



## City Research Online

### City, University of London Institutional Repository

---

**Citation:** Flew, T. & Iosifidis, P. (2020). Populism, globalisation and social media. *International Communication Gazette*, 82(1), pp. 7-25. doi: 10.1177/1748048519880721

This is the accepted version of the paper.

This version of the publication may differ from the final published version.

---

**Permanent repository link:** <https://openaccess.city.ac.uk/id/eprint/23038/>

**Link to published version:** <https://doi.org/10.1177/1748048519880721>

**Copyright:** City Research Online aims to make research outputs of City, University of London available to a wider audience. Copyright and Moral Rights remain with the author(s) and/or copyright holders. URLs from City Research Online may be freely distributed and linked to.

**Reuse:** Copies of full items can be used for personal research or study, educational, or not-for-profit purposes without prior permission or charge. Provided that the authors, title and full bibliographic details are credited, a hyperlink and/or URL is given for the original metadata page and the content is not changed in any way.

## **Populism, Globalisation and Social Media**

**Terry Flew** Email: [t.flew@qut.edu.au](mailto:t.flew@qut.edu.au); ORCID iD: 0000-0003-4485-9338

**Petros Iosifidis** Email: [P.Iosifidis@city.ac.uk](mailto:P.Iosifidis@city.ac.uk); ORCID iD: 0000-0002-2096-219X

Published online in *International Communication Gazette*, October 2019

Actual Publication in *Issue 82, Number 1, February 2020*

### **Accepted Version:**

#### **Abstract**

Since the 2010s we witness the rise of populism and nationalism as part of a reaction against the global policies of the last 30 years in Western liberal democracies and beyond. This article seeks to unpack the rise of populism and nationalism and its relationship to social media. We begin by reviewing the relevant literature relating to the globalization paradigm and assesses how it has influenced communication studies. The rise of the globalization theory coincides with key advancements in the post-Cold War world, such as the growth of international trade, the global movement of people, the increase in the number of international laws and forums, economic liberalism, as well as the rise of the internet and global digital communication networks. But while

the global era denotes a cosmopolitan vision, economic insecurity, growing inequality in wealth distribution, as well as cultural change and shifts in traditional values and norms have brought about a broader concern that globalization is associated with a shift of power to transnational elites, whose impact upon common people's life and experiences are not fully acknowledged. Contemporary populism has been associated with nationalism, but also with the active use of social media platforms as alternative communication sites to mainstream media which is seen as having been captured by elite consensus politics. This complicates the relationship between truth and free expression in an age of social media, meaning that we need to account for the role of such platforms in the rise of populism and 'post-truth' politics, as well as its scope to advance the goals and strategies of progressive social movements.

## **Keywords**

Populism; nationalism; globalisation; social media; post-truth; fake news; un-celebrity.

## Introduction

Western democracies are in a state of flux. From the Brexit vote to the victory of Donald Trump in the US Presidential elections, through to the assortment of populist parties across the world, the spread of populist and associated nationalist movements suddenly seems unstoppable. There are populisms of both the political left (SYRIZA in Greece, Podemos in Spain, the Jeremy Corbyn movement in the UK) and the political right (Donald Trump in the USA, UKIP and The Brexit Party in the UK, France's National Front, the Swedish Democratic Party, the Party for Freedom in The Netherlands, the Alternative for Germany – AfD, Austria's Freedom Party, Vox in Spain, Pauline Hanson's One Nation in Australia, and others). Alongside this development, the nation-state is resurfacing as the primary vehicle of political life. Multinational institutions (EU, WTO) and multilateral trade treaties (NAFTA/TLC) are being challenged because they are seen by some as not serving the national interest. Nation-states have certainly seen their capacity to govern undermined by the globalisation process, leading some scholars to pursue the 'declining state' thesis, but some others claim that national governments still retain key policy instruments to achieve many economic and political objectives (Iosifidis, 2016).

