a tool for political actors and *ordinary* citizens in the context of populism. Therefore, it is important to understand what it means to be politically active in an online environment. Given that the advent of the Internet provided new ways of being politically engaged, it is not surprising that the next concern of academics was the Internet and its relation to political participation and civic engagement (e.g. Bimber, 2001; Putnam, 2000). In a classical view, *political participation* is broadly defined as voluntary, intentional acts aimed at influencing the government, in a direct or less direct way (Verba *et al.,* 1978 cited in Ekman & Amnå, 2012: 286). Traditionally, activities such as *voting* in the elections (local and national*), conducting campaigns*, *contacting officials* and *collective activities* were perceived as dimensions of political participation (Verba & Nie, 1972: 56- 63). With the introduction of Internet-based technologies, and the emergence of different acts of political participation as well as the blurring of the public and private spheres, it became almost impossible to decide what is and what is not a form of political participation. However, due to growing political apathy and disengagement in politics among citizens, researchers tended to stretch the concept of political participation to fit novel forms of political activity (Lilleker, 2014). At the same

time, these new acts of political participation were dismissed by other academics (Gladwell, 2010; Morozov, 2011).

To further complicate how to explain what it means to be politically engaged online, there is no explicit distinction between *civic engagement* and *political participation* (see Lutz *et al.,* 2014). *Civic engagement* itself does not have a clear definition and became "a catch-all" concept (Ekman & Amnå, 2012: 288). This confusion over the definition of *political participation* and *civic engagement* is linked with the influential work of Robert Putnam. In his book *Bowling Alone*, Putnam (2000) greatly contributed to the debate regarding citizen engagement as well as to the terminological confusion (Ekman & Amnå, 2012). Putnam (2000) expressed the view that due to television and the Internet, citizens are neither interested in political matters in America nor in building community. The author labelled a wide spectrum of activities under the term *civic engagement* without providing a precise definition (Berger, 2009; Ekman & Amnå, 2012).

Other scholars, both those interested in offline and online forms of political participation, have not adequately addressed this issue. For example, in a systematic review of online political participation, Lutz *et al.* (2014: Chapter 4) found *political participation* and *civic engagement* to be a "composite construct in empirical field of inquiry". In turn, Bala (2014: Online) defined *civic engagement* as "all the ways in which individuals participate in public life, how they learn how they get involved in various problems and contexts beyond anyone's privacy or intimacy". The overlapping definition of *political participation* and *civic engagement* led to the lack of established approaches, preventing comparison and meta-analysis (see Lutz *et al.,* 2014).

To answer the question of what it means to be politically active online, I will first try to disentangle the complicated relationship between *political participation* and *civic engagement* based on a typology offered by Ekman & Amnå (2012). They distinguish between attentive activities (*social involvement*), actions aimed at enhancing the community life (*civic engagement*) and actions aimed at influencing the government (*formal and informal political participation*). These categories form different dimensions of political participation, where *social involvement* and *civic engagement* are forms of latent political participation (activities that cannot be assigned to the category of formal or informal political participation but might have an influence on them in the future), while *formal and informal political participation* are manifest forms of political participation (ibid.). In the later part of this chapter, by heavily relying on Ekman & Amnå's (2012) typology, I will try to show that it is not possible to assign certain political behaviour online to an exclusive category. Instead, I will suggest that online political activities can take various forms which are not exclusive; for example, people can discuss politics online, and then they can decide to take action to influence the government or to enhance the life of the community. In this sense,

I will define political activity online as activities that can take both manifest and latent forms of political participation. In addition to this, I will present the approaches of scholars interested in political participation online. I will claim that these perspectives are views from distinct angles, and, in fact, they fit into Ekman & Amnå's (2012) typology of political participation.

2.3.2 Disentangling political participation and civic engagement

With the growing expansion of different political behaviour, Teorell *et al.* (2007) suggested extended modes of political participation, subscribing to the definition offered by Brady (1999: 737; cited in Teorell *et al.,* 2007: 336) of *"action by ordinary citizens directed toward influencing some political outcomes"*. This term has four main characteristics. Firstly, an *action* must be taken by citizens. Secondly, citizens must be *ordinary* meaning that actions taken by elites, professionals and lobbyists do not count towards political participation. Thirdly, although activities do not need to be targeted at the government or state, they need to aim to have an impact on a political outcome (ibid.: 336). Therefore, simply talking about politics with friends or paying attention to the news are not considered political participation.

Compared to the classical definition of political participation given by Verba *et al.* (1978) cited in Teorell *et al.* (2007: 336), there is no requirement for the actions to be directed at the government. Teorell *et al.* (2007: 336) also developed a more comprehensive typology than the four modes of political participation proposed by Verba & Nie (1972). The dimensions suggested by Teorell *et al.* (2007: 343) encompass "electoral voting, party activity, consumer participation, contacting, and protest activity". Some of these modes of political participation are similar to the classification suggested by Verba & Nie (1972) (e.g. political participation such as voting, campaign activity, contacting politicians, and cooperative activity). The only difference lies in two dimensions: *protest activity* and *consumer participation* (Teorell *et al.,* 2007: 343). *Consumer participation* refers to "donating money to charity, boycotting and political consumption, as well as signing petitions", while *protest activity* is understood as any form of protest (e.g. demonstrations or strikes) (Ekman & Amnå, 2012: 287). Therefore, Teorell *et al.* (2007: 343) enhanced the typology by adding dimensions that were deemed unconventional forms of political participation in the 1970s (e.g. boycotting), but which have later become the norm.

Nonetheless, Ekman & Amnå (2012) pointed out several problems with the modes of political participation developed by Teorell *et al.* (2007). Protest activities can take different forms, e.g. protest voting; however, it is not clear if these kinds of activities could be assigned to *the protest category* suggested by Teorell *et al.* (2007). More importantly, Ekman & Amnå (2012) argued that the typology ignores political acts or engagement that do not count as political participation but

could have a potential impact on conventional modes of political participation or political actions in the future. One of these "pre-political" activities could be discussing politics or consuming political news (Ekman & Amnå, 2012:288). Ekman & Amnå (2012) conceptualised these activities as *civic engagement* and *social involvement* (ibid.: 289). *Civic engagement* was defined as actions towards community life at the collective level and actions towards showing an interest in politics at the individual level, while *social involvement* refers to attention given to political issues at the individual level and interest in politics by presenting a certain lifestyle at the collective level (ibid.: 292). While the definition of *social involvement* might seem similar to the definition of *civic engagement*, Ekman & Amnå (2012) pointed out that *social involvement* precedes *civic engagement* and *political participation*. They distinguished in their typology between actions which might be a precondition for political actions (*latent political participation*) and actual actions towards political change or to influence the government *(manifest political participation)* (ibid.: 292).

2.3.3 Political participation, civil engagement and social involvement in an online environment

Although Ekman & Amnå (2012) provided a useful typology by distinguishing pre-politics from political participation, the authors did not take into account activities enabled by the Internet. Therefore, to investigate political behaviour of users in online spaces, it is difficult to assign certain activities to the categories based on the typology offered by Ekman & Amnå (2012) without knowing the motivation behind these activities. This issue can be best portrayed by referring to the study made by Vissers & Stolle (2014). While most studies considering the effects of Internet use on political participation or civic engagement look mainly at Internet usage (e.g. Abdu *et al.,* 2017; Meesuwan, 2016; Valenzuela, *et al.,* 2009), Vissers & Stolle (2014) argued that instead of focusing on the intensity of Internet use, specific measures of Internet use should be introduced. Vissers & Stolle (2014) conceptualise specific measures relating to Facebook use as *Facebook political participation*. Under the umbrella of *Facebook political participation*, Vissers & Stolle (2014) listed activities such as:

- Sharing a political opinion on Facebook;
- Joining a Facebook group started by ordinary citizens;
- Starting a Facebook group; and
- Liking/joining a Facebook group started by political parties/politicians.

In Vissers & Stolle's (2014) study, the activities which they assigned to the category *Facebook political participation*, in fact, can also be a form of:

- *Social involvement* (attention and interest in political matters);
- *Civic engagement* (individual/collective actions to influence situation in a society, outside of the network of family or friends); and
- *Political participation* (formal/informal, collective/individual actions aimed to influence the government or political outcomes).

In Table 1 below, I present how these political activities (linked especially to Facebook political activities) can be forms of both manifest and latent political participation. Liking a Facebook group has been excluded from this comparison as there is no such option as liking a Facebook group, and it is not clear if Vissers & Stolle (2014) meant Facebook Pages or Facebook groups.

Latent political participation (civic engagement)			Manifest political participation
Measures adopted by Vissers & Stolle (2014)	**Social involvement (attention)**	**Civic engagement (action)**	**Political participation**
Sharing political opinion on Facebook	Sharing political opinion on Facebook as a way of expressing a political interest in a topic	Sharing political opinion on Facebook as a way of starting discussion regarding certain issues	Sharing political opinion on Facebook to influence the political outcome with mobilising calls
Joining a Facebook group started by ordinary citizens	Joining a Facebook group started by ordinary citizens to stay updated about politics	Joining a Facebook group started by ordinary citizens to discuss politics with others	Joining a Facebook group focused on influencing formal political actors and institution or bringing about political change
Joining a Facebook group started by political actors	Joining a Facebook group started by political parties/politicians as way of identifying with their ideology	Joining a Facebook group started by political parties/politicians in order to discuss politics with other members	Joining a Facebook group started by political parties/politicians in order to contact them directly by interacting with them
S**tarting a Facebook group**	Starting a Facebook group as a way of showing an interest in politics or some political issues	Starting a Facebook group to discuss political issues with people who think alike	Starting a Facebook group as an activity within a party and as a way of promoting their ideology

Table 1 The example of categorisations of online political activities by relying on the typology of political participation developed by Ekman & Amnå (2012).

Although Table 1 above mainly reflects on Facebook groups, similar issues can be identified when applying political activities enabled by technology to different social media platforms (e.g. on Twitter, a user can tweet to influence a political outcome or tweet to show an interest in a particular topic/issue). Thus, it can be said that it is not possible to view an online political activity as one or another category without knowing the intention of the person performing it. Additionally, a citizen on one platform can perform an online political activity which can be seen as political participation, while at the same time on another platform can show a form of political

engagement (e.g. by starting discussion with friends). What is more, with little cost involved, they can easily switch from being politically involved to participating in politics. For example, they can discuss political issues on Facebook Pages, and they can contact a Member of Parliament to influence their decision by directly exchanging messages with them or writing an email. Therefore, "what it means to be digital politically active" cannot be simply defined by using terms such as *political participation*, *civic engagement* or *social involvement* offered by Ekman & Amnå (2012). Even though they distinguish between more attentive activities, such as actions towards enhancing community and rational, goal-oriented actions towards political change, carrying out an action itself (e.g. joining a Facebook group, creating a Facebook group and tweeting) cannot necessarily be treated automatically as a form of political participation or civic engagement. For example, I can create a Facebook group to influence the government or a political outcome, but I can also create a Facebook group to attract other people to discuss politics or create a group of like-minded people who identify with the same ideology. In this way, an action itself does not need to be necessarily about enhancing community life or changing/influencing a political outcome, an action can also be a form of showing an interest in politics.

Researchers interested in digital politics have presented different approaches towards political opportunities enabled by the Internet. The first perspective considers political activities on the Internet as a new distinctive form of political participation (e.g. Theocharis & van Deth, 2018). The other view suggests that online political activities replace some old traditional forms of political participation (e.g. Best & Krueger, 2005), while other researchers view them as a form of political communication rather than political participation (Marichal, 2013; Miller, 2017). There is also some criticism that new forms of activism drive citizens away from actual activities that bring social change (often referred to as *clicktivism* or *slacktivism*) (Gladwell, 2010; Morozov, 2011; White, 2010). Based on a sample of respondents from Germany, Theocharis & van Deth (2018) suggested that activities such as commenting on social media about political issues, posting or sharing political links on social media and encouraging other people to take action using social media, represent a new mode of political participation fitting into the general repertoire of political participation. The authors took into consideration the most used political actions on the Internet, distinguished by the Pew Research Centre. Their study also demonstrated that expressive, individualised modes of participation are additional to traditional modes of protest activities. Best & Krueger (2005) showed that contacting politicians online in America has become as popular as contacting them by using offline tools (e.g. phone/mail) showing that some forms of formal political participation can have their counterpart online. Marichal (2013: Online), in his empirical study looking at Facebook groups, suggested that the formation of Facebook groups should be seen "less as intentional efforts to promote social and political change and more as a

discursive performance designed to express a political identity" and offered the term *micro-activism*. Micro-activism is understood as small acts of political activism (sharing a link or content, creating a page or group on Facebook). These activities are not seen as traditional forms of activism towards mobilisation and political change (ibid.). Nonetheless, this does not mean that they might not have a positive impact on conventional forms of political participation. Similar views (although more theoretical in nature) were expressed by Miller (2017), who suggested that political acts online are a form of talk (not necessarily political talk) promoting more passive political engagement. The author argued that due to digital communication requiring relatively little effort to become politically involved, there is a need to revise the approach towards activities seen traditionally as active actions and accept discursive expressions which also can be a form of activism (ibid). With regards to the perspective that political acts performed online are meaningless, there is no empirical research confirming a *slacktivism/clicktivism* thesis. Instead, researchers find a positive connection between online political activities and offline political participation (e.g. Conroy *et al.,* 2012; Mazak & Stetka, 2015).

Based on the above considerations, I suggest that these perspectives are different lenses through which online political behaviour can be viewed, and citizens' online involvement in politics can take forms which can be seen as *political participation*, *civic engagement* or *social involvement* (see Figure 1). For example, the same citizen at the same time can express themselves online, take action by signing a petition and create a group on Facebook towards enhancing community life. The typology offered by Ekman & Amnå (2012) can be still utilised in an online world, and the approaches of other researchers considering political participation in an online environment fit into their typology. For example, online communicative practices can be seen as *social involvement,* while new and old modes of political participation can be allocated to other dimensions named by Ekman & Amnå (2012) as *formal political participation* and *extra-parliamentary activism*. It is important to consider these dimensions as different, non-exclusive forms of being politically active (see Figure 1).

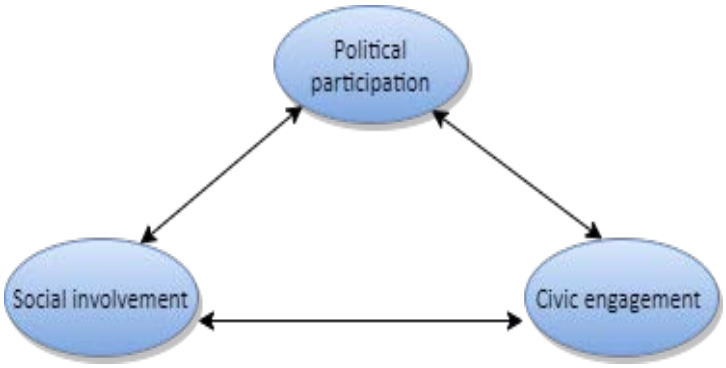

Figure 1 Different forms of being politically active in a digital environment

2.4 Political activity from a perspective of social involvement

In this thesis, I view political activity online through the lens of communication practices. Taking into consideration that technology evolves, and new services are being offered with new possible applications for a political purpose, rather than focusing on specific activities enabled by a technology (liking, sharing or commenting), I look at the Internet and its capabilities (information and communication). Therefore, I take an approach towards political activity online by focusing on discursive performances. Although this new type of digital activism has been named using different terms, researchers have referred to the same activities which are difficult to capture with the definition of *political participation* or *civic engagement.* In this research, I use the term *social involvement* conceptualised by Ekman & Amnå (2012). Attentiveness to political issues can be manifested online in several different ways (by creating a Facebook group or by discussing politics on a forum, joining a Facebook group and so on). However, in this thesis, I focus on the communication and information capabilities of the Internet and user-generated content. What distinguishes *social involvement* from *civic engagement* and *political participation* is the fact that these activities are ways of showing an interest in politics, and *social involvement* precedes civic engagement and political participation.

There are three theoretical approaches towards the democratic communication capabilities of the Internet and online political activity. The first perspective considers the potential of the Internet in creating a dialogue and its relations to the notion of public sphere. In turn, the second view moves from the emphasis on a political dialogue by focusing on user-generated content and drawing upon Goffman's (1959) theory of the presentation of the self. Finally, the third approach views people gathering over computer-mediated technology with shared interests as communities. In the later part of this chapter, I will try to show that these perspectives present

distinct thinking about the Internet's democratic potential that are not mutually exclusive and can co-exist in online spaces.

2.4.1 Political dialogue

The development of the Internet and Internet-based applications has caught the attention of communication scholars interested in whether the Internet might revoke the model of a Habermasian public sphere (e.g. Dahlgren, 2005: Dalton, 2008). New technologies, especially social media, provide spaces where people can discuss different topics and remain anonymous (e.g. Poor's (2006) analysis of Slashdot's website). In addition to this, social media enables every citizen to be both a reader and producer of the content (Mahlouly, 2013). The public sphere is a place where concerned citizens can discuss politics freely and reach conclusions through rational debate (Papacharissi, 2002). This concept is strongly associated with sociologist Jurgen Habermas, who viewed discussing politics as an important element of a healthy democracy, enabling citizens to make informed choices and encouraging them to participate in political activities (e.g. Habermas, 1962/1989; Zukin, 2006). In Habermas's view, citizens who exercise their power to vote might be influenced by political campaigns, but they can avoid a situation where the ruling elite shapes their opinions by talking with others about political issues (ibid.). Habermas's concept can be viewed as a version of deliberative democracy. Deliberative democracy refers to collective decision making by free and equal citizens who, through discussion and rational reasoning, suggest solutions to some social problems (Bozdag & van den Hoven, 2015). The defenders of the vision claim that citizens can be better informed by discussing and evaluating their own arguments. By doing this, they can become more tolerant of diverse opinions, respect other people's views, and decide on political issues based on reasonable arguments (ibid.).

Nonetheless, critics challenge these suggestions by drawing attention to the different and more complicated aspects of the Internet that prevent the creation of a public sphere such as that expressed in Habermas's view. To present different lines of criticism, I will use the elements of the public sphere (based on Habermas's concept) distinguished by Poor (2006). These elements are *inclusion* (everyone is included, even those who were previously excluded), *equality* (statements expressed by others are assessed on their merit rather than on a social position), and *rational discussion.*

First, despite the openness of the Internet, not everyone has access to it (Polat, 2005). Even though some stories might be diffused to different mass media channels (television or radio), the Internet is not seen as a public sphere, but as a medium that links various public spheres (Keane, 2000, in Polat, 2005: 449). In addition, even those who have access to Internet-based applications

might not be confident or skilled enough to have an argumentative discussion (Ahlstrom, 2012). Therefore, the equality element of the public sphere might not exist in the online environment. What is more, issues regarding minority groups might be seen as less important and in order to achieve a common good, they might be excluded from a discussion (Young, 2002). Excluded minority groups can make counter-publics in opposition to the public sphere and organise themselves around different issues (Poor, 2006), however, there is still a question as to whether these counter-publics are equally powerful to the main public sphere (see: Papacharissi, 2004).

The capability of the Internet to be a space for reasonable discussion is also challenged, suggesting that online public discourses are fragmented and bring together like-minded people who constitute "mutually exclusive cyber-communities" (Dahlberg, 2001c: 617). Most criticism involves discussion of whether the Web enhances citizens' knowledge about political issues or connects them with like-minded peers (e.g. Sunstein, 2001). The studies investigating different platforms confirmed that people favour talking about politics with people whose views are similar (e.g. Adamic & Glance, 2005; Jurgens *et al.,* 2011; Kushin & Kitchener, 2009). However, this is not seen as a positive phenomenon, with academics referring to this as *cyberbalkanization* (e.g. Bozdag & van den Hoven, 2015) or *echo chambers* (see: Sunstein, 2001). Both terms are related to each other where *cyberbalkanization* (e.g. Bozdag & van den Hoven, 2015) is understood as grouping people on the Internet who share the same perspectives while *echo chamber* refers to being reinforced in one's own views (Sunstein, 2001). Sunstein (2009) expressed his concerns over the Web's ability to bring like-minded people together who might have a limited orientation of other political arguments and develop extreme attitudes or polarised points of view.

This argument goes in line with another concern regarding the mechanism used by companies to better tailor content to the user's preferences (see: Pariser, 2011). Zuiderveen Borgesius *et al.* (2016: 3) have distinguished between *self-selected personalisation*, in which users choose the content which reflects their own views – conceptualised by academics as selective exposure, and *pre-selected personalisation*, whereby algorithm systems choose the content without user's knowledge – very often referred to as *filter bubble* (Pariser, 2011: 9). People's tendency to favour like-minded opinions is not a new phenomenon, and it has been studied for a long time by sociologists concluding "that friends, co-workers, colleagues, spouses, and other associations tend to be more similar to each other than randomly chosen members of the same population" (Bisgin *et al.,* 2010: 533). This is very often referred to as *homophily,* the process of bonding with people who have similar backgrounds (O'Hara & Stevens, 2015: 415). The presence of *homophily* has been confirmed by scholars investigating different online spaces such as blogs (e.g. Adamic & Glance, 2005), Twitter (e.g. Jurgens *et al.,* 2011) and Facebook groups (e.g. Kushin & Kitchener, 2009). Nonetheless, there is still the question of whether users encounter different points of view

randomly. For example, Marichal (2012: 23) claims that Facebook connections are not based on shared interest, but on social proximity, since friends and relatives do not necessarily hold the same beliefs. Research on pre-selection personalisation used by online services is still in its infancy and it cannot be clearly stated that online giants (e.g. Facebook and Google) make choices for users in terms of what is seen. However, as the technology develops and tries to predict how people behave in an online environment, the concern about pre-selection should not be completely abandoned (see Zuiderveen Borgesius *et al.,* 2016)

There is also a question over the quality of information shared and the ability to critically evaluate information on the Internet. To have a reasonable discussion to make informed decisions, information shared and posted on online forums needs to be true and informative. Nonetheless, the Internet provides access to a vast amount of information that can be written and shared by anyone. Carr (2010) claims that a higher amount of information has a negative impact on people's attention to evaluate and reflect on the arguments presented. The author suggested that his own habits in processing information became less reflective, attentive and engaged as his use of the Internet rose (ibid.). Additionally, a higher amount of information does not imply that this information is good in quality and helps citizens to be better informed (e.g. Bimber, 2003). With the technological developments of the Web, where everyone can produce content, it has become difficult to distinguish which information is reliable and which is not. Apart from this, it is profitable to distribute online content on a large scale since there are no regulations in terms of ethical standards, and everyone can easily publish unchecked content on the Web (Allcott & Gentzkow, 2017; Morozov, 2017). For example, it has been noted that during the US election in 2016, there were websites run by young people from Macedonia which contained misleading content (Allcott & Gentzkow, 2017). In the light of the Brexit referendum and the US election in 2016, there are concerns regarding whether people can critically evaluate information found on the Internet (e.g. Tambini, 2017). Critical evaluation of information is one type of digital literacy. Digital literacy refers to cognitive, technical and sociological skills to take part in a digital environment. It moves beyond the traditional view of writing and reading or using computer software (Eshet-Alkalai, 2004). Eshet-Alkalai (2004) distinguished different skills needed for people to be digitally literate, which include:

- *Photo-visual literacy*;
- *Social-emotional literacy*;
- *Branching literacy (hypermedia and non-linear thinking);*
- *Reproduction literacy; and*
- *Information literacy.*

The last skill – *information literacy* – has become essential in a digital era where, to be able to make a use of information on the Web, users have to consider the credibility of information and notice biased content (ibid.). Conroy *et al.* (2012) found that politically orientated groups in Facebook presented a low quality of discourse with false statements, half-truths and limited supporting evidence.

Despite the critique, most scholars evaluated online discussion spaces against their set of requirements (or elements) to be able to assess whether online public spaces are deliberate or not (e.g. Stromer-Galley, 2007; Wright & Street, 2007). Some researchers have considered some of these aforementioned limitations, but as a solution, they suggested a different design of online services that facilitate online deliberation. For example, Dahlberg (2001b: 623) noted that Minnesota e-Democracy presents an online public sphere which supports online deliberation "through the use of e-mail lists, the formalization of rules and guidelines, the careful management of the forum, the development of self-moderation, and the focus on issues located within a geographically bounded political jurisdiction". Therefore, the idea of the public sphere has not been rejected by the academics who tried to show how specific online spaces with particular features can create a more deliberative space.

2.4.2 Political expression and presentation of self

Rather than approaching online discussion spaces by looking to see if they meet the criteria of deliberative democracy or which model of democratic communication they present, other researchers have looked at how the Internet is being used for political presentation (e.g. Marichal, 2013; Mahoney *et al.,* 2016). It is argued that Web 2.0 has provided new forms of communication "from instrumental or communicative to expressive" (Marichal, 2012: 7). Social media sites, through their design, are perceived as platforms that encourage user self-expression. For example, Facebook has its own business model which is based on users sharing information. In simplified terms, users' preferences are then sold to advertisers who place tailored adverts on their profiles (Marichal, 2012). Thus, it is not surprising that Facebook's architecture allows users to reveal information about themselves in various ways such as sharing content, posting status updates or uploading pictures. Svensson (2011: 50) claims that a contemporary political practice in a digital environment is to "express, perform, maintain, create and recreate identities and their meaning". He further argues that joining a Facebook group supporting a certain cause is a form of showing a political opinion and lifestyle (ibid.:50). Fuchs (2013, cited in Miller, 2017: 258) has shown through an analysis of Twitter tweets that there was no indication of having a debate on this platform, therefore suggesting that Twitter is another platform designed to manage and present identity. Mahoney *et al.* (2016) in research on how the Scottish electorate use the image

sharing platform Instagram for political self-expression, demonstrated that Instagram is indeed used to construct and express political thoughts. In turn, Marichal (2013) found that the formation of Facebook groups is linked to the performance of political identity. These considerations draw attention towards expressive practices as opposed to deliberation on social media.

Goffman's (1959) dramaturgical approach has been widely utilised in understanding online self-presentation generally, not just politically (for a detailed list, see Hogan, 2010). According to Goffman's (1959) approach, people present the best version of themselves to audiences. They decide what to reveal or what not to reveal about their behaviour; something that Goffman (1959) defined as *impression management*. Goffman's (1959) perspective suggests that people play different roles depending on a situation. In a social media context, people can perform multiple identities at the same time by having different connections and belonging to different groups (Papacharissi, 2012). For example, on Facebook, I can belong to many different Facebook groups where I can choose to reveal certain aspects of my identity. The other core concept of Goffman's (1959) work is the notion of *back-stage* and *front-stage. Front-stage* is where people try to show their best qualities depending on their specific role, while *back-stage* is where people manage their performances (Hogan, 2010: 378). In relation to social media, there is still an ongoing debate as to whether social media represents a *back-stage* or *front-stage* environment (for more see Hogan, 2010: 378). For example, Facebook can be viewed as presenting both *back-stage* and *front stage* spaces (Marichal, 2013). A frustrated person can post a message on Facebook which friends can view, or they can make a message public (*front-stage*), but at the same time they can send a private message via chat (*back-stage*).

2.4.3 Online communities

The third approach towards online political activity departs from the concept of creating a dialogue or the possibility of expressing yourself. It instead focuses on bringing people together who interact with each other via computer-mediated technology. The advancement of technologies enables people to visit certain pages/websites online and discuss topics with other people. This new form of social integration has become a subject of interest for those interested in investigating communities. Nonetheless, research is lacking precision in the definitional approach towards online community (OC), often providing broad descriptions. In this section, I will reflect on the fuzzy definition of community, then I will present how OC has been defined by other researchers. I will then suggest treating OC and online political community (OPC) as evolving concepts that cannot be captured in a concrete definition.

There is no set definition of community: sociologists have defined and redefined its description over the last 50 years (Wellman, 1982). First, community was described through physical attributes such as size and location, and community was seen as "group-like neighbourhoods and villages" (Wellman, Boase & Chen, 2002: 153). With transportation developments allowing people to easily change location, the sociological approach towards defining community started to refer to the relationships between individuals with two terms being introduced: strong-ties (e.g. family) and weak-ties (e.g. information exchange) (Preece, 2001: 2). The definition of OCs is also not clearly defined and consistently used by all academics. Pioneers in this field, such as Howard Rheingold (2000), interpreted OCs as people who group in online spaces and show support and empathy. Other researchers later developed this definition by suggesting that OCs are "the *people* who come together for a particular *purpose*, and who are guided by *policies* (including norms and rules) and supported by *software*" (Maloney-Krichmar & Preece, 2005: Online).

Concerning OCs that gather people around political issues and causes, by scanning the available literature, it could be said that there is no difference in the definition of OPCs compared to OCs. Studies investigating OPCs very often briefly mention the term of OPC, but it is never explained fully. If some studies provided a definition of OPCs, they reflected on the definitions of OC, treating *political* as an additional adjective. For example, Al-saggaf & Weckert (2005), who described OPCs by adopting Preece's approach:

> **"(1) People who interact socially as they strive to satisfy their own needs or perform special roles such as leading or moderating;**
>
> **(2) A shared purpose such as interest, need, information exchange or service that provides a reason for the community;**
>
> **(3) Policies in the form of tacit assumptions, rituals, protocols, rules and laws that guide people's interaction;**
>
> **(4) Computer systems to support and mediate social interaction and facilitate a sense of togetherness" (2000:10).**

Taking into consideration the above attributes, it could be concluded that an OPC is a group of people who come together over computer-mediated technology to interact. These people have a shared interest and are guided by rules. Therefore, this description does not differ from the definitional approach towards OCs.

The lack of definitional approach towards OPC might be explained by the fact that the community itself is treated as a fuzzy concept with no clear boundaries. However, the influential definition of

OC developed by Preece (2000) might be too broad, leading to the simplification of online interactions. With the development of the Internet and social media, many platforms now exist that enable people to interact and connect with each other over a shared interest and be guided by platform's policies and regulations. People interacting on these platforms might not be even aware that they are part of an OC. Moreover, they might use these technologies for a certain purpose or treat it as a communication channel. Either way, they might not have a sense of belonging to a community. Hammond (2016) addressed this issue by developing a new definition of OC, suggesting that it is not a free value concept. According to Hammond (2016), to constitute an OC, members need to be aware that they are members of an OC, recognise other members too, interact with each other regularly and over a certain period, feel connected to other members, and show respect for others, even those who have different opinions. The author stressed that members have to show an element of reciprocity and therefore associations which lack this element cannot be called communities (Hammond, 2016: 15). By reciprocity Hammond (2016) means that members respect each other's opinions and/or point of views within the community. As Hammond (2016) noticed, it is almost impossible to identify an OC without cyberbullying that might be challenged or ignored, but as the author pointed out, cyberbullying itself should not be treated as a cultural norm.

Hammond (2016)'s definition of OC is idealistic. Although the author points out essential elements of an OC, these features can be probably achieved while designing or creating an OC. For example, respect for other people's views could be incorporated into the community's rules and enforced by admins/moderators. Nonetheless, in an online context, OC can often be created by everyone, and might attract members, but admins might have no intention of enforcing certain behaviours. These considerations do not help in clarifying how OPCs should be defined. Preece & Maloney-Krichmar (2005) suggested that rather than spending energy on developing a definition of OC, it might be more productive to accept that it is a very difficult term to define. I suggest taking a similar approach towards OPCs. Instead of trying to provide a fixed definition of OPC, I propose to reflect on studies that investigated online groups that gathered people together around a shared interest in political topics.

OPCs have been studied by taking various perspectives, and with different focuses, therefore, it is difficult to draw any conclusions. For example, Soon & Kluver (2007) looked at how online political communities are built in Singapore through a hyperlink analysis. Hameleers (2019) analysed populist discourse in online communities in the Netherlands to see if they create a shared identity. Arlt *et al.* (2019) examined the debate surrounding the Swiss referendum on the Nuclear Withdrawal Initiative on Twitter by indicating online communities. Finally, Velasquez (2012)

looked at specific features in a Columbian website and how they might impact participation in political discussion.

2.4.4 Political dialogue, political expression or cyber-communities? Distinct models of democracy and communicative practices

Based on the above considerations, it seems that no single approach towards communicative practices online is "correct", especially when each of these perspectives has its own limitations. Online discussion spaces hardly meet the idealised concept of deliberative democracy, while there is limited empirical research suggesting that communication on online platforms only takes the form of developing a political identity or community. In my view, these three aforementioned perspectives reveal their assumptions in terms of the possibilities afforded by the Internet. The Internet is seen as a platform with the possibility of creating a political dialogue by providing access to vast amounts of information and enabling the exchange of political views. Advocates of expressive forms of communication see the Internet as a tool that allows users to self-express themselves and disclose political preferences. Similar views are expressed by Dahlberg (2011) in his considerations of different positions towards digital democracy dominated in research. Dahlberg (2001a) has also been influential in presenting three different "camps" towards the democratic potential of digital technology. He suggested that rhetoric in regard to electronic democracy can be divided into three visions: *liberal individualism*, *communitarian* and *deliberative*. Freelon (2010), relying heavily on Dahlberg's (2001a) categorisation, suggested that scholars pay too much attention to the deliberativeness of online spaces or multi-spheres and ignore other important dynamics occurring on these platforms. According to Freelon (2010), there are three different models of democratic communication – *liberal individualist*, *communitarian* and *deliberative* – which can co-exist in online spaces. The first model of democratic communication – *liberal individualist* – suggests that individuals are interested in self-expression rather than engaging in a meaningful discussion. Thus, communication happens in one way; individuals usually check other people's views about certain issues to see what they think and sometimes challenge their views by hostile comments (Freelon, 2010: 1176-77). Freelon (2015) suggests that the norm for a *liberal individualist* is to express themselves uncivilly without the need to listen to others. In *liberal individualist* forums, people pursue their own views, therefore, neglecting the importance of discussion (Freelon, 2010), while for a deliberative democrat, dialogue is an important aspect. In turn*, the communitarian* model of democratic communication is interested in building communities of people who think alike, have a shared interest, or are the same race or age (Freelon, 2010: 1177). People in such groups present high levels of interactivity and are rather removed from arguments outside of their group (Freelon, 2015). For the

communitarian mode, the phenomenon of *homophily* (connecting with people who think in similar ways) is not seen as a negative factor in relation to democracy. In fact, avoiding different views is associated with a higher level of political participation (see Mutz, 2006). In this way, it can be interpreted that out of all these models of democracy, *communitarian* online discussion spaces are most likely to mobilise members for various forms of political action (Freelon, 2010: 1180).

These views are extremely helpful in understanding the different visions of democracy supported by digital technology. It helps to see that communicative practices online can present characteristics of the *liberal individual, deliberative or communitarian* models. More expressive forms of communication focused on the pursuit of self-interest can be assigned to the *liberal individualist* model. However, communication that takes place within online spaces can also have features of both the *communitarian* and *deliberative* models. Figure 2 presents a typology of online political participation, showing that these three forms of online engagement are not exclusive. It also accounts for communicative practices that are classified under the term of *social involvement*. The models of democratic communication are perspectives that allow analysis of an online discourse and, similar to different categories of online political participation, one mode does not exclude another mode.