But it is not merely Western democracies that harness nationalism, for traces of this trend can be found in the BRICS (Brazil, Russia, India, China, South Africa) and other developing countries. The rise in power of Jair Bolsonaro's Partido Liberal Social – PSL in Brazil is a recent example. In this article, we wish to debate the challenges that regional integration and globalisation face due to the rise of nationalism. There are numerous possible explanations for the rise of nationalism, populism, authoritarianism, and intolerance in opposition to cosmopolitanism. These

range from economic reasons (the global economic slowdown), inequality, psychological accounts (pessimism, nostalgia, and the belief that things were better in the past), support for ‘authoritarian personalities’ as political leaders, and immigration and discomfort with strangers, all of which lower support for globalisation.

The article also examines the role of new-media tools in spreading nationalistic as opposed to cosmopolitan views. In addition to opening up opportunities for dialogue and difference (see Iosifidis and Wheeler, 2016), new communication tools such as Twitter and Facebook can bypass the mainstream media’s frequently liberal-cosmopolitan stance and allow people to talk to each other directly, organise in groups and rallies and accelerate the spread of nationalism. Politicians like then UKIP leader Nigel Farage in the UK also take advantage of these new media to get through their nationalistic, anti-immigrant messages and capture popular fears that the nation may not survive an influx of foreigners (Iosifidis and Wheeler, 2018). Worse, social media has been associated with the spread of so-called ‘post-truth politics’ and ‘fake news’ and this article contributes to the discussion of combating disinformation and better profiling ‘real news’ outlets as an alternative to fake and chaotic information sources.

## **Rise and Fall of the Globalisation Paradigm**

The globalisation paradigm has been highly influential in communication studies, and the social sciences generally, since the 1990s. It is characteristically difficult to define, having both an empirical dimension, referring to identifiable trends in global interactions (trade and investment flows, internet connectivity, number of international government and non-government

organisations, multilateral agreements and international institutions etc.), and a normative dimension, that refers to transformations in culture, identity, political and symbolic power, and the relative strength of nationalist and cosmopolitan ideas. While it is true that “there is no single theory of globalisation that commands common assent” (Sparks, 2007: 126), there are sufficient commonalities among key theorists in the field that one can refer to a paradigm that stands in contrast to other approaches to international communications, such as modernisation theories and critical political economy (Sparks, 2007; AUTHORS).

There has been empirical evidence supporting globalisation claims, as the world has seen greater global economic integration over the last three decades. Foreign investment grew at three times the rate of global GDP between 1990s and 2015, and world trade as a percentage of global GDP grew from 30 per cent of global GDP in 1973 to 70 per cent in 2018 (AUTHORS; World Bank, 2019). Global supply chains and infrastructure are also far more integrated than they were in the 1990s due to transformations in transport and communication, and there is deep recognition of global brands. Importantly, as of 2019, six of the world’s top ten global brands in the communications media and information technology space are: Apple (#1), Google (#2), Amazon (#3), Microsoft (#4), Samsung (#6) and Facebook (#9) (Interbrand, 2019).

At the same time, we need to be careful when using aggregate figures as metrics of globalisation. A considerable part of world trade and investment is regional rather than global: it occurs among nation-states within Europe, Asia and the Americas, rather than across the globe. Alan Rugman argued that, rather than extending their operations over a ‘flat world’ (e.g. Friedman, 2005), most of the world’s largest companies pursue international expansion through *regionalization* rather

than globalisation, and that multilateral trade agreements have for the most part facilitated such regionalization (Rugman and Oh, 2008). The economic geographer Peter Dicken has also proposed that the vast majority of the world's largest companies are "national corporations with international operations (i.e. foreign subsidiaries)" rather than truly global corporations "whose geographically-dispersed operations are functionally integrated" (Dicken, 2003: 30).

An example of the challenges of global expansion has been seen with Apple. After long having had its products largely manufactured in China, Apple products were a huge success when they first became widely available for retail in China in the late 2000s, due to the reputation of the global brand and their superior quality to the lower-cost Chinese-made digital devices. Over the course of a decade, however, Chinese phone makers such as Huawei, Xiaomi and others have caught up and perhaps surpassed Apple in terms of product innovation, while capturing market share due to lower prices and better understanding of Chinese consumers. While Apple retains a highly significant market presence in China, and its products still carry considerable cachet with middle-class Chinese consumers, there has been a substantial catch-up by the local competitors in this fast-growing market, and Apple carries the disadvantage of being branded as an 'American' cultural product.