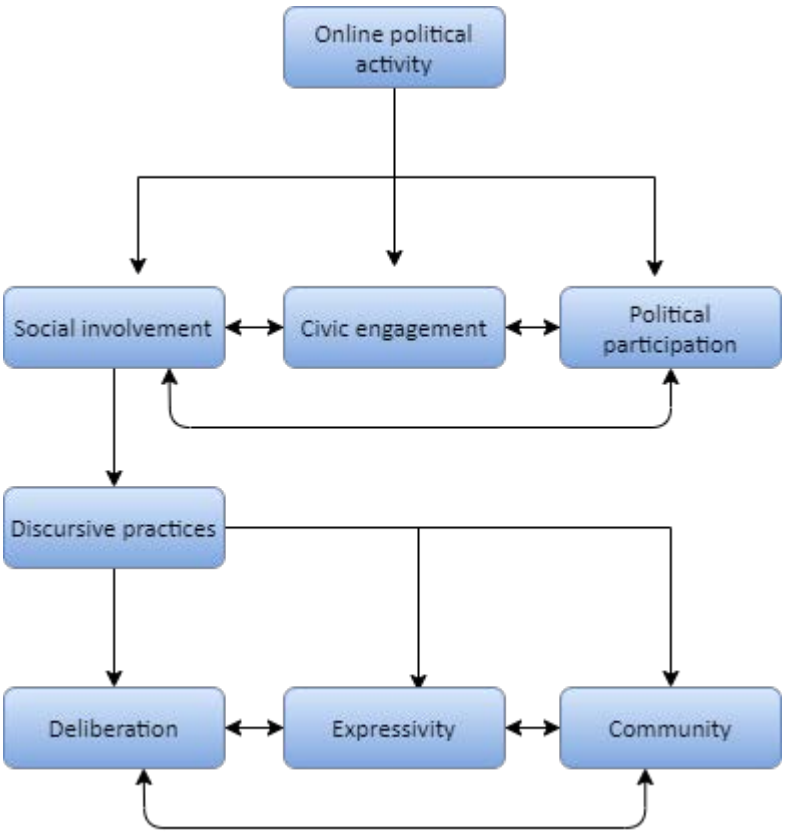

Figure 2 Political activity online and its forms with the emphasis on communicative practices

Chapter 3 Research context: Poland and Kukiz'15

3.1 Introduction

This chapter will summarise the political-historical context of Poland after 1989, explaining early traces of populism in Poland, as well as highlighting research on populism on social media in Poland and the emergence of K15. This will provide a context for the empirical analysis of online activism of K15 supporters in Chapters 5 and 6, tracing the post-communist politics of Poland, and the growing support and activism among populist supporters. This thesis is concerned with the specific online activities of K15 supporters, but to understand their views and behaviours, one needs to understand first the political context in Poland.

3.2 The political context of Poland: late 80s and transformation period

Between 1945 and 1989, Poland was under Soviet influence, facing Stalinist repressions and economic difficulties. With the growing economic hardship, in 1980 an independent union – Solidarity – was formed, led by Lech Walesa. Solidarity performed strikes and demonstrations, as well as forming the main opposition against the Communist government. With more than 9 million members, the union served the purpose of a social movement (Lech Kaczyński, former President of Poland, and Jarsoław Kaczyński were also members) (Friszke, 2003: 375). The actions of its members and growing social dissatisfaction led to the introduction of martial law in December 1981, lasting until 1983. As a result, the activities of Solidarity were weakened, and Lech Walesa was interned (Schmemann, 1982). Nonetheless, the economic situation in Poland was not stabilised, with a growing number of people living in poverty (over 60% in the 1980s) (Buzek, 2009). The Polish nation faced a lack of necessary goods, where queuing in shops to find out that there is nothing available became a norm.

During the government's restrictions, Solidarity operated underground and was re-born in 1989 when roundtable talks with the Communists took place. These roundtable talks marked a historical moment in Polish history and started a transformation process in the country. A proportional election system in the parliament was introduced, "civil reforms were restored, the death penalty was abolished, and the armed forces were depoliticized" (Lukowski & Zawadzki, 202: 412). In 1989, a partially free parliamentary election was held, and Tadeusz Mazowiecki served the role of Prime Minister. Lech Wałęsa was elected as the President of Poland in the first free presidential election in 1990, for a five-year term. At this time, inflation was very high (639.6% in 1990) and still growing (Buzek, 2009). One of the solutions was to introduce an anti-

inflation system of reforms, very often referred to as the “Balcerowicz Plan” or “Shock Therapy”. The aims of the reforms were to stabilise the Polish currency, change the tax system, as well as liberate markets (Onufer, 2005: 139).

The Balcerowicz Plan led to a radical increase in prices, e.g. electricity costs increased 300% and gas prices rose by 250%. To better portray the situation, the pension of the President of Poland was 19,672 zlotych per month, the Prime Minister earned 17,990 zlotych per month, while the cost of a simple Lego set was 44,000 zlotych (Markowska, 2012: 241). The health of the population deteriorated with more people claiming benefits and early retirement due to disability; in the early 1990s, only 61% people were able to work, while in 1980, this number stood at 81.6% (ibid.: 243). Although these reforms contributed to reducing inflation and instigating a boom in private business development, the Balcerowicz Plan has its opponents and supporters to this day (see Szolucha & Czernicik, 2019; Buzek, 2009). On the one hand, the peaceful revolution seems to be praised, especially by Polish liberal elites and the West, while the other side of the political spectrum (especially left-leaning organisations) pointed out the negative aspects of the transformation, which created social inequalities (Leyk, 2016: 644). The transformation plan itself is also criticised for presenting only one available option that moved away from socialism to a free market and introduced rapid changes that had a major impact on state-owned sectors (e.g. mining or agriculture) (Onufer, 2005; Szolucha & Czernicik, 2019). No other alternatives were taken into consideration, and many people in the government did not have the relevant experience to suggest different transition visions. The projections of the proposed plan were also too optimistic (e.g. the expected decline in production was five times lower than in reality, while millions lost jobs instead of an expected 400,000) (Szolucha & Czernicik, 2019: 155).

In 1995, Aleksander Kwaśniewski became the President of Poland and was re-elected in 2000, serving this role until 2005. According to Lukowski & Zawadzki (2019: 417) the success of Kwasniewski beating Lech Walesa in the 1995 presidential election was partially influenced by the position of the Church and its lobbying to restrict the rights of abortion which alienated some voters who decided to vote for the left (Lech Wałęsa lost the election by only a small margin). Three important events happened while Kwaśniewski was the President of Poland: Poland finalised its Constitution in 1997, joined The North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) in 1999 and the European Union (EU) in 2004 (ibid.). When Poland joined the EU, it was experiencing high unemployment rates. More people were investing in education and learning languages, postponing decisions on purchasing goods or starting a family, and there were increases in mental health diseases and cases of suicide (Karlik, 2015: 229). Many people also decided to migrate to

other countries after 2004 (a total of 2.455 million Polish citizens decided to work temporarily in other countries in 2018) (GUS, 2018).

The political scene after 2004 was very much influenced by two different positions: further liberalisation of the Polish economy, and appealing to those who did not benefit from the transformation process (Szczerbiak, 2017). This was very much seen in the next election in 2005, where Lech Kaczyński from PiS became the next President, beating Donald Tusk who supported the liberal economic system. PiS also gained the greatest number of seats in the Sejm. Nonetheless, PiS did not have a parliamentary majority and had to make a coalition with Self-Defence and the LPR (League of Polish Families), which proved to be an unworkable collaboration, and they ceased to exist in 2007. Civic Platform (PO) defeated PiS in the next election and formed a coalition with PSL. Donald Tusk, who served the role of Prime Minister until 2014, had tried to build a diplomatic relationship with Germany and Russia after Jarsoław Kaczynski's hostile foreign policy (e.g. the accusation of building a German-Russian pipeline that would endanger Polish interests). During Tusk's government and Lech Kaczynski's presidency, there was growing conflict between the two caused by differences in views and approaches to policy. As a result, they made a separate journey to Russia, commemorating the anniversary of the massacre in Katyn. Kaczyński's aircraft crashed in Smoleńsk, resulting in the deaths of Lech Kaczyński and other senior officials (Lukowski & Zawadzki, 2019; 433-437).

In the next election, Jaroslaw Kaczyński removed himself from the face of the campaign, and Beata Szydło (PiS) ran a campaign to become Prime Minister of Poland. Compared to PO's campaign, PiS again appealed to disadvantaged people by referencing unfavourable policies of PO's government (Fomina & Kucharczyk, 2016: 60). They also presented a counter-perspective to PO's policies (e.g. a decrease in the retirement age, free medicines for older people, and unwillingness to accept refugees). In 2015, PiS won a majority in the Sejm and became the first party that did not have to form a coalition to rule (Lukowski & Zawadzki, 2019; 433). Although Beata Szydlo was the Prime Minister at the time, all decisions were run by Jaroslaw Kaczynski. Then, in 2019, PiS secured yet another majority in the Sejm (PKW, 2019)

3.3 Populism in Poland

This section will reflect on populism in Poland, its definition, and early traces of populist parties. I will later present a short review of available sources on populism on social media in Poland. Later, I will describe the emergence of K15 and its supporters. The review of how K15 emerged, and the profile of their supporters, provide a context that will later inform the empirical analysis of their online communication.

As in Western-oriented literature, populism is a contested term in Poland, with no clear agreement between Polish scholars on how populism should be defined. For example, Maria Marczewska-Rytko (1995: 26) describes populism as a doctrine, while Roman Bäcker (2007:32) defines populism as a way of thinking which lies between ideology, fundamentalism, and post-tribal mode of thinking. In turn, Przyłęcki (2013) takes a definitional approach towards populism by seeing it as a political strategy and being more interested in discursive practices.

The traces of populist discourse in Poland go back to 1918. However, focusing on populism after 1989, the first sign of populism was noticed during the free presidential election in 1990. Stanislaw Tymiński appeared unexpectedly in a political area, and by addressing the issues of people during democratisation, came second in the presidential election. Nonetheless, his party – Party X – was less successful and did not make a mark in the parliamentary elections (Stanley & Cześnik, 2018: 71). In the 1990s, populist parties did not gain any significant success. This situation changed in 2001, when there was an end to the post-communist divide that had previously shaped the political scene (i.e. the voting divide between two different visions: pro-communist and pro-democratic regime) (Stanley & Cześnik, 2018). In 2001, Samoobrona Rzeczpospolitej Polskiej (Self-Defence of the Republic of Poland – SRD) became the third-largest political force with 10.20% of votes, while Ligia Polskich Rodzin (The League of Polish Families – LPR) gained 7.87% of votes (PKW, n.d). Table 2 summarises the results of the election in Poland in 2011.

Political group	**% of votes**
Left Democratic Alliance + Labour Union (SLD-UP)	41.04
Civic Platform (PO)	12.68
Self-Defence (SRD)	10.20
Law and Justice (PiS)	9.50
League of Polish Families (LPR)	7.87

Table 2 Results of the Sejm election in Poland in 2001 Source: PKW, n.d.

SRD was initially a grassroots movement of farmers and trade unions but soon expanded its appeal to other groups of society disadvantaged by the process of transformation (Stanley & Cześnik, 2018; Stępińska, *et al*. 2017). Both parties identified challenges that a new system had

brought about; SRD blamed Balcerowicz for his economic plan, while LPR tried to preserve Catholic values. Przyłęcki (2012) in his discourse analysis noted that SRD presented plebeian populism, with its use of anti-elitism rhetoric and conspiracy theories (ibid.). In turn, LPR portrayed progressive values (gay rights, abortion, feminism) as a danger to the Polish nation (Stępińska, *et.al*. 2017: 314). In 2015, PiS won a majority in the Sejm while K15 came third in the parliamentary election (PKW, 2015). Unlike in 2005, when PiS was viewed as right-wing, conservative party, in 2015 PiS started to be described as a right-wing populist political party. In 2019, PiS secured a majority in the Sejm for the second time, while K15 made a coalition with the Polish People's Party (PSL) and became the fourth largest party (PKW, 2019).

Based on sources available in English and access to some Polish journals, empirical research on populism on social media in Poland is rather limited, with just a few exceptions. Żuk & Żuk (2020) analysed Polish YouTube channels, as well as comments under YouTube video content, to see if there was a connection between right-wing populism and anti-vaccine thinking. Their analysis showed that anti-vaccine movements thrive in the populist environment. Jakubowski (2017) rethought the role of social media in the age of growing prominence of populism. Lipiński and Stępińska (2019) analysed the factors (including social media) that contributed to the successes of populist leaders Pawel Kukiz and Janusz Korwin-Mikke in 2014–2015. They found that although media coverage of these two leaders was not that high compared to PiS or PO, they were actively covered by social media channels. Additionally, they utilised social media very well in their political communication. Other researchers considered social media in a more general sense, rather than strictly linked to the activity of populists, looking at communicative strategies used by politicians on social media. For example, Matuszewski & Grzybowska-Walecka (2015) analysed Facebook content and compared the communication of Pawel Kukiz, Bronisław Komorowski and Pawel Kukiz during the presidential campaign in 2015. They found, among other things, that there was no specific strategy for using Facebook. This communication media was rather treated as presenting information to the electorate. However, based on their analysis, they were not able to suggest which content resonated more with Facebook users or if there were any differences in communicating on Facebook between the different candidates (ibid.: 51-52). Mazurek (2015) analysed the 2015 presidential campaign of Paweł Kukiz on Twitter. The author noticed that most of his tweets were informational/promotional, alongside significant engagement from his followers who were retweeting his content.

3.3.1 K15

K15's success of becoming the third-largest party[1] in the Sejm during the parliamentary election in 2015 was met with surprise (Napieralski, 2015). K15 is led by a Polish singer – Pawel Kukiz – who also ran in the presidential election in 2015, gaining 20% of votes. As we can learn from the official K15 website, citizens encouraged by his success in the presidential election in 2015 set up an electoral committee (Kukiz'15, 2017). By considering Mudde's (2004) operational definition of populism, K15 can be described as a populist movement because of its glorification of citizens and presenting them as pure people, as well as its anti-establishment rhetoric. K15 also shows a hostile view towards the EU (Strategia Zmiany, n.d). There were also suggestions for introducing single-seat constituencies (JOW), a presidential system and a national referendum (ibid.). Pawel Kukiz very often presents himself in patriotic clothes and cooperated with the National Movement (a far-right organisation) (Koczanowicz, 2016: 77; Konopka, 2016). K15 attacks not only elites but also the mainstream media for their biases (Onet, 2015). Although K15 presents elements of populism based on Mudde's definition (2004), his main postulates are JOW, the fight against 'partocracy' (in the Polish system, politicians are obedient to the party leader) and the need to create pro-citizen democracy. Pawel Kukiz presents the conservative-nationalist character of his movement, but he gathered people from different political formations that also gained seats in the Sejm from K15 parliamentary list in 2015 (e.g. Robert Winnicki from a nationalist party, and Wilk from The Congress of New Right) (Matuszek, 2017: 130).

Despite the fact that K15 gained significant support in a relatively short time, a similar case was observed in Polish history in 2001, when a political formation not associated with any established political party entered the political scene. In 2001, Self-Defence (SRD) won 10.2% of votes. However, the main difference between K15 and SRD was their channel of communication. K15 mobilised people mainly through social media (Facebook, Twitter and YouTube), while SRD organised protests and manifestations (Kasprowicz & Hess, 2016: 13-14).

During 2015-2019, K15 was faced with the issue of many activists leaving the party and creating their own political formations or moving to other political groups. The idea of gathering people from other political organisations that also supported a change in the political system proved to be challenging. For the parliamentary election in 2019, K15 decided to form a coalition with Koalicja Polska (Polish Coalition – PLS). They gained 8.55% of votes, and K15 representatives took 5 out of 30 mandates. In 2015, K15 had 42 mandates in the Sejm, however, according to Paweł Kukiz, the lower number of mandates did not concern him, explaining that it would be easier for

[1] K15 claims that it is not a political party, but a civic movement.

him to manage his representatives and still educate society about what he perceived as an undemocratic electoral system (Gazeta Prawna, 2019). PLS decided to include in its programme the main postulate of K15, namely the introduction of JOW (PSL Koalicja Polska, 2019). Nonetheless, the decision to form a coalition with PLS led to other representatives leaving K15. Online, supporters also showed disapproval by unliking K15 (around one thousand people unliked the K15 Facebook official page) (Niezależna, 2019).

To show his disaffection with the electoral system and governing parties, Paweł Kukiz did not register his political formation as a political party, restricting himself from receiving financial support to run a political party (Matuszek, 2017). Nonetheless, Pawel Kukiz recently announced his potential plans to register K15 as a political party under the name Kukiz'15. This would mean the end of a coalition with the Polish Coalition (TVP, 2020). However, as this plan has not happened yet, Paweł Kukiz might be testing the general mood to see if this action would encourage people who left the party to come back.

3.3.2 Supporters of K15

Although politicians/political parties' messages and postulates have to meet with the needs of people in order to be successful in an election, the demand-side of people voting for populist parties/politicians has been neglected for a long time by scholars (see Mudde & Kaltwasser, 2017; Schulz *et al.,* 2017). A limited number of studies interested in people who voted for populist parties have measured populist attitudes and their socio-demographic characteristics. These studies considered different countries, and therefore they were set in different political contexts (e.g. Spruyt *et al.* (2016) on Flanders, and Hawkins & Kaltwasser (2014) on Chile). The study conducted by Norris & Inglehart (2016) in 32 European countries suggested that people who support authoritarian populist parties are more likely to be male, less educated, older and religious. Norris & Inglehart (2017) also claimed that after the Second World War people who experienced stability and peace (younger generations), are more open to new ideas and new movements, bringing more *postmaterialist values* into politics. However, these values will not be apparent in countries with a low income. According to Norris & Inglehart (2017), changes embraced by the younger population explain why older people tend to support populist, xenophobic parties as a way of protecting or presenting different values in comparison to the young generation (*materialist values*). Nonetheless, the economic situation with "declining real income, declining job security, and rising income inequality, bringing growing insecurity" also explains why there is an increase in support for populist parties (ibid.: Online).

K15 presents an interesting case since this movement attracted mainly young people aged 18–24 (19%) and 25–34 (38%). These statistics have not changed dramatically since the election in 2015, and their main supporters remain aged between 18-34 (CBOS, 2017). Based on results from CBOS and Adriana, the average K15 voter tends to have at least a high school degree or higher, is satisfied with their material situation, and strongly dissatisfied with the government (Maliszewski, 2015). Therefore, the explanation as to why people support populist parties given by Norris & Inglehart (2017) does not apply to this case. The cultural backlash thesis and the influence of economic insecurity could be more relevant to the electorate of established party PiS, which gained the majority in the Sejm in 2015. PiS presented populist, xenophobic rhetoric, and their electorate consisted of older people, with a low income and living in small villages (Maliszewski, 2015). By looking at the analysis of K15 supporters conducted by CBOS (2017), the success of K15 could be explained by the ability of the movement to attract people who were disinterested in politics, and did not express loyalty to any political party. Their heavy usage of social media channels may have also contributed to their electoral success (Lipiński & Stępińska, 2019).

The outcome of the parliamentary elections in 2019 is more challenging to assess in terms of K15 voters since they made a coalition with PLS. The age breakdown of voters shows that the biggest age group that voted for PLS was aged 30-39 (11.1%). Nonetheless, there was no significant difference in the percentage of votes between other age groups (18-29 – 10.3%; 40-49 – 10.6%; and 50-59 – 9.9%) (Gazeta, 2019). As the percentage of votes increased in all age groups for PLS in 2019 (compared to the outcome of the parliamentary election from 2015), it is difficult to see any connections and suggest what percentages of votes came from K15's supporters. Additionally, other smaller political formations joined the coalition.

Chapter 4 Conceptual framework for studying online political activity from a perspective of social involvement

4.1 Introduction

It has been established in Chapter 2 that s*ocial involvement* through communicative practices can take the form of political dialogue (*deliberative mode*), self-expression (*liberal individualist mode of democratic communication*) and building a community (*communitarian mode of democratic communication*). In order to investigate populist engagement online through the lens of populist supporters' communicative practices, I will be drawing on Dahlberg's (2001a) three distinct modes of democratic communication, and Freelon's (2010) indicative characteristics of these models. These models suggest that discussions online may take different forms.

These three modes of democratic communication are mainly researched by media and communication academics in the context of online political discussion. I will present the current research on online political discussions, which is currently dominated by deliberative theory. Later, I will list the features of three modes of democratic communication (*deliberative*, *communitarian* and *liberal individualist*) distinguished by Freelon (2010) and critically evaluate them. I will also present the most up-to-date studies that triangulate the three theories. I will later explain what model I expect to be dominant and what features of certain types of democratic communication I predict to be common in discussion spaces used by populist supporters. I will also argue that the discussion will be shaped by technological design and the way people use it.

4.2 Online political discussion and triangulations of theories

4.2.1 Research dominated by deliberative theory

Research into online political discussion spaces has been mainly dominated by deliberative theory (see: Freelon, 2010; Wright, 2011). Deliberative theory in the context of online discussion spaces has been most influenced by Habermasian theory regarding the public sphere (e.g. Oz *et al.,* 2018; Wright & Street, 2007). The empirical research focuses on the analysis of online political discussion spaces to see the extent of their deliberation (Freelon, 2010; Wright, 2011). There are two approaches towards measuring the ability of online space to meet the criteria of deliberation. The first one is rather critical suggesting that the concept of the public sphere "was never meant

as a measuring stick against which to assess discussions on or offline" (Stromer-Galley, 2014), thereby criticizing the general approach in using different measures to assess the quality of online political discussion based on deliberative theory. Other researchers claim that all elements of deliberation should be satisfied when online discussions spaces are aimed at influencing the government and taking political actions, while in other cases "the full-scale deliberation" is not required (Oz *et al.,* 2018: 3403). Many studies have established out that online discussion spaces do not meet all the standards of deliberation (Janssen & Kies, 2005; Stromer-Galley, 2014). Apart from assessing online political discussion spaces based on how deliberative they are, concerns have also been raised regarding social as well as technological features that might have contributed to people conducting a more (or less) deliberative discussion. These factors are, for example, *anonymity*, *moderation*, *live chat* as opposed to *asynchronous discussions* and *selection of information* (Friess & Eilders, 2015).

With regards to *anonymity*, there are mixed views about the requirement of using a legal name while posting comments. Some researchers find that *anonymity* enables people to express themselves without the fear of being judged (e.g. Kim, 2006), while others observe "the identification of the participants is a fundamental element for explaining the quality and the persistence of political debate." (Janssen & Kies, 2005: 321). The *moderation* of discussion spaces is one of the features that researchers agree has a positive impact on the overall quality of discussion (Friess & Eilders, 2015). Having someone who is monitoring and facilitating the discussion can even lead to higher levels of intention to participate in the discussion when compared to spaces where the discussion is unmoderated (Wise, *et al.,* 2006). It is also suggested that it is better to have a technological design where people can respond after taking some time to think about the topic discussed (*asynchronous discussions*). If the communication happens in an *asynchronous way*, there is a higher chance of creating a high-quality discussion (for more comment see Friess & Eilders, 2015). From the perspective of deliberative theory, *the selection of information* also matters, as high-quality information might encourage participants to have a reasonable discussion (e.g. Friess & Eilders, 2015).

These features are mainly discussed in terms of how the design might fulfil the promise of the public sphere or deliberative democracy. Nonetheless, as noted by Friess & Eilders (2015), designing for democracy might not be enough, simply because in the end the participants decide how to utilise these technological features. Esau *et al.* (2017) expressed a similar view by stating that online discussion spaces will be influenced by other factors, not only by their technological design. Nonetheless, Esau *et al.* (2017) approach the participants' input as being another feature that affects the online discussion, suggesting that this is not the focus of their study. However, ignoring the relationship between technological design and the people who use or interact with

this technology, has led Esau *et al.* (2017) to some dubious assumptions (or hypotheses). The authors analysed comments from three different platforms: news forums, news websites and Facebook pages. They selected *moderation* (the ability to pre-moderate and post moderate comments*), asynchronous discussion* (the discussion does not occur in a real-time), *availability of information* (quality information about the topic), and the level of topic definition (how well defined is the topic that initiates the discussion) as *technological features* that influence the quality of deliberative discussion (ibid. 329-331). *Moderation* and *asynchronous discussion* could be perceived as technical designs over which users lack influence, however, features like *availability of information* and *the level of topic definition* could hardly be called technological design solutions. Undoubtedly, the software enables users to post a text with more or less defined topics for discussion, but the users (or the admins of news websites, forums, and Facebook pages) decide how they will utilise these opportunities provided by the technology.

4.2.2 Triangulations of three perspectives towards democratic communication: deliberative, communitarian and liberal individualist

As research into online political talk is dominated by deliberative considerations, Freelon (2010) suggests that there are other models of democracy that might occur in online discussion spaces. Focusing solely on deliberative features while analysing online political discussion spaces leads to missing some other important characteristics of discussion (Freelon, 2010: 1174). Apart from studies investigating the level of deliberativeness in online spaces and the factors that may enhance deliberative talk, scholars also critiqued the unitary public sphere suggested by Habermas. Fraser (1990) is one of the theorists who introduced the notion of counterpublics and some other studies further relied on this idea, suggesting that there are different public spheres (e.g. Papacharissi, 2002). Nevertheless, counterpublic views are still rooted in the ideals of deliberative theory (Freelon, 2010: 1174). According to Fraser (1990: 67) "*parallel discursive arenas [are] where members of subordinated social groups invent and circulate counter-discourses, which in turn permit them to formulate oppositional interpretations of their identities, interests, and needs*". Dahlgren (2005: 152) points out that on the Internet there are thousands of different groups and organisational movements which are perhaps facilitating fragmentation. On the one hand, populist movements and their use of the Internet can be viewed as forming counter-public spaces where they form their own identities and voice their concerns omitted from the public debate. On the other hand, the view of counterpublics very much depends on the context and research aims. For example, in a Polish context, where there is a governing populist party – PiS (which was the main party representing a right-wing ideology during the election in 2015) – there is a question of whether other populist movements such as K15 presented views

that had not already been circulating in the public debate before the parliamentary election of 2015. Additionally, counterpublics might be a useful perspective when analysing discursive practices and the role of social media. In this research, the focus is more on user-generated discussion on social media and how populist supporters communicate. Freelon (2010) introduced a new framework for analysing online discussion by referring to the work of Jurgen Habermas and Lincoln Dahlberg (2001a). His framework presents three modes of communication: *the deliberative*, the *communitarian* and the *liberal individualist* modes, and their inductive measures. In this way, Freelon (2010) recognised the existence of different types of discussion without restricting himself to a deliberative vision.

4.2.3 Variables for each model of democratic communication

Freelon (2010) provided the indicative metrics for studying the three models of democratic communication indicated for online political discussion by listing features that were designed to measure how deliberative online spaces are, and how critical towards deliberative theory (e.g. features such as ideological homophile or attacking others). In this section, I will present an overview of his framework to not only list these empirical measures and provide their definitions but also show that their adoption might be, at times, problematic. Therefore, when applying the categorisation developed by Freelon (2010), the technological constraints need to be evaluated, as well as how each indicator might help to structure an argument that concerns the other models of communication. Freelon (2010) himself suggested a flexibility towards his framework and distinguished elements of these modes of democratic communication.

Freelon, (2010: 1181 – 1182) associates *the deliberative mode of democratic communication,* where the users aim to achieve a common ground through rational-critical argumentation, with the following features:

- ***Rational-critical argument*:** The deliberative model of communication will present a rational-critical debate concerning the posted message. There are different operationalisations of this concept. For example, Graham & Witschge (2003: 181 -183) coded messages according to rationality using these categories: *initial rational argument* (reasoned claims where a participant has initiated the discussion) and *responses* (where participants exchange their messages). The *responses* category had two subcategories*: reasoned/justified claim* and *reasoned/non-justified claim*. *Reasoned/justified claim* was further divided into three categories: *counter-argument* (a reasoned justified message with counterclaim), *rebuttal* (a reasoned justified message with a counterclaim that is a response and defence of the original counterclaim stated earlier), and *refute-to-rebuttal*

(a reasoned justified response to the rebuttal by the person who first started the rebuttal).

The *reasoned/non-justified claim* had the following sub-categories: *response-informative* (an unreasoned unjustified claim seeking information, or asking questions), *response-affirmation* (an unreasoned unjustified claim seeking affirmation), and *counter-assertion* (un unreasoned unjustified claim that is the critique of another message). Table 3 below summarises these codes.

Rationality	
Initial rationale argument	*Responses:* • *Reasoned/justified claim:* o *Counter-Argument* o *Rebuttal* o *Refute-to-Rebuttal* • *Reasoned/non-justified claim:* o *Response-Informative* o *Response-Affirmation* o *Counter-Assertion*

Table 3 The list of codes developed by Graham & Witschge (2003) for rationality category

In turn, Trenel (2004) proposed a measurement of rationality based on the following self-explanatory categories: *topic relevance*, request for *information/opinion, opinion*, *critical opinion*, *affirmative opinion, justification level*, and *reference to common ground*. In comparison to Graham & Witschge (2003), Trenel (2004) added to these categories 'topic relevance' and 'reference to common ground'. Other studies have tried to operationalise *deliberation* (including *rationality*) in online discussion spaces, but it is not the aim of this part of the discussion to list them all. Instead, this thesis aims to show a different range of approaches. It is, however, worth noting that these categories were mainly developed in order to test the level of deliberation in online spaces. Therefore, they present a very sophisticated level of analysis of messages in the context of deliberation, and this kind of level of analysis might not be required when adopting Freelon's (2010) framework. Freelon (2010) himself did not provide the operationalization of the *rational-critical argument* category in his framework. Instead, he just presented the features of deliberative communication which could be distinguished, leaving researchers to decide how they wished to measure *rational-critical* debate in their studies.

- ***Inter-ideological response and inter-ideological questioning***: Freelon (2010) listed *inter-ideological response* and *inter-ideological questioning* as other metrics of *deliberation*. For Trenel (2004) and Graham & Witschge (2003) seeking more information was one of the measures of rational/critical debate. However, compared to other modes of communication, an emphasis is placed on the relationship between the participants in the discussion. For example, for the *deliberative* mode of democratic communication, the line of questioning or answering should be between people who present different views, but still keep their messages civil, avoiding attacks and other forms of discourse that are aimed at undermining opponents (Freelon, 2010). When questions are asked in such a way that there is an exchange of opinions between people who present ideological similarities, presented more in the form of a conversation between people who think alike, these features align more with a *communitarian* discussion (Freelon, 2010). *Inter-ideological response* and *inter-ideological questioning* can be assessed based on an analysis of the whole thread where it is possible to determine if there are ideological differences or similarities.

- ***Equality*****:** Equality was one of the other features of deliberation distinguished by Freelon (2010). In the Habermasian view, online discussion spaces are open to people where everyone can freely ask questions or initiate a topic (Dahlberg, 2001c). Equality can be demonstrated through the fact that no one is judged based on their social position but according to the merits of their argument (e.g. Poor, 2006) or it can be perceived as forming an equal contribution to the discussion (Freelon, 2010; Dahlberg, 2001c). Freelon's (2010) framework refers to the latter understanding where equality is measured by the equal distribution of comments between participants. However, applying this approach to online discussion spaces might fall short. First of all, there is some doubt as to what this feature can indicate about *deliberation,* apart from the fact that the discussion is not equal where "a small number of users contribute to the majority of posts" (Freelon, 2010: 1182). Secondly, it is challenging to imagine an online space where there is an equal contribution to the discussion from all participants. Considering online discussion spaces where everyone with Internet connection has equal access to it, there will always be more engaged people in the discussion than others. Some might have a better knowledge of the topic or have specific skills (including eloquence) or be more interested in the matter and be personally affected by it. Empirical research confirms the same; in online spaces, participation is concentrated among minority participants (e.g. Albrecht, 2006; Davis, 2005). Graham & Wright (2014: 626) concluded that:

"The existence of a highly active minority would appear, thus, to be the norm and is an extension of the 1/9/90 rule, which predicts that only 1% of users of a forum post, with 90% lurking and 9% editing".

In this way, equality seems to be a more useful concept when considering if certain online spaces enable access for everyone (in that no one is denied access). Investigating the distribution of posts between participants can be a more powerful metric when considering their impact on the discussion and the modes of democratic communication.

- ***Public-issue focus:*** The other dimension of deliberation is whether people stay focused on political issues when in discussion spaces (Freelon, 2010). This feature can be useful when applied to non-political spaces, where the aim is to observe the degree of *deliberation*. In forums dedicated to political issues, this indicator might not indicate very much, as public issue focus is expected to be high. If this is not the case, then it does not explain whether the forum is more *liberal individualist* or c*ommunitarian* in nature. In other words, if public issue focus is found to be low in an online political space, it cannot be said that this is because there are more characteristics of *liberal individualist* or *communitarian* modes of democratic communication. Consideration would also need to be given to which topics can be perceived as *liberal individualist* or *communitarian* in order to make a compelling argument.

- ***Discussion-issue focus:*** For Freelon (2010), reference to the main post while commenting is one of the features of *deliberation*. Freelon (2010: 1182) suggested that *"topic focus is less characteristics of the liberal individualist and communitarian models".* Nonetheless, this dimension must be considered with some caution, especially when analysing the discussion spaces that were not designed for *deliberation*. For example, Facebook Pages (the empirical focus of this study) are a space where everyone with a Facebook account can create a Page of a specific nature. While everyone interested can start a discussion on these Pages, the thread started by a Page admin is the most visible. The posts posted directly by the participants go to the left side of Page, and they are not easily spotted by the other readers. In this way, the topics discussed are mainly influenced by the content that the Page admins decide to post. If users want to start a discussion on a different theme, they might choose to post underneath the initial thread. What is more, on Facebook Pages, you can reply not only to the main post but also to any other person who has commented under the original topic (See Fig. 3). If Comment 2 was made under the thread on a topic unrelated to the original post and the other participant (Comment 3) decides to continue this discussion, the question is whether these comments should be

considered as a manifestation of the user's own interest, or whether the structure discourages users from staying focused on the topic discussed.

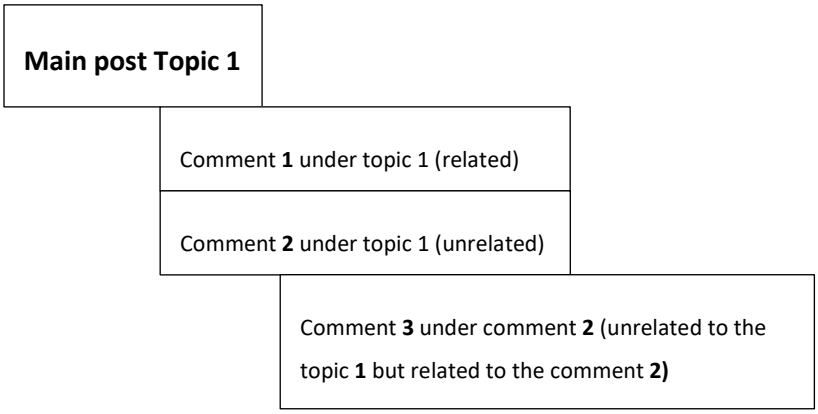

Figure 3 An illustrative example of the structure of a discussion thread on Facebook Pages.

The *liberal individualist* mode of democratic communication in comparison to the *deliberative* mode of democratic communication is not interested in creating a dialogue to reach a common ground. A key characteristic of *liberal individualism* is people seeking to express themselves, and the features selected by Freelon (2010) that describe this mode are monologue, personal revelation, personal showcase and flaming, defined below:

- ***Monologue:*** The participants do not engage in a dialogue which is indicated by a lack of exchanging arguments or references to other people's comments. This feature can be contrasted with one of the features of the *deliberative model,* namely the *discussion topic focus*. If there are a low number of posts which focus on the initial topic, one would expect to see a high number of posts where participants ignore the other comments and even the initial post. However, as pointed out before, the type of discussion and technological constraints would need to be considered before assigning the feature of 'monologue' to all comments that do not seem to relate to the main topic.

- ***Personal revelation****:* Revealing personal information while commenting rather than focusing on the merits of argument is another feature of *the liberal individualist model*. Freelon (2010) contrasted this feature with the *public issue topic* (discussing topics that are political in nature). For Freelon (2010: 1182) *public issue focus* is "the conceptual counterpart of personal revelation in the liberal individualist model". This means that in online discussion spaces where individuals reveal personal information rather than discuss political matters, these comments should not be counted as the feature of *the*

deliberative mode of democratic communication but as an example of the *liberal individualist mode of democratic communication*.

According to Freelon's measures of each mode of democratic communication, comments that are political in nature would have been classified as a feature of the *deliberative* mode of democratic communication. Nevertheless, I suggest a careful consideration of this binary approach, especially when groups of a political nature are analysed. For example, on Facebook Pages, when people comment underneath the main post (one that is political in nature), they might reveal some personal information about themselves. If, for example, the main post is about upcoming elections (hence political in nature), but a person comments below suggesting that they are disappointed with the party and will never vote for it again, this comment is both political in nature, and personal, because it includes a user's personal experience.

- ***Personal showcase:*** The participants might take advantage of discussion spaces to advertise their own personal blogs or political sites (e.g. by posting links). They might create videos, images or memes. As Freelon (2010: 1179) states, *"publicly linking to [one's] own media becomes a liberal individualist plea for attention".*

- ***Flaming:*** The participants might post offensive messages towards other participants whose views are different (Freelon, 2010). Flaming can be explicit: e.g. "*you are an idiot*", or implicit: e.g. "*thinking can hurt*". Either way, the poster wants to undermine the argument of the opponent by using *ad hominem* attacks, or *"simply antagonizing others for its own sake"* (Freelon, 2010: 1180).

The *communitarian* mode of democratic communication presents measures that are associated with creating a community or group identity. Freelon (2010) distinguished the following indicators:

- ***Ideological homophily:*** This measure has been the subject of various studies (e.g. Adamic & Glance, 2005; Colleoni *et al.,* 2014; Jurgens *et al.,* 2011; Kushin & Kitchener, 2009). By investigating *ideological homophily*, these studies sought to address criticisms regarding the ability of online spaces to create a public sphere. Online spaces were criticized for connecting like-minded participants in a space where their views are reinforced (e.g. Sunstein, 2001). Freelon (2010) does not explain how this feature could be implemented in the analysis of the three modes of democratic communication, apart from suggesting that homophily is seen as a positive phenomenon in the

communitarian mode of democratic communication in contrast to its position in the *deliberative* mode where one of the crucial elements is the exchange of different views.

- ***Intra-ideological response/ intra-ideological questioning:*** Similar to *ideological homophily*, *the intra-ideological response* refers to the exchange of views between people who think alike. For Freelon (2010), in *deliberative* spaces, there will be a more cross-cutting exchange of views. Following this argument, *communitarian* spaces are characterised by communication between people who hold the same views. It is not entirely evident how *the intra-ideological response* is different from *ideological homophily* mentioned earlier. Freelon (2010) referred to Kelly *et al.'s* (2005) method for analysing an intra-ideological response, suggesting that their approach is reliable. Still, this study has never been published and peer-reviewed, so there is some doubt about the reliability of their approach. What is more, the authors used the Netscan tool in order to analyse the interactions of the most active users in USENET newsgroups. A similar method could be used to analyse *the inter-ideological response.* ***The intra-ideological questioning approach*** is a less problematic indicator as Freelon (2010) claims only that in *communitarian* places, there might be questions asked by participants that have similar views. In *deliberative* spaces, participants would ask questions presenting different views.

- ***Mobilisation:*** This indicator is associated with Mutz's (2006) demonstration of how deliberative theory works in practice. Mutz (2006) noticed that despite the idealised concept of the public sphere, participation is more likely to happen when there is a limited number of exchanges of various views. Freelon (2010) suggested that in *communitarian* spaces, where there is an agreement between users, there will also be calls encouraging political action. For example, "Let's vote in the election" – "Yes, we should all vote".

- ***Community identification:*** Freelon (2010: 1181) stated that a person's identification with a community is a further dimension of the *communitarian* model of democratic communication. He proposed an analysis of the language used and proposed looking for words such as "we" or "us", as being indicators of belonging to a community, or simply asking people about their sense of belonging to the community. For example, "*we should implement a new project of change*".

4.2.4 Research that applied three modes of democratic communication

There are very few studies which have empirically applied Freelon's (2010) framework of three modes of democratic communication. To date, three studies that adopted Freelon's (2010) framework have been identified. Freelon (2015) applied his own framework to Twitter and news comments, while Yan *et al.* (2018) applied it to the non-political space of two cricket forums (Pakistani and Indian cricket forums). The most recent study was conducted by Valera-Ordaz (2019) applying the framework to Facebook Pages for four Spanish political parties. All of these studies used the method of content analysis, and all of them concluded that different modes of communication exist within online political discussion. Freelon (2015) noticed that on Twitter, there are more *communitarian* characteristics, while the news comments section was more *liberal individualist* and *deliberative*. Yan *et al.* (2018: 14) found evidence that different modes of democratic communication co-exist and they "may mingle and intersect within one common sphere". Valera-Ordaz (2019) noticed that *deliberative* and *communitarian* features seem to be very high for political parties in Spain. The author also looked for differences in terms of ideological stance, noting that right-wing political parties in Spain present more features of *liberal individualism* while left-wing parties presented more *communitarian* features (ibid.). All studies applied somewhat different operationalisations of the three modes of democratic communication.

Deliberative dominated studies, as well as empirical research on the three modes of democratic communication, tend to rely on content analysis. What has been observed is that these studies more or less implicitly hold pre-assumptions about the homogeneity of online spaces. For example, Valera-Ordaz (2019) compared Spanish political parties on Facebook Pages by looking at differences between left-wing and right-wing parties, and between old and new parties. However, the author did not take into consideration that even though the same online space is analysed, the online discussion spaces might have attracted different users and user behaviours. Therefore, there might have also been differences in the modes of communication within the parties themselves. In terms of the technological design of Facebook Pages, from a visitor's or follower's perspective, there is the possibility to respond to the main post, respond to the other people commenting under the post, and to submit a comment to the Page. The admin of the Page can moderate the post by either editing or deleting comments. However, having the same technological features does not mean that they are always used in a consistent manner. Additionally, Pages created for the same party can have different aims and roles to fulfil.

Freelon (2015) applied the three democratic models of communication in his study of Twitter hashtags and news comments sections. Freelon (2015) is mainly interested in assessing the

communicative norms of online discussion spaces and examining the extent to which the platform and the ideological positions contribute to the differences in communication norms. The normative assumption mainly assessed the ideological position (left/right), and as Freelon (2015: 776) has observed himself, it was not always possible to judge individual ideological positions based on the content of a message. Moreover, Freelon (2015) has paid little attention to the fact that certain types of technological design will not only have an impact on the type of democratic communication used, but also users' behaviours and the way they interact with the technology. While having some technological solutions can facilitate certain type of discussion, there is no guarantee that this will happen. If we consider different online spaces which share an identical technological design (e.g. Facebook open groups) and then compare them to each other (e.g. two Facebook groups supporting similar cause/issues/matter), we might be able to notice that users' behaviours differ and, despite common technological features, they might utilize different modes of communicative practices. Freelon (2015: 785) by extracting online comments from two different newspapers, the Washington Post and the Seattle Times, noticed that two different communicative models exist in the same online discussion space, concluding that "*the coexistence of both deliberative and liberal individualist characteristics in the same discussion spaces poses something of a conundrum for normative theory*".

4.2.5 Populism and different models of democratic communication

Populism is an 'ideology that considers society to be ultimately separated into two homogeneous and antagonistic camps, "the pure people" versus "the corrupt elite"' (Mudde, 2004: 543). By working on this minimalist definition of populism provided by Mudde (2004), it is possible to identify the key characteristics of populism. These characteristics are *pure people* and *the corrupt elite*. There is another feature that cannot be extracted from the above definition, but is very often mentioned in the literature, namely *ostracizing the others* (e.g. Engesser *et al.,* 2017; Mazzoleni & Bracciale, 2018).

To start with the first element of populism which is the need to appeal to *the pure people*, populists tend to refer to 'the people', however 'the people' and its meaning is rather ambiguous and can be interpreted in different ways (e.g. *hard working people* – most can refer to themselves as hard working) (Reinemann *et al.,* 2017). As (Reinemann *et al.,* 2017: 19) has pointed out, populists do not just appeal to the people, they "create a new social identity among citizens […] in order to unite them and generate a sense of belonging to an imagined community". Despite the fact that populists create an impression of a unity of people, they also very often adopt more specific rhetoric as to who belongs to this vision, therefore excluding other groups of people (e.g. positioning *pure people* against the *corrupt elite* would suggest that elites are not viewed as part

of the people) (ibid.). This technique is very closely aligned with the idea of the creation of social identity. In order to generate social identity, some borders must be introduced for people to be able to distinguish who can be identified as a member of a particular group (ibid.). Therefore, it is not surprising that the other characteristics of populism are *anti-elitism* and *ostracising the others.* Depending on the context, the elites can be politicians, law firms or even media organisations. These elites are portrayed in a negative way, as very often those who are deemed to have control over the rights of *pure people* are then blamed for unfavourable situations (Engesser *et al.,* 2017). In terms of *ostracising the others*, it is quite common to attack other groups that are favoured by the elites and do not fit into the category of *pure people* as defined by populist movements and parties. These out-groups could be, for example, immigrants, refugees and criminals (ibid.: 1112).

By distinguishing the key elements of populism, it becomes possible to make assumptions regarding what might be observed in different modes of communication that are prominent in discussions between populist supporters. Although most of these elements have been differentiated with reference to the communicative strategies of populist's leaders (e.g. Engesser *et al.,* 2017; Mazzoleni & Bracciale, 2018), it is more likely that populist supporters will present the same core elements in their communication online. This idea is driven by the fact that those who decide to create or support Facebook Pages, groups, websites or any other medium for political formation or movement are more likely to hold the same views or believe in similar ideas as their leaders. Taking into consideration the view that populist leaders create a sense of community and social identity, it is more likely to see that their supporters will present the features of the *communitarian* mode of democratic communication. I suspect that in their discussion they will be using words that suggest that they are a community (e.g. "we", "us") (*community identification*). They will more likely present similar views to each other (*ideological homophily*), hence the discussion will be based on asking or addressing questions between different participants who hold the same views (*intra- ideological questioning and intra-ideological response*). According to Mutz's (2006) findings, people who are exposed to the same views are more likely to be politically engaged. Therefore, I assume there will be a high level of calls of action (*mobilisation*) while analysing on populist supporter's discussion online.

Since it is expected that the members will reinforce existing strongly held views, any counterpoints or arguments presented by people who do not agree with them will face hostility. However, posts that attack other members might be also presented by people who visit Facebook Pages and do not identify with populist supporters and their views. This feature of *flaming* is especially associated with the *liberal individualist* mode of democratic communication.

Analysing populists' online communication solely from the perspective of *deliberation* would probably lead to conclusions that these spaces are not deliberative, and a lot of important elements would be missed. These spaces might not have been created in order to discuss politics and reach common ground, but to build a sense of belonging to a community and to express views or dissatisfaction both individually and in groups.

Chapter 5 Research framework

5.1 Introduction

In this chapter, I will describe the selected research framework. This thesis uses qualitative content analysis for both of the empirical works (with its innovative application in Study 2). It does not offer frameworks at a macro-level with a practical paradigmatic assumption (e.g. ethnography/action research). Therefore, I will be referring to the 'research framework' instead of the methodology to make a distinction between these two terms. In addition to this, I incorporated disciplinary insights to place online political discussion in a typology of online political participation. Instead of suggesting new methods for analysing the Web, I modified an existing method of enacting a content analysis.

In the next section, I will first revisit my research questions (as set out in Chapter 1) and discuss the field of social research on the Internet. Building on that discussion, the interdisciplinary character of this study is then explored. This explains how, in order to define political activity online, two domains of research were combined (political science and communication studies). Both disciplines are concerned with the new political activities being enabled by the Web; however, they offer different approaches towards online political activity. By developing a typology of online political participation, I show how I incorporated the research from communication studies and then assigned their perspective of different modes of democratic communication to one of the categories of political participation, namely *social involvement*. Although this thesis focuses in particular on *social involvement* and the communicative practices of populist supporters, I suggest ways in which it might be possible to create a richer understanding from the integration of the two disciplines.

In this chapter, I also discuss the qualitative research tradition and justify the choice of qualitative over quantitative methods for this study, and I also explain how I ensured the reliability of these research findings. For this thesis, I selected a method of qualitative content analysis. As this method is applied at the micro-level (two Facebook Pages that support K15 and their comment sections, see Chapter 6) and macro-level (the classification of Facebook Pages created in support of K15, see Chapter 7), the process of conducting this analysis is explained for these two different studies.

5.2 Research questions

As noted earlier in Section 1.4, the main research question addressed by this thesis is: “How do populist supporters engage online?” This will be answered by looking at the comments section on two Facebook Pages that support K15. The following sub-questions were formulated:

- What type of democratic communications do populist supporters of K15 present on Facebook Pages?
- Is there any dominant mode of democratic communication?
- Are there any differences between communication types on these observed Facebook Pages?

The results from the first study have led to another study that was assessing the homogeneity of Facebook Page created for K15 with predefined questions:

- Are Facebook Pages supporting K15 homogenous?
- What are the types of Facebook Pages supporting K15?

To discover if Pages supporting K15 are homogenous, the following sub-questions were formulated:

- What are the roles of Pages supporting K15 based on their description in the "About" tab?
- What are the purposes of Pages supporting K15 based on the posts?
- How are the analysed Pages (*Kukiz’15* and *Informator Kukiz’15*) positioned within the broader environment of Pages created in support of K15? Are there any differences between the attributes of *Kukiz’15* and *Informator K15*?

5.3 Internet Research

The Internet is now an essential part of everyday life. It is not surprising, therefore, that the Internet has also become a research focus for researchers seeking to understand complex social phenomena observed on the Internet (Amaturo & Punziano, 2017). Nonetheless, there is an ongoing debate regarding how the Internet should be studied, whether there is a need for new methods or whether existing techniques should be utilised. The calls for developing new methods are positioned within a camp that considers the Internet as a revolution, in other words, a disruptive construct. This view is expressed by Hine (2005) and other scholars who have adopted big data approaches and computational methods (e.g. Mayer-Schoenberger & Cuckier, 2013). Hine (2005) refers to online methods such as virtual ethnography or online interviews as new

methods that create a division between the online and offline environments; therefore new ethical guidelines and practices are required. Computational methods, in turn, embrace the vast amount of digital data enabled by the Internet, and suggest new statistical approaches that should be introduced (e.g. vast amounts of data can be collected compared to traditional statistical sampling methods) (Mayer-Schonberger & Cukier, 2014). On the other side of the spectrum are scholars presenting the view that existing arrangements should be modified rather than introducing new methods to study the Internet. Examples of studies that utilised the existing methods are those who investigated online political discussion (e.g. Freelon. 2015; Valera-Ordaz, 2019; Yan *et al.,* 2018). These authors adopted a method of content analysis in an online environment.

Apart from the methodological challenges imposed by the Internet, there has also been an evolution in term of how the Internet should be viewed. Early studies adopted an approach that investigated the Internet and its effects on society. The Internet was viewed as an object influencing society in a (mainly) negative way (Burnett *et al.,* 2010: 2). This view can be linked to one of the dominant paradigms that understands technology as a source of societal change, very often referred to as technological determinism (MacKenzie & Wajcman, 1999). In the early days of studying the Internet, the clear division between online and offline realms was noticed (e.g. virtual community versus community) (Burnett *et al.,* 2010: 2). As a critique of this perspective, the social construction of technology (SCOT) was developed. SCOT is a theory developed within Science and Technological Studies that criticises the standpoint of viewing technology as a fixed artefact upon which social influences play no role (e.g. Bijker, 2008).

SCOT is strongly associated with the concept of interpretative flexibility, where different groups that are using technology can produce various meanings (Kline & Pinch 1996: 766). While this theory is useful for drawing attention to the social aspects, it omits the technological factors that might lead to social determinism (Halford *et al.,* 2010). More recently, there has been a shift in the research regarding the Internet with more studies suggesting that social and technical influences are equally important, and that they shape each other (ibid.: Burnett *et al.,* 2010). A similar approach was noticed in Gidden's structuration theory (1991). He rejects the concept of dualism where a phenomenon is explained either by social or non-human factors.

In this thesis, instead of developing a new method, I utilise the existing research technique, and take an interdisciplinary approach towards the Internet in order to place the analysis within the wider context of online political participation. Later, I describe how two approaches (from political science and communication) were combined. I will also suggest how other studies can benefit from utilising combined insights in their research.

5.3.1 Interdisciplinary research

It has been argued that complex problems cannot be solved through the lens of a single discipline, and that an interdisciplinary approach will be more likely to provide a fuller understanding of observed phenomena (Repko, 2008). This view also applies to the Web if it is treated as a socio-technical construct. As Hendler *et al.* (2008: 64) note, "understanding the Web requires more than a simple analysis of technological issues but also of the social dynamic of perhaps millions of users". Although my main research question does not relate directly to understanding the Web per se, it does examine political engagement on the Web, and because the Web is seen as constantly evolving rather than as a fixed product, analysing it requires thinking in innovative ways. While there are different definitions of the nature of interdisciplinary studies, Repko offers a definition that combines a few perspectives:

> **"Interdisciplinary studies are a process of answering a question, solving a problem, or addressing a topic that is too broad or complex to be dealt with adequately by a single discipline and draws on disciplinary perspectives and integrates their insights to produce a more comprehensive understanding or cognitive advancement." (2008:12)**

This definition was not placed here without reason. First, it emphasises the process of performing interdisciplinary research, therefore allowing for methodological flexibility. Secondly, it refers to the integration of disciplines to answer, or raise new questions, or to offer solutions that would not have been possible by simply looking through a single discipline lens (ibid.: 11-12). This thesis seeks to answer the research question by reflecting on the perspectives of political science and (political) communication studies. The disciplinary insights of both disciplines are combined when developing the typology of online political participation. It is believed that this integration will enable future research to look for a richer understating of and connections to online political participation.

To investigate political engagement online, two disciplines were indicated: political science and communication studies. There is a separate discussion about whether political science should be considered as a sub-discipline of social science and/or a field of inquiry (e.g. Burnham *et al.,* 2008), and whether communication is the applied profession (Repko, 2008: 4), humanities, or a social science discipline (Gronbeck, 2005). As Repko (2008: 5) observes, disciplines are constantly evolving and "today's discipline may well have been yesterday's sub-discipline or branch of an existing discipline". For this research, political science and communication studies are referred to as disciplines. Still, I acknowledge that neither discipline has a clear epistemological and methodological perspective, and in order to integrate them, I reviewed both their approaches towards online political engagement.

Political science, in a broad sense, deals with the study of government and political activity and behaviours (Oxford English Dictionary, n.d.). In turn, communication studies are interested in human communication as it is used in various channels and contexts (University of Montana, 2015). Both disciplines have their sub-fields. The aspect of political science that is most relevant to this thesis is political behaviour. Political behaviour investigates how people participate in politics (see Dalton & Klingemann, 2013). In turn, political communication is a sub-domain of communication studies. Political communication studies the role of communication in political systems and draws "from a wide range of social science and humanistic disciplines" (Jamieson & Kenski, 2017Online).

Political scientists, while analysing political activity on the Internet, tend to look at the effect of Internet use on offline and online forms of political participation (e.g. Valenzuela *et al.,* 2009; Vissers & Stolle, 2014). This type of research is frequently part of a discussion of whether Internet usage leads to mobilisation (as more tools become available, more people decide to participate in political matters) or normalisation (the Internet only encourages political participation in those who are already politically active) (Lutz *et al.,* 2014). Surveys are very often the method of analysis where different variables are adopted and tested (e.g. Internet use, social media use, political interest or knowledge, attitudes or socio-demographics) (e.g. Bode, 2012; Vissers & Stolle, 2014). These surveys rely on self-reported usage by participants (see Lutz *et al.,* 2014). Although these studies undoubtedly contribute to our knowledge of political engagement online, they lack a consistent approach to the way that political participation, civic engagement and online political participation are defined and used (see Lutz *et al.* 2014 for more comment). For example, Conroy *et al.* (2012: 1536) measured the effect of online group membership upon offline political engagement by defining political engagement as "offline conventional forms of political participation and political knowledge". In turn, Vissers & Stolle (2014) investigated how Facebook political participation (sometimes referred as political engagement) impacts other online and offline forms of political participation. Online and offline forms of political participation tend to be approached as a broad spectrum of activities aimed at not only the government, whereas Facebook political participation tends to be viewed as a distinct mode of political participation. At the same time, the traditional definition of political participation is very often defined in a way that overlaps with the definition of civic engagement (Ekman & Amnå, 2012).

In parallel, media and communication studies investigate political discussion online in the context of the potential of the Internet to influence public opinion and increase political engagement. Therefore, political communication researchers are also interested in political activity online; however, they do not situate their discussion within the broader debate about political participation, and whether citizens communicating online is a new form of online political

engagement. Focusing on the quality of comments and other forms of citizens expressions, this terrain of research tends to be more concerned in the ability of online groups, forums or spaces to recreate a vision of the public sphere or the idealised concept of deliberative democracy (see Freelon, 2010). Scholars studying the dynamics of online political discussion spaces, therefore, usually ignore how and even if discussions about politics fit into a typology of political participation. They usually adopt a method of (quantitative) content analysis, and look at user-generated content rather than self-reported usage (e.g. Freelon, 2015; Yan *et al.,* 2018). These distinctions between the approaches of the disciplines are summarised in Table 4.

Online political engagement		
Discipline	Political Science	Communication Studies
Sub-field	Political behaviour	Political communication
Assumptions	The effect of the Internet on different forms of political participation (online and offline)	The potential of the Internet to create a reasonable discussion
Theories	Mobilisation, reinforcement and normalisation theories, participatory democracy	Deliberative democracy theory, public sphere theory, liberal theory, communitarian theory
Concepts	Political trust, political attitudes, political knowledge, socio-demographics, clicktivism, slacktivism, micro-activism	Filter bubble, slacktivism, clicktivism, echo chambers, homophily, the digital divide
Methods	Mostly surveys, experiments	Content analysis of user-generated content (mainly quantitative)

Table 4 Political engagement online thorough perspectives of political science and communication studies

The integration of these two disciplines (communication studies and political science) started from rethinking online political participation by offering a clear distinction between different categories of online political engagement (*social involvement*, *political participation* and *civic engagement*) (see Chapter 2: Section 2.3). Discussing politics online was allocated to the category of *social involvement* where people, while not taking direct action towards the government, are instead attentive to politics. People can exercise political activities by moving between categories of political participation. In this way, political participation is seen as a political process. For example, to vote, people need to be interested in politics. The Internet has enabled people to show their interest in politics, among other things, by discussing politics with other people outside their network of family and friends. It also results in a trail of digital traces.

Therefore, it is possible for user-generated content to be investigated by looking not only at the content and quality of comments exchanged between people, but also at the relationships and the broader forms of political participation, which reflect a wider political knowledge. If there is a positive link between discussing politics online (where a low quality of discussion is presented) with voting in the election, then we might need to reconsider its implications for political participation.

Growing political apathy and declining political engagement have led researchers to investigate political activity online in the hope that the possibilities of the Internet might be able to reverse the trend. However, recent studies have automatically assumed that people engaged in politics have a good understanding of politics and their political participation is treated as a positive phenomenon (see Lutz & Hoffmann (2017) for more comment). Conroy *et al.* (2012) found a positive link between Facebook group membership and offline political participation, and a negative relationship in terms of users' political knowledge due to the low quality of the discussion. The authors concluded scholars that should pay more attention to the exchange of information and the type of opinions presented in order to better understand the effects of online political activity on offline political participation. Some could argue that the online and offline world division might no longer be applicable with these two domains increasingly overlapping. However, there is no academic consensus and enough empirical evidence to make this assertion. Some researchers view political activities on the Internet as a new distinctive form of political participation (e.g. Theocharis & van Deth, 2018), while other researchers claim that online political activities are replacing some old traditional forms of political participation (e.g. Best & Krueger, 2005), and others see online political activity as a form of political communication (e.g. Miller, 2017) (see also Chapter 2, Section 2.3.3 for some more comment).

Presumably, discussions that present more diverse arguments and characteristics of *the deliberative communication mode* will positively affect their members' political knowledge. For example, Druckman & Chong (2007), by implementing the framing theory, discovered that exposure to diverse views creates a better quality of public opinion and people are less susceptible to manipulation. It would be interesting for future research to examine whether certain modes of democratic communication are linked to higher or lower political knowledge (however, political knowledge might be measured by looking at different levels of understanding about political issues, e.g. immigration, the EU, refugees, gay rights). This could be further explored by observing the relationship between particular modes of democratic communication, political knowledge and voting habits. Content analysis of a particular political group that is prominent on social media could be analysed to learn more about their dominant mode of

communication. Then a survey could be run for this group to learn more about their political knowledge and voting behaviour in the election.

Links between political communication and political behaviour can be also developed by taking a similar approach to studies that analysed the relationship between Internet use (or social media use) and political participation (e.g. Boulianne, 2017; Vaccari & Valeriani, 2018). Firstly, a subset of population could be selected (e.g., college students, young people, populist supporters of a specific political formation that actively use social media) to analyse their political knowledge and voting behaviour (e.g. voting in elections), as well as belonging to different political groups online or other social media channels (Facebook Pages or groups) for discussing politics online. Secondly, following the example developed by Conroy *et al.* (2012), in-depth content analysis could be conducted on selected social media accounts (e.g. Facebook Pages) to learn more about discussion types based on the three modes of democratic communication.

It must be pointed out that due to limited time and resources, this thesis is not investigating the communication modes of political groups and their impact on other forms of political participation (e.g. voting) and political knowledge. Nonetheless, it develops and improves a framework for studying online political discussion. In order to understand the relationship between types of communication and different forms of political participation, I have enhanced the framework for studying online political discussion. The development of this framework also informs the empirical approach I have taken. Political science and communication studies have mainly adopted a quantitative approach to studying political engagement (where they set hypotheses, investigate the relationships between different variables, and seek to make generalisations on that basis). I argue that when analysing discussion spaces, qualitative content analysis is desirable in order to understand the context and subjective meaning of the posts and messages. I also follow the three modes of democratic communication (Freelon, 2010) when analysing political discussion. In addition to this, I take into consideration the fact that technological design as well as users will impact the political discussion.

5.4 Qualitative research tradition

Quantitative research methods adopt an objective approach toward investigating problems and producing knowledge. Rooted in positivism, there is an assumption that objectivity and accuracy can be achieved by quantifying data, and by testing hypotheses and theories by using deductive reasoning. On the other hand, the qualitative research tradition (rooted in social construction and interpretivism) takes the view that reality cannot simply be measured as it is being constantly shaped by social actors (Bryman, 2012: 33-34; Crotty, 1998; O'Leary, 2017). The researchers

working in this research paradigm are interested in exploring the observed phenomena in-depth rather than quantifying them (O'Leary, 2017: 142). Thus, there are fundamental differences in approaches to inquiry between these two traditions. The qualitative research traditions assume that there is no single reality, appreciates this subjectivism, and does not seek generalisation (O'Leary, 2017). There are a range of influential methodologies in qualitative research, including ethnography, phenomenology and ethnomethodology (O'Leary, 2017: 143). However, instead of delving into one or another methodological approach, I developed my own framework and strategies which I think are appropriate for my research questions. This decision is justified here and in the subsequent chapters describing the empirical analysis.

In this thesis, I chose to conduct qualitative content analysis, presenting the view that reality is constructed by people and therefore, rather than being measured, it has to be interpreted. The choice of qualitative content analysis was selected by taking into consideration two major factors. Firstly, this method allows me to explore in-depth communication patterns, be sensitive to the context in which the comments were posted, and to see whether there are differences between political groups supporting the same political party on the same platform. Secondly, for the subject of analysis, I selected Facebook, as this platform was very popular amongst populist supporters. To comply with ethical regulations and Facebook's terms and conditions, automated methods, and other methods that would collect personal data, could not be used.

Qualitative content analysis made it possible to collect data in an unobtrusive way, without recording any personal information, based on live observation. Although this method has its limitations (which will be explored in later sections), this study hoped to adopt an existing practice in a creative way that allows for investigations into the changing nature of the Facebook platform.

Most of the studies that investigated online discussion spaces have adopted the approach of quantitative content analysis when analysing and presenting their results (see Freelon, 2015; Esau *et al.,* 2017; Yan *et al.,* 2018; Zhou *et al.,* 2008). Although most of these studies did not explicitly say how the comments were coded (e.g. if they counted word frequencies and so on), sometimes by looking at the descriptions of their measures, it was more or less evident that they adopted a qualitative approach towards coding and the text was qualitatively read and later converted into numeric values. In other words, a quantitative analysis was conducted on qualitative data. This research undertakes qualitative content analysis meaning that the data is analysed and presented in a qualitative way. There is some use of quantitative data such as descriptive statistics and/or graphs to help visually represent and summarise the findings.

While this process might look similar to the studies mentioned above, which adopted a form of content analysis, the crucial difference is that this qualitative content analysis will also look at the interpretations of new patterns (latent content analysis). By adopting this approach, the systematic nature of content analysis can be maintained "for the various stages of qualitative research, without undertaking over-hasty quantification" (Mayring, 2004: 266). What is more, Freelon (2015) has developed a framework for analysing the modes of democratic communication. While I will be heavily relying on his categorisation system, by conducting a qualitative content analysis I will be able to not only formulate new categories but also analyse the latent meaning of the text (something that was neglected in the study conducted by Freelon, 2015).

5.4.1 Position of the researcher

In conducting qualitative research, it is important to understand one's own biases that might guide the research or have an impact on the categorising and understanding the text (Erlingsson & Brysiewicz, 2017). I, the researcher, am female, was born and raised in Poland, and have lived for the last decade in the United Kingdom. I completed a BA in Media and Communication at De Montfort University, and an MSc in Web Science at the University of Southampton. My interests are in online political participation, technology and politics, and online political communication. While completing my MSc in Web Science, I conducted research on populist supporters online. I was interested in their socio-demographic metrics as well as how they express themselves online. The group I analysed was K15 and my analysis was conducted via Facebook groups. I selected to examine K15 as this political group is an interesting example of populist ideas resonating mainly with young, educated people. During the analysis of their communication, I observed a significant number of comments attacking another person and/or group of people. Most of the messages showed anger or hate towards different groups, institutions or anyone who did not fit into the group's perspective on different matters. Since these people were extremely active on Facebook in comparison to other Polish political groups, I became curious about the content of their discussions. This led me to my PhD journey. While analysing their communication online, I tried to approach the texts with an open mind. I made sure I considered carefully the context in which each message was posted and what the author meant. I was particularly attentive to the coding category which referred to *flaming* (attacking other people) to make sure that I am not biased based on my previous experience with this political formation.

5.4.2 Trustworthiness and rigour

Instead of judging the credibility of qualitative research by the criteria of a quantitative research tradition, some standards were introduced to ensure this research is credible. These were based on the indicators provided by O'Leary (2017). To achieve credibility in qualitative research, I managed my subjectivity, made sure that the findings can be applicable to the research context that I investigated, and explained the research process in detail in order to be validated by others.

Transparent subjectivity over objectivity

According to Katz (1987: 36) *"epoche* is a process that the researcher engages in to remove, or at least become aware of prejudices, viewpoints, or assumptions regarding the phenomenon under investigation". Instead of claiming that my views are objective, I managed my subjective views throughout the analysis. I paid particular attention to the *liberal individualist* mode of democratic communication and its feature of *flaming*. I also repeated the process of analysis with a conscious effort at taking into consideration my understanding of the world. My subjective views were also considered by discussing initial judgements and interpretations with my supervisors.

Dependability over reliability

To make sure that the method was systematic and well-documented, I came back to the coding and re-evaluated posts after one month. All changes to the codes were also reported in analytical memos so I could keep track of developments. I also implemented an intra-coder reliability check to see whether the coding scheme has well-developed definitions. After three months, 20% of data for the first study was re-coded. The values of 0 and 1 were assigned (0 – disagreement, 1 – agreement). There was one disagreement concerning the category of *flaming*. The definition of *flaming* was updated leading to 90% of agreement. The same approach was taken towards the second study. The first attempt showed a low percentage of agreement (60%). However, after updating the definition, the agreement level increased to 90%.

Auditability over reproducibility

This study cannot be reused to achieve similar findings. Sharing the data set between different researchers can be against Facebook's Terms of Service. In addition to this, I would have to make sure that there are no sensitive and identifiable characteristics before making the data accessible to the public. What is more, the data from Facebook was collected through live observations; it might be impossible to conduct an accurate replication of this, since some posts might now be deleted and no longer accessible. Additionally, some groups or Facebook Pages might disappear.

As a way of overcoming these considerations, I am transparent in documenting the process of analysing the data so other researchers can see how I arrived at the conclusions.

Transferability over generalizability

For the first study (Chapter 6), the sample was too small to be able to generalise to a broader population or to draw conclusions about Facebook Pages that gather K15 supporters. However, this study will enable me to learn about a specific group. If someone decides to conduct similar research, they might follow the clear procedures for the analysis and apply them to a different data set. In relation to the second study (Chapter 7), the conclusion can be generalised to K15 on Facebook and their types of Facebook Pages. The procedures were also reported in detail for others to be able to produce a similar study in different settings.

5.4.3 Ethical considerations

This study has received ethical approval number 45355.A3 (see Appendix A) from the University of Southampton Ethics Committee. The ethics application was submitted in August 2018, and it was approved in November 2018. The process of obtaining ethical approval is worth mentioning. There is no clear guidance on conducting social media research, with some studies providing conflicting information (Townsend & Wallace, 2017). However, I followed the framework for ethical research with social media data provided by Townsend & Wallace (2017).

This framework encourages the researchers to reflect on the terms and conditions of the chosen social media platform (e.g. whether the data can be treated as public and if it is ethical to republish the data). In this study, I was concerned with one feature of Facebook, namely Facebook Pages. Facebook Pages were treated as public (as per Facebook's terms and conditions) and I have decided to not share the data set in order to protect user anonymity. Facebook's terms and conditions were also not clear in stating whether sharing the data set is allowed.

Despite taking these protective measures towards using data from Facebook Pages, my ethical application (45355.A3) raised some concerns with the ethics committee board. As I suggested that I would be gathering the data by using the NVivo software from Facebook Pages, the ethics committee was concerned that the scraped Pages might contain data that would make it possible to identify the author. As a way of addressing this issue, I explained that NVivo uses Facebook's API and therefore scrapes the data that is allowed by Facebook. I suggested that I have no intention of re-publishing the data, the analysis would use aggregated data, coded in NVivo (or manually) and qualitative analysis of content would be presented with no direct quotations in the publications. The ethics committee was also concerned about seeking approval from the owners

of the Facebook Pages prior to collecting the data. I argued that if the data to be used in this study were private and sensitive (i.e. not available on public pages), then I would seek consent from the gatekeeper of the community (the Page admin) and informed consent would be required if the content of pages were to be republished.

While I was in the process of securing ethical approval, the software applications (including NVivo) enabling collection of data from Facebook via automated means ceased to have access to the Facebook API. This required me to think about other possible ways of collecting the data and re-submitting the application for ethical approval. The manual method of collecting the Facebook Pages data was therefore ultimately chosen.

After collecting comments from two Facebook Pages and conducting an initial pilot analysis, it was felt that the analysis was too abstract, and did not sufficiently explore the context and meaning of online discussions. I therefore amended the ethics application to introduce direct quotations in the analysis for the purpose of criticism (excluding any quotes with the potential to cause harm or distress and put individuals at risk).

The first study revealed interesting differences (see Chapter 6) that were then explored in the second study. For the second study, I developed the typology of Facebook Pages, collecting Page names, Page descriptions and recording the contested meaning. This was also reflected in the ethical application that was later amended and approved (see Appendix A).

5.5 Qualitative content analysis

Content analysis allows us “to study human behaviour indirectly, through an analysis of their communications” (Fraenkel & Wallen, 2006: 483). By focusing only on the data generated, it is unobtrusive in nature (Krippendor, 2004). In the literature, there is a different definition of content analysis. The very early description of content analysis goes back to Berelson (1952). For Berelson (1952), content analysis was a method of analysing a text in a systematic, objective and quantitative way, therefore suggesting its quantitative nature. Currently, content analysis is applied to many different disciplines (Mayring, 2004). Therefore, content analysis can be conducted in both qualitative and quantitative ways as it is not linked to any specific discipline which has its way of finding the truth. The best current definition of content analysis is that it is a scientific method of analysing different communication material that is in some form recorded (e.g. text, photos, videos) (ibid.)

In this thesis, the method of qualitative content analysis was adopted at both the micro- and macro- level. The micro-level (the first study) analyses comments underneath posts on two

Facebook Pages supporting K15. The macro-level (second study), in turn, builds the typology of Facebook Pages supporting K15. Even though the same method of analysis was used, different approaches to the analysis were chosen.

Hsieh & Shannon (2005) have distinguished three main approaches to the analysis while doing a qualitative content analysis: *conventional*, *directed* and *summative*. *The conventional approach* is taken where there is no existing theory, or there is limited knowledge about a particular phenomenon. The categories are directly derived from data. *The directed approach* is more deductive in nature, extracting groups from existing research before the analysis and during the investigation. *A summative content analysis* starts with the manifest content analysis where word or content is identified and quantified, then is followed by latent content analysis where interpretations of this recognised content/words are made.