The accelerated global uptake of the internet and digital media, and its profoundly disruptive impact upon all aspects of media and communication, have been a central feature of the period from the 1990s to the present. The number of internet users was estimated at 4.1 billion (53 per cent of the world's population) by 2018, with the fastest rates of growth being in the developing world. Among this digitally networked population, 3.2 billion (42 per cent) were social media

users, and 2.95 billion (39 per cent) were active mobile social media users. The most widely used social media platforms in 2018 were Facebook (2.2 billion users), YouTube (1.5 billion users), WhatsApp and Fb Messenger (both with 1.3 billion users), and WeChat (980 million users) (We Are Social, 2018).

Rather than seeing global communication technologies as leading to an increasingly homogeneous global culture, globalisation theorists stressed how new forms of interconnectedness across boundaries enabled transformations in media, culture and politics. Greater awareness of people and events in other parts of the world, and a capacity to form alliances, allegiances, and communities of shared interest across geographical and territorial boundaries, promotes “the extension and intensification of social relations and consciousness across world-time and world-space” (Steger, 2009: 15). A key area in which global ICTs have had a major impact has been upon politics, where emergent forms of networked politics, based on what Bennett and Segerberg (2012) termed a “logic of connective action”, that has enabled new forms of political mobilisation outside of, and often in opposition to, the established political institutions (c.f. Castells, 2012).

The cumulative impacts of economic and cultural globalisation, driven by international trade and commerce and by digital communication networks, are seen as three-fold upon culture and identity. First, globalisation enables a pluralisation of cultures and identities, through global media and communication flows, large-scale migration and the formation of diasporic identities. Tomlinson (2007: 364) observed that, far from destroying distinctive cultures and identities, “globalisation has been perhaps the most significant force in creating and proliferating cultural identity”. Second, the pluralisation of cultures and identities is linked to the growing



deterritorialisation of culture, or “the integration of distant events, processes and relationships into our everyday lives ... [and] the “weakening’ of the traditional ties between cultural experience and geographical territory” (Tomlinson, 2007: 360-1). Third, this entails a weakening of the ties between national culture and identity, as “many individuals have acquired a pluri-national sense of self” (Scholte, 2005: 231), while these individuals also increasingly adopt non-territorial or supra-territorial frameworks of collective identity, not bound to nation-states as the primary referent:

Whereas national identities involved attachment to a particular homeland, other aspects of being such as age, bodily condition, class, faith, gender, profession, race, sexual orientation, and belonging to the human species itself are not bound to territorial location (Scholte, 2005: 240).

Such developments can be seen with the rise of global environmentalism, transnational movements around race, gender and sexuality (e.g. #metoo, Black Lives Matter, marriage equality), the growing global coordination of religious and faith-based movements, and transnational rights and social justice campaigns. The spread of global media and cultural forms has enabled the rise of non-territorial forms of cultural identity, and the global internet has also provided new ways in which such identities can be developed, shaped, co-ordinated, networked and struggled for. There has also been the resurgence of small nation nationalisms, such as the Catalan and Scottish independence movements, where ‘stateless nations’ can draw upon the resources of global media to expand awareness of and support for their campaigns to be recognised as independent nations.

At the same time, we need to be careful not to overstate the degree of global mobility of most of the world's population – international migrants still account for about 3 per cent of the world's population (Berg and Besharov, 2016) – or the extent to which people freely abandon national identities in favour of the 'global supermarket' of cosmopolitan identities (Mathews, 2000). Nation-states themselves take different approaches to cultural pluralism, with some embracing diversity and multiculturalism, and others maintaining strict hierarchies between the dominant culture and those of recent migrants. But all nation-states continue to invest heavily in the institutions, ceremonies and rituals through which cultural identities are conferred, and even when hybrid identities are adopted (Chinese-Australian, Latino-American, British Muslim etc.), there is a push and pull between host and homeland identities that does not in itself negate the idea of nationhood.

It has been a commonplace of globalisation theorists to argue that the nation-state is in decline, experiencing a crisis of sovereignty and diminished capacity to govern on behalf of its citizens, in the face of the internationalisation of capital, crises of legitimacy, the rise of multilateral agreements and supra-state institutions, and global civil society operating in an increasingly transnational public sphere. Steger (2009: 9) defined globality as “a social condition characterized by tight global economic, political, cultural, and environmental connections and flows that make most of the currently existing borders and boundaries irrelevant”, while Hardt and Negri (2000: 306) argued that the current phase of global capitalism was one where “large transnational corporations have effectively surpassed the jurisdiction and authority of nation-states”. This does not entail the disappearance of nation-states; rather, they become what Giddens termed “‘shell institutions’ ... inadequate to the tasks they are called upon to perform” (Giddens, 2002: 44).

It is very apparent that the size of nation-states has not declined over the last 30 years, as the share of government spending as a percentage of GDP has remained relatively constant over this period across OECD nations, albeit with significant fluctuations within countries and differences between countries (OECD, 2019). Whether there has been a decline in the effectiveness of government interventions, and hence a loss of sovereignty vis-à-vis global forces, is a complex, multidimensional question. It was noted earlier that most corporations are primarily national rather than truly global, giving nation-states significant potential leverage points over their operations. In contrast to the ‘powerless state’ thesis, nation-states often actively promote globalisation of ‘their’ national economies, in order to enhance the global competitiveness of key national businesses (Weiss, 1997). More generally, and picking up upon the historical account developed by Mann (1997) and others, the concept of the nation-state encapsulates a range of institutions and functions, meaning that while globalisation may weaken state capacity in some areas (e.g. an autonomous macroeconomic policy), it may act to strengthen it in others (e.g. stronger educational institutions able to conduct world-leading research and attract international students).

While a weakening of nation-states and territorial sovereignty could be seen as a source of crisis in the global system (Streeck, 2017), globalisation theorists tended to take the more positive view that cosmopolitan identities and emergent global civil society movements are filling the political vacuum, raising the possibility of what Habermas (2001: 94) termed ‘post-national’ citizen identities, that could counter the ‘neoliberal’ vision of an unconstrained global market with a politics “to follow the lead of the markets by constructing supranational political agencies”. Beck (2007: 166) proposed that “in an era of global crises, national problems can only be solved through

transnational/national cooperation and state networks”, while Kaldor (2003: 12) identified global civil society as a movement for “democratizing globalisation”, and Held (1997: 310) proposed a cosmopolitan democracy “where citizens must come to enjoy multiple citizenships.”

There is some empirical evidence to support aspects of the global civil society argument. The number of active international non-governmental organisations (INGOs) is now estimated at about 38,000 worldwide, and there have been experiments with multi-stakeholderism and engagement of INGOs in global governance frameworks, such as the World Summit on the Information Society. But with the notable exception of the European Union – which itself experienced significant turmoil in the 2010s – their significance pales against that of multilateral agreements framed within the system of nation-states, and the claim that cosmopolitan arguments are advancing within national polities is thrown into question with the rise of national populism. Indeed, INGOs and civil society group have often been targeted by populists who accuse them of being tools of cosmopolitan elites. The civil society movement also faces the challenge that while it can claim to advance accountability and transparency within institutions of national and international governance, its claims to democratising global governance are undercut by the fact that its own leaderships are not democratically elected, a point often made by critics of such organisations.