For the first study, the analysis of comments on Facebook Pages takes a theory-driven approach with categories and codes predefined by the existing research. However, inductive and deductive techniques are utilised while analysing the text. Freelon (2010) provided a very useful framework by distinguishing the characteristics of different models of communication. Nonetheless, my study considers a different country, on a different platform and in a different context. Therefore, I wanted to allow for the formulation of different categories/codes apart from those distinguished by Freelon (2010), if needed. Additionally, the analysis of comments started from looking for readings of them beyond the superficial level. This process is referred to as the latent content analysis. Latent content analysis refers to the level of interpretation. The manifest content analysis is more descriptive in nature as it focuses on what people are saying while the latent analysis looks into the underlying meaning (Erlingsson & Brysiewicz, 2017: 94). In this way, before it was decided which category any comment should be assigned to, I looked at the whole thread to be able to understand the context in which comments were posted by users.

For the second study at the macro level, a conventional approach to the analysis was used. The codes and the categories were mainly generated from data (with one exception). While there were some pre-existing codes (e.g. top-down and bottom-up, Page management), these codes were created with the pre-assumption that they might be changed or disregarded while learning about the data. Although some descriptive statistics are presented, this technique is not “quasi statistical rendering of the data, but rather a description of the patterns or regularities in the data that have, in part, been discovered and then confirmed by counting” (Sandelowski, 2000: 338). While proponents of qualitative research might see any attempt at quantification while doing a qualitative study unacceptable, Morgan (1993) explains as to why counting is an integral part of

qualitative content analysis, suggesting that counted codes enable researchers to learn about data, spot patterns and further examine why the patterns are occurring.

Morgan (1993) pointed out that qualitative content analysis lies:

> **"Between the numerical orientation of quantitative content analysis and the interpretive orientation of grounded theory… [and] qualitative content analysis is an appropriate choice when the available data and the research goals call for the advantages of content analysis in describing what patterns are in the data as well as the advantages of grounded theory in interpreting why these patterns are there".**

Table 5 below presents different approaches that were applied to the analysis of the comments section on Facebook Pages and classification of the Facebook Pages.

Approach to the analysis	**Study One** **Micro-level study** (Analysis of comments on Facebook Pages)	**Study Two** **Macro-level study** (Classification of Facebook Pages)
Conventional content analysis		X
Directed content analysis	X	
Summative content analysis		

Table 5 The explanation of approaches to the analysis applied to Study One and Study Two

5.5.1 Strengths and weaknesses of qualitative content analysis

Qualitative content analysis is a useful method as it is flexible in terms of its research design by allowing either inductive or deductive techniques. It also has fewer procedures to follow when compared to other qualitative research methods such as phenomenology, hermeneutics, grounded theory or ethnography (Bengtsson, 2016: 8). It is also an unobtrusive method, as it analyses the data that is already available (Krippendor, 2004). The major criticism of qualitative content analysis is derived from two distinct perspectives. For the proponents of quantitative content analysis, the qualitative approach lacks a depth of statistical analysis, while for the qualitative researcher, this approach does not provide rich analysis (Morgan, 1993; Elo & Helvi Kyngas, 2008). However, it must be pointed out that if the study is more descriptive in nature

(qualitative or quantitative), it does not lose its importance, especially when it was designed to answer questions such as: the who, what and where of events.

The next two chapters will present the procedure of conducting content analyses and describe their findings with conclusions. Study One (Chapter 6) was conducted on a micro-level by analysing comments made under posts from two Facebook Pages supporting K15 over a period of one year and applying Freelon's (2010) conceptualisation of three modes of communication. It was discovered that Pages that support K15 present different modes of democratic communication when compared. The findings from the first study informed the second study (Chapter 7). Study Two was conducted at the macro-level, in which the typology of Facebook Pages was built to see if there are different roles for Pages supporting K15.

Chapter 6 Study One: An analysis of the comment sections from two Facebook Pages supporting Kukiz'15

6.1 Introduction

The previous chapter discussed the research framework, as well as the benefits of combining two fields of research. This chapter describes the process of collecting and analysing the data. The research findings are also presented. As was established in Chapter 2 and Chapter 4, this study investigates *social involvement,* conceptualised as discursive practices online. Three approaches towards communicative performances are adopted: *deliberation*, *expressivity*, and *building a community*. The comments were collected from two Facebook Pages endorsing K15 over a period of one year, and some of the indicators developed by Freelon (2010) for each mode of democratic communication were implemented, allowing for the development of my own definitions. The comments were analysed in a deductive way, and the pilot study was first conducted to develop a robust categorisation while adopting Freelon's three models of democracy. Although the analysis is qualitative in nature, it includes descriptive frequencies that give an overview of the data, while in-depth qualitative analysis helps to understand those descriptive frequencies better and to shed some light on the dynamics of online discourse that take place on these Facebook Pages supporting K15. The discussion of the results summarises the empirical findings, while the conclusion reflects on these findings in the context of the literature review (Chapter 2).

6.2 Coding procedures

6.2.1 Sample

Based on my observation of different social media websites, Facebook is a very popular platform used by supporters of K15 in Poland (see Chapter 1, Section 1.4, for the justification to study supporters of K15). In 2017, at the time of writing the thesis, there was no significant visibility of populist parties on other social media, such as Twitter or Instagram. Facebook Pages supporting K15 were therefore selected for the population for this study. As there are a significant number of Facebook pages supporting K15, only Facebook Fan Pages with no more than 1,000 likes were considered for this analysis. In addition to this, activity over the period of one week was analysed to see how frequently posts were being made. For these Pages to be considered active, the

admins had to write a post at least three times a week. A period of one year was selected for this study (from 22.11.2017 to 22.11.2018). Two Facebook Pages were selected as the sample for this study using the aforementioned criteria: *Informator Wojowiczny* (which translates as 'warrior's informant') and *Kukiz'15*. Both Facebook Pages posted at least three times a week. *Informator Wojowiczy* had 4,563 likes, and changed its name during the analysis to *Informator Kukiz'15*. In turn, *Kukiz'15* had 296,000 likes. *Kukiz'15* is a formal Page run by Kukiz'15 while *Informator Kukiz'15* appears to be the result of bottom-up, grassroots activity.

I collected a total number of 759 comments from *Informator Kukiz'15* and 788 comments from *Kukiz'15*. All comments (759) posted between 22.11.2017–22.11.2018 were extracted for *Informator Kukiz'15*, but because the second Facebook Page *Kukiz'15* attracted a high number of responses under one post (sometimes even reaching over 200 comments), the number of comments observed was limited to 50 under each post.

Due to the changing policy of Facebook's API and changes to the terms and conditions of this platform, the comments were collected using live observation (I initially planned to collect data by using the NVivo software). I had a spreadsheet wherein I could record each post and the comments underneath them. I also recorded some metadata (time of post, post reactions). This enabled me to collect the data in an unobtrusive way, and in compliance with Facebook's terms of service. The names of users and other identifying data were not recorded to protect the users.

6.2.2 Facebook and Facebook Pages

Facebook is a social media platform founded in 2004 by Mark Zuckerberg. At the time of writing this thesis, its stated mission "is to give people the power to build community and bring the world closer together" (Facebook, 2019). The company claims to have 1.52 billion daily active users on average, and states that people use Facebook to "stay connected with friends and family, to discover what is going on in the world, and to share and express what matters to them" (ibid.). Since 2004, Facebook has been developing rapidly and has many different features (Newsfeed, Facebook groups, Facebook Pages, Facebook live videos and short videos, etc.). Facebook Pages can be created by anyone who has a Facebook account. Facebook Pages are used by companies to advertise their products or by individuals for different purposes. A Facebook Page is managed by the person who created it and who is also an admin of the site. There is the possibility that other admins can also be assigned to manage the Page. Different roles for managing the website can be created too. While everyone can post on Facebook Pages, these posts appear on the right-hand side of the Page and can be easily missed and go unnoticed by other people visiting the site. Therefore, the admins of the Page are those who decide which content appears and is visible to

everyone. However, everyone with a Facebook account can comment under posts. Facebook Page admins can further moderate the discussion by deleting any comments. All sorts of posts and comments can be made either by posting a video, image, or a link to other content.

Facebook's business model is based on advertising. Users create free accounts and use Facebook services at the expense of their own data which is then utilised by the company. Facebook faced a crisis following the Cambridge Analytica revelations where it was discovered that vast amounts of data had been used (without the users' explicit consent) to aid the political campaigns of right-wing candidates in 2016 (e.g. Cadwalladr & Graham-Harrison, 2018). This resulted in changes to Facebook's terms of service and the loss of ability to collect data via automated means.

6.2.3 Unit of analysis

The comments underneath posts were subjected to analysis. Each comment was analysed in its entirety rather than sentence-by-sentence. Since individual messages can be only analysed in the context of the discussion, whole threads were recorded. The posts were first read/watched before deciding the best way to categorise the comments. This step was important for knowing the context in which a comment under a specific post was posted.

6.2.4 Excluded data

I excluded posts that did not have any comments from data collection. This also included posts with videos and images that did not have any text on them, as it was ambiguous to understand the meaning and their relation to different modes of communication. For example, there could be a link to a song by Pawel Kukiz on YouTube. However, I could not assign such a video to any pre-defined categories of different modes of communication. What is more, there were not many videos and images of a similar type to enhance the framework by creating additional categories.

Posts with videos that could not be played (hence the context could not be understood) were also excluded along with their comments. Posts which presented domestic issues (crimes/deaths) were excluded from the analysis. This was mostly because the pre-analysis of 100 posts showed that it is not beneficial to analyse the comments under a post which talks about non-political issues. For example, comments under a post about the death of someone would usually present the writer's condolences, thereby they could not be assigned to any mode of democratic communication and its features.

6.2.5 Framework

The framework used relies heavily on the categorisation presented by Freelon (2010) and his indication of three modes of democratic communication (*deliberative*, *liberal individualist* and *communitarian*). Descriptions of the features of these different modes were presented within the theoretical framework (Chapter 4). Not all of Freelon's (2010) features of different modes of democratic communications were utilised in this paper. The pre-analysis of 100 posts from two Facebook Pages showed some ambiguity in allocating posts to certain categories. For example, *the rational-critical argument* is one of the features of *a deliberative model of communication* suggested by Freelon (2010). Nonetheless, this category was too broad to be able to easily allocate some comments to it. Therefore, the features of *the deliberative mode of democratic communication* were supplemented by Trenel's (2004) online deliberation metrics. In addition to this, features such as *public issue topic* (issues discussed related to politics), *equality* (whether participants contribute equally to the discussion) and *discussion topic focus* (keeping focus on the topic initially started in a post) were also not used in this analysis.

While *public issue topic* is a good indication for measuring to what extent the online discussion spaces meet the criteria for deliberation, analysing this feature along with other features of different modes of democratic communication would be problematic. Although it would be expected for people in a group designed for deliberation to discuss only issues that are political in nature, this might not be necessary for the other models of democratic communication (e.g. the *communitarian* mode where people should build a community of shared values and where these values do not need to be solely linked to political matters). *The discussion topic* focus was another feature of the *deliberative* mode of democratic communication that I decided not to include in my analysis. The technological design of Facebook Pages does not encourage users to stay focused only on the topic being discussed. On Facebook Pages, the admins can make a post, thereby initiating the conversation and can suggest what topic is going to be discussed. The users can comment on the initiated posts, but they cannot start a discussion (a topic) by themselves. Therefore, if they want to discuss something that has not been initiated, they might comment under the post, and do not address the initial topic. The pre-analysis showed that users post under the original post and start a thread on a different issue which is then discussed with other participants. I have decided to classify the first comment that started a new discussion as *a monologue* – a feature of the *liberal individualist* mode of democratic communication. The rest of the discussion was then analysed against the three modes of democratic communication. In relation to *equality,* this feature would be useful while doing quantitative analysis; however, for qualitative analysis, it would be difficult to see if the comments are posted evenly among users.

From the *communitarian* model, the feature of *ideological homophile* was not analysed as it would have been too ambiguous to use it in a qualitative study. The research tradition of analysing *homophile* has traditionally relied on sociometric surveys, while Internet-based studies used improved statistical or big data and computational methods (e.g. Willer & Boutyline, 2016; Colleoni *et al.*, 2014). The exchange of comments where there is agreement appeared to be easier to investigate (*intra-ideological response* and *intra-ideological questioning*). *Intra-ideological response* includes the sub-category of *attacking the others*. *The community identification* feature also was included in the analysis.

All the features of the *liberal individualist* mode of democratic communication enumerated by Freelon (2010) were included in the analysis (*flaming*, *monologue*, *personal revelation* and *personal showcase*). In Appendix B, the detailed descriptions of all modes and their features can be found. Table 6 below summarises the characteristics of the different modes of communication used in this study.

Measures distinguished by Freelon (2010)	Measures used in this study
The deliberative mode	The deliberative mode
Rational critical argument	Critical argument
Public issue focus	Common ground
Topic discussion focus	Inter-ideological response
Equality	Inter-ideological questioning
Inter-ideological response	
Inter-ideological questioning	
The liberal individualist mode	The liberal individualist mode
Flaming	Flaming
Monologue	Monologue
Personal revelation	Personal revelation
Personal showcase	Personal showcase
The communitarian mode	The communitarian mode
Homophile	Community identification
Community identification	Mobilisation
Mobilisation	Intra-ideological response
Intra-ideological response	Intra-ideological questioning
Intra-ideological questioning	

Table 6 The characteristics of different modes of communication distinguished by Freelon (2010) vs. the characteristics used in this study (characteristics in bold were not used in this study)

6.3 Findings

6.3.1 Patterns in qualitative data

Populist communication and the three democratic modes of communication

Table 7 shows descriptive counts for all the codes coded for different types of democratic communication. Considering the analysis from both Facebook Pages (*Kukiz'15* and *Informator Kukiz'15*), most messages were allocated to the *communitarian* category, counting 46% of all codes. The least prominent feature was the *deliberative* mode (20%). This pattern is consistent with the pre-assumption about populist communication that suggest the dominance of the *communitarian* mode of democratic communication, as well as theory about the coexistence of

different modes of communication. Table 7 shows the coexistence of different modes of democratic communication where the relative percentages for each model of democratic communication are meaningful (*deliberative* – 20%, *communitarian* – 46%, and *liberal individualist* – 33%).

		Informator Kukiz'15 (%)	Kukiz'15 (%)	Facebook Pages (%)
Deliberative				
Critical argument		29 (4%)	9 (1%)	37 (2%)
Common ground		3 (0%)	3 (0%)	6 (0%)
Inter-response		91 (12%)	109 (14%)	212 (13%)
Inter-questioning		31 (4%)	38 (5%)	75 (4%)
Total		**154 (20%)**	**158 (20%)**	**312 (20%)**
Communitarian				
Community identification		10 (1%)	6 (1%)	16 (1%)
Mobilisation		3 (0%)	0 (0%)	3 (0%)
Intra-response		286 (38%)	235 (30%)	521 (33%)
	attacking the others	97 (13%)	40 (5%)	137 (9%)
Intra-questioning		27 (4%)	9 (1%)	36 (2%)
Total		**423 (56%)**	**290 (37%)**	**713 (46%)**
Liberal individualist				
Flaming		42 (6%)	186 (24%)	228 (15%)
Monologue		101 (13%)	138 (18%)	239 (15%)
Personal revelation		36 (5%)	8 (1%)	44 (3%)
Personal showcase		3 (0%)	8 (1%)	11 (1%)
Total		**182 (24%)**	**340 (43%)**	**522 (33%)**
Total				**1547 (100%)**

Table 7 Descriptive counts and percentages for all categories and their features coded on

Facebook Pages supporting K15

However, features of the *communitarian* mode of democratic communication such as *community identification*, *mobilisation* and *intra-ideological questioning* were almost non-existent in the discussion space of populist supporters. *Community identification* counted for only 1% of all messages, *mobilisation* 0% and *intra-ideological questioning* only 2%. *The intra-ideological response* amounted to 33% of all coded messages (Table 7). Therefore, there is a question as to whether users of these Facebook Pages form a community, or whether they are simply supporters who comment on posts and follow the Page to stay updated with the party's news or subscribe to

populist's ideology. *The intra-ideological response* as the most frequent category revealed that as a part of populist identity, populist supporters of K15 tend to attack other political parties or out-groups (e.g. Jewish people, Germany, PiS and PO). What is also very characteristic for their

> P: "Agnieszka Ścigaj - Member of the Polish Parliament - One can get the impression that Rafał Trzaskowski's statement about "freezing funds for Poland from the EU budget until the victory of the Civic Platform" is muted. Regardless of the truth of this statement, attempts to intimidate Citizens in this way are simply outrageous."
>
> C1: "PO and Nowoczesna treats our nation like prostitutes – if we will vote differently, the funds from EU will be frozen!!! – what a statement!!!!Sir Czaczkowski shoot yourself in the head!!!!!!
>
> *Informator Kukiz'15*

communication is the use of inflammatory and uncivil language when attacking these outgroups. For example:

One of the main core characteristics of populism as an ideology is to attack *the elite* and the others who do not fit the definition of *pure people*. This technique fits well with the general approach of creating an imagined community. While using inflammatory language is characteristic of the *liberal individualist* mode of democratic communication, in this context, it was decided that attacks towards parties and other out-groups (where there is an agreement between the commenters or the post and the commenter) is a part of the identity of K15 supporters and it should be categorised *as the intra-ideological response*, a feature of *communitarian* mode of democratic communication. However, *liberal individualist* communication was also frequent. This is due to fact that other people were undermining K15 activities by posting hostile comments, while supporters of K15 responded uncivilly to such comments. Additionally, people either respond to posts or they start a new discussion.

Differences in the mode of democratic communication between the two Facebook Pages

The dominance of deliberative theory in analysing the political potential of the Internet arguably contributed to taking a technical determinism view by looking at which design features might enhance *deliberation*. The studies that adopted Freelon's framework (2010) on the three modes of democratic communication indicated a similar approach, neglecting the user/admin input that might be different on the same analysed platform, as well as the aims these Pages are trying to fulfil (e.g. Freelon, 2015). Additionally, there was an assumption about the uniformity of online spaces (e.g. technological design with more *liberal individualist* affordances will have more *liberal individualist* features). When looking at the occurrences of comments on both Pages, most comments appeared to be allocated to the *communitarian* mode of democratic communication. Nonetheless, even though both Facebook Pages have the same features (being able to comment under posts, admins can moderate the discussion by deleting the comments), they present different modes of democratic communication when reviewed separately. For *Informator Kukiz'15*, 56% of all comments were allocated to the *communitarian* mode of democratic communication, while for Kukiz'15, only 37% of all comments were allocated to this category (Table 7). In addition, while 43% of all comments were allocated to the *liberal individualist* category for *Kukiz'15*, only 24% of all comments were allocated to this category for *Informator Kukiz'15* (Table 7).

The differences in the most dominant modes of communication in these two Pages can be explained by two observed phenomena. The commenters on *Informator Kukiz'15* expressed what they think about a certain topic. Moreover, comments are posted in relation to the main post more, and there is less interaction between the commenters themselves. In addition to this, the comments are often reminiscent of a conversation with the person who made the post. In the comment thread below, the Page owner is asking which parties Page users support:

> P: What parties do you support?
>
> C1: "I do not support any party, only the Kukiz'15 movement"

In the other comment, the Page owner is expressing their views:

> P: "I have to admit that the celebrations about the Warsaw Uprising in the English media are great! (…)"
>
> C1: "This is so beautiful, thanks for those who made this."

On the Facebook Page *Kukiz'15,* the first notable difference is the amount of interaction between commenters. During the data collection, the number of comments had to be limited to 50 for practical reasons due to lengthy discussions under the posts. Additionally, under the same post, new topics were started. Topics initiated by commenters that were not related to the original post were considered as a form of *monologue* (a feature of the *liberal individualist* mode of democratic communication), while other comments were analysed by looking at the three modes of democratic communication. What is more, use of aggressive and offensive language was more prominent on *Kukiz'15* than on *Informator Kukiz'15. Kukiz'15* is a formal Page with a greater number of followers compared to *Informator Kukiz'15.* It is, therefore, not surprising that it attracts people who are willing to undermine *Kukiz'15* activities or present opposing views. The use of uncivil language seemed to encourage this type of behaviour amongst other commenters. On the *Kukiz'15* Page, insults are thrown at people even when there is not a political argument at stake, rather there is an assumption that someone is associated with a different party when attacks are being made. The example below shows a post about a statement given by one of K15's representative regarding court reforms imposed by the ruling party PiS (PiS started a number of court reforms, including reform of the Supreme Court that oversees the lower courts, that have been met with European Union investigation).

> P: "PiS made a mistake by not packing all of these victims of bad experience with the courts and sending them to the European Commission so that they can tell them about justice in Poland."
>
> C1: "It is necessary to pack the KUKIZ 15 "stunners" and take them not to Brussels but to the dustbin of history."
>
> C2 in response C1: "Only PO and Nowczesna are going to Brussels."
>
> C3 in response to C1: "For the PO ransomers, the red-haired *cunt* paved the trail ..... 'Let them pound after his like smoke'."

In this example, the post (P) suggests sending all victims of Polish courts to the European Commission to let them tell their stories. In response, the first commenter (C1) suggests sending K15 supporters to the dustbin of history. It is not known whether this poster disagrees with the statement or has just decided to post an inflammatory comment. In response, the other commenters (C2 and C3) assume that the previous commenter (C1) does not agree with this statement and must therefore be associated with another party. There is no attempt at trying to engage in the discussion or understand what the view of C1 is.

6.4 The modes of democratic communication

In this section, I will present findings from applying Freelon's (2010) framework to two Facebook Pages supporting K15 and to conducting qualitative content analysis. Some direct quotes will be presented. As the comments were analysed in a deductive way, some categories were not observed often, and these categories will therefore be only briefly mentioned. In Section 6.5 and 6.6, I will reflect on the findings, including what the absence of certain features can mean for online political discussion of populist supporters, and provide an analysis with a conclusion. To comply with the ethical application, I will not present comments that might put people at risk. Instead, I will present aggregated forms without using direct quotes. This technique has been especially used when describing *flaming*, one of the features of the *liberal individualist* mode of democratic communication. It is also important to note that comments were analysed in relation to the main post and to the other people commenting, therefore the allocation to certain categories was highly sensitive to the context in which they were posted.

6.4.1 The deliberative mode of democratic communication

The key feature of the *deliberative* mode of democratic communication is to have a rational discussion based on critical argumentation in order to reach a common ground. "Deliberation involves engaging in reciprocal critique of normative positions that are provided with reasons and thus are criticisable and open to critique rather than dogmatically asserted" (Dahlberg, 2001c: 2). To measure rational-critical argumentation, two indicators were selected: *critical opinion and common ground.* Apart from these features, two other indicators distinguished by Freelon (2010) were introduced, *inter-ideological questioning* and *inter-ideological response*.

Critical opinion refers to comments presented in a critical way, where views of other people are being questioned. They might also be a form of criticism towards a political party's activities. To be allocated to the *common ground* category, comments would need to try to integrate one's own view or other people's views in attempt to reach common ground about the discussed topic.

An *inter-ideological response* is a way of commenting to show disagreement with another person that commented or the person who made the original post. *Inter-ideological questioning* occurs when a commenter asks a question in response to the other commenter (or the author of the post) whose views are different or who is seeking some further clarification. Appendix B has more detailed definitions of each of the categories.

6.4.1.1 Informator Kukiz'15

Deliberation on *Informator Kukuiz'15* did not take the form conceptualised by Habermas, where citizens suggest solutions to certain social problems through discussion and rational reasoning. However, there were elements of the presentation of different views on *Informator Kukiz'15.* These inter-ideological responses often concerned K15 activities and what is considered the right thing for the party to do. There were a few attempts at integrating different views to reach *common ground*. *Critical opinions* were also made as a way of exercising criticism towards the party.

The *deliberative* characteristics on *Informator Kukiz'15* revealed the very young character of K15 as an organisation, as there is still discussion and questioning of K15's position on certain topics (e.g. vaccination, the financing of parties). K15 as a political group has gathered people mainly around the idea of bringing changes to the electoral system, where the power is brought back to citizens and where politicians do not need to obey their party leader. Nonetheless, this approach seems to be problematic when their supporters would like to see their views on other topics to be represented by K15's representatives. Sometimes, but very rarely, commenters would remind others who presented different views to focus more on the core postulate of K15: that is, bringing power back to the citizens by introducing single-seat constituencies.

In the following paragraphs, I will describe the categories which fall under the *deliberative* mode of democratic communication with some examples. Some categories, such as *common ground* and *critical option,* will only be briefly mentioned due to limited examples being available and the fact that they do not reveal anything about the discussed mode of democratic communication.

The inter-ideological response

The inter-ideological response of K15's supporters considered two main topics: vaccinations and the financing of political parties. Regarding the first topic, populist supporters on this Facebook Page presented distinct views on whether it should be obligatory to vaccinate children or not, and what option K15, as a representative of the people's will, should support. The interpretation of *inter-ideological responses* suggested that both the representatives of K15 in the Sejm and their supporters have differing opinions on this topic. Two politicians from K15 were mentioned in the

discussion: Skutecki (against vaccination) and Szczucinski (for vaccination). As one of the commenters noticed, these differences in views come from the idea that everyone should be free to support ideas that they believe in, rather than be forced to comply with the political party that they belong to:

> C1: "On the one hand, you can say that it is a mess, but on the other hand, you can choose. There is no party imposing the will. It is true that this freedom must be within the limits of, for example, specified by the assumptions, programme, status (call it as you want it), but these boundaries are aimed at the superior change of the system to one in which the party interest is not a superior good. We have to make up for ourselves."

Still, the review of responses suggested that commenters prefer politicians representing K15 to support their view on the topic of vaccination. For example, one of the commenters expressed that they see more support from the party towards Szczucinski than towards Skutnicki who seems to be a better person to start a dialogue on with this topic.

> C1**:** "This topic is problematic for everyone because 95% of those questioned by me think that Paweł Kukiz and Kukiz'15 prefer vaccination without the right to decide whether the parent has the right or the obligation to vaccinate. (…). None of you asked the question of what you want, but you only support Szczucinski, while Skutecki is a far better person to be chosen for the dialogue (…)."

It is worth mentioning that while there was some disagreement between commenters, there is no sign of referring to what has been said in the previous comments to reach common ground or attempts to understand opposing views. For example, one commenter tried to explain that the person supporting the anti-vaccination point of view had support from K15:

> C1:" To make it clear: I and the vast majority of deputies support Paweł Skutecki. Besides, he was allowed to organise a large debate about vaccines in the Sejm."

C1 also suggested in the discussion thread that the project created by the politicians from K15 with regard to anti-vaccination is Skutecki's own initiative, not the project of K15, as not everyone supports it, and it was not presented to the Presidium. This line of argument was not acknowledged by the other commenter (C2), suggesting that the commenter is lying, as previously they stated that the majority of deputies support Pawel Skutecki. In this way, C2 was still trying to persuade politicians from K15 to support Skutecki's project. It is interesting that this discussion between two commenters under the post revealed that one of them was a representative of K15 in the Sejm. The respondent C2 was not satisfied, suggesting that they were influenced by information in media outlets claiming that the politician is acting without getting party support:

> C2**:** So why we don't see this information? There are plenty of articles on the Internet, suggesting that Skutecki is on his own while everyone supports Szczucinski. Kukiz should also clearly state his position, but he is silent, and this is very annoying".

The second topic considered the financing of political parties and concerned a post about the idea of removing government subventions. *The inter-ideological response* claimed that political parties have to be financed; otherwise, there is the harm of increasing corruption. The responder who disagreed with this claim suggested that having political parties funded by the government is absurd and that citizens should be able to control politicians and remove them from office when necessary:

> C1: “From reading this, I have an impression that we need to pay politicians, otherwise they will be looking for illegal ways of obtaining money?!!! With such a course of reasoning, we allow them to ‘ride’ on our money. This is a real pathology - where is the significant role of social control? They are going to power for what purpose: if for *the trough*, so where we are that we allow it and vote for it. It's a bit like, you give away your wallet to a criminal because otherwise they will take it by force. That is why it is necessary to introduce tools to appeal to deputies, councillors who have misrepresented the matter (…).”

There were some other *inter-ideological responses*: the topic of an Independence March and whether it is a good idea to carry religious signs, the critique of posted articles from an ‘unreliable’ newspaper, the critique of a politician and what they said in relation to accepting refugees, and the acceptance of politicians with ties with the Communist party.

The inter-ideological questioning

Populist supporters of K15 on *Informator Kukiz’15* questioned the comments of other people, the politicians of K15 and the content of posts. This category revealed that populist supporters on this site do not always hold the same views about the topic being discussed. For example, JOW (single-seat constituencies) is a main postulate of K15. There were comments questioning what happened with this postulate. While some commenters suggested that they did not support this idea, others asked what was wrong with it (see below extract).

> C1: "And what happened to JOW? Do they not like them anymore? JOW was the main postulate and this is how they [Kukiz'15] got into the Sejm."
>
> C2: "It is not true. I did not like JOW and many other people did not like it too. This is why the support for Kukiz'15 has dropped".
>
> C3 in response to C2: "What is wrong with JOW?".

There was also some *inter-ideological questioning* in relation to the voting of K15 on financing a Jewish cemetery via the government. The analysis of all comments that were assigned to the category of *inter-ideological questioning* indicated that when questions are asked, other commenters rarely responded to them.

Common ground

Comments that integrated different views were allocated to the category *common ground*. As this category was not significant, it will be only briefly described. The comments on *Informator Kukiz'15* that presented the integration of different views displayed similar characteristics, even though these comments were posted in relation to different subjects. For example, there was a post which suggested that Poland should not be governed but served. The comment that integrated different views under this post suggested focusing on choosing the right people rather than elites. Similar views echoed in other comments which tried to integrate distinct opinions but were considering different topics. For example, by bringing attention to the idea that the real focus should be on the elimination of political parties, or on how to restore a government of citizens while eliminating the power of elites. As the main postulate of Kukiz'15 was to "bring power back to citizens", it can be said that this idea resonated in finding common ground and in reminding the other commenters of what is important.

Critical opinion

The critical argument category comprises comments where it could not be assessed whether there was an *inter-ideological disagreement*. It was rather seen that the commenters were expressing dissatisfaction with the party, the group, and occasionally with the leader, but they were looking for solutions. For example, one of the comments (in response to the post suggesting that citizens should govern) criticized the party for not accepting party subsidies and for not joining the other political groups in order to have a better influence on politics:

> C1: "Ehhh, I am starting to associate your optimism with fatalism ... Get on your feet finally, because every year, there are less and less people supporting the group ... :(. Join some other political group – finally, get money for a real election programme ... This is politics and you have to start playing hard with them ... With the current approach, we will not win anything".

It is worth noting that C1 acts as an advisor with a very direct and informal tone (e.g "*get on your feet*"). It also has an element of community identity with the reference to 'we' in *"we will not gain anything*". However, this comment was still classified as a feature of *deliberation,* because the meaning of the whole comment was analysed rather than singular words or sentences. It was also a rather unusual example where a feature of the *communitarian* mode of democratic communication appeared in a comment classed as a *deliberative* characteristic.

The directness of comments regarding what the party should or should not do is further expressed in these two comments. Two commenters (C1 and C2) under a post that criticized the current government (PiS) suggested that this form of posting is trolling:

> C1: "eh so much trolling happening here.... this is not going to end well, I give you six months more and it is going to be end for Kukiz'15"

> C2: "Kukiz'15, you will not gain anything from fighting with PiS, you will only lose and as a result the anti-polish party new PO (KO) will gain…"

6.4.1.2 Kukiz'15

Overall, cross-cutting discussion between commenters did not occur very often on this Facebook Page. *The deliberative features of democratic communication* indicated that even when differences in views occurred, these comments did not relate to important topics. Additionally,

they often took the form of *flaming* (uncivil language) and were not considered as comments presenting the features of *inter-ideological response*. Below, I present each category in more detail.

Inter-ideological response

On the *Kukiz'15* page, there were few examples of cross-cutting discussions. Responders usually referred to the main post and did not necessarily read other people's comments to engage further in the debate. However, when disagreeing with another person, uncivil language did occur and, therefore, these comments were not allocated to the category of *inter-ideological response*.

While there might be some disagreement visible in the comments, disputes between commenters tended to be about trivial subjects and their responses balanced a fine line between *the inter-ideological response* and *flaming* categories. For example, in the extract below, there was disagreement as to whether the comment made by a representative of K15 about the speech of someone from the opposition was correct:

> *C1: "And how did he say it?"* Inter-ideological questioning
>
> *C2 in response to C2: "…Please go to his profile and check for yourself?"* Inter-ideological response
>
> *C3 in response to C2: "I don't need to. I saw, I listened to his speech".* Inter-ideological response
>
> *C4 in response to C3: "AS YOU CAN SEE, NOT EVERYONE UNDERSTANDS WHAT THEY WATCH AND LISTEN TO. I SUGGEST YOU SWITCH TO TV TRWAM (a religious TV channel), THEY SAY THINGS THERE IN THE EASIEST POSSIBLE WAY!"* - Flaming
>
> *C5 in response to C4: "Did you refer to the previous comment? No. Please, then use your own advice, maybe something is going to change, and the view will be different."* - Flaming

When someone asked what exactly the person said in his speech, there were responses such as *"please go to his profile and check yourself"* or attacking the person ("*I suggest you switch to TV*

Trawam"). In this exchange, the reason for this hostile comment or *inter-ideological response* is unknown as there did not seem to be any visible ideological differences between commenters. However, it could be assumed that when someone is looking for further explanation, their motivations are not treated as genuine, and they are therefore treated as being unsupportive of K15. Even if this is true, there are no attempts to provide a 'friendly answer', and then find out if there are indeed ideological differences.

Inter-ideological questioning

Inter-ideological questioning presented as questions asked critically (e.g. how draft bills created by K15 helped with the living conditions of other people, or whether the author of the post can provide more evidence for the claims being made). This category also showed some element of being rational. For example, the post claimed that PO and PiS (political parties) create a false impression that they are against each other, while in fact, they are combining forces while voting for specific laws. The commenter suggested that this conflict might be beneficial for both parties, so why they should not take advantage of this:

> C1: "In fact this conflict might not be fake. If it is beneficial for both parties, why shouldn't they be taking advantage of it?"

The other post indicated that there should be a restriction regarding the age of politicians in the Polish parliament, especially for those who are retired. The commenter asked whether it should be acceptable to have very young people in the Polish parliament:

> C1: “So seriously: should people in their 20s be in the Polish parliament? In my opinion, no. To make it clear, I have signed the project 65 plus, but I think there is a need for an age limitation for younger people that can be in the Sejm.”

The questions can also be rational when there is a disagreement between two people commenting under the post. For example, one comment suggested that Jewish people blame Polish people for not helping them out, claiming they do not present the truth. Another commenter responded by asking questions as to who is also covering the truth concerning unfavourable facts and that Polish people also attack Jewish people:

> C1: “Probably we live in two different realities, after all, we are blaming each other for the worst. Do we not shout, "gas Jews"? Do we not accuse them of all the evil of this world? Are we not saying that they are seeking to rule the world, etc.? Did anyone, even a Jew, ever question the fact that Poles were saving Jews? Has anyone ever claimed otherwise? In addition to the heroes who saved them were also those who reported and murdered them and I do not mean only Jedwabne […].”

Nonetheless, this sort of example where a person was questioning another commenter’s view was rather rare. In addition to this, presenting a different view did not lead to an engagement in debate but to personal attacks.

Critical opinion

Populist supporters on *Kukiz'15* presented critical views mainly of the solutions presented by K15. For example, there were claims that it could be a wrong decision to decide to not receive the government subsidy, or whether K15 should implement more bills rather than just propose them (these critical opinions were expressed in relation to a post about the number of projects proposed by K15). Similarly, in *Informator Kukiz'15*, critical opinion took the form of direct advice. In the first example below, both commenters express their view on what is the best to do for the party (in this case, to look for financial support). C2 even directly refers to Pawel Kukiz in his statement, as if Pawel Kukiz himself is managing this Page.

> C1: "Instead of taking subsidies, informing the public during the campaign, and trying to change the system, you prefer to complain about how bad it is in this country. Ask Korwin how it looks in practice ..."
>
> C2: "Pawel, you have to take subsidies to eliminate other parties and 'darmozjady' (parasites). And when you rule, then you will do as you think."

Common ground

The analysis over the period of one year revealed only one topic where populist supporters were trying to integrate their views to reach a common ground. The specific topic considered whether Sundays should be working or non-working days. Commenters tried to convince people who believed that Sundays should be non-working days (especially in the retail industry) that there should be freedom of choice and that the issue should not be regulated by the government. The lack of examples allocated to this category is not surprising, considering that when there are inter-ideological views, the commenters either choose not to engage in discussion, or decide to attack opponents.

6.4.2 The communitarian mode of democratic communication

The *communitarian* mode of democratic communication is interested in building a community of shared values. To examine the features of the *communitarian* mode of democratic communication, four measures were created: *intra-ideological response* (with the sub-category of

attacking the others), *intra-ideological questioning*, *community identification* and *mobilisation* (please see Chapter 4 for detailed descriptions of these features).

The intra-ideological response is a comment that refers to the main post or is in response to other commenters and expresses agreement. Sometimes, while there is no disagreement between the commenter or the author of the post, the commenter might attack other groups (e.g. political groups, or minority groups) and use inflammatory language. This type of comment was classified as *attacking the others,* which is a subcategory of *intra-ideological response*. *Intra-ideological* questioning occurs when a commenter seeks further explanation or clarification. *Community identification* is a comment that has plural references ("we", us"). *Mobilisation* is a category in which messages call for some political action (either to contact a politician, sign a petition, vote, or to register in the election).

The following sections will discuss the findings for each category. Similar to *the deliberative mode of democratic communication*, some categories did not have many comments allocated, hence they will be briefly mentioned in this analysis.

6.4.2.1 Informator Kukiz'15

The *communitarian* mode of democratic communication took the form of conversational talk between K15 supporters and the person who authored the post. *Intra-ideological response* has a sub-category *attacking others* where commenters were in agreement towards an aggressive view of certain people, parties or subjects. Sometimes, these attacks were expressed in a harmful way and to protect the user's anonymity, such comments are not presented in the analysis. Although there are ideological similarities, there were very rare occasions where a *community identification* style of language was used, or where there were calls to take action.

Intra-ideological response

The intra-ideological responses of populist supporters revealed more conversational talk between the person posting and the person commenting. These posts considered, for example, who they were going to vote for in the next election, whether it is acceptable for some people to protest, or where they are going for their holiday. There were also motivating messages for representatives of K15, either for those who were going to run in local elections, for those who were going to take part in debate or were taking part in debate (e.g. "Peter, you can do it", "Go, BACON, GO"). The supporting messages were directed towards Pawel Kukiz, Justyna Scigaj, Piotr Liroy, Marek Jakubiak and Stanislaw Tyszka. These comments showed approval towards their statements. For

example, Agnieszka Scigaj posted a comment complaining about the lack of support from the European Union which was supported by C1 using the following words:

> C1: "Very true, there is no lies in that"

Approval towards the post or the commenter was also expressed in these groups by using emoticons, smiley faces, or images demonstrating agreement.

This category also indicated a specific feature of this group. First, there was a general dissatisfaction shown towards other political groups or politicians. To capture this sort of communication, a sub-category of *intra-ideological response* was created, namely *attacking the others*. While *flaming* or *attacking others* is one of the features of the *liberal individualist* mode of democratic communication, it was noted that populist supporters of K15 tended to attack other political parties, celebrities, people who left K15, people mentioned in the article, and Jewish people. However, this seemed to form part of their group identity rather than fall under the category of personal expression and fulfilment of self-interest, especially when there was general agreement between the person who posted the post/ or another commenter using inflammatory language. For example, Kuba Wojewodzki is a Polish showman who was criticised for his controversial remarks regarding a crime (though the post did not identify what crime Wojewodzki criticised). Populist supporters who decided to comment under this post used words such as "idiot" or "moron" towards Kuba Wojewodzki. Therefore, they agreed not only with the person who started the discussion but also with other people commenting on it.

The messages that attacked others contained uncivil language, and were often aggressive, sometimes presenting threats. For example, there was a post with a video of speeches of politicians from March 2009 about the shutdown of a dockyard. Someone commented suggesting that these politicians should be all killed. Another example is the comment directed at the speech of a rabbi where the commenter expressed his view that it is a shame that Hitler did not kill all Jewish people. The post under which this comment was posted had a link to a video with a description suggesting remarks of a rabbi were scandalous. The Jewish representative talked in this video about feeling unsafe during the Independence March.

Populist supporters were particularly dissatisfied with two politicians: Andruszkiewicz and Morawiecki. Andruszkiewicz used to be involved with the National Movement party, and gained his seat in the Polish parliament in 2015 by running in the parliamentary election from the list of the electoral voters of K15. He later left K15. Morawiecki is a Polish politician who also started in the parliamentary election from the list of the electoral voters of K15, but he was unsuccessful

and did not gain the seat. He too left K15. Andruszkiewicz, when mentioned in the post, inspired comments referring to him as a "rat" or "cheater", "idiot" or "moron". In turn, Morawiecki was criticised for gaining recognition thanks to K15. When Morawiecki left K15, he launched a new political party, so some people accused him of trying to get into politics by using K15.

It is interesting that while Morawiecki and Andruszkiewicz are former K15 politicians, attacked and disliked by K15 supporters, this does not seem to apply to Piotr Liroy, who is also a former K15 politician who left the party. The post with Piotr Liroy's statement about PO received these comments:

> C1: "Brilliant, 'dumbfounded'. Cool. Liroy told the truth about PO in half a minute."
>
> C2: "Now we need to be kicking ourselves, that we lost him… He is a genius!"
>
> C3: "Bravo, Liroy!"

Perhaps, liking or disliking previous K15 politicians has something to do with their views, and whether these views resonate with K15 supporters. Additionally, the nature of a post seemed to create either more or less favourable tones in the comments. For example, one of the posts about Morawiecki was presented in a way that suggested that politicians used K15 electoral lists for political gains, something perceived in a negative way by some of the commenters. On the other hand, the post about Liroy had positive undertones and it was positively received by the commenters.

Intra-ideological questioning

Intra-ideological questioning was posted mainly in the response to a post. The questions asked tended to be looking for a further explanation (e.g. why they are blocking this content? Why were priests not included in the image?).

Sometimes, the questions asked revealed that populist supporters were looking for a level of engagement from the person who originally posted the post, suggesting that they were somehow working for K15. For example, there were questions such as:

Example 1: C1: "We know this, what does Kukiz'15 think of the obligation to vaccinate kids?"

Example 2: C2: "Why does Kukiz'15 support Konrad Mazowiecki?"

These sorts of questions are direct responses to the main post. Nonetheless, the author of the post or other Page followers did not respond to the questions asked.

Community identification

Populist supporters on *Informator Kukiz'15* motivated other members to not give up and to continue to work towards the change (e.g. if we do not vote for K15, the other political party is going to win; now it is the best time to gain more supporters). They used words like "we" and "us" when describing the activities of K15 (e.g. "Where is our logo?" "We should not convert to a party as we might be blamed for being hypocrites"). There were few comments allocated to this category, as not many met the criteria of presenting a community identification.

Mobilisation

This category was virtually non-existent, since there were not many calls to motivate the group to take some action. However, users as well as Page admins might present more motivational language during elections. In other periods, a Page might be more informational in nature and post and discuss political events and K15's activities.

6.4.2.2 Kukiz'15

Similar to *Informator Kukiz'15*, the *communitarian* features consisted mainly of two categories: *intra-ideological response* and *intra-questioning*. In comparison to *Informator Kukiz'15,* the main difference lies in the ways views were being challenged by other people who do not agree. Therefore, it could be claimed that supporters are not being reinforced in their claims, at least not on this Page, and they are exposed to other perspectives. The lack of calls to take action and the use of community language also indicates a low sense of community belonging. However, users formed an identity by agreeing on who to dislike. Apart from attacking other parties, they tended to also be aggressive towards previous politicians associated with K15. The historical element of people who were involved with the Communist government still seems to play an important role in discussions, especially when considering the topics of pensions and wages.

Intra-ideological response

Intra-ideological response was assessed by looking at whether the commenters present the ideological similarities between the authors of the post (when they add a further comment) or between other people commenting. As *Kukiz'15* attracts many comments under each post, there might also be ideological agreement between people commenting, even though they take a different view than to the one presented in the main post. For example, there was a post about the conflict between Poland and Israel where it was suggested that Poland should not be blamed for the Holocaust and portrayed as an accomplice:

> P: "Jerzy Kozłowski - Kukiz'15 in defence of historical truth and the good name of Poland!" The Poland-Israel crisis on the Act on the Institute of National Remembrance is fuelled by forces out of our control. We don't allow such a narrative that we are jointly responsible for the Holocaust, because it offends us and insults our history. From the victim, they make an executioner. It is unacceptable! When I hear Israel's education minister or PO Święcicki MP, I am terrified. All united must say "NO!" You support? Share!

In the below extract (where responses to the post are presented), there is an agreement between the author of the post and the commenter (C1). The author of C1 says: "let's remember when we vote how PO deals with the Holocaust". Hence this comment was classified as an example of *intra-ideological response*. However, C3 disagrees with the author of the post suggesting that no one is framing Poland for the Holocaust, also classified as an *inter-ideological response.* The following comment (C4) agrees with C3 by saying that it is good that there is at least someone who has a basic knowledge in this topic. Thus, C4 was categorised as *an intra-ideological response* as both commenters showed ideological similarities.

> C1 in response to the post: "Let's remember when we vote how PO deals with the Holocaust" *Intra-ideological response*
>
> C2 in response to C1: "You are sick" *Flaming*
>
> C3 in response to the post: "You are making this up yourself. Nobody even tries to frame us up for the Holocaust. Has not the official position of Germany reached you about a few days ago? Or maybe listening with understanding is not Kukiz'15's strongest point? (…) *The inter-ideological response*
>
> C4 in response to C3: "It is good to listen to someone on this forum who has a basic knowledge in this topic". *The intra-ideological response*

Although one might question whether C4 is the example of agreement between C3, these comments were not analysed in isolation but in the context of other people commenting. Under this specific post, there were 48 other comments. The disagreements with C3 were very explicitly expressed by others with attacking undertones. In this way, even though there were some *intra-ideological* comments, it cannot be said that people commenting on Kukiz'15 are not exposed to other views. This Facebook Page attracts a significant number of comments where people do not hold similar views on the discussed subject.

If there were ideological similarities, they very often related to the main narrative of K15, namely fighting the partocracy. What was also specific for the intra-ideological responses was the presentation of hostile comments towards outgroups. These outgroups for populist supporters are political parties, Germany, Morawiecki (the previous representative of K15), and people who had previously been involved in politics or working for the government while Poland was under Soviet influence regarding internal and external affairs. Uncivil language was often used when referring to these people (e.g. thieves or rats). This was captured by the sub-category of *intra-ideological response, attacking the others*. It seems that historical events from the Soviet influence are still visible in the rhetoric of populist supporters of K15.

The intra-ideological questioning

The intra-ideological questioning of K15 comes from asking further questions in relation to the main post:

> Example 1
>
> C1: "And what is the effect of these projects? Have any of the proposed projects by Kukiz'15 been successfully implemented?"
>
> Example 2
>
> C2: "And what did Adas Andrus say?"

There was only one case when someone asked for more information in relation to the comments posted under the main post. The main post was about projects introduced by K15. The commenter (C1) suggested that some of the projects already implemented by the government should be reconsidered, e.g. non-working Sundays. The person (C2) responded to this post by asking a direct question about whether this person is working so hard that they do not have time for shopping on a weekday.

This category did not reveal anything unusual for communication of K15's supporters.

> C1: "I am waiting for somebody to start submitting projects to re-consider some acts, e.g. the one with a ban on trading on Sundays, etc."
>
> C2 in response to C1: "Are you working so hard that you need to do shopping on Sundays?".

Community identification

Commenters expressed *community identification* on K15 by referring to the general interest. Freelon (2010: 1181) suggested that "collective pronouns such as 'we', 'us' and 'our'" indicate that members feel a sense of belonging to a community. Populist supporters on *Kukiz'15* used collective pronouns mainly to suggest some solutions or outline what needs to be done. What is interesting that sometimes the comments were reminiscent of a discussion between two members of parliament from the same political group:

> C1: "We need to reform everything."
>
> C2: "These billions do not depend on us, because everything happens outside, behind our back. Our friends from the USA are doing so in this moment, therefore our ranting will not lead us to anything good."

Even though K15 representatives act as politicians and represent the group in the Polish parliament, the central postulate of K15 was to bring power back to the citizenry. This can be seen as a reason why populist supporters of K15 feel empowered to suggest some solutions or keep their representatives accountable on the official Facebook Page. The above comments present the directness of commenters in suggesting some solutions.

Mobilisation

There were no comments allocated to this category. In the sections 6.5 and 6.6, I will reflect on what this could mean.

6.4.3 The liberal individualist mode of democratic communication

The *liberal individualist* mode of democratic communication is characterised by online communication, which shows an interest in personal expression.

To examine the self-interested and egoistic features of communication between populist supporters, four categories were selected: *flaming*, *monologue*, *personal revelation* and *personal showcase* (see Chapter 4).

Flaming is a category in which commenters are interested in undermining the opponent's views by using uncivil, inflammatory language. The *monologue* category was allocated to comments that

did not engage in the discussion in response to other commenters, or to the post. *Monologue* was also used to classify comments that started new topics under the same thread. The *personal revelation* category encompassed comments that reveal personal experience or feelings, while comments that included links to personal sources as a way of self-promotion were categorised as *personal showcase*.

6.4.3.1 Informator Kukiz'15

On *Informator Kukiz'15*, *flaming* and *monologue* were the most frequently seen sub-categories from the *liberal individualist* category. Uncivil language was used towards people who support K15 and towards K15 itself. These attacks towards K15 and its supporters encouraged uncivil responses from those who disagreed. Additionally, there were commenters who expressed themselves, but their self-expression did not relate to the other comments or the post. *Personal revelation* took more the form of revealing information such as support towards certain parties or voting preferences.

Flaming

In this category, I will present aggregated examples rather than providing direct quotes to protect users and be compliant with the ethical application. *Flaming* mainly took the form of attacking K15, people who support the movement (very often referred to as Kukizowycy'15), or Pawel Kukiz, the leader of K15. It is unclear whether the users who used *flaming* supported K15 but were dissatisfied with the party, or people who did not support K15 and presented their disagreement in a hostile way. Nonetheless, comments were very often presented offensively by using rude adjectives. Here is a list of examples: "Kukizowcy are *sluts*; K15 are hypocrites mixed with stupidity; Pawel Kukiz has lost control; Pawel Kukiz should continue singing on Woodstock rather than be in politics". As a result, these comments often encouraged responses from people who disagreed with the commenters. These responses were also aggressive and offensive (e.g. you are an idiot, or you are stupid, or visit a doctor).

For example, in the extract below, C1 questions the claim that vaccination is harmful for children, however, C1 does not present their views to explain why this thinking might be wrong. Instead, C1 attacks the group by saying that they might start believing in Yetis or that the earth is flat. C2, in

response to C1, attacks the person by suggesting they are ignorant. Of course, one attack encourages another person to do the same, hence C3 does the same by insulting C2.

> C1: "I would like to see these hundreds, thousands of children affected by vaccines.
>
> I wonder when Kukiz '15 will start to be the place for 'Followers of Chemtrails', Flat Earthers, or maybe Yeti believers."
>
> C2 in response to C1: "You'd better be silent. Ignorant people shouldn't open their mouths."
>
> C3 in response to C2: " 1. Learn to write in Polish 2. why are you speaking?"

Monologue

This category revealed two main features of the way populist supporters engage online: 1) they do not read the main post and the subsequent comments; and 2) they post something unrelated (either an unrelated thought, or they start a new discussion on a topic that was not mentioned in the discussion). It has been noted that there are some pessimistic undertones in the comments not related to the topic. The examples below present dissatisfaction with the country but they were posted in relation to different posts:

> C1: "F***, in this country, it will never get better"
>
> C1: "What is wrong with this world?"

There are sometimes comments posted in the form of images with some text. These images look more like 'spam' and the aim of posting them is not clear.

Personal revelation

Personal revelation on *Informator Kukiz'15* mostly occurred in the expression of voting choices of people commenting under the post (which party they are going to vote for, or which party they support), many suggesting that they will never vote again for K15 as they are dissatisfied with the

party. It was noted that *personal revelation* did not take shape as suggested by Freelon (2010) where commenters refer to their own experience/feelings while commenting instead of having a rational-critical debate. Personal revelations were sometimes encouraged by the main post, for example, *"who are you going to vote for?"* People who decided to comment under this post revealed their personal preferences in terms of voting.

Personal showcase

Under the main post, some links to external content were posted. However, it was impossible to judge the content of those links as they were no longer working. There were also no descriptions to make it possible to guess what these links might be referring to (except for one link which was promoting the National Movement). Hence, *personal showcase* was not a visible feature for this mode of democratic communication in this analysis.

6.4.3.2 Kukiz'15

Flaming and *monologue* were the two most frequent features in the *liberal individualist* category. *Kukiz'15* is a formal Page with over two hundred followers and attracts people who disagree with the content posted. Nonetheless, people visiting the Page did not seem to be trying to have a rational debate or present their different views in a civil way, rather they visited this Page to attack the group. Even if sometimes there were *inter-ideological responses*, uncivil language was used, therefore these comments were classified as *flaming*.

Flaming

The *Kukiz'15* Facebook Page attracts people who disagree with the party. Nonetheless, they do not engage in rational-critical debate, but instead choose to use insulting language towards the party and the people supporting it, to show disagreement. As this is the Facebook Page for people supporting K15, insulting language was then used by K15 supporters in retaliation. For example, a comment suggesting that people supporting Kukiz'15 "should be sent to the skip" inspired the response "people supporting PO should be sent to Brussels".

Apart from using flaming language when there was a disagreement, commenters also used *ad hominem* attacks when someone simply asked questions. For example, when someone in response to the main post asked what the abbreviation PFN meant, someone else responded to this comment saying that the person was so stupid they were unable to use Google search:

> C1: "What is PFN?"
>
> C2: "So what? You cannot use the google search hahaha. There are apparently so many intelligent people, but they cannot use the google search, http://lmgtfy.com/?q=pfn here you go, you bright person."

It was observed that while some comments were just insults (e.g. you are stupid, you are an idiot and so on), there were also comments which were rational and critical, but unfortunately either they included direct insults in their statement or defamatory remarks. The *deliberative* mode of democratic communication excludes argumentation that has some uncivil and insulting elements.

Monologue

Like on the *Informator Kukiz'15* Facebook Page, the participants presented *monologue* features when they started a discussion on a topic that was not mentioned in the main post or within other comments. Some commenters did not always comment under a corresponding comment, or made comments where it was not clear who they were addressing. This Page attracted a lot of comments and sometimes there were multiple discussions about different topics happening at the same time under the main post. On a Facebook Page, you can reply to the main post, or you can reply directly to the previous person who commented by pressing the "reply" button. By using the "reply" button, the name of a person is tagged in the comment. In this way, the person to whom the reply is referring can be identified. Not using this function may indicate that members of this group might not have the digital skills to be able to comment under the correct post, or some of the comments have been moderated/deleted, so the sense of discussion was lost.

Personal revelation

A good example of participants on this Facebook Page referring to their own personal interest occurred in the discussion on the topic of whether Sundays should be non-working days. The main argument from people commenting was that people should be happy, and that no one should decide what is the best for them. Therefore, the focus was on themselves. See the extract below:

> C1: "Since when does someone dictate how to live and what to do on Sunday? If someone does not want to work on Sunday, they should not choose to work in this industry."
>
> C2: "XXX, I should be happy and free from any stupid regulations, and neither you nor anyone else should decide about it."

Personal showcase

Personal showcase occurred when, instead of focusing on the rational-critical debate, the participants referred to an external website or posted spamming information. People also used the Page to ask for financial help and someone also ran a survey asking if there was a need for voting online. There were not many comments allocated to this category to reveal any other interesting dynamics.

6.5 Discussion of results

The aim of this study was to find out how populist supporters of K15 communicate online based on three modes of democratic communication. The discursive actions were first conceptualised as part of the typology of online political participation where they take a form of showing interest in politics. Freelon (2010) provided a framework for analysing online discussion by taking into consideration three visions of the democratic potential of the Internet: creating a public sphere (*deliberation*), building a community of shared values (*communitarian*) or expressing yourself (*liberal individualist*). As Freelon (2010) pointed out, the research on political communication online has been dominated by deliberative theory. However, these three visions co-exist, as shown in empirical studies conducted by Freelon (2015), Yan *et al.* (2018) and Valera-Ordaz (2019).

In the communication of populist supporters of K15 on Facebook Pages, it has been observed that all three modes of communication are visible. Nonetheless, it was expected that populist supporters would build a community on the Facebook Pages and therefore present more characteristics of the *communitarian* mode of democratic communication. While this is true for supporters of K15 when considering the number of all codes allocated to particular modes of communication, it is not true when looking at the pages in isolation. Freelon (2015) in his study on

Twitter and the news comments section assessed the differences in communication mode by looking at the left/right-wing stance and platform design. He formulated the hypothesis that discussion spaces and their ability to host more features of a certain mode of democratic communication will be influenced by technological design. Twitter, due to its hashtag element that can be used when writing about a certain topic, is considered to have a *communitarian* architectural design. Comments sections on two newspapers where people could submit a comment below a new story were seen as an architecture supporting a *liberal individualist* type of conversation. The findings indicated that Twitter had more *communitarian* features whereas news comments sections had more *liberal individualist* and *deliberative* features (ibid.). I argue that online spaces should not be treated as unified, and even though Twitter might enable the *communitarian* mode of democratic communication due to its technological design, there is no guarantee this will happen. The analysis of two spaces on the same platform — two Facebook Pages created in support of K15 –proved that there are differences in modes of communication. *Informator Kukiz'15* had more characteristic of the *communitarian* mode, while *Kukiz'15* presented more of the *liberal individualist* mode.

Populist supporters on *Informator Kukiz'15* communicate in a manner akin to conversational talk towards the people who posted the main post. They do not engage in an intra-ideological exchange of comments between themselves. What is very specific for this group is attacking others, i.e. political groups, other political parties, Jewish people or even celebrities. Because *attacking the others* is one of the core features of populism, this kind of communication is seen more as a facet of the group's identity rather than a *liberal individualist* feature. Although populist supporters of K15 might use uncivil language to attack *the others*, other commenters do not seem to be offended, and such comments are often made in relation to a main post that is more or less a form of the attack itself. Nonetheless, some of these comments can be very aggressive and could potentially represent hate speech. What has been also observed is that there is some inconsistency in approach over who is being attacked. For example, on one hand, great dissatisfaction with people who left K15 was observed, but on the other hand, someone who is no longer associated with K15 can be praised for their views. Populist supporters on *Informator Kukiz'15* also communicated in this way, attacking Pawel Kukiz, *Kukiz'15* and people supporting the group. These aggressive comments very often led to responses which were also insulting in nature.

It was found that populist supporters do not always post on the topic discussed: they either presented their thoughts unrelated to the discussion or were willing to start a new discussion on a topic that had not previously been mentioned. Their online communications also contained features of the *deliberative* mode of democratic communication. They asked inter-ideological

questions, presented *inter-ideological responses* and their comments were sometimes critical in nature. Although the features of the *deliberative* mode of democratic communication occurred on *Informator Kukiz'15*, their comments were far from the ideal of rational-critical debate. When an exchange of comments occurred between two people who do not think alike, there waas rarely any attempt to acknowledge the other person's views or to try and to find common ground.

For the other page analysed, *Kukiz'15*, similar observations could be seen concerning modes of democratic communication. Populist supporters on *Kukiz'15* created a group identity by attacking those who do not belong (according to them) to the *'pure people'*. The main difference between the two pages is that *Kukiz'15* attracts more people who present different views than *Informator Kukiz'15*. Nonetheless, different views did not lead to critical-rational debate, rather they led to insults and personal attacks. It seemed that some visitors to the *Kukiz'15* Facebook Page did not wish to engage in the discussion, rather they preferred to antagonise their political opponents for its own sake. Consequently, it was often challenging to see what the disagreement really was and whether there was any argument at stake. Sometimes, populist supporters used personal attacks in response to someone asking a question. When a comment expressed *inter-ideological* differences, the participants still decided to use defamatory language. Nonetheless, these examples were rare, so it cannot be suggested that posters presenting critical opinions whilst simultaneously flaming the other person represented a group norm.

6.6 Conclusion

Consistent with findings from other studies on online discussion spaces (Freelon, 2015; Yan *et al.*, 2018; Valera-Ordaz, 2019), all modes of communication were found to co-exist on Facebook Pages supporting K15. The most dominant mode of democratic communication on the two Pages studied was the *communitarian* mode, while the least dominant was the *deliberative* mode of democratic communication. It is not, therefore, surprising that these Facebook Pages had a low number of messages with *deliberative* characteristics. Regardless of this fact, one feature of *the communitarian model* was the most visible– *the intra-ideological response*. *The intra-ideological* category revealed conversational talk where people commented on the main post. However, there were few calls for action and the language used in comments did not suggest that users viewed themselves as part of a community. It could be claimed that due to the lack of other elements associated with a group of shared values, populist supporters of K15 on these Facebook pages do not build a sense of community. However, they seemed to form a group identity by agreeing on who belongs and does not belong to the category of "*pure people*". Populism as an ideology divides society into two separate camps, the "*pure people*" and "*corrupt elite*" (Mudde, 2004). One of its core features is also to "*attack the others"*. *"The others"*, depending on the

context, can be elites, political opponents or media firms. Populist supporters of K15 on these Pages tended to attack political opponents, people who have worked for the government under the Soviet influence, and minority groups (e.g. Jewish people). As this othering formed part of users' identity, *attacking the others* was categorised as a distinct feature of *intra-ideological response.* The use of inflammatory language was conceptualised by Freelon (2010) as a feature of the *liberal individualist* mode of democratic communication. This study, by taking a qualitative approach, distinguished between uncivil comments made as a way of fulfilling self-interest and comments that used attacking language to show agreement with other commenters and/or the author of the post. Sometimes these comments were aggressive and potentially harmful. Hate speech is not regulated in Poland and is not seen as requiring notice by the current government. This poses questions about who should be regulating it (for example, technological companies or the state) and whether citizens should be educated to respect other groups.

As populist supporters tend to be closed to other arguments and will attack people who hold different views, I expected to see a significant number of messages demonstrating the *flaming* feature of the *liberal individualist* mode of democratic communication. However, in the communication of K15 supporters, the number of messages containing the element of flaming was not high. However, offensive and uncivil words were very often presented by people who contributed to the discussion either by attacking the party, the leader, or the people who support K15. Thus, these Pages instead attracted people who were willing to undermine the group and the party. What is more, when there was a disagreement between two commenters, it could not be said that insulting messages were driven by the fact that inter-ideological differences were occurring, as it was challenging to judge the exact nature of the disagreement. Even though the features of the *deliberative* mode of democratic communication occurred on Facebook Pages, it was noted that the discussions did not involve a critical-rational exchange of comments, as reaching the common ground very rarely happened. Perhaps the participants do not have skills or knowledge to discuss issues where they can respect each other, different views and aim to find common ground. The *deliberative* characteristics also indicated that K15 does not have an established position on many topics (e.g. vaccination or the financing of parties), hence these topics are being discussed by supporters showing inter-ideological positions.

What also needs to be noted is the fact that there were differences between these two Facebook Pages. *Kukiz'15* contained more elements of the *liberal individualist* mode of democratic communication, while *Informator Kukiz'15* displayed more *communitarian* elements. As both Facebook Pages have the same architecture (e.g. moderation, the ability to comment), the differences between them may be because they attract different people and the technological design can be used in different ways by supporters of the same party. Research on online

discussion spaces was initially dominated by a deliberative theory, but as soon as researchers realised that the deliberative ideal of democratic communication on the Internet is far from being achieved, they started looking at the design of online spaces to see what factors enhance *deliberative* communication. Although Freelon (2010) recognised that there are divergent forms of political discourses, his empirical study (2015) was still strongly rooted in a deliberative approach by assessing the discourse architecture and its impact on the mode of democratic communication. Paying too much attention to the design might lead to *technological determinism*. The existence of certain features that might enhance one or another model of communication does not necessarily mean that these will be used consistently by the users.

Considering the dominance of different modes of communication on Facebook Pages, for *Kukiz'15*, it could be said that this Page attracts more people who do not think alike, and users who decide to use uncivil language and attack the supporters of K15. What is more, the discussion on Facebook Pages can be influenced by the authors of posts or by people commenting themselves. While this requires more research, the posts themselves (tone, language and the selection of news) could lead to more and less *deliberative* modes of communication. The same can be suggested in relation to the users commenting under the discussion thread, and what kind of language they are using. For example, for *Kukiz'15*, it was noted that sometimes people attacked someone who asked a question. Using inflammatory language while commenting might encourage the same behaviour from other participants. The other explanation for differences between these two Facebook Pages created in the support for the same political group is the fact that online spaces are not homogenous. These two Pages could have different roles and fulfil distinct objectives.

The most dominant mode on *Informator Kukiz'15* was the *communitarian* mode of democratic communication; this results from the fact that most commenters agreed with the initial post. What is more, commenters presented conversational talk between themselves where they discussed even non-political topics (e.g. where they are going for a holiday). Members of *Informator Kukiz'15* who used uncivil messages did so to attack opponents, or other minority groups (e.g. Jewish people). As this appeared to be part of the group's identity, this behaviour was categorised as *the intra-ideological response,* under the distinct feature of *attacking the others*. Members of *Kukiz'15* also attacked their opponents and the other outgroups; however, they did not do this as often as commenters on *Informator Kukiz '15*. The findings showed that 5% of all comments on Kukiz*'15* were allocated to the sub-category *attacking the others*, while the figure was 13% for *Informator Kukiz'15*.

6.7 Limitations and further research

This study has some limitations. Firstly, Facebook proved to be a difficult platform for the research. The posts and the comments were manually registered with a link in order to review them later when necessary. While it was possible to access these links to posts and comments for some time, some of the links stopped working. It could not be assessed if the reason was due to the changes to Facebook Pages (renamed Pages), or because these posts had been deleted. Secondly, the thesis did not examine who was contributing to the discussion. It could be that there are certain people who contribute most to these Facebook Pages, therefore influencing the type of discussion. Nonetheless, to comply with the ethical application, I did not collect (and take into consideration during the analysis) personal data such as names. Improved methods for conducting a study using Facebook data could overcome these limitations.

Another limitation is that this study cannot be generalised due to the selected method and small sample. Additionally, it would have been beneficial to analyse more Pages supporting K15 in-depth to see whether there is something special about these two analysed Pages and their differences. It might also be worth comparing the modes of democratic communication with supporters of other parties (populist or non-populist) to see if there are any differences in their mode of democratic communication. For example, this study found that populist supporters of K15 tended to attack Jewish people or other out-groups that do not belong to the category of *pure people* (in their view). Attacking other commenters is a feature of the *liberal individualist* mode of democratic communication. However, in this context, attacking comments were not towards commenters but groups of people who did not fit into the category of *pure people*. Thus, comments like this were categorised as a feature of the *communitarian* mode of communication. It would be interesting to see if the same observation could be made while analysing supporters of other political groups on social media.

This study sheds some light on the fact that discourse architecture is not the only factor that might influence certain types of discussion. Two Facebook Pages that gather people around the same party presented different dominant features of certain modes of communication. This would suggest that Facebook Pages should not be viewed as homogeneous. Further research is required to see if these differences derive from the fact that these Pages had distinct roles. Much of the research on deliberation online has focused on the technological design that enhances deliberation. Previous studies adopting quantitative methods for analysis very often treated online space as being homogeneous. The next chapter will build a typology of Facebook Pages supporting K15 to test this argument.

Chapter 7 Study Two: Classification of Facebook Pages

7.1 Introduction

The first phase of the study showed differences in the mode of democratic communication when comparing two Facebook Pages supporting the same political party. This finding would indicate that Facebook Pages are not homogeneous, and it is therefore essential to explore this matter further. Previous studies that investigated online discussion space and analysed the three modes of democratic communication treated online services as being homogenous (e.g. Freelon, 2015; Valera-Ordaz, 2019). By adopting a method of content analysis and by selecting the platform (Twitter, Facebook or news section), researchers looked at whether the discourse architecture, left/right issue stance or the ideology of the party impacted the mode of democratic communication. Since I qualitatively analysed the comments from the same platform (Facebook), feature (Facebook Pages) and political group (K15), I was able to learn that there are differences in the modes of democratic communication used. The two Facebook Pages, when analysed together, presented one dominant mode of democratic communication – c*ommunitarian*; nonetheless, when compared, they presented slightly different modes of democratic communication. I provided an explanation for this discovery: firstly, even though two online spaces have the same discourse architecture (for example, the ability to comment, the length of the post, moderation), this does not mean that these features will be utilised by users/admins in the same way.

To better understand the difference between the communicative practices displayed on two Facebook Pages supporting K15, I have developed a typology of Facebook Pages that enables me to classify Facebook Pages in support of K15. This classification aims to see if there are different types of Facebook Pages endorsing K15. The idea of developing a classification of Facebook Pages was introduced after considering different methods that would collect and show some sort of distinct data, which proved to be challenging. Therefore, I decided to manually collect and build a typology of Facebook Pages, as well as analyse them using qualitative content analysis. First, I identified the deductive categories, and then I introduced inductive coding for different levels of analysis: the types of Pages, and the stated and observed roles. I also implemented a pilot study to validate coding on a selective sample (N=22). The next sections will describe the process of building a typology of Facebook Pages.

7.2 Data Collection

The Facebook search engine was used to find Pages on Facebook that support K15 or are associated with K15. An initial search started from the name of the party Kukiz'15 and its leader, Pawel Kukiz. The other Pages were identified by looking at the posts (from where they were re-posted), and the liked Pages by a Page. By taking this approach, the Page named "Kukiz'15 Strony" (created to list all possible Pages associated with K15) was discovered. This Page helped to find other Pages that were not included in the set. By adopting this technique, 166 Pages were discovered.

Facebook Pages that had not been active for the two months since their latest post were excluded from the set. The reason for invoking this criterion was that the classification of Facebook Pages took place around the pre-election campaign in Poland, and not making any posts around this time would suggest that these Facebook Pages are no longer active. I collected and analysed the first 20 Facebook Pages to decide what data should be obtained. This approach enabled me also to structure the following research questions:

1. What are the types of Facebook Pages supporting K15?
2. What are the roles of Pages supporting K15 based on their description in the "About" tab?
3. What are the roles of Pages supporting K15 based on the posts?
4. How are the analysed Pages (*Kukiz'15* and *Informator Kukiz'15*) positioned within the broader environment of Pages created in support of Kukiz'15? Are there any differences between the attributes of *Kukiz'15* and *Informator Kukiz'15*?

The classification was built on these metrics:

- Facebook Page name
- Facebook address
- Likes
- Affiliation
- Operating area
- Created by
- Stated role of Page based on the description provided in the "About" section

- Observed role of Page based on scanning the last recent 20 posts (as for some Pages, 20 posts could go back a year, and the role of the Page could change in the meantime, the most recent role that was noticed was recorded)

Facebook Page name, Facebook address and *Likes* are attributes of Pages. *Affiliation*, *Operating area*, *Stated role of Page* and *Observed role of Page* were identified after the pilot study of 20 Facebook Pages. The category *Created by* was the only pre-existing category. The literature on populism and social media is dominated by investigating the supply-side of populism (political actors/politicians), and the way they use social media. Nonetheless, social media can also be used by populist supporters (the demand-side of populism). *Created by* refers to whether a particular Facebook Page was created by populist supporters (bottom-up), or political actors/political figures (top-down). This dimension was added to be able to enrich the typology of Facebook Pages. Table 8 below summarises the markers and approaches towards the analysis.

Markers	**Explanation/Unit of analysis**	**Approach to the analysis**
Facebook address	URL	-
Facebook name	The name of the Facebook Page	-
Likes	Number of Facebook Likes	-
Affiliation	Facebook name, Page Description (email address, the name of a person managing the website), as well as Google search to further distinguished between different Facebook types	Inductive (codes are created from data)
Created by *(Top-down)* *(Bottom-up)*	Email address, name of the person managing the website (if possible) and official links to the website	Deductive (codes are created from literature review)
Stated role of Page	'About' section	Inductive

Observed role of Page	Based on the last 20 posts/or most recent role. The general impression was recorded after scanning posts.	Inductive
Operating area *(National)* *(Regional)*	The general impression was recorded after scanning the last 20 posts. The last 20 posts reveal if they are run on a national or regional level (identified through comments pointing to local events or activities).	Inductive

Table 8 The summary of collected markers

7.3 Coding procedure

This section describes the coding procedure in detail by looking at how categories were created from taking an inductive approach. Categories generated from data were: *Affiliation*, *Stated role of Page*, *Observed role of Page* and *Operating area*.