### **Populism, Nationalism and Globalisation**

It has by now become a commonplace to observe the rise of populism in the 2010s as part of a backlash against the policies of the last 30 years in Western liberal democracies, the perceived

bipartisanship of the established political parties and political and economic elites generally (including media elites), and rising inequalities and a sense of being disconnected from governmental decision-making. In Europe, populist political parties now attract about 25 per cent of votes in elections in European states, as compared to about 5-7 per cent in the 1990s (Lewis, Clarke, Barr et. al., 2018), and a growing number of political leaders are being identified as being populists. Inglehart and Norris (2016) attributed the rise of new populist parties in Europe primarily to cultural factors, such as a backlash against multiculturalism and cosmopolitanism, but others such as Judis (2016) and McKnight (2018) have associated populism with an economic backlash against rising inequalities, and what they see as 30 years of centre-left parties accommodating themselves to neoliberal globalisation under the guise of the ‘Third Way’. Ruccio (2018) has noted that globalisation was accompanied by growing income and wealth inequalities in the United States, with the share of income held by the top 1 per cent of the population rising largely in parallel with the growth in trade as a percentage of U.S. GDP.

*Insert Figure 1*

Eatwell and Goodwin (2018) have attributed the rise of national populism to what they term the ‘Four D’s’:

1. Distrust of political elites, anger at corruption, and perceived exclusion from the institutions of liberal democracy;
2. Deprivation, in the face of rising economic inequalities, stagnant real wages, job insecurity and declining social provision;

3. Destruction – real or perceived – of national cultures and traditions, value systems and authority structures, and historically embedded ‘ways of life’;
4. Dealignment of citizens as voters from the major political parties, and from the class and other societal cleavages associated with those parties.

Goodwin has observed that:

Each national populist party has its own local particularities but there are common themes. In the aggregate, national populists oppose or reject liberal globalisation, mass immigration and the consensus politics of recent times. They promise instead to give voice to those who feel that they have been neglected, if not held in contempt, by increasingly distant elites (Goodwin, 2018).

A defining feature of contemporary populism has been its association with nationalism, often counterposed to an ideology of globalism. When populist leaders speak of the legitimate authority of ‘the people’, in opposition to ‘the elites’ (Mudde and Kaltwasser, 2017) they are referring to a national people with its own defining history, culture and identity that is largely coextensive with the territorial boundaries of the nation-state. Addressing the Conservative Political Action Committee on 25 February 2017, shortly after becoming U.S. President, Donald Trump highlighted the extent to which he saw his presidency as being about serving national interests, rather than advancing global priorities:

Global cooperation, dealing with other countries, getting along with other countries is good, it's very important. But there is no such thing as a global anthem, a global currency or a global flag. This is the United States of America that I'm representing. I'm not representing the globe, I'm representing your country. (Trump, 2017)

The Brazilian President Jair Bolsonaro said that the lessons he had learned from the British wartime leader Winston Churchill included “patriotism, love for your fatherland, respect for your flag – something that has been lost over the last few years here in Brazil” (Phillips, 2018). Addressing the Valdai Summit in Sochi in 2014, Russian President Vladimir Putin observed that “The biggest nationalist in Russia is me. But the most correct nationalism is to line up actions and policies so that it goes for the good of the people” (Yandex News, 2014). At the National Heroes' Day commemorations of August 28, 2017, The Philippines' President Rodrigo Duterte urged Filipinos to “emulate the patriotism of our heroes ... [and] join the government in building a stronger nation that is capable of providing a better life for its people” (Duterte, 2017).

Populist nationalism tends to be seen as an ideology of the political right, by both its advocates (Bannon, 2018) and its opponents (Lloyd, 2018; Kenny, 2018). But there is also a left-populism, albeit one that competes with more anti-populist positions that identify populism primarily with the nationalist right, and as a movement that the left needs to fight, in the name of defending and extending the principles of liberal democracy. Taking the anti-populist view, Müller (2016: 102) argued that populists are “a real danger to democracy”, while Mudde and Kaltwasser (2017: 118) observed that “populism often asks the right questions but provides the wrong answer”. By contrast, the case for *left-populism* as argued by Judis (2016), McKnight (2018) and Mouffe (2018)

proposes that the populist upsurge is based on widespread disillusion with ‘politics-as-usual’, and the perception that major parties had reached a consensus around major policy questions, particularly in the economic sphere. Mouffe (2018: 1) argues that “we are witnessing a crisis of the neoliberal hegemonic formation and this crisis opens the possibility for the construction of a more democratic order”, but also that “so many socialist and social-democratic parties are in disarray because they stick to an inadequate conception of politics”. For Mouffe (2018: 17), the rise of populism is a response to what she terms ‘post-democracy’ where “politics has become a mere issue of managing the established order, a domain reserved for experts, and popular sovereignty has been declared obsolete.” Mouffe identifies populism as the means through which parties of the left can offer a more ambitious program of radical and pluralist democracy. At the same time, Mouffe (2018: 71) argues that a left populist political strategy is of necessity also a national one as “the hegemonic struggle to recover democracy needs to start at the level of the nation state that, despite having lost many of its prerogatives, is still one of the crucial spaces for the exercise of democracy and popular sovereignty”.