7.3.1 Affiliation Type

The initial coding was created by looking at the Facebook Page names. At a later stage, Facebook Page name and Page Description (email address, the name of a person managing the website) were taken into consideration. To further distinguish between different actors who created the Pages, a Google search was conducted. This enabled me to find out which Facebook Pages were created by politicians, candidates, activists or previous Kukiz'15 candidates/politicians. The purpose of this analytical procedure was to be able to distinguish between different Facebook types. Table 9 below describes how different types of affiliation were identified.

	First stage	Second stage
Unit	Page name	Pages name + Page "About" section (looking at email addresses and who is managing the Page), and (optionally) a Google search for politicians' names to see who they are
Purpose	To be able to identify different types of Facebook Pages	To provide a more sophisticated list of Facebook types
Identified types of affiliations	Politician (personal name, e.g. Pawel Kukiz) Branch K15 (e.g. Kukiz15 Wroclaw) Private initiative (e.g. Ruch Kukiz15) Young Club (e.g. Klub Mlodych)	Politician **Candidate** **Activist** Branch K15: ***Activist*** ***Candidate*** ***Private initiative*** **Official Party** **Previous K15 Politician** **Previous K15 Candidate** Young Club

Table 9 The process of identifying different affiliations

Definitions of proposed Facebook types

Through implementation of the coding techniques outlined above, I developed different "affiliations" or types of Facebook Page. Table 10 below summarises each category with their subcategories and their definitions.

Affiliation	Definition
Personal Pages *(Pages that have a personal name in the description and were created initially in support of K15)*	
Politician	There is a personal name in the name of the Facebook Page, and this person is associated with K15, being an elected representative of K15
Candidate	There is a personal name in the name of the Facebook Page, and this person is associated with K15 and is starting or started in the elections affiliated with K15
Activist	There is a personal name in the name of the Facebook Page, and this person is associated with K15 but not a public official (member of K15, or political candidate)
Previous K15 Politician	There is a personal name in the name of the Facebook Page, and this person is associated with K15, has been elected as a representative of K15 but no longer supports the party
Previous K15 Candidate	There is a personal name in the name of the Facebook Page, and this person is associated with K15 (started in the election in 2015 or 2019), but no longer support the party
Private initiative Pages (Pages that were created in support of K15, might be around concerning issues, and are not managed professionally)	
Private Initiative	This Page type does not indicate that it is professionally used (there is no professional email address in the description). It is also not a Page created by a politician or an activist – no mentions of names in the Page description). e.g. Armia Kukiza15
Party (Official party page indicated by official contact details)	
Official Party Page	The Page is professionally managed, and there are official contact details in the Page description.
Branch K15 (Pages that have a region/city in the name of Facebook Page)	
General	This Page has a region/city/district in the name of the Facebook Page, but there is no indication of who is managing this Page.

Private Initiative	There is a region/city/district in the name of the Facebook Page, and it is a private initiative (e.g. Coalition Gdansk)
Activist	There is a region/city/district in the name of the Facebook Page and it is managed by a person who is not formally associated with Kukiz 15 (the 'About' section can suggest that)
Candidate	There is a region/city/district in the name of the Facebook Page and is managed by a person who was going to run or did run in the elections in 2015/2019. (the 'About' section can suggest this through the email address, links to the website and so on).
Young Club (Page that was created in support of K15 and they have a name 'Young Club' in the Page description)	
Young Club	The name of the Facebook Page suggests that this Page was created by people belonging to the Young Club (Klub Mlodych).

Table 10 Affiliation types and their definitions

7.3.1 Stated Roles of Pages

The stated role of the Page was assessed by taking into consideration the Page description in the 'About' section. I derived 11 categories of the stated role of Pages: *anti-K15 Page*, *promoting K15*, *supporters of K15*, *local contact with K15 representatives*, *self-promotion*, *issue-based*, *looking for new members*, *voluntary activities*, *enhancing local community*, *informational*, *not stated*. Table 11 below describes each category.

Category		Definition
Anti-K15 Page		The Page description suggests that the Page no longer supports K15, or it supports a person who is not associated with K15 anymore.
Promoting K15	**National**	The Page description refers to the main postulates of K15, e.g. to bring power back to the citizens, and/or activities of K15.
	Local	The Page description refers to the local activities of K15/K15 Reps.
Supporters of K15	**National**	The Page description states that it was created for/by supporters of K15.
	Local	The Page description states that it was created for/by supporters of K15 in a specific region.
	Young Club	The Page description suggests that it was created to gather young people supporting K15.
	Young Club local	The Page description suggests that it was created to gather young people supporting K15 in a specific region.
Local contact with K15 Reps		The Page description suggests that the Page was created to enable direct contact with a local K15 coordinator.
Self-promotion		The Page description includes the biography of a person or/and some other information regarding the upcoming elections (e.g. from

	which party list they are going to start in the election).
Issue-based	The Page description suggests that it was created around a specific issue (e.g. animals or agriculture).
Looking for new members	The Page description suggests that it is looking for members.
Voluntary activities	The Page description claims that the Page was created to voluntarily support people.
Enhancing local community	The Page description suggests that it was created to work towards enhancing local society.
Informational	The Page description suggests that this is an informational page.
Not stated	The Page description does not reveal the role of the Page.

Table 11 Types of stated roles and their definitions

7.3.1 Observed roles of Pages

Apart from looking at the stated role of the Page in the Page description, the role of each Page was also assessed by looking at the posts. Similar categories were produced in comparison to the stated role of the Page, although not all categories found after analysing the Page description were also discovered in the posts. These categories were: promoting K15 (propagation of K15 postulates, K15/Koalicja Polska activities and promotion of K15 representatives), self-promotion (promoting own activities within the party), issue-based (focus on specific issues, e.g. animal rights), anti-K15 (promoting other political parties, expressing disapproval towards K15, criticising K15), informational (local/national news), and entertainment (links to movies, songs unrelated to politics). As I conducted a multi-dimensional analysis, only a condensed meaning unit was recorded rather than extracting each of the last 20 posts from each Facebook Page. The pilot study showed that it is very difficult to record different dimensions of Facebook Pages and the last 20 posts for each type (to get a full understanding of a post, text or video, it would need to be also recorded, however this would not guarantee that the context would not be lost). From condensed

meaning units, initial codes were suggested, and later final categories were proposed. Table 12 below provides code characteristics with some illustrative examples of the posts found in the dataset, as well as the initial and final categorisations.

Condensed meaning unit	**Example post**	**Initial coding**	**Final category**
Attacking other parties, bringing power back to the citizens, anti-establishment messages	 [Translation: Well, how nice they conspired! Jakubiak, Korwin, Dulski, Macjejewski, Winnicki, Bosak, Kulesza are members of the group which destroyed the Kukiz15 movement!]	Propagation of K15 postulates	**Promoting K15**
Posts that represent mainly activities from one of more of Kukiz'15 representatives	 [Translation: Press conference with Wojciech Bakun – the president of city Przemysl]	Promotion of K15 Representatives	

Party activities (debates, meetings, statements, party projects and propositions)	 [Translation: We don't want our grandmothers and grandparents to make a difficult choice between medicine or food. Seniors deserve special support, so we will abolish the taxation of pensions to improve their quality of life. Each senior will receive an average of PLN 400 more each month, which he can spend for any purpose.]	Propagation of K15/Koalicja Polska activities	
Presenting their own activities within the party (interviews, debates, statements)	 [Translation: I am encouraged to listen to my own thoughts]	Self-promotion from K15	**Self-promotion**

Party activities (debates, meetings, statements, party projects and propositions)	 [Translation: The party leader has met with his supporters in Sokolka]	Propagation of Konfederacja	**Anti-K15 Page**
Party activities (debates, meetings, statements, party projects and propositions)	 [Translation: We say no to Jewish claims from Poland and the war with Iran]	Propagation of Partia Wolnosc	
Party activities (debates, meetings, statements, party projects and propositions)	 [Translation: About Kukiz'15 and the political map of Poland]	Promotion of Partia Wolonsc Reps	

Posts that represent mainly activities from one of more of Konfederacja reps, or recommend some candidates	Gorąco zachęcam wszystkich znajomych do oddania głosu na listę nr 4 #Konfeferacje. Mój głos oddam na Sebastiana Dziębowskiego to odpowiedni kandydat na to stanowisko. Znamy się z wielu działań między innymi z rady dzielnicy. Człowiek orkiestra, dla niego nie ma rzeczy niemożliwych, głos na Sebastiana to wartość dodana. 👍 #Konfederacja ... See more  [Translation: I am encouraged to vote for number 4 #Konferdercja. I will vote for Sebastian Dziebowski]	Promotion of Konfederacja Reps	
Posts that represent mainly activities from one of more of PiS reps	Dziś w Zduńskiej Woli odbyła się konferencja prasowa podczas której poparłem kandydaturę Tomasz Rzymkowski - Poseł na Sejm RP.Razem zaapelowaliśmy do wyborców Kukiz'15 z 2015 r. z tego okręgu wyborczego, aby zagłosowali na Posła Rzymkowskiego, który startuje z listy PiS z miejsca 6.🇵🇱🇵🇱  [Translation: Today in Zdunska Wola a press conference took place where I showed support for Tomasz Rzymkowski]	Promotion of PiS Reps	
Anti-Kukiz'15 statements, expression of no longer supporting K15 after the decision to make a coalition with PSL	 Jerzy Jachnik 14 August Teraz jestem już pewny iż dobrze zrobiłem, że odszedłem z Kukiz'15. Czemu ? Ano temu że skoro obecny główny ideolog Kukiz'15 dottore Jarosław Sachajko dwa miesiące temu w gazecie programowej Ruchu Kukiza do PE twierdzi , iż PSL sprzedał interesy mieszkańców wsi i rolników za stołki w spółkach, ministerstwach i za lokalne posady - zaś niedawno ten sam dottore Sachajko w programie TV twierdzi, że PSL zrobił najwięcej dla rolników !!!! Zmienił zdanie o 180 stopni bo teraz sam startuje z list PSL. To ja pytam gdzie jego doktora etyka, honor, prawdomówność i poważne traktowanie wyborców ? Uważam że w szambie. [Translation: Now I am sure that I did the right thing and left Kukiz'15. Why? Well, since current ideological ideologist Kukiz'15, Jarosław Sachajko,	Criticism of K15	

	two months ago in the programme newspaper Kukiz Movement claimed that PSL sold the interests of village residents and farmers for personal gains - yet recently the same Sachajko on a TV programme claimed that PSL has done the most for farmers!!!! He changed his mind by 180 degrees because now he starts himself from the PSL lists. I am asking where are his ethics, honour, truthfulness and serious treatment of voters? I believe they are in a cesspool.]		
Presenting own activities within the party (interviews, debates, statements) but from a different political group		Self-promotion from a different party	
Information about animal rights		Issue-based: animal rights	***Issue-based***

	[Translation: We have to again ask you for a favour. We are looking for a dog that was last seen near Panorma shop.]		
Information /issues about agriculture	 [Translation: The next protests of farmers, on this occasion in Germany]	Informational: agriculture	
Local activities/matters (e.g. festivals, celebration, activities/issues regarding specific city/region)	 [Translation: Organisers of the event invite fans of running (and others) to take part in the next edition of Gdansk Bieg Tropem Wilczym]	Local news	**Informational**

Sharing news from different sources (websites, pages) that can be political in nature (but not necessary)	 [Translation: (title of the link) Feminists announce a horrible photo competition "Abortion through the lenses of the 21st century"]	News	
Entertainment (links to the song, movies)	 [Link to the song]	Entertainment	**Entertainment**

Table 12 Illustrative examples of posts and final categories

7.3.2 Operating area

Because many Facebook Pages had a district/city/region/country in their Page name (e.g. Kukiz Warsaw, Kukiz UK), the operating area category aimed to classify Pages to identify the level at which they operate. However, this marker was built by looking at the last 20 posts rather than at Page names. Two subcategories were created: National/Regional.

7.4 Findings

This chapter discusses the homogeneity of Facebook Pages supporting K15. The descriptive element of analysis is presented with the occurrence of different types of Facebook Pages and differences between certain kinds of Pages to provide background information and context. The qualitative study offers a further investigation of identified types and categories from quantitative elements of analysis. Tables and figures are shown to support qualitative content analysis.

However, only significant Facebook Types, Stated Roles and Observed Roles are reported in this analysis. A more detailed breakdown of Observed Roles and Stated Roles can be found in Appendix C and Appendix D.

7.4.1 Types of Facebook Pages

Figure 4 below presents the different types of discovered Facebook Pages: the information is presented in a figure rather than a table to enable easier navigation, and to enhance reliability. Five different types of Facebook Pages were identified: *Branch K15*, *Personal Pages*, *Private Initiative, Young Club*, and *Official (Party) Page*. A total of 60% of the Facebook Pages were recognised as *Branch K15* (with a region or city in their name), while *Personal Pages* (pages that had a personal name) comprised 29% of all Pages (see Figure 4).

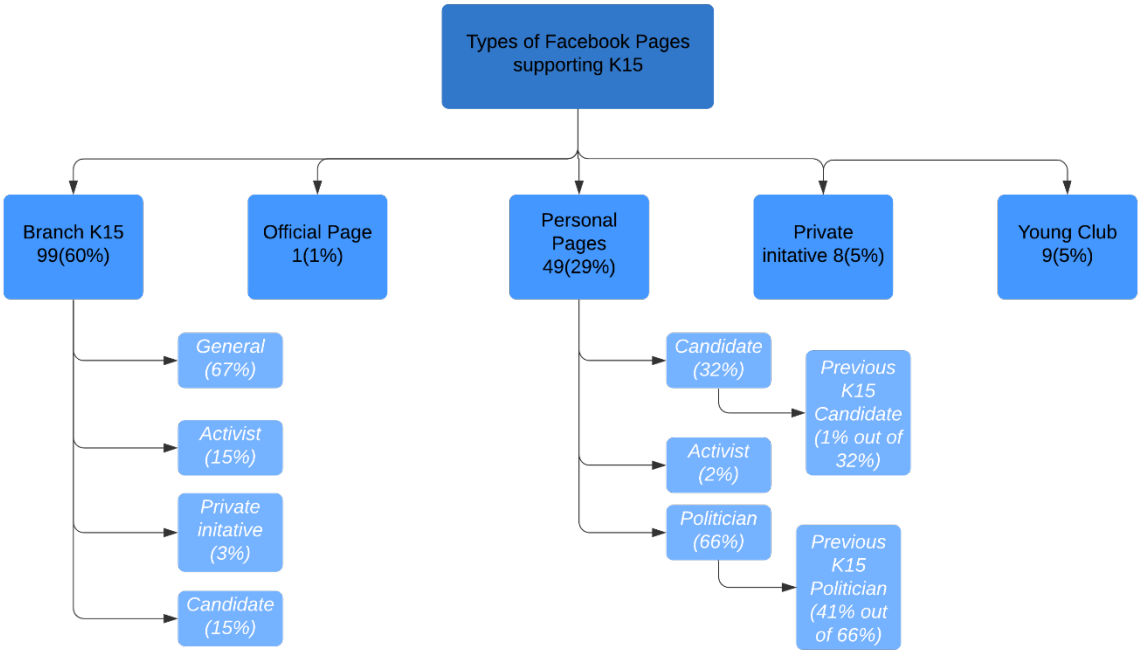

Figure 4 The typology of Facebook Types based on their affiliation

However, *Branch K15* and *Personal Pages*, unlike the other types, contained further subtypes. The *Branch K15* category was divided into five types depending on the information provided in the "About" section on their Facebook Pages. These subtypes are:

- *General* (only a city/region/district name in the Page name),
- *Candidate* (city/region/district name in the Page plus managed by a candidate),
- *Private initiative* (city/region/district name in the Page and it is a private initiative),
- *Activist* (city/region/district name in the Page plus managed by a candidate)

Although there were other sub-types distinguished, the *General* subtype was still dominant amongst other subtypes. *Personal Pages* types were run by:

- *Activists* (2%)
- *Candidates* (32%)
- *Politicians* (66%)

It is interesting that even though most of *the Personal Pages* were managed by politicians themselves, 41% out of these Pages are now managed by politicians who decided to leave the party (Figure 4). One of the reasons for this could be the upcoming election and K15's decision to form a coalition with another party.

As *Branch K15* and *Personal Pages* were the most commonly occurring types of Facebook Pages, it was worth looking at the other metrics such as *Created by* and *Operation area*. The posts for *Branch K15*, even though they were created in support of K15 activities in a specific region, showed that they also operated on a national level (67%) (Table 13). *Branch K15* Pages were mostly run by supporters (56%), followed by people officially involved in the party (e.g. a politician or candidate) (44%). *Personal Pages* operated on a national level (88%) (with a few exceptions) and were mostly managed by people officially involved in the party (86%) (see Table 13).

Operating level	**Branches K15**	**Personal Pages**
National	66 (67%)	43 (88%)
Regional	33 (33%)	6 (12%)
Total	**99 (100%)**	**49 (100%)**
Created by		
Bottom up	55 (56%)	7 (14%)
Top down	44 (44%)	42 (86%)
Total	**99 (100%)**	**49 (100%)**

Table 13 Operating level and management type for Branch K15 and Personal Pages

7.4.2 Stated Roles of Pages

Apart from the identification of different types of Facebook Pages, *Stated Roles* in the Page description were recorded. Fifteen different roles of Facebook Pages were discovered:

- Not stated
- Anti-K15
- Enhancing the local community
- Informational
- Local contact with K15 Reps
- Promoting K15,
- Promoting K15 local
- Supporters of K15
- Supporters of K15: local
- Supporters of K15: Young club
- Supporters of K15: Young club local
- Self-promotion,
- Voluntary activities for people,
- Issue-based
- Looking for members

(For a detailed definition of each category, please see Table 11)

The most frequently catalogued role was 'not stated' with 37.35% of Pages giving no information about their purpose. A total of 16.87% of identified Pages included a biography, suggesting that these Pages were created for self-promotion, while 12.65% were Pages created by supporters of K15 in specific regions (Table 14).

Stated Roles	%
Not stated	**37.35**
Self-promotion	**16.87**
Supporters of K15 (Local)	**12.65**
Promoting K15 (National)	6.63
Local contact with K15 reps	6.02
Supporters of K15 (National)	3.61
Promoting K15 (Local)	3.01
Anti-K15	3.01
Enhancing local community	2.41
Issue-based	1.8
Supporters of K15 (Young Club)	1.8
Supporters of K15 (Young Club/Local)	1.8
Informational	1.2
Looking for members	1.2
Voluntary activities for people	0.6
Grand Total	**100**

Table 14 The occurrence of stated roles of Pages in %

7.4.2.1 Self-promotion

The self-promotion category was prevalent in the Personal Pages Facebook Types. Examples of classified stated roles which fall under self-promotion include:

"Jarosław Sachajko - Poseł na Sejm RP" Page: Jarosław Sachajko • Kukiz15

"I am very pleased to inform you that in the next local elections I will apply for the mandate of a councillor from the 3rd district in Zabrze." Page: Alina Kedziorska

7.4.2.2 Supporters of K15 local

Pages that stated in their description that they were supporting Kukiz'15 in a local area were classified as *Branch K15* (for a detailed breakdown of each category and its occurrence in each Facebook Type, see Appendix C). These are some examples of Pages that stated their role as being local support for K15:

"Local unit of people supporting Kukiz'15 in Poznan" Page: Kukiz'15 Poznan

"The official website of supporters of Kukiz15 in Polkowice" Page: Kukiz'15 Polkowice

Apart from stating a supporting role in certain areas, there were also references to groups of people who identify themselves with the idea of introducing a new Constitution:

"Page of the Kukiz'15 movement, or more precisely the Association for the New Constitution, bringing together members of the Kukiz'15 movement, supporters and activists cooperating in Podkarpackie Province number 23" Page: Kukiz'15 Rzeszow.

7.4.3 Observed Roles of Pages

Although most Pages did not provide information to suggest why a Page had been created and which role they were trying to fulfil, the role of the Page could be assessed by looking at the last 20 posts. While for some Pages there was a combination of different roles (e.g. entertainment with information and promotion of K15), a considerable number of Pages presented only promotional material (43.98%). A mixture of presenting informational with promotional content (16.27%) and Pages that no longer support K15 formed a substantial number of other Observed Roles (16.27%) (Table 15).

Observed Roles	%
Promoting K15	**43.98**
Anti-K15	**16.27**
Informational/Promoting K15	**16.27**
Informational	8.43
Self-promotion	6.02
Self-promotion/Promoting K15	3.61
Issue based	1.2
Promoting K15/ Entertainment	1.2
Undefined	0.6
Issue based/Promoting K15	0.6
Entertainment/Informational/Promoting K15	0.6
Informational/Self-promotion/ Promoting K15	0.6
Entertainment	0.6
Grand Total	**100**

Table 15 The occurrence of observed roles of Pages in %

Based on their posts, *Branch K15* (57 out of 166) and *Personal Pages* (10 out of 166) were the Page types with the most significant number of pages promoting K15. Some Page types shared material against the K15 party and were still classified as Pages created in support of K15 (e.g. *Branch K15: General*, *Personal Page: Candidate*, *Personal Page: Politician, Private Initiative, Young Club*) (Appendix D). *Branch K15* as the most significant page type had mainly a promotional role (58%), followed by a combination of promotional and informational roles (23%). *Personal Pages* mainly served the roles of being Anti-K15 websites (31%), self-promotional (20%) or promotional (20%) (Table 16).

Observed Roles	Personal Pages	Branch K15
Anti-K15	**15 (31%)**	7 (7%)
Entertainment	0	1 (1%)
Promoting K15 (National)	10 (20%)	**57 (58%)**
Self-promotion	10 (20%)	0
Self-promotion/Promoting K15	5 (10%)	1 (1%)
Promoting K15/Entertainment	0	2 (2%)
Informational	4 (8%)	7 (7%)
Informational/Promoting K15	1 (2%)	23 (23%)
Informational/Self-promotion/ Promoting K15	1 (2%)	0
Entertainment/Informational/ Promoting K15	1 (2%)	0
Issue-based	0	1 (1%)
Issue-based/Promoting K15	0	0
Undefined	1 (2%)	0
Grand total	**49**	**99**

Table 16 Observed roles and their occurrence in Branch K15 and Personal Pages

7.4.3.1 Promotional themes

Promotion of K15 was the central theme revealed during the descriptive analysis. It consisted of several sub-themes: propagation of K15 postulates, promotion of K15 representatives, and propagation of K15/Koalicja Polska activities (Fig. 5). These posts presented not only the current activities of the party and their coalition (debates and interviews) but also messages which resonated with K15 ideology (such as anti-establishment messages or attacking the other parties). The incidence of promotion of K15 can be linked to upcoming elections, as most of the Pages became a digital version of offline billboards presenting different candidates for consideration (for example, many pages were noted referring to the candidacy of Paweł Szramka, Janusz Wasilewski, and Agnieszka Ścigała).

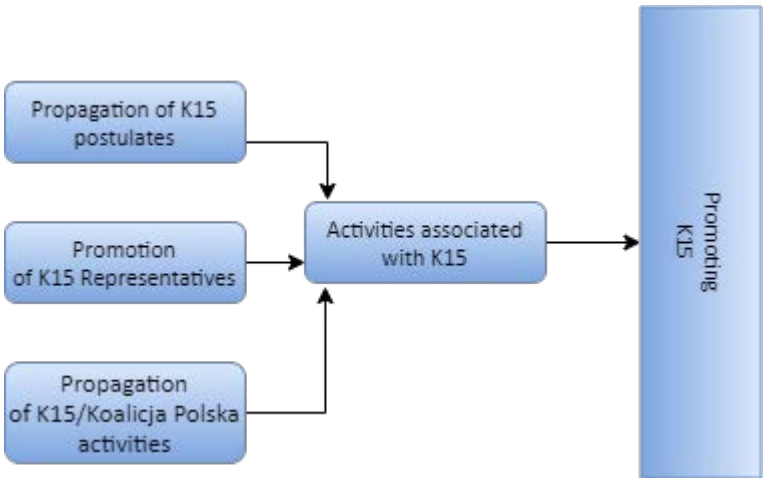

Figure 5 Sub-themes and the theme "Promoting K15"

Combining the *Promoting K15* theme with other dimensions ('Created by' and 'Affiliation'), it was discovered that there were Pages created by the same person. The 'About' section could sometimes reveal the person managing the Page. Even though Facebook Pages are public, personal names were not recorded to protect the anonymity of these people. However, it was marked which Pages are managed by the same people. Based on this information, Case X and Case Y were discovered. In Case X, multiple Pages were managed by an activist informally associated with K15; these Pages were managed on a local level, posting K15's activities concerning a specific region (Figure 6). Although these Pages were managed by an activist, they were classified as a top-down activity as their description and official links revealed a more professional management.

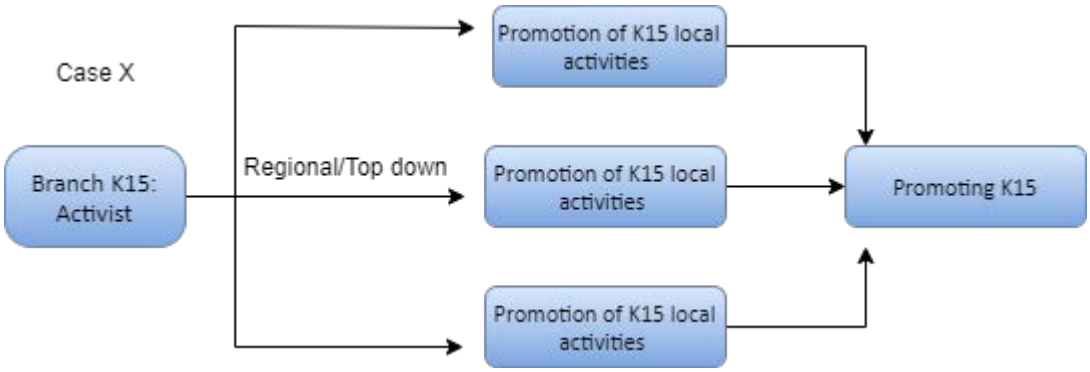

Figure 6 Case X: Multiple Pages that present the role of promoting K15 being managed by the same person

Case Y presented an example of the same Facebook type (Branch K15: Candidate) where two Pages were run by the same person (with observed role as 'Promotion of K15 Rep'), while one Page was co-managed with another person in another instance. A slightly different strategy could be observed in the example where the Page was co-managed (Fig. 7). Apart from promoting K15 representatives, the political activities of the party were also posted. It is also worth noting from

Case Y that these Pages serve dthe role of promoting themselves rather than different candidates. Despite this, they did not reveal that this is a personal page by looking at their affiliation type, and they did not post information about their activities by referring to themselves in the first person.

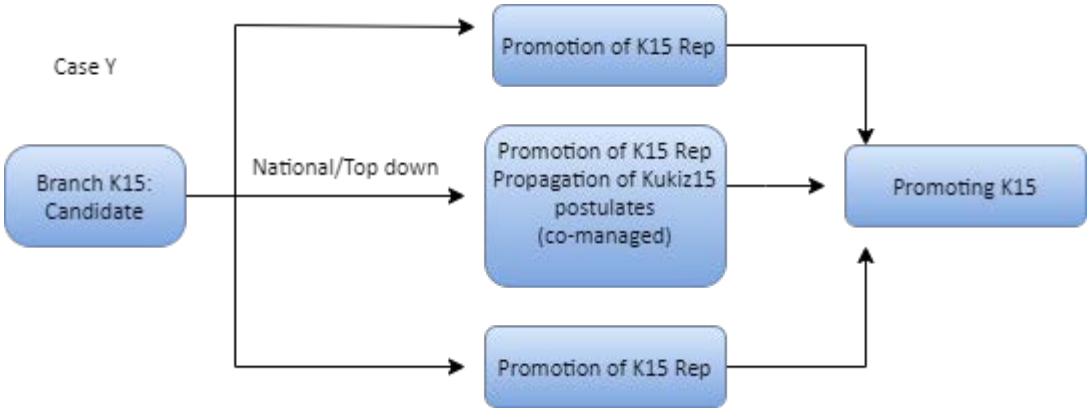

Figure 7 Case Y: Pages being managed by the same person and being co-managed that present the role of Promoting K15

While information about who is managing a Page could highlight small differences between strategies for running pages, their ultimate role was still to promote K15. Additionally, it was rare to find out who is managing a Page. It was also tricky to spot clusters of Pages that pose similar characteristics and suggest that the same individual runs them by looking only at the 'Created by' and 'Affiliation' types and the 'Promoting K15' theme. However, by expanding the analysis to list all themes, it was learned that the same Case X (Figure 8) also presented a different theme apart from promoting K15. The fact that Case X Pages were run by the same person illustrates that the role of promoting K15 can be combined with posting general political information or can be purely informational (Figure 8). In turn, Case Y did not show other themes apart from 'Promoting K15' after expanding the analysis. This could suggest that Pages run by the same person might show the same role, as was seen in Case Y, or pose slightly different roles and be run more intuitively run (as seen in Case X). In fact, by looking at the occurrence of themes, it can be noted that the 'Promoting K15' theme was often present alongside themes such as entertainment, political information, or self-promotion (e.g. Table 16). Therefore, there might be small variations in the roles of Pages run by different people or by the same people (as seen in Case X), and that is why it is challenging to spot clusters of Pages that look the same.

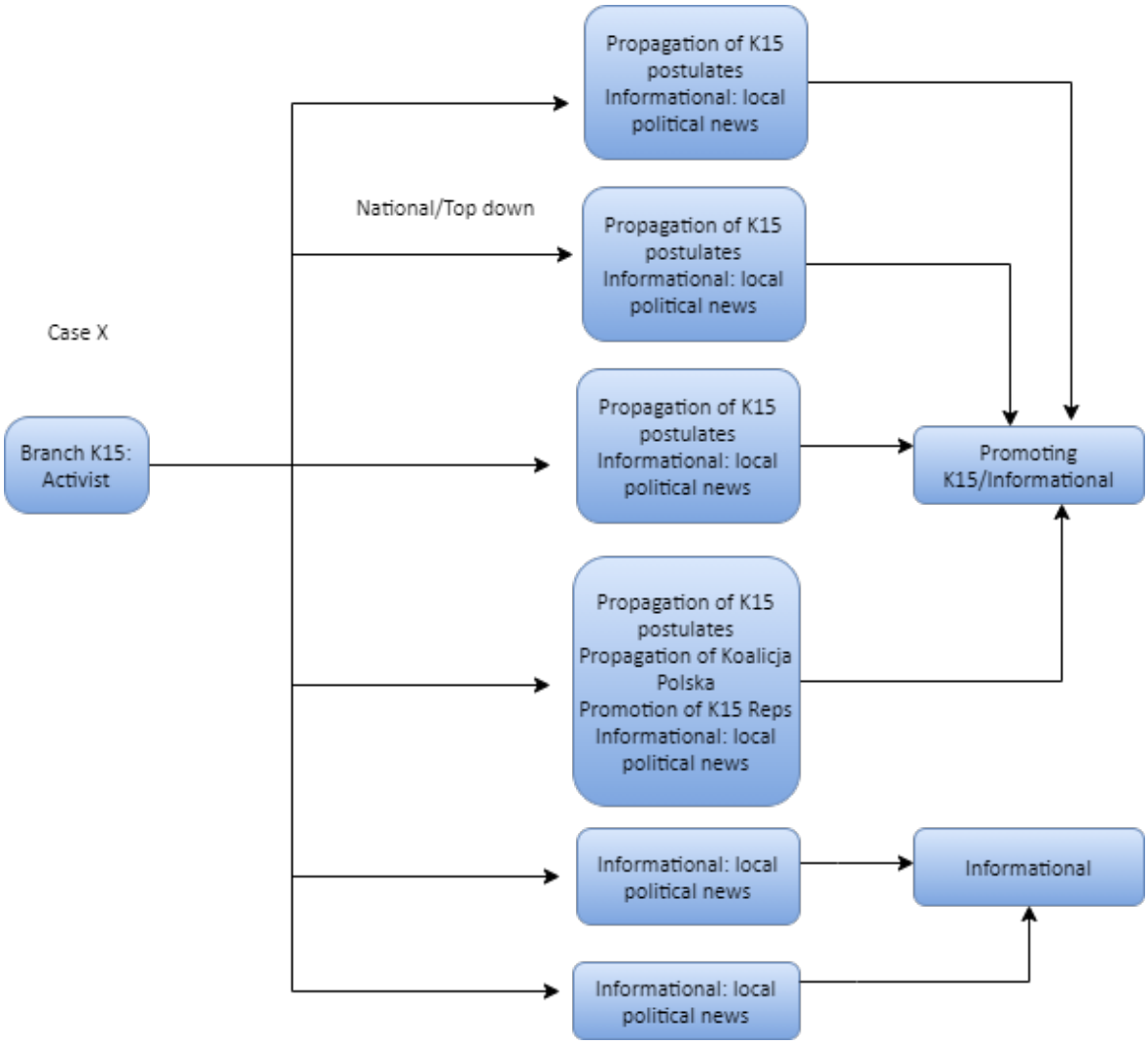

Figure 8 Case X and their roles based on posts made after expanding the analysis by listing all themes

7.4.3.2 Anti-K15 theme

The Anti-K15 theme is an interesting example of where we could observe Page roles shifting after K15 went into coalition with another party. It was noticed that there were cases where admins of Pages expressed no more extended support towards K15, disagreement with the leader's decision, and/or promoted themselves or other candidates from different political parties. By promoting themselves under a name still associated with K15 or under a personal name, it could be learned that these people moved to another right-wing party or to a far-right party (Konfederacja, PiS or Partia Wolnosc). It was also observed that criticism of K15 and a decision to leave the party was triggered by K15 forming a coalition with Koalicja Polska. There was one exception where criticism of K15 was closely linked to the activity of one member from K15 – Pawel Kukiz-Szczucinski.

The Anti-K15 role that was established based on posts was not stated in all Pages descriptions in About section. *Personal Pages* can be divided into four categories where admins either:

- Updated their status and suggested that they are no longer with K15;
- Included only personal information;
- Did not include anything in the description; or
- Suggested that their role is to support a particular issue.

In turn, *Branch K15* Pages in their stated role did not identify at all that they no longer support K15; instead, they:

- Had no description stating their role; or
- Suggested that they promoted K15 local activities.

Young Club Pages also, in their Page description, provided information suggesting that they are looking for new members or support for the activities of a Young Club in a local area. *Private initiative* Pages either suggested that their role is aimed at either gathering people supporting K15 in a local area, promoting K15 or did not state their role (Figure 9). Considering that some Pages promoted themselves from different parties, or candidates from opposite parties still under a Page identified with K15, it could be said that they are gathering people who are also dissatisfied with K15's decision to make a coalition. Lastly, using the stated role provided in the Page description was not always the most suitable way of identifying the role of Pages, as they did not seem to be updated to reflect the shifting roles of Facebook Pages or the actual roles.