## **Populism and Social Media**

The online forums or social spaces of the Web 2.0 (a nascent movement towards a more interactive and collaborative web as it provides a platform for online social participation in communities of interest) differ substantially from the traditional media such as that of public service broadcasting in a number of ways: first, they attract many more people than traditional media (see statistics above). Second, social networks allow more interactivity and many-to-many communication on a global scale, rather than one-to-many as it is the case with broadcast media. Third, the rapid uptake



of the global distribution platforms dramatically lowers the costs of reaching international audiences, and makes all content potentially accessible worldwide, for instance through reposting and retweeting by online user communities. Thus online activity facilitates the creation of communities by dropping the costs of cooperation and the creation of new publics (Howard and Hussain, 2013).

This has been particularly true during social protests and uprisings. The social uses of networks, and indeed their value in organised political protest and rebellion - the enhanced connectivity experienced between social media users has helped activate and deepen ties during uprisings, for instance during the 'Arab Spring'. What is more, they have changed the democratic process and the nature of the public sphere. The debates surrounding the idea of the public sphere have taken a renewed interest with the emergence of new online media and social networks which can provide new communication spaces where debate can be conducted. Social media platforms are frequently used to call networked publics – publics that are constructed by networked technologies (boyd, 2010, 2014) - into being and into action during periods of political instability. In regimes where media are controlled, inaccessible, or not trusted these platforms force a radical pluralisation of news dissemination and democratic processes (Dahlberg, 2009). But while much has been written about the power of networked protest in places like Turkey (Gezi Park protests) or Egypt (where social media sites became the tools of a protest movement that ultimately helped unseat the government), some commentators have analysed its weaknesses as well (Iosifidis and Wheeler, 2016; Tufekci, 2017).

Indeed, populist groups are formed around social media networks and channel their anger through these online spaces. Each one of us is provided with a device from which to circulate personal views, a way of reinforcing our subjectivity by differentiating ourselves from others by either rejecting or accepting what already exists in social media platforms. In this sense, social media do not encourage the formation of a rational, informed deliberation, for they inflect and magnify an irrational public mood where “chaotic enterprises are trapped in a daily staging where ethos, pathos and logos are all mixed up” (Paparachissi, 2015: 26). These online spaces, populated by publics whose actions are motivated by shared feelings, contrast sharply with the traditional Habermasian public sphere, a space where informed public dialogue is supposed to take place. While not ignoring that the mainstream media have been criticised for their failure to realise the ‘ideal’ public sphere, social networks, blogs and websites go a step further by serving to interact in isolation with those who already think what we think (Sunstein, 2008). Rational persuasion is therefore weakened, while so-called ‘affective persuasion’ becomes prevalent. Common people become the recipient - but also transmitters - of deceptively simple messages that invoke political terms heavily invested with symbolic meaning and emotional valence (Maldonado, 2017).

There has also been a change of the relationship between political actors and citizens. This includes a more direct communication between populist leaders and their base, the creation of channels that sideline those of the mainstream media, as well as the emergence of ‘post-truth’ as a framework that gives new value to narratives as conveyors of political values that disrupt established social conventions (Maldonado, 2017). The populist approach has served well a number of political leaders that have defied the establishment, with the most noticeable achievements being Brexiteers and the rise of Donald Trump, but also the appearance of populist underpinnings that defy liberal

democracies in countries such as Poland, Hungary and Turkey. What is interesting is the way in which populism functions and spreads with the help of social media networks in order to mobilize political emotions. Indeed, contemporary populism boosted by the social media exploits both the public sphere and disrupts individual realities. Although hardly a new phenomenon, populism and its political performance can facilitate the deployment of political emotions in the networked public sphere through social media technologies. The new public sphere allows citizens to act as co-creators of opinion since they can generate and distribute online content (through blogs, webpages, and so on) that can be shared with others (Castells, 2009). In turn, populist leaders take advantage of the digitization of the public sphere and present themselves as allies to people, or as leading a ‘movement’ rather than a party.