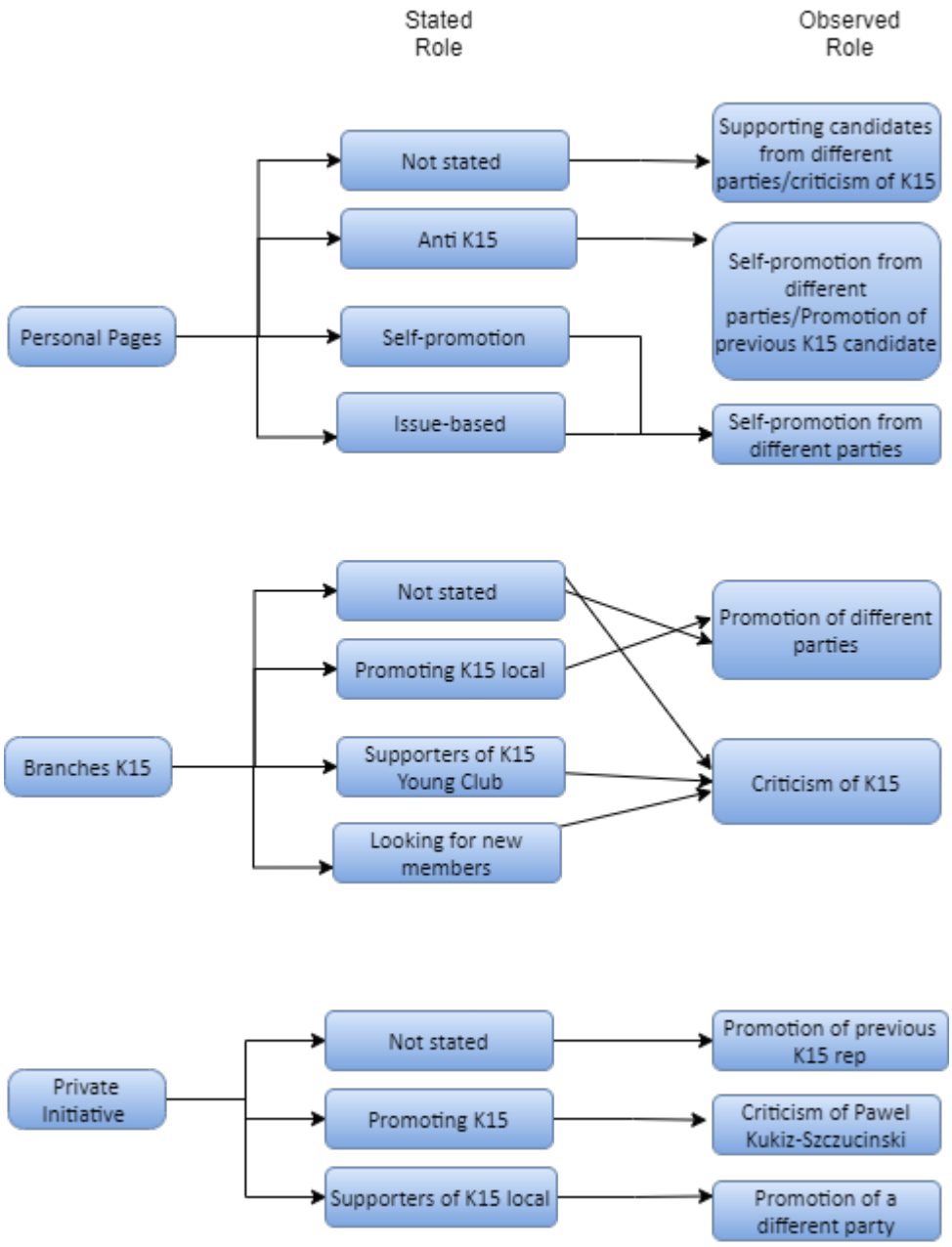

Figure 9 Stated and Observed Roles of Pages that showed an Anti-K15 theme in their posts

One Page that had an Anti-K15 role stated in their description (a candidate from a different party), but the observed role was informational. This Page was the Personal Page of a previous K15 candidate, and quite unlike other Personal Pages, this person did not promote themselves in the posts even though they were standing in the 2019 parliamentary election.

7.4.4 Top-down/bottom up

As the classification of Facebook Pages allowed people to find all possible Facebook Pages created for K15, the category 'Created by' looked at whether these Pages are managed by politicians/people formally associated with a party or its supporters. This was assessed by looking

at the Page description in the 'About' section. Email addresses, as well as linked private profiles, helped to define the management type. The number of Pages managed by supporters and political actors was similar. Out of 166 Pages, 79 were indicated as being bottom-up initiatives while 87 were identified as being top-down. Nonetheless, the investigation of these Pages revealed the complexity of this space. Some Facebook Pages were run by *Candidates* or *Politicians* but presented as the bottom-up management type. At the same time, some of the *Branch K15: General* and *Branch K15: Activist* sites were managed professionally. This may indicate the special organisational structure of K15. The significant number of Facebook Pages classified as *Branch K15* (99 Pages out of 166) in local areas, districts, and regions would suggest that some activities of electoral committees are done online. However, it does not look as if there is a general strategy for the way these Pages should be run, therefore there are Facebook Pages that include official email addresses (e.g. …@ruchkukizka.pl) and physical addresses where they can be visited. In relation to *Personal Pages* and examples where the Pages did not include professional information to consider them as officially representing K15, this might be due to the shifting nature of people vouching for K15. They probably created personal Pages to support K15, then decided to run in the election (local/parliamentary) and/or became a representative of K15 if they were successful in their campaign. However, they have not changed their Page description to reflect the change.

The supply- and demand-side division might not be relevant in the case of K15. K15 enabled citizens, agreeing with the leader's vision, to run in the election, using his name as affiliation. Therefore, *Activists* might disseminate K15's postulates, gain their visibility via online/offline activities, and then run in the election, possibly gaining a seat.

7.4.5 Stated Roles vs. Observed Roles

Figure 10 below presents Stated Roles versus Observed Roles (based on the 20 most recent posts). From this, it was observed that Pages descriptions were not the best identification of the roles these Pages fulfil. Page creators often paid no attention to including this information or to updating it when there was a significant shift in their activities (e.g. the self-promotion stated role and the Anti-K15 observed role). Additionally, the stated role often did not correspond to the content posted on these pages. For example, the Stated Role of supporters of K15 local would imply that there would be more activities aimed at supporters in a local area. However, more often there was promotional or promotional/informational content in general associated with the K15 party. A similar observation can be made concerning the Local contact with K15 Reps where their observed roles were promotional/or informational promotional. However, taking into consideration that these Pages stated in their description: *"A local website created in order to be*

able to directly contact the representative of this region", these Pages seemed instead to fulfil the roles of online deputies' offices. As K15 did not take any public money to fund its political activities, there could be no funds available for running offices where face-to-face contact with a representative is possible. Facebook Pages enable direct messaging with an admin, and there are no costs involved. Therefore, as the ultimate role is providing direct contact with K15 representatives, the content being posted might play a secondary role and rather be a way of keeping the Pages visibly active. There is a question as to whether these Pages stated their role as supporting K15 and in addition to promoting K15 activities also provided direct contact with local representatives of the party.

Additionally, Pages with roles aimed at gathering K15 supporters in a local area (Supporters of K15 local) and enabling direct contact with K15 representative, with a few exceptions, did not tend to have posts linked to any regional activities of K15. However, they instead reflected on a range of different activities, ideas, and postulates associated with the party (Figure 10).

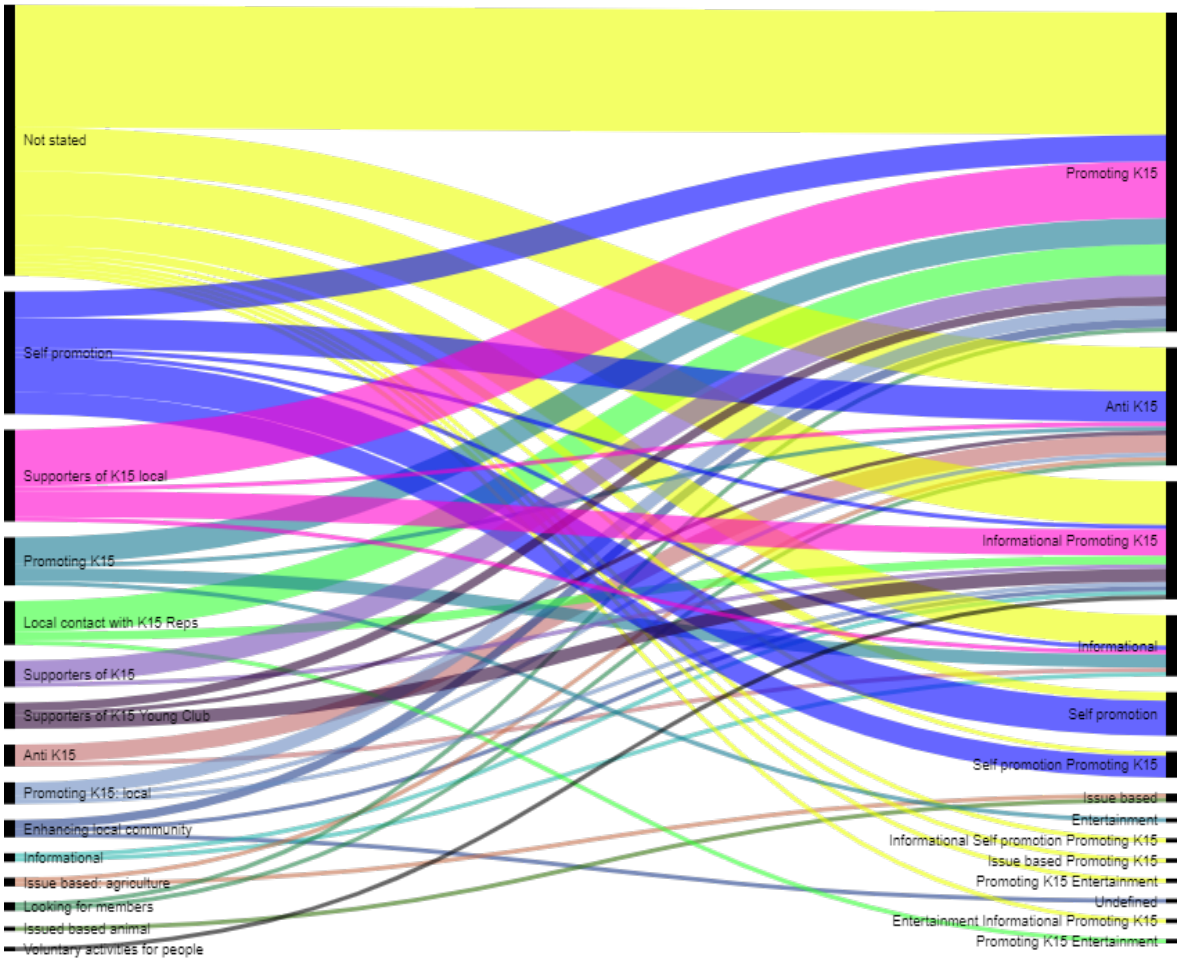

Figure 10 Stated vs. Observed Roles of Facebook Pages associated with K15

7.4.6 *Kukiz'15* Page and *Informator Kukiz'15*

Kukiz'15 and *Informator Kukiz'15* are Pages that were analysed in-depth in the first study. Analysis of their comments sections showed differences in their mode of democratic communication, despite supporting the same political group (K15) and using the same online service (Facebook Pages). *Kukiz'15* presented more characteristics of *liberal individualism* while *Informator Kukiz'15* presented more of the c*ommunitarian* mode of democratic communication.

These two Pages present unique examples when compared to other Pages. *Kukiz'15* is the only Official Facebook Page not run in any district (some Pages are stated as official and managed at a local level). Although it does not have any roles stated in its About section, the Page is informational with political news being presented and comments appearing alongside political issues and other matters which are not linked to any specific region.

Informator Kukiz'15 is a private initiative Page (run by someone who is not officially associated with K15), and it has *Promoting* as its stated role, but its role is Anti-K15 based on posts. Unlike the other Anti-K15 Pages that changed from their supporting role to dissatisfaction with K15 after they made a coalition with *Koalicja Polska*, *Informator Kukiz'15* is critical towards one person associated with K15 – Pawel Kukiz-Szczucisnki. From the Page description, it can be learnt that the Page aims to promote K15 but no longer supports Pawel Kukiz-Szczucinski:

"Edition May 2019 - Due to the scandal caused by our candidate Paweł Kukiz-Szczuciński suing innocent Internet users in electoral mode, the warrior informant page Kukiz'15 as a community gathered in the Kukiz Movement, and in accordance with the suggestions of this community expressed in the comments, withdraws all support for this candidate.

In May 2019, Paweł Kukiz-Szczuciński sued Internet users in an electoral procedure in order to allow free expression and assessment of himself as a candidate in elections to the European Parliament. Because Paweł Kukiz says that elections are an exam for candidates, that MPs are to be the employees of voters, and postulates the need for transparency in public life, Paweł Kukiz-Szczuciński's behaviour shows hypocrisy, which K15 voters are not able to accept.

The Page was created to promote the activities of the Kukiz Movement and the Kukiz'15 Parliamentary Club. It promotes K15 MPs and the main ideas of the movement, allowing its members and supporters to freely evaluate and express their opinions" (Informator Kukiz'15)

Nonetheless, it is complicated to understand the reason why there is no longer support for Pawel Kukiz-Szczucinski. The information provided that Pawel Kukiz-Szczucinski *"sued Internet users in*

an electoral procedure in order to allow free expression and assessment of himself as a candidate in elections to the European Parliament", was not reported in any other places.

Even though *Informator Kukiz'15* no longer supports Pawel Kukiz, its stated role claims to be promoting Kukiz'15' activities and representatives. However, based on the posts, its role seemed mainly to criticise Pawel Kukiz -Szcucinski. Pawel Kukiz-Szczucinski is a doctor, known for his active support for vaccination. Supporters of K15 are very divided in this area, and the attack towards Pawel Kukiz-Szczucinski may also be linked to personal beliefs about vaccination.

7.5 Discussion

Homogeneity of Facebook Pages supporting K15

The homogeneity of Facebook Pages supporting K15 was assessed on a number of different levels. The analysis was multi-dimensional by identifying *Facebook Types*, *Observed Role* and *Stated Roles*. Other additional metrics were also collected, such as *Operating Area* and *Created by* (Management type), to enhance the understanding of different types of Facebook Page created in support of K15. By looking at the first dimension of analysis – *Facebook Types*, it was observed that although different several types exist (*Personal Pages*, *Branch K15* created for certain district by activists, politicians, young club, or general, *Young Club*, *Private Initiatives*), most Pages are *Branch K15: General* (where it is not identified who runs them in local areas) and *Personal Pages*. Even though the Facebook typology of Pages created in support of K15 has two major clusters of Facebook Types (*Branch K15* and *Personal Pages*), there are variations within these Pages when looking at *Operating Area* and *Created by* (Management type*). Branch K15* and *Personal Pages* are managed on a national level, with some regional-based activities cases. They are run by politicians and other people officially associated with the party, as well as supporters. The same can be observed for *Personal Pages* (although they are mostly run by politicians themselves).

At this level of analysis, then, Facebook Pages are not homogeneous. Although they present two main clusters of the same Page Types, they can be further distinguished by those that are run on a national or regional level and those that are bottom-up or top-down initiatives.

The second level of analysis in terms of the homogeneity of Facebook Pages supporting K15 considers *Observed Roles* based on posts. Although *Stated Roles* were also recorded, they appeared to be a poor dimension for analysing the uniformity of Facebook Pages. Most of the Pages lacked a description identifying what role the Page was trying to fulfil. *Observed Roles* showed that Pages supporting K15 tended to post promotional material combined with

entertainment and informational posts or self-promotion. The difference between self-promotion and promoting K15 is that self-promotion posts were written in the first person ("I did" etc.) while promotional posts referred to general activities associated with the party, and/or disseminating their postulates. *Observed Roles* analysis found different variations of promotion (e.g. Promoting K15/Entertainment/Self-promotion K15). Additionally, there were cases where Pages were managed by the same person, and their roles were either promoting K15 or presenting a mixture of promoting and informational material, or being informational. This observation suggests that Pages can be created by the same people and have different variations in their roles.

Apart from promoting Pages with different elements, some Pages no longer supported K15 but still operated under the K15 name (e.g. Kukiz'15 *city name*). Although these Pages do not promote K15 activities, they recommend themselves or other parties' activities that they support. This critical attitude towards K15 is associated with the party's decision to make a coalition with another party (with one exception where criticism was towards one member of K15 – Pawel Kukiz-Szczucinski). Running Pages under K15's name suggest that these Pages were trying to gather people who were also dissatisfied with the party and sought an alternative party to vote for in the upcoming election of 2019.

This second level of the analysis showed that Pages are also not unified. Although they might be mainly promotional, they frequently combine different elements with promoting material (informational/entertainment). Besides, Pages can shift their role very quickly based on current affairs, as observed on the Anti-K15 Pages.

Stated vs. Observed roles of Facebook Pages supporting K15

Stated roles do not always correspond to the actual roles based on the observed posts. This is due to the changing roles of a Page (e.g. no longer supporting K15), as well as being mainly created to be an online version of local deputies' offices, enabling contact with representatives, suggesting that what is posted on these pages does not play that vital a role. What is more, there is a question over whether what is posted on these Pages is linked more closely with political events, rather than sticking with what is stated in the description of each Page (e.g. promoting K15 activities before the 2019 parliamentary election). However, to be able to answer this question, posts on these Pages would need to be analysed over a longer period of time.

The position of *Kukiz'15* and *Informator Kukiz'15* in a typology of Facebook Pages created in support of K15

Kukiz'15 and *Informator Kukiz'15* are Pages that were analysed in the first study. By extracting comments from both Pages over a period of one year, I learnt that they present difference in their

mode of democratic communication. The typology of Facebook pages helped me to discover that these two Pages are unique examples. *Kukiz'15* is the only Page that was classified as an *Official Page* that, although it offers information, does not serve a function of promoting K15. *Informator Kukiz'15* is the example of a private initiative run by an activist. What is more, *Informator Kukiz'15* changed its role in May 2019, showing disapproval towards a party member. Presumably, therefore, *Informator Kukiz'15* had a different role compared to the role it might have had based on posts when the comments were analysed between 22.11.2017 - 22.11.2018. This sort of finding does not help in building a great understanding as to why different modes of democratic communication occurred when analysing their comments section in Study One (Chapter 6). The analysis of comments on *Kukiz'15* showed mostly the *liberal individualist* mode of democratic communication, which is interesting as *Kukiz'15* had an informational role based on its posts which should perhaps have led to the *deliberative* mode of democratic communication being more prevalent. Nonetheless, it might be the case that users and how they engage in the discussion might have a greater impact on the discussion type rather than the posts themselves. In turn, *Informator Kukiz'15* makes it difficult to draw any conclusions since it changed its role after the analysis of its comments was performed.

7.6 Conclusion

The previous study (Chapter 6) indicated that there are variations in the mode of democratic communication on the same platforms for groups created in support of the same party. Studies that implemented the three models of democratic communication developed by Freelon (2010) horizontally assessed the differences in online discussion spaces by looking at either distinct parties or platforms. The first study noticed dissimilarities vertically in the identical technological design and equivalent political formation. To further explore these findings, I made a claim that online spaces are not uniform and might be used in varied ways, despite enabling equal functions. To test this assumption, I classified all Facebook Pages supporting K15.

The second study looked at the typology of Facebook Pages and revealed that Pages created in support of K15 are not uniform. Even though there might not be that many variations in different types of Facebook Pages, with some types being more visible than others, they are complicated and unpredictable, with shifting roles and outlying cases. More importantly, the typology of Facebook pages informs us not only about the way that K15 operates in an online environment, but also about political moods within the party.

The homogeneity of Facebook Pages supporting K15 was assessed on several different levels. Considering Facebook types, two major clusters of Facebook types were discovered: *Branch*

K15 and *Personal Pages*. Creating a Branch for K15 in local areas and Personal Pages might be linked with a general strategy of gaining visibility and support. The success of Pawel Kukiz in the presidential election in 2015, where he gained significant support, encouraged his supporters to set up an electoral committee. The idea of bringing power back to citizens meant that anyone could run in the local, parliamentary election, or for the office in local councils from a K15 election list. In fact, this possibility was used by, for example, the National Movement, where some of its members entered the Sejm in 2015 from the K15 parliamentary list. Therefore, it is not surprising that *Personal Pages* and *Branch K15* were created by politicians/candidates, as well as by people who were simply in favour of K15. However, it must be stressed that in the case of K15, the distinction between *bottom-up* and *top-down* populism is more fluid. People can be actively involved in K15 and then run for the next election, becoming an official representative.

Although there are different types of Pages, their strategy in terms of online content does not take a significantly different form. Pages are somewhat promotional in nature, whilst adding some informational or entertainment material. Additionally, they are not that predictable; for example, *Branch K15* Pages created in local areas do not always present activities in their specific regions. At the same time, *Personal Pages* are not always managed on a national level. This phenomenon can be explained by the fact that these Pages are run by individuals, and there is no general online strategy imposed by K15. Secondly, there is some indication that Pages might be created and run by the same person without any strategy, hence presenting some variations (e.g. one Page can have national content while another presents regional activities).

While the 'About' section tab proved to be a less revealing dimension due to many Pages not including any information, one observation can be made about Pages supporting K15. Some Pages described their role as enabling direct contact with a local representative of K15. Therefore, apart from gaining visibility through online activities, Pages can also be an online version of a local deputies' offices. K15 did not take any public subsidies for the election in 2015 and 2019, as a way of expressing its disagreement with the political system. Therefore, the low costs of running Facebook Pages (or if any cost at all) seems to have been used to enable activities that would normally require significant financial resources.

Facebook Pages supporting K15 are not static but fluid and dynamic with changing agendas. The shifting roles were observed in Facebook types where candidates or politicians associated with K15 no longer identify themselves with the party. This was also seen in posts where dissatisfaction towards the party was expressed. Because these Pages operated under the K15 name, presumably their aim was to gain support from a group of supporters who were also dissatisfied with K15 and looking for alternatives candidates and parties representing their views. It must be

pointed out that there were two exceptions to this case: one, where the Page stated an Anti-K15 role in the Page description, but it was posting informational material. The other case is where there was an Anti-K15 role stated in the description, and the posts showed the same, but the disapproval expressed was mainly towards one member of K15.

Pages that were selected for the first study – *Kukiz'15* and *Informator Kukiz'15* – were positioned in the typology of Facebook Pages as being rare examples. *Kukiz'15* is the only Page identified as an *Official type*, while *Informator Kukiz'15* is a Page that changed its role in May 2019 and was classified as an Anti-K15 Page. Unlike other Anti-K15 Pages that did not support the decision to make a coalition, *Informator Kukiz'15* showed disapproval towards Pawel Kukiz-Szczucinski without a clear specific reason. One possibility is that it could be due to his position on vaccination, but this is not explained in the Page description.

7.7 Limitations

One of the most significant limitations is that only the last 20 posts in each case were recorded based on online observation. These last 20 posts might not always reflect the role of Pages. For example, the classification of Facebook Pages was built during the campaign period for the parliamentary election in 2019. The admins of Pages might post different content outside the election period and present different roles. Additionally, the observed roles were based on an online observation, where only the condense meaning of unit was documented. This proved to be challenging to review posts for the same period after some time. There might be better strategies for extracting content from Facebook Pages while being compliant with its terms and conditions policy.

Another limitation is that this study considered the homogeneity of Facebook Pages created in support of K15. Therefore, general conclusions towards the homogeneity/heterogeneity of discussion spaces on Facebook Pages cannot be drawn. It would be interesting for future studies to test this claim further by analysing different formations. I was transparent in describing the process of collecting and analysing data, hopefully encouraging researchers to conduct similar studies to be able to compare the results.

Chapter 8 Conclusion

8.1 Introduction

This research was designed to explore how populist supporters engage online based on the example of the online engagement of K15 supporters on Facebook Pages. It had the following aims:

- To locate communication practices in a wider political landscape
- To develop a framework for studying online political behaviour that takes into account the Internet's communication and information capabilities
- To examine the modes of democratic communication of supporters of K15 on Facebook Pages
- To compare the same online spaces (Facebook Pages) created in support of K15 to see if there is any difference in the mode of democratic communication
- To examine the homogeneity of Facebook Pages supporting K15

Therefore, to analyse the online engagement of populists, the typology of online political participation was rethought and applied to the online environment. The perspective of *social involvement*, as one of the dimensions of online political participation, was used in this thesis. *Social involvement* on the Internet has been defined as showing an interest in politics by commenting on politically orientated pages. Discursive performances were previously analysed by suggesting what impact it might have on democracy. Three different perspectives were noted: one viewpoint understands people's communicative activities online as a form of expressivity; another suggests online communication provides a chance of creating a dialogue where common ground can be reached; and a third point of view claims that people build a community of shared values. It was suggested that all three ideas are valid and exist in an online environment. Additionally, I placed these distinct visions about the potential of the Internet as empirical measures of the *social involvement* category (Chapter 2). The political-historical context of the elected country (Poland) was described, and the selected political group, K15 was introduced (Chapter 3). Lastly, the theoretical framework described in more detail the empirical measures for each viewpoint based on the indicators developed by Freelon (2010), and also provided an overview of studies that applied the three models of democratic communication to the online discussion spaces (Chapter 4).

The research design (Chapter 5) included a qualitative content method applied at a micro- and macro level of analysis. The micro-level analysis was designed to look at the comments section of two Facebook Pages (Chapter 6), while the macro-level built a classification and typology of Facebook Pages to gain a better understanding of where the two Pages analysed were positioned (Chapter 7).

In the following sections, I will discuss the theoretical considerations and the findings from the empirical work with respect to my research questions. I will then summarise these findings by placing them in a wider discussion. Next, I will reflect on the limitations and the main challenges I faced while analysing Facebook Pages. I will also point out areas for further investigation and conclude with recommendations.

8.2 Theoretical considerations

8.2.1 RQ1 What does it mean to be politically active online?

To answer this theoretical question, I reviewed the research from political science that investigated new forms of political engagement on the Internet. I showed that there was terminological confusion over how to categorise activities enabled by the Internet. With growing political apathy and disengagement, the introduction of the Internet provided new opportunities for participating in politics. These new opportunities proved to be challenging to define with a growing number of studies placing a wide spectrum of online political activities under the umbrella of political participation or civic engagement. Ekman & Amnå (2012) addressed this problem by making a clear distinction between the latent and manifest forms of political participation. The latent forms of political participation are forms of pre-activities preceding direct ways of influencing the government (e.g. voting). The authors allocated activities towards enhancing the community (*civic engagement*) and actions that show an interest in politics (*social involvement*) as dimensions of the latent form of political participation. In turn, the manifest forms of political participation *(political participation)* are the actual efforts aimed at impacting the government.

Using these three dimensions of political participation (*social involvement*, *civic engagement* and *political participation*), I suggested that they all exist in an online environment, but it is impossible to suggest which activities are a form of *social involvement*, *civic engagement* or *political participation.* For example, liking a Facebook Page that is political in nature can be a form of showing an interest in politics (*social involvement*), working towards enhancing the community (*civic engagement*), or trying to directly influence the government (*political participation*). In this

way, I claim that political activity online can take the form of social involvement, civic engagement or political participation and these three categories are not exclusive. Moreover, people can move between one and another category in an online environment.

8.2.2 RQ2 How can be populist's political engagement analysed by considering their discursive practices online?

To analyse populist supporters' political engagement online in a manner that takes into account their communicative practices, I used the dimension of *social involvement*. In this way, *social involvement* was defined as communicative practices on the Internet. There were three different approaches towards the Internet's democratic capabilities: one suggested that the Internet enabled the creation of a political dialogue and public sphere; the second perspective considered the Internet's ability to present one's political views without the need to engage in discussion to reach a common ground or to have a reasonable discussion; and the third view sees people as using technological affordances to create cyber-communities of shared values. These perspectives, according to Dahlberg (2001c), present different models of democracy: *communitarian*, *liberal individualist* and *deliberative*. Based on this conceptualisation, Freelon (2010) developed measurable indicators of each model, suggesting that these models co-exist in an online environment, rather than favouring one model over another. Therefore, populists' online engagement can be analysed from a perspective of *social involvement* where showing an interest can take the form of discussing politics online through self-expressivity (*liberal individualist*), building a community (*communitarian*), or engaging in political dialogue (*deliberation*). These dimensions are not exclusive. In fact, this conceptualisation enables us to account for discursive practices that are considered as being important in a healthy functioning democracy. Placing online political talk in the typology of online political participation can help us to build an understanding of how it can impact other modes of political participation (e.g. voting in elections).

8.3 Empirical considerations

8.3.1 RQ3 How do populist supporters of K15 communicate online based on the three modes of democratic communication?

Two Facebook Pages were analysed to answer this question*, Informator Kukiz'15* and *Kukiz'15*. *Informator Kukiz'15* is an informal Page which had 4,563 likes at the time of analysis, while *Kukiz'15* is an official Page with 296,000 likes. The analysis considered comments under posts made between November 2017 and November 2018. Qualitative content analysis has been

conducted with reference to the three-modes of democratic communication developed by Freelon (2010). For each mode of democratic communications, the following indicators were selected based on a pilot analysis:

- **The deliberative mode of democratic communication:** inter-ideological responses, inter-ideological questioning, critical opinion and common ground;
- **The communitarian mode of democratic communication:** intra-ideological responses, intra-ideological questioning, community identification, mobilisation;
- **The liberal individualist mode of democratic communication:** flaming, monologue, personal revelation, personal showcase.

The qualitative content analysis was highly sensitive to the context in which messages were posted (in relation to the main post and to other people commenting under posts). Descriptive statistics were also used to spot patterns in the data. Analysis revealed that the discussions of populist supporters on Facebook Pages did indeed presents characteristics from each mode of democratic communication. This finding is consistent with Dahlberg's (2001c) theoretical conceptualisation of different spheres co-existing in an online discussion space. The research into online political discussion was dominated by deliberative theory, where researchers were assessing distinctive technological designs. However, as Freelon (2010: 1174) saw, focusing solely on an investigation of deliberative features could lead to omitting other forms of political expression. While there were features from each mode of democratic communication present, *the communitarian* mode of democratic communication was dominant when looking at the combined results from both Pages. The presumptions about the way populist supporters might communicate suggested that they would be using mainly a *communitaria*n mode in their discussion in order to create a sense of belonging to the community. Although the *communitarian* mode of democratic communication was a major category, it cannot be said that populist supporters of K15 form a community of shared values based on the analysis of their comments posted on these two Facebook Pages. First of all, other forms of political communication co-exist (*deliberative* and *liberal individualist*). Secondly, one element of the *communitarian* feature was mainly present in their comments – *the intra-ideological response* – which indicated agreement between the author of the post and the commenter, or the commenter and the other commenters. Although there were some indications that populist supporters create an identity by attacking those who do not belong to the group of 'pure people', their ideological similarities were more reminiscent of conversational talk, where some solutions were proposed by people engaged in the discussion.

Communication studies are known for using quantitative content analysis; it is therefore not surprising that communication studies adopted a method of content analysis while analysing online discussion spaces. While these studies help us to understand communicative dynamics in different contexts, restricted by the method, they were only looking at differences horizontally (distinctions between parties or platforms). A qualitative content analysis allowed the research to spot differences in the mode of democratic communication vertically (on the same platform, for the same political group). What has been observed is that *Kukiz'15,* the official party Page, attracts people who do not necessarily support the party. However, they do not engage in a rational-critical debate, but instead choose to attack other people whose views are not the same as theirs. This behaviour also encourages other people to use uncivil language.

Additionally, as this Page attracts more people who decide to comment under posts or other people's comments, sometimes they become uncertain about where they should write their response. The posts that are placed where they do not belong were classified as *a monologue*, a feature of the *liberal individualist* mode of democratic communication. On *Informator Kukiz'15*, however, there were more commenters interacting with the author of the post, engaging a casual talk, where ideological differences could not be seen.

The communication of populist supporters on these two Pages also revealed interesting information about K15. First of all, the party leader, Pawel Kukiz, animates supporters based on the main postulate to fight the current political system where it is expected that politicians obey their party leader. Pawel Kukiz's solution was to introduce single-seat constituencies. By gathering people around this vision, he also congregated people with different views about other topics. This was visible in supporter communication where there was disagreement about matters such as how K15 should be financed or which position K15 should hold about vaccinations. The idea that politicians should be supporting the ideas that they believe in, rather than agree with the party leader seems to be problematic, especially as K15's supporters present distinct views about certain topics. Nonetheless, there is an agreement in one regard – dissatisfaction with the opposition parties, Jewish people and Germans. On *Kukiz'15*, it was observed that historical events from the Soviet era still play a vital role. Until 2001, the political scene was divided into two blocks: those who supported the pro-Communist regime and those who were willing to accept a pro-democratic system. Thirty-one years after the fall of Communism in Poland, the topic of the Soviet Union's influence is still visible in political discussion. However, the discussion does not consider which regime should be adopted by Poland, but how people who were working for the Soviet Union should be treated, especially in terms of the amount paid for their pensions.

A further factor that might be worth considering, especially for those who support the *deliberative* mode of democratic communication, is that people who are engaged in the comment section do not seem to have the skills to conduct a reasonable discussion. Proponents of the *deliberative* model of democratic communication were looking for design features that might fulfil the promise of the ideal of political talk. Nonetheless, the discussion of these supporters showed that they might lack basic digital skills (such as posting under the right comment), or they do not have knowledge of how to conduct a discussion where there are conflicting views. To improve the quality of citizens' debate, it might be needed to further evaluate their digital literacy skills such as critical thinking, the ability to spot untrue information and an ability to discuss political issues civilly, without attacking opponents whose views might be different.

One could argue that sometimes attacking opponents might be a deliberative technique rather than indicating a lack of certain skills. Such a strategy can be observed in political debates where undermining an opponent is considered as winning an argument, especially in the Polish context. This might lead to citizens' belief that this is the only way of showing disagreement and discussing politics with people whose views are different. Nonetheless, unconscious or conscious behaviour might still indicate a lack of empathy skills and compassion, as well as a lack of awareness of the impact of uncivil language and attacks, which generally does not lead to reaching common ground or convincing the other side to reconsider their views. However, it must be pointed out that educating citizens might not be enough, as some changes would need to happen at the level of political discussion as presented in the media, newspapers, and other communication channels. Additionally, some other factors would need to be investigated to understand people's online political communication.

8.3.2 RQ4 Are the Facebook Pages supporting K15 homogenous?

The findings of Study One indicated that there can be differences in the modes of communication on the same platform for the same political party. This phenomenon was further investigated by classifying all Facebook Pages supporting K15 to see their roles and assess if all Pages created in support of K15 are uniform. The sub-questions formulated were:

- What are the types of Facebook Pages supporting K15?
- What are the roles of Pages supporting K15 based on their description in the "About" tab?
- What are the roles of Pages supporting K15 based on the posts?
- How are the analysed Pages (*Kukiz'15* and *Informator Kukiz'15*) positioned within the broader environment of Pages created in support of *Kukiz'15*? Are there any differences between the attributes of *Kukiz'15* and *Informator Kukiz'15*?

A Facebook search identified one hundred and sixty-six Pages. The following metrics were recorded: *Facebook address*, *Facebook name*, *Operating area*, *Created by* (Management type), *Stated Role and Observed Roles*. The perceived role of a Page was based on the description provided in the "About" section. The actual role of the Page and Operating area were based on scanning the most recent twenty posts. The qualitative content analysis (with the acceptance of quantitative data) was conducted by applying both inductive and deductive strategies.

Five types of Facebook Pages were discovered: *Branch K15*, *Personal Pages*, *Private initiative*, *Official Pages* and *Young Club*. In the relation of Stated Roles, most of the Pages (37.35%) did not include any information in their description (*not stated*), or they suggested that were created to promote themselves (*self-promotion* - 16.87%) or were created in support of K15 in a specific region (*supporters of K15 local* -12.65%). For the Observed Roles of Pages, the most significant categories were Pages presenting only promotional material (*promoting K15* - 43.98%), or that had a mixture of informational with promotional content (*informational/promotional* - 16.27%), or Pages that no longer support K15 (*Anti-K15* -16.27%).

Homogeneity of Facebook Pages

The homogeneity of Facebook Pages identified with K15 was examined on two different levels. The first level looked at the types of Facebook Pages. It has been noted that even though there are two main clusters of Pages of the same type: *Personal Pages* and *Branch K15*, unlike other Pages they have different subtypes. *Personal Pages* have a personal name in their description and were created initially in support of K15. These types of Pages could be divided into the following sub-categories: *Politicians (66%)*, *Activists* (2%) *Candidates (32%)* based on their association with K15. Even though most of the *Personal Pages* are Pages created by *Politicians*, 41% of these Pages are associated with politicians that had left K15. *Branches of K15* are types of Pages that had a region or city in their name. They also had sub-categories: *General* (only a city/region/district name in the Page name), *Candidate* (city/region/district name in the Page plus managed by a candidate), *Young Club* (city/region/district name in the Page plus managed by young club), *Private initiative* (city/region/district name in the Page and it is a private initiative), *Activist* (city/region/district name in the Page plus managed by a candidate). The most meaningful subcategory for *Branch K15* were Pages that had only city/region or district name in the Page description (*General* – 67%).

Adding other metrics such as *Operating area* and *Created by* enabled me to see further variations. *Operating area* took into consideration the last 20 posts to examine if the author of the page refers to local matters/activities (*Regional)* or posts are not specific to any location (*National*). *Created by* was assessed by looking at the Page description and email addresses to determine if

the Page is a *bottom-up* or *top-down* activity. Even though *Branch K15* Pages were created in a specific region, their posts showed that they also operate on a national level (67%). Only 12% of all *Personal Pages* operated on a regional level. In relation to '*Created by'* some *Personal Page*s were indicated as unofficial activity (*bottom-up* - 14%*)* while this number was higher for *Branch K15 - 56%*. From this level of analysis, it was concluded that Facebook Pages are not homogeneous. Although there are two main clusters of *Branch K15* and *Personal Pages*, there are variations within them in terms of their *Operating area* and whether they were created as a bottom-up or top-down initiative. Additionally, there were types within *Personal Pages* that were created by people who no longer associate with the party.