The EU Referendum which led to the Brexit decision in 2016 was accompanied by the populist online narrative. The social media echo-chamber tended to reinforce the anti-European rhetoric within the mainstream media led by a chorus of Brexit-led newspapers and Leave campaigners. There is a certainly a continued relevance of mainstream/legacy media with social media as an ‘echo chamber’ in the case of Brexit, and this also applies to other examples, such as Fox News as a key ‘inspiration’ for Donald Trump! In the case of Brexit, anti-immigrant sentiment was fuelled by the view that dysfunctional European elite was bent on undermining Britain’s economy, sovereignty and self-confidence across both the social and established media.. This led to the xenophobic falsehoods claiming that a Vote Leave outcome would Canute-like turn back the ‘waves’ of immigrants who were ready to pounce from Eastern Europe and the Syrian refugee crisis (Iosifidis and Wheeler, 2018). A large-scale social media data analysis (see <http://www.referendumanalysis.eu/eu-referendum-analysis-2016/section-7-social-media/impact->

[of-social-media-on-the-outcome-of-the-eu-referendum/](#)) demonstrates that not only did Brexit supporters have a more powerful and emotional message, but they were also more effective in the use of social media like Facebook, Twitter and Instagram. A combination of factors, such as the more intuitive and straightforward messaging by the Leave campaign (which is crucial for social media campaigning) and the highly emotionally charged nature of messages (which facilitated the viral spread of Leave ideas) led to the activation of a greater number of Leave followers at grassroots level, something that eventually influenced many undecided voters.

In tandem, Donald Trump's 2016 campaign for the Republican nomination for President and his General Election challenge against Democratic nominee Hilary Clinton for the Presidency has been seen as an expression of political leadership via the interface of social media platforms. Trump, the property tycoon and reality television star, propelled his candidacy through a purposefully controversial spectacle of outlandish and hateful commentary and bravado. He constructed a deliberate news agenda through his social media and campaign appearances. Trump's twitter handle itself- @realDonaldTrump - directly communicates the idea that the content presented is genuine and unfiltered. His syntactical choices similarly foster a sense of immediacy and connection; he regularly uses first person address, referring to himself as 'I' and audiences as 'you.' Trump also employs words such as 'together' and 'we' to suggest a shared responsibility and interaction between himself and his followers (for instance, "if we have no border, we have no country"). He consistently thanks his supporters in tweets, like "thank you America!.Together we will #MAGA [Make America Great Again]." Trump's "thank you" posts create a sense of personal, direct connection between the candidate and his supporters (Iosifidis and Wheeler, 2018). But perhaps the trope that Trump employs most frequently in order to make

a case for his sincerity is that of identifying, pointing to, or calling out instances of insincerity as he sees them. Many of his posts are accusatory and he condemns everyone from reporters to media outlets, to former employees and, of course, his opponent as “crooked,” “rigged,” “made up,” “biased,” and “corrupt.” His favoured moniker for Democratic opponent Hillary Clinton was “Crooked Hillary,” a phrase that marks her as inauthentic and insincere while bolstering his own professed transparency. Trump’s smart use of Twitter creates a bond between followers and leaders that befits populist strategies. Whereas the anti-establishment discourse of populism entails a distrust of mainstream media and conventional politicians, social networks make it easier for populist movements to feed their followers with their own news (Maldonado, 2017). Jair Bolsonaro’s 2018 political campaign in Brazil echoed US President Trump’s nationalist focus on making Brazil, in this case, great again.