The second level of the analysis looked at *Observed Roles*. *Stated Roles* were not taken into the analysis as most of Pages did not include any description. Several themes were discovered for the *Observed Roles*, and they showed that Pages supporting K15 mostly post promotional material that can be combined with entertainment and informational posts or self-promotion. The Pages have also changed their role, and despite their name, they no longer support K15. Individuals, admins of Pages decided to leave the party after Pawel Kukiz chose to make a coalition. Pawel Kukiz's rhetoric against the ruling government and other parties worked against him when he decided to make a coalition with another party to gain seats in the Sejm. On this level of analysis, it cannot be also said that Pages are uniform. Even though their roles based on the observation of posts present mostly promotional material combined with information or entertainment, they are not the same. What is more, although several Pages are managed by the same person, they might have variations in how they are run. These small dissimilarities might influence the type of discussion. Supporters of K15 encouraged by the result of the presidential election in 2015, where Pawel Kukiz gained 20% of votes, set up an electoral committee. As a way of raising awareness of K15, they extensively used social media. Nonetheless, it does not look as if there was a general strategy imposed by K15 for how these Pages should be run.

Differences in analysed Pages: *Kukiz'15* and *Informator Kukiz'15*

Kukiz'15 and *Informator Kukiz'15* presented differences when their modes of communication were compared. The classification of Facebook Pages showed that these two Pages are unique cases. *Kukiz'15* is the only Page that was identified as an *Official Page* while *Informator Kukiz'15* is a *Private initiative* Page that no longer shows support towards K15. Although there were other Pages that no longer support K15, *Informator Kukiz'15* is the only Page that expressed dissatisfaction with one representative and their position on vaccination as a reason to not support K15. Considering that all other *Anti-K15* Pages turned against K15 after Pawel Kukiz decided to team up with another party, *Informator Kukiz'15* is an interesting example.

Kukiz'15 did not specify any role in their Page description, but their posts demonstrated an informational purpose, presenting political news and comments about political issues and matters. The informative nature of posts should potentially lead to more deliberative discussion on the Page. However, the analysis of comments revealed that on *Kukiz'15* all modes of democratic communication are visible with a dominance of *liberal individualist* characteristics. Among other things, the way people interact with each other might have a greater impact on which mode of democratic communication is observed. Additionally, this Page attracted people who disagree with K15 and rather than engaging in the discussion, they decided to attack the supporters of K15.

In relation to *Informator Kukiz'15,* it is difficult to draw any connections, as the Page has changed its role since the first study (from supporting K15 to not supporting). However, this study shed some light on the fluidity of Facebook Pages. It would be interesting to conduct a longitudinal analysis that accounts for role changes of Pages to discover whether these changes are reflected in the mode of democratic communication.

8.4 Summary

This study investigated the demand-side of populism online and its communicative practices by placing them in a wider typology of online political participation, based on the example of supporters of a populist movement in Poland, K15. The demand-side of populism has been overlooked by scholars. The same approach has been observed in studies investigating populism on social media. While attention has been paid mainly to the charismatic leaders or characteristics of people supporting populist parties, the Internet's ability to enable people to express themselves and group with like-minded people has been largely ignored.

This thesis examined the social involvement of the populist movement K15 in Poland. K15 is a relatively new movement that attracted mainly young people in Poland. While many countries across the globe have seen an increase in support for populist parties, Poland is one of the countries where a populist party is in power. According to Norris & Inglehart (2017), older populations tend to support populist, xenophobic parties as a way of protecting or presenting different values in comparison to the young generation. K15 is an interesting example, as people who support them are mostly aged between 18–34. In addition to this, they utilised social media tools to promote K15 ideas and organised themselves online in an interesting way.

The discursive practices were conceptualised as *social involvement* where people are showing an interest in politics, but they can quickly change their online involvement by enhancing a community (*civic engagement*) or directly influencing the government (*political participation*). In

this way, I view online political acts as a non-linear process where people can easily switch their intention, from paying attention to politics to directly influencing political outcomes.

The way that citizens talk about politics has been a concern of communication scholars for many decades. Nonetheless, these studies failed to account for discursive practices as a legitimate form of *political participation* by referring mainly to the fact that citizens' communication is essential for democracy. At the same time, another area of research tried to define new activities enabled by the Internet, including the possibility for expressing oneself online. For some inquiries, online expressive political forms are meaningful acts that do not count towards mobilisation or *political participation*; the other studies have looked at whether online political acts are a new form of *political participation* or whether they are replacing conventional ways of participating in politics. These perspectives focused on how to define or categorise online actions.

Three approaches towards communication capabilities enabled by the Internet emerged, which Dahlberg (2001a) divided into three visions: *liberal individualism* (being interested in expressing views without engaging in a rational discussion), *communitarian* (building a community of shared values) and *deliberative* (critical-rational debate in order to reach a common ground). As Freelon (2010) noticed, scholars tended to place the most focus on *deliberation*. What is more, Freelon (2010) argued that rather than adopting one or another vision of the democratic potential of the Internet, all these perspectives co-exist in an online environment. The author also provided indicative measures for each position (Freelon, 2015). To date, three studies have investigated online comments sections based on the three modes of democratic communication: Freelon (2015) analysed Twitter and the news comments; Yan *et al.* (2018) applied the conceptualisation developed by Freelon (2015) to non-political spaces (Pakistan and Indian cricket forums); and the most recent study conducted by Valera-Ordaz (2019) looked at the comments on the Facebook Pages of four Spanish political parties. All these studies concluded that different modes of communication could indeed be present in the same comments sections. Concerning specific findings, Freelon (2015) observed more communitarian characteristics on Twitter while on news comments sections, a mixture of *liberal* and *deliberative* features were found. Yan *et al.* (2018) found that features of distinct spheres might mingle with the most dominant one in non-political spaces. Valera-Ordaz (2019) noticed that right-wing political parties in Spain present more features of *liberal individualism* while left-wing parties present more *communitarian* features. All these studies adopted a method of content analysis but used different operationalisations of concepts.

The *social involvement* of K15 supporters was analysed by looking at the comments section on two Facebook Pages. I applied the three modes of democratic communication framework

developed by Freelon (2010) and used a method of qualitative content analysis. Each comment was analysed in the context of the posts and comments underneath it. This approach helped to discover that even though *attacking the others* is considered as an element of the *liberal individualist* mode of democratic communication*,* in populist communication it seems more to form an element of their group identity. Comments that were inflammatory in nature, but where there was agreement between the author of the post and the other commenters, were therefore classified as a feature of the *communitarian* mode of democratic communication. It was also found that there are differences in the dominant mode of democratic communication between analysed Pages. Considering that these Pages support populist parties, it was expected that *communitarian* features would be dominant. While *communitarian* elements were mainly visible in the discussion on *Informator Kukiz'15*, this was not true for *Kukiz'15*. On *Kukiz'15*, more *liberal individualist* features were observed. *Kukiz'15* seemed to attract more people who do not support the party but visited the Page to question the party's actions in an accusatory way. The research that applied the three modes of democratic communication looked at factors that might influence the mode of democratic communication such as ideological stance and technological architecture. My thesis claims that even when the same technological design is present and people are grouped around the same issue or party, there will still be differences in the mode of democratic communication, as online spaces are not uniform and they attract different users and online behaviours. The classification of Facebook Pages that were created for K15 showed that these Pages are not homogenous. There are variations in the way they are managed and by whom. Additionally, these Pages can easily change their roles. This study also revealed the uniqueness of two previously analysed Pages – *Kukiz'15 and Informator Kukiz'15*. *Kukiz'15* was the only Page classified as an *Official Page*, while *Informator Kukiz'15* changed its role from when it was last observed, and it no longer supports K15, as of the time of writing.

8.5 Recommendations

New approach towards studying online political discussion

Regarding online political discussion, *deliberation* has been studied for some time by political communication scholars using mainly a content analysis method. The limited number of studies to date that have applied the three modes of democratic communication to online political talk also adopted a quantitative analysis method. This enabled generalisation and comparison of differences in modes of communication between different parties or online service. Nonetheless, in-depth analysis of comments sections showed differences in communication mode when comparing two groups supporting the same political formation on the same online platform (Study One). One explanation was that the analysed online platform is not homogenous and the

findings from Study Two showed that there are differences between Pages. It would be interesting to see if the same observations occur for different political groups on the same or another platform.

Additionally, I learnt that the two analysed Facebook Pages presented unique cases, where one Page (*Kukiz'15*) was the only Page classified as *Offici*al, and the other Page (*Informator Kukiz'15*) no longer supports K15. Although this finding did not explain fully why distinct dominant modes were observed on these two Pages, combined with the results from Study One, it shed some light on the fact that these Pages might attract different audiences and therefore behaviour. For example, Study One observed that on *Kukiz'15,* attacking-style comments encouraged other users to respond in the same way, while on *Informator Kukiz'15* there was more agreement between commenters, and very often the author of the post. Considering that both Pages have the same technological design, the observed differences suggest that online services are not used consistently by users. More studies could further test this argument by accounting for other factors, such as the number of followers, the tone and language of a post, and its impact on a discussion.

The impact of online talk on other forms of political engagement

The democratic potential of the Internet has been analysed from two perspectives: deliberative and participatory democracy. The deliberative theory states that citizens should engage in rational, critical debate about political matters to reach common ground and suggest solutions. Participatory theory studies the political engagement of citizens in order to influence the decisions of policymakers. Both viewpoints consider political participation as a crucial component in a healthy functioning representative democracy. However, these two theories were focused on measuring separate aspects. Deliberative democrats looked at the quality of online discussion while participatory democrats considered the effects of online acts on political outcomes (such as voting in an election). Additionally, with the development of new tools and methods of political engagement, political participation has become a very contested term. By redefining political participation and placing communicative acts in the typology of online political participation, it was possible in this thesis to combine assumptions and theories from both participatory and deliberative democracy. This research, although focused mainly on communicative online practices, tried to show that it is possible to make richer inferences of how online discussion contributes to democracy by distinguishing different forms of political participation. Different types of online communication can influence differently other forms of online/offline political participation. This is something that hopefully other researchers are going to explore.

Comparison with other political formations/movements

This thesis examined the demand-side of populism by focusing on the communicative practices of populist supporters of K15. It would be interesting to see if there are differences in the ways supporters of other political parties or formations communicate online compared to K15 supporters. For example, a significant number of Facebook Pages have been created in support of the United Kingdom Independence Party (UKIP). Similar to K15, these Pages support UKIP in different regions/cities in the UK (e.g. Norwich, Newbury, Cannock). There also might be other parties whose ideology is widely disseminated by their supporters online.

Increasing the quality of discussion by teaching citizens how to conduct debates about political topics

During the analysis of comments on Facebook Pages, it was observed that commenters lack digital literacy skills. These skills refer mainly to the ability to critically evaluate information and being able to use digital tools in a way that they were designed (for example, commenting under the correct discussion). Although the quality of posts and comments was not a subject of the analysis, it was noted that the users did not evaluate sources or spot biases. This is an issue, especially when people are discussing political matters but the presented view in the main post under which they are commenting is not recognized by them as being incorrect or biased. The problem not only lies in people's skills at judging the credibility of the source but also in their competency to conduct a discussion and be open to other people's views. Even if there are people who hold different views, they might not present these views in a way that encourages reasonable discussion, or other people involved in the discussion might not see a reason to understand the perspectives of those whose values differ from their own. To see an increase in deliberative features of communication, there is a need to consider how logical discussion, excluded from the commenter's emotions and own interests/identities, can be conducted. However, a rational-critical debate is only possible when people are able to recognise credible sources of information. It might be worth considering teaching those skills to citizens from an early age. The negative consequences of people believing misleading information has recently been seen during the COVID-19 pandemic. The restrictions imposed by many governments, and the difficult position many people found themselves in, led some to believe in conspiracy theories. Non-compliance with regulations can put other vulnerable members of society at risk and contribute to the spread of the virus. While there are more studies testing tools to detect misinformation and fake news online from a technical standpoint, the interconnected relationship between technology and the people who are using it must be not forgotten. Solely technological solutions might improve the situation, but they will not tackle the problem itself.

Hate speech and the regulatory environment in Poland

According to the European Commission (2016), hate speech is defined as "the public incitement to violence or hatred on the basis of certain characteristics, including race, colour, religion, descent and national or ethnic origin". The discussions on both Pages analysed for this thesis showed that populist supporters tend to attack Jewish people and other political opponents in a manner that is potentially harmful. In some European countries, hate speech is regulated, and there are laws prohibiting speech that is potentially an infringement on the human right to equality and dignity. However, in Poland, there is no such law. On the one hand, the lack of appropriate legislation can explain why such language is visible on Facebook Pages; on the other hand, information technology companies (including Facebook) have been obliged to deal with hate speech by signing the EU hate speech Code of Conduct in 2016. The visibility of hate comments on open online spaces poses the question of whether there should be an appropriate intervention from Facebook or the government. This topic is further complicated by the fact that the ruling government does not see a reason to regulate hateful conduct, and members of its party very often use uncivil language towards minority groups themselves. In 2019, Pawel Adamowicz, the mayor of Gdansk was assassinated. Pawel Adamowicz was known for his support towards minority groups and disapproval of PiS. Despite this tragic event, the ruling party did not decide to take any steps to stop the spread of hate speech. Hence, the use of language that might harm others might soon become socially acceptable in Poland. We need to make sure that hate speech is not allowed by engaging more with technological companies as well as by influencing governments. It might also be necessary to educate society to distinguish between hate speech and freedom of speech and to understand its differences.

Access to Facebook data

The Cambridge Analytica scandal led Facebook to change access to its API, forbidding the collection of data through automated means. This resulted in the inability to collect data from Facebook on a larger scale. While qualitative research can be still conducted by manually collecting data or by recruiting participants through Facebook, the quantitative methods that comply with Facebook's terms of service became very limited. Although Facebook provides a research partnership and releases some data for analysis, the decision regarding which features are essential to study is solely in the hands of the company. Facebook has around 1.6 billion daily active users where social interactions are happening every day, and online and offline domains are blurring. Considering Facebook's popularity and the strong integration of Facebook into everyday life, Facebook itself makes a worthy topic for study. However, the inability to use other methods might lead to a limited understanding of analysed space. For example, this thesis

would benefit from computer-automated methods to enable a comprehensive analysis of various social networks. Researchers and academics need to take an active role in pursuing technological companies to gain access to their data while protecting users' privacy. It might also be necessary to develop good ethical standards within the academic community for studying Facebook.

Appendix A Ethics Application Form (45355.A3)

A.1 Ethics Application Form for SECONDARY DATA ANALYSIS

Please consult the guidance at the end of this form before completing and submitting your application.

1. Name(s): Justyna Lisinska

2. Current Position: PhD Candidate

3. Contact Details: 58/2011

Division: Politics and International Relations

4. Is your research being conducted as part of an education qualification?

Yes x☐ **No** ☐

5. If Yes, please give the name of your supervisor:

Will Jennings, David Millard

6. Title of your research project / study:

Populist supporters of Kukiz'15 and their engagement.

7. Briefly describe the rationale, aims, design and research questions of your research

Please indicate clearly whether you are applying for ethics approval for a specific piece of research, or for overarching ethics approval to use certain datasets for a range of research activities. Approval for the latter will only cover the datasets specified here, for a maximum of 3 years and then subject to renewal.

The aim of the study is to understand the political engagement of populist supporters through the lenses of their communicative practices. The main research question for this study is **"How do populist supporters engage online?"**. Based on a literature review, a number of subsidiary questions have been defined:

1. How do populist supporters communicate online? What type of democratic communications do populist supporters present on Facebook? Is there any dominant mode of democratic communication?

2. How does users' behaviour on specific platforms and technological features influence certain modes of democratic communication?

3. What are the roles of Facebook Pages supporting Kukiz'15?

The data collected from Facebook Pages will also help the further analysis by comparing the results.

Kukiz'15 is a civic movement in Poland with populist undertones. There is a significant number of people who support this movement on social media by creating Facebook Pages or contributing to the discussion.

8. Describe the data you wish to analyse

Please give details of the title of the dataset, nature of data subjects (e.g. individuals or organisations), thematic focus and country/countries covered. Indicate whether the data are qualitative or quantitative, survey data, administrative data or other types of data. Identify the source from where you will be obtaining the data (including a web address where appropriate).

The first phase of study will examine social media posts and responses to those posts on Facebook Pages. Only Facebook Pages with a membership over 1,000 and active usage (by scanning a front page of how many posts is posted daily) will be utilized. The posts made by the Page admin which do not have any comments will be excluded from the analysis. The posts, comments and images will be subjected to the qualitative text analysis. There are two approaches to the data collection: first observation and making notes of comments in order to allocate them to the correct category and in the future NVivo might be utilised for the data capture and the data analysis (it enables data to be obtained in a quicker way and it is less time consuming). The study will consider supporters of Kukiz'15 in Poland and will cover a period of one year (one year back from the date of obtaining an ethical approval, e.g. ethics approved on 1/11/2018 then the period of analysis 2/11/2017 – 2/11/2018).

The Facebook Pages are open spaces where everyone is able to view/read posts.

The second phase of study will review all Facebook Pages that were created in support of Kukiz'15 in order to find out what role they have and how two previously analysed Pages are situated based on this analysis.

The design

Using a Facebook search engine, the search of Pages that support Kukiz'15 will be conducted. The snowball sampling will be utilised. The initial search will apply key words such: Kukiz 15, Pawel Kukiz, Kukiz, Kukizowcy, Jakubiak to get lists of pages as a starting set for the snowball process. The description of Page, 'About', as well as, the front Page first week of activity will be scanned in order to understand the role of Pages. This process will be done in an inductive way in order to be able to classify Pages supporting Kukiz'15 (e.g. are these Pages local or national? What these Pages are trying to achieve?)

The research questions

What are the roles of Facebook Pages that support Kukiz'15?

9. What are the terms and conditions around the use of the data? Did data subjects give consent for their data to be re-used? If not, on what basis is re-use of the data justified?

Please state what (if any) conditions the data archive imposes (e.g. registration, signing of confidentiality agreement, specific training etc.). In many cases the data controller will have given explicit permission for data re-use. Please explain how you justify the use of data if approval and consents for the original data collection and re-use are not in place. This may be the case where, for example, the original data collection predated requirements for ethics review or occurred in a jurisdiction where explicit consent and approval are not required.

Data is obtained from pages on the social media platform Facebook that are publicly available.

1. **For the first phase of study:**

Data collected by using NVivo's plug-in: NVivo uses the Facebook API, hence NVivo downloads data only allowed by Facebook.

Data collected by the researcher: The data will be collected based on observation. The researcher will have a spreadsheet with the categories of communicative democratic practices. In order to keep track of observed posts, after finishing the allocation of comments to the specific categories, the researcher will make a note of the last observed post (time and date when the post was made and a link to the post). This approach will enable the researcher to return to the last-visited post with comments and continue further observation.

All participants on Facebook Fan pages have accepted Facebook policies agreeing that the data is public and allowing it to be used by third parties, see https://www.facebook.com/legal/terms.

Additionally, the Facebook policies indicate:

'Posts on Facebook Pages or public groups: *Facebook Pages and public groups are public spaces. Anyone who can see the Page or group can see your post or comment. Generally, when you post or comment on a Page or to a public group, a story can be published in News Feed as well as other places on or off Facebook.*

Remember that public information can:

- *Be associated with you, even off Facebook*
- *Show up when someone does a search on Facebook or on another search engine*
- *Be accessible to Facebook-integrated games, applications and websites you and your friends use*
- *Be accessible to anyone who uses our APIs, such as our Graph API"*

https://www.facebook.com/full_data_use_policy

On Q9, it is not clear why you are not trying to get permission from the Facebook page owners and why you do not post on the page an explanation of what you are doing, giving the people the option of having their posts deleted

Through its policies and API, Facebook has given rights for re-use of the data, and this study will not release or re-publish any identifying data collected via NVivo or collected through observation. Facebook Pages differ from Facebook Groups where an admin's approval is required for the accessing and download of data. If the data to be used in this study were private and sensitive (i.e. not available on public pages), then the researcher would seek consent from the gatekeeper of the community (the site admin) and informed consent would be required if the content of pages were to be republished. However, the data on Facebook Pages is public and visible to everyone and the researcher has no intention of re-publishing the data. The analysis will use aggregate data, coded in NVivo (or manually) and qualitative analysis of content will be presented. For the purpose of criticism, some of comments posted on Facebook Pages might be quoted in the research. Online posts on Facebook Pages are public, due to the nature of the platform, and as such there is no reasonable expectation of privacy on behalf of the social media user. On Facebook Pages, people express their opinions as public statements that can be viewed by any of the X million users of Facebook worldwide.

While the quotations to be used in the research may be traced back to the person who originally

posted it, this attribution can be made by anyone. For example, media commonly refer to posts by individuals in their reporting (e.g. Georgia ex-leader Saakashvili). Furthermore, the study will not use quotes that might cause some harm or distress and put individuals at risk (e.g. hate speech), nor will it disclose any personal information included in posts (e.g. names, other people's names, places, personal details). Any personal information will be removed, and the text used will be limited to non-sensitive topics.

2. **For the second phase of study:**

The same Facebook policies apply, and Facebook Pages will be taken into consideration in order to classify them. Facebook Pages are public and their description and activities everyone is able to view, re-share and re-use.

10. Do you intend to use personal data (https://ico.org.uk/media/1549/determining_what_is_personal_data_quick_reference_guide.pdf) or sensitive personal data (http://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/1998/29/section/2) as defined by the Data Protection Act (even if the data are publicly available)?

Yes x☐ **No** ☐

If YES, please specify what personal data will be included and why.

1. For the first phase of study:

Q10 and Q13 - it would seem more realistic to work on the assumption that you are collecting personal data (images, people naming others etc) and thus work out how to mitigate the risks.

Many thanks for your submissions. You state in your application that you will be using the NVivo software to scrape Facebook data. Please explain how this works. If you are accessing the data through the software please provide details of the data you will access to.

If you are look at the Facebook pages directly then you cannot claim anonymity; you will be able to see the poster's information. If the software somehow strips this personal data you should provide details.

NVivo downloads data from Facebook Pages including the ID of posts, the content of posts, the name of the Facebook Page, posted images, links to the posts, comments made under the post, the ID of comments, the content of comments, comment likes, the time and date when posts and comments were made, Page likes, and the Page category. Nvivo also captures comments

mentioning other people's names. As noted, this is publicly available content. Any extracted data will be stored securely and will not be republished.

For the data collected through observation, the post content (or link to it if there is an image or video attached) and the comments will be recorded. The comment id will be allocated to each comment recorded to see if there are comments posted by same users. The researcher will also make some notes to see how many times posts or particular comments were liked.

2. For the second phase of study:

No personal data is going to be collected.

11. Do you intend to link two or more datasets?

Data linkage refers to merging of information from two or more sources of data to consolidate facts concerning an individual or an event that are not available in any separate record. Please note that for the purposes of research ethics we are not interested in the merging of different waves of a particular survey, or the merging of data from different countries for the same survey.

Yes ☐ **No** x☐

If YES, please give details of which datasets will be linked and for what purposes.

12. How will you store and manage the data <u>before</u> and <u>during</u> the analysis? What will happen with the data <u>at the end of</u> the project?

Please consult the University of Southampton's Research Data Management Policy (http://library.soton.ac.uk/researchdata/storage and http://www.calendar.soton.ac.uk/sectionIV/research-data-management.html), and indicate how you will abide by it.

Q12 - the data should only be held on the research data drive 0 please refer to ISolutions about data security before you start any research.

All data will be securely stored on a password-protected university laptop. All analysis of the data will be conducted by the researcher (Jonak) and the data would not be analysed in public spaces (i.e. the data will be analysed in the postgraduate research room or at home). All discussion of the data with supervisors will be conducted in private. The data will be processed fairly because the sites' owners have made the data public and available for analysis. Accuracy of the data will be ensured by clearly structured and well-organised management of files. There will be also a

separate document with metadata. At the end of project, the data will be held in accordance with the University's policy on data retention.

13. How will you minimise the risk that data subjects (individuals or organisations) could be identified in your presentation of results?

Please consider whether disclosive ID codes have been used (e.g. date of birth) and whether it is theoretically possible to identify individuals by combining characteristics (e.g. widow in Hampshire with 14 children) or by combining datasets. How will you protect individuals' anonymity in your analysis and dissemination?

For the first phase of study:

Apologies for the late reply, but your submission raises a number of difficult questions which we have been discussing. In general terms, while it may be possible and legal to scrape the data into NVivo, there appear to be unrealistic assumptions about being able to de-identify the data.

There are number of steps that the researcher will take in order to minimise the risk that data subjects could be identified to make sure that individuals' anonymity is protected in my analysis and dissemination:

1. The data downloaded through NVivo will be securely stored on a University laptop, password protected. The data obtained through observation will be also stored on a University laptop, password-protected.

2. The analysis will not present any identifying information (e.g. names, images, content that could be linked to a specific individual)

3. The researcher will present paraphrased quotes in the publication and the aggregated data

4. The data downloaded through NVivo and collected through observation will not be published. For replication purposes, the research will provide details of the process of how the data was collected and analysed.

For the second phase of study:

1. **There is no risk in identification as the classification of Facebook Pages will be presented.**

14. What other ethical risks are raised by your research, and how do you intend to manage these?

Issues may arise due to the nature of the research you intend to undertake and/or the subject matter of the data. Examples include data or analysis that are culturally or socially sensitive; data relating to criminal activity, including terrorism, and security sensitive issues.

There is not further risk raised by the research.

15. Please outline any other information that you feel may be relevant to this submission.

For example, will you be using the services or facilities of ONS, ADRN, or HSCIC and/or are you obtaining ethical review from NRES (through IRAS) or other? Please confirm whether the data being used are already in the public domain.

n/a

16. Please indicate if you, your supervisor or a member of the study team/research group are a data controller and/or data processor in relation to the data you intend to use as defined by the Data Protection Act, and confirm that you/they understand your/their respective responsibilities https://ico.org.uk/for-organisations/guide-to-data-protection/key-definitions/).

I will be the data processor while my supervisors will be the data controllers who decide in collaboration what needs to happen with the personal data.

Appendix B Coding scheme for Study One

B.1 Coding scheme to categorise discussion on Facebook Pages of populist supporters

Phases:

1. Scan the post and the comments below the post

2. If there is a link to the text – open it; if there is an image with text on it – read it

2. Think about the context in which the message was posted

3. Allocate to the certain category or review later

(In order to allocate the comment to a certain category, read the whole thread to understand the discussion)

Codes	Definition	Example	Coding Rule
Deliberative mode of democratic communication The deliberative mode of democratic communication expects people to have a reasonable discussion about certain matters, aimed at reaching a common ground.			
Critical opinion	The comment is presented in a critical way. It might be a form of counterargument.	e.g. You keep referring to the justifications as to why people tend to vote for populists. This is not wrong and not the point of discussion. By attacking the governing party, you	A comment can be classified as critique when: 1) The other opinion is being rejected; 2) It is a counter argument or a defence of own claims in light of other's claims.

		will not gain anything. You are just trolling here, sooner the Kukiz'15 will be gone if this behaviour continues.	The critique does not necessarily have to be in relation to the other person's view. For example, it might show a criticism toward party's actions. **Ad hominem**: A comment is not considered as a critique if a person attacks another person in order to invalidate his or her argument (see "Flaming").
Common ground	The comment refers to reaching a common ground when it presents the integration of one's own and other people's views.	e.g. I would suggest that apart from single-member constituencies, other measures would need to be introduced like Single Transferable Vote that I suggested previously.	The comment is not classified as reaching common ground if there is a reference to: 1) Personal interests, or 2) Other groups.

		e.g. We should introduce a deep reform of courts in Poland, therefore we suggest introducing "Judiciary of Peace".	The comment is also not clarified as common ground if there are no integrations of other's people views.
The inter-ideological response	The inter-ideological response occurs when a participant responds to the other message posted by another person whose views are different. This is the best explained as the exchange of views between people whose views are different.	e.g. I have different view on that, but I understand your point view.	The response must relate to the post or previous comment.
The inter-ideological questioning	The inter-ideological response occurs when a participant is asking a question in response to the other participant whose views are different, or is seeking some clarifications.	e.g. I am not quite sure, are you suggesting that populism is good for democracy?	

2. The liberal individualist mode of democratic communication The liberal individualist mode of democratic communication focuses on the idea that people are not interested in engaging in discussion and prefer to present their own views.			
Monologue	The message does not relate to the post or previous comments. The person is only interested in expressing their opinions and views. The comment can be also allocated to this category, if it is unclear if the person agrees with the posts or the comment	*e.g. The original post is about the reform of courts, but the person refers to the recent increase in VAT*. *e.g. The comment: Kukiz'15 did not vote for the increase in VAT.* The reply to the comment: *Have you seen their manifesto? So why did they vote for increasing VAT*? This reply does not address the previous comment where the answer was provided. e.g. the original post relates voting for Kukiz'15, the comment underneath: *and then volla for PiS!*. This	If the comment does not relate to the original post, but it starts a discussion where other people are commenting, the comments underneath should not be classified as monologue since commenters are engaging in the discussion and a new topic has emerged.

		comment is not critique as it is not clear whether the commenters is being critical to the post, it is not also clear if this is inter- or intra-ideological response.	
Personal revelation	The comment reveals personal experience/personal feelings.	e.g. *I don't agree with you. My personal experience says otherwise.* *After the last regulation, I won't be voting for you.* *I really support your party and believe in your programme.*	
Personal showcase	The message includes some links to personal sites, blog or any other content. The comment is more a form of advertisement.	e.g. Check out our website	

Flaming	The message is insulting and harassing other people's comments (or main post) especially when they present different views. It can also attack the group supporters in general. Responses to questions asked by people that showed some irony were also classified as *flaming*, as these comments did not fit into any other mode of democratic communication.	e.g. You are an idiot e.g. Supporters of Kukiz'15 are idiots. e.g. You cannot use Google search?	
3. The communitarian mode of democratic communication This model is based on the idea of community where people create a group of shared values and interest.			
Mobilisation	The message calls for some political action (either to contact a politician, sign a petition, vote, register in the election)	e.g. Let's vote for Kukiz'15	
Community identification	The comment presents the language of community, e.g. "we", "us"	e.g. We don't want to be governed by elites	

Intra-ideological response	The comment is made in relation to the previous comment (or it is a reply to the post) and it does not present different views or it is a form of expressing agreement with another person's view. It might also take the form of a conversation.		
Attacking others	The comment is made in relation to the post or/and to relation to other comments where there is no disagreement between the author of the post or other people commenting in order to attack other groups (e.g. political groups or political actors) using inflammatory language.	e.g. Politicians from PiS are idiots (this comment is made in relation to the post about PiS 's new policy)	The intention of the act matters, not what act is. The use of offensive language is not necessarily an attack. When intention causes psychological harm to the person or undermines a person then it should categorised as flaming.
Intra- ideological questioning	Questions are directed towards individuals who have similar views.		The whole thread (post and comments) needs to be scanned first in order to see if *intra- ideological questioning* occurs when the

			commenter seeks further explanation or clarification.

Appendix C Stated Roles of Facebook Pages

C.1 Stated Roles of Facebook Pages supporting K15 and their occurrence for each Facebook Type

Stated Roles	Occurrence	%
Anti-K15	**5**	**3.01%**
Previous K15: Politician	5	100.00%
Enhancing local community	**4**	**2.41%**
Branch K15: General	1	25.00%
Branch K15: Activist	2	50.00%
Previous K15 Politician	1	25.00%
Informational	**2**	**1.20%**
Branch K15: Candidate	1	50.00%
Branch K15: General	1	50.00%
Local contact with K15 Reps	**10**	**6.02%**
Branch K15: General	8	80.00%
Branch K15: Activist	2	20.00%
Not stated	**62**	**37.35%**
Young Club	1	1.61%
Branch K15: Candidate	7	11.29%
Branch K15: Private initiative	2	3.23%
Branch K15: General	31	50.00%
Branch K15: Activist	6	9.68%
Candidate	5	8.06%
Official Page	1	1.61%
Politician	6	9.68%
Private initiative	2	3.23%
Branch K15: Candidate	1	1.61%
Promoting K15: National	**11**	**6.63%**
Activist	2	18.18%
Branch K15: General	2	18.18%
Branch K15: Activist	3	27.27%
Politician	1	9.09%
Private initiative	3	27.27%
Promoting K15: local	**5**	**3.01%**
Branch K15: General	4	80.00%
Branch K15: Activist	1	20.00%
Self-promotion	**28**	**16.87%**
Activist	1	3.57%
Candidate	9	32.14%
Politician	11	39.29%
Previous K15: Candidate	1	3.57%
Previous K15: Politician	6	21.43%
Supporters of K15: National	**6**	**3.61%**

Branch K15: Candidate	1	16.67%
Branch K15: General	4	66.67%
Private initiative	1	16.67%
Supporters of K15: Local	**21**	**12.65%**
Young Club	1	4.76%
Branch K15: Candidate	3	14.29%
Branch K15: General	15	71.43%
Branch K15: Activist	1	4.76%
Private initiative	1	4.76%
Supporters of K15: Young Club	**3**	**1.81%**
Young Club	3	100.00%
Looking for members	**2**	**1.20%**
Young Club	1	50.00%
Branch K15: Candidate	1	50.00%
Voluntary activities for people	**1**	**0.60%**
Branch K15: Candidate	1	100.00%
Supporters of K15: Young Club/Local	**3**	**1.81%**
Young Club	3	100.00%
Issue-based	**3**	**1.81%**
Branch K15: Private initiative	1	33.33%
Previous K15 Politician	1	33.33%
Private initiative	1	33.33%
Grand Total	**166**	**100.00%**

Appendix D Observed Facebook Roles

D.1 Observed Facebook Roles and their occurrence for each Facebook Type

Observed Role	Count of Facebook Types	%
Promoting K15	**73**	**43.98%**
Activist	3	1.81%
Branch K15: Candidate	10	6.02%
Branch K15: Private initiative	1	0.60%
Branch K15: General	40	24.10%
Branch K15: Activist	5	3.01%
Candidate	3	1.81%
Politician	5	3.01%
Private initiative	3	1.81%
Young Club	3	1.80%
Informational/Promoting K15	**27**	**16.27%**
Branch K15: Candidate	2	1.20%
Branch K15: General	13	7.83%
Branch K15: Activist	8	4.82%
Candidate	1	0.60%
Young Club	3	1.81%
Anti-K15	**27**	**16.27%**
Young Club	2	1.20%
Branch K15: General	7	4.22%
Candidate	1	0.60%
Politician	2	1.20%
Previous K15: Candidate	1	0.60%
Previous K15: Politician	11	6.63%
Private initiative	3	1.81%
Informational	**14**	**8.43%**
Activist	1	0.60%
Branch K15: Candidate	1	0.60%
Branch K15: Private initiative	1	0.60%
Branch K15: General	3	1.81%
Branch K15: Activist	2	1.20%
Candidate	1	0.60%
Official Page	1	0.60%
Politician	2	1.20%
Previous K15: Politician	1	0.60%
Private initiative	1	0.60%
Self-promotion	**10**	**6.02%**
Candidate	5	3.01%
Politician	5	3.01%
Self-promotion/ Promoting K15	**6**	**3.61%**

Branch K15: Candidate	1	0.60%
Candidate	1	0.60%
Politician	4	2.41%
Promoting K15/Entertainment	**2**	**1.20%**
Branch K15: General	2	1.20%
Issue-based	**2**	**1.20%**
Branch K15: Private initiative	1	0.60%
Private initiative	1	0.60%
Issue based/Promoting K15	**1**	**0.60%**
Young Club	1	0.60%
Entertainment/Informational /Promoting K15	**1**	**0.60%**
Candidate	1	0.60%
Undefined	**1**	**0.60%**
Previous K15: Politician	1	0.60%
Informational/Self-promotion /Promoting K15	**1**	**0.60%**
Candidate	1	0.60%
Entertainment	**1**	**0.60%**
Branch K15: General	1	0.60%
Grand Total	**166**	**100.00%**

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