As the internet rapidly expanded, the new communications formats offered other politicians too with greater opportunities to reconfigure their campaign strategies and secure high levels of visibility, including left-wing ones. For instance, the current UK Labour party leader Jeremy Corbyn, with his ‘un-celebrity’ celebrity performance and unlikely ascendancy from Parliamentary backbencher to political leadership has shown how an ‘outsider’ politician could effect a political reversal by galvanizing his ‘affective capacities’ into the mainstream of politics. The construction of a social movement via Momentum, a left-wing British political organisation, has been instrumental to Corbyn’s organizational success and political legitimacy. Most especially, for Corbyn’s supporters and even in more hostile arenas within the mainstream media, he has been seen as a figure of ‘authenticity’ for both good and bad. This has occurred against the prevailing

norms amongst the political elites whose previous responses had been to ‘triangulate’ their approaches to the electorate to say as little as possible they could about ideology.

The Corbyn phenomenon demonstrates the blurring of the lines between political insiders and outsiders in the social media age. The ways in which politicians present themselves to the public, coupled with advancements in digital technologies, facilitated new ways for politicians to enhance their fame. As Corbyn’s ascendancy to political leadership in 2016 has operated in the vacuum in the centre-left political narrative with the collapse of the credibility of the Blairist settlement of the ‘Third Way’, this had foundered as a legitimate political response in an era of economic austerity, anti-globalisation and populist nationalism. In direct contrast to Trump, Corbyn’s ‘uncelebrity’ political performativity and narrative referred to his genuine beliefs to define his leadership and to establish a rapport with the public. This has gone hand-in-hand with the incorporation of the social media into his leadership and election campaigns, along with his para-social linkages with the electorate.

## **Social Media and Post-Truth Politics**

Social media have also become platforms for the rapid circulation of what has become known as ‘Fake News’ (Wardle, 2017). There has been considerable focus in the context of both the 2016 US Presidential election and the 2016 UK referendum on EU membership as to what extent fake news had an influence on the outcomes (Iosifidis and Andrews, 2019). The Twitter output of the successful US Presidential candidate Donald Trump and the Brexit campaign in the UK, whose repeated focus on xenophobic claims about Turkish citizens and their likely entitlement to enter

the UK, coupled with the false pledge about Brexit leading to an additional £350 million per week for the NHS, were widely spread on digital media (Cummings, 2017). In particular, the EU referendum showed that social media tools can be used to shape the public agenda, form public opinion and drive social change – for better or for worse. In parallel with Trump’s sensational victory, the vote for Brexit was secured in what has been dubbed the era of ‘post-truth politics’ largely based on fake news, the misuse of statistics and appeals to emotion rather than policies and facts. In this capacity, hybrid media and online discourses constructed a potent ‘politics of fear’ which impacted on the UK electorate’s political thinking. It may yet prove a costly game for the British people and the rest of the EU citizens. One worrying trend in the new world is that stretching the truth can be seen as just part of a game. European leaders are struggling to absorb the impact of Internet-spread fake news on balloting around the world as the continent faces a series of elections during 2017 that will reshape its future. Post-truth in politics is one of the drivers of populism and it is one of the threats to democracy (AUTHORS).

Undoubtedly fake news is profitable, for there are economic advantages for producers of fake news relating to the level of engagement that social media users undertake (Tambini, 2017). Fake news websites can generate revenue for their creators by raising sums from advertising on their sites through, for example, Google AdSense or through Facebook advertising on their Pages. There is an industrialisation of fake news in certain quarters, with what can be termed ‘troll factories’ (Stahle, 2017), and also the use of propaganda bots on social media. More likes, more shares, and more clicks lead to more money for advertisers and platforms (Tambini, 2017). The way in which Facebook’s algorithm works has contributed to this process. Facebook’s aim was to ensure people stayed on the platform as long as possible—and that meant their News Feed needed to be

‘interesting and relevant’—and in practice that meant reinforcing their views, not confronting them. Facebook’s News Feed algorithm, regularly updated, took into account thousands of factors to determine what shows up in any one user’s. As news stories are spread by other Facebook users, knowledge of the original news source diminishes radically and this is not surprising, since there is no branding difference in the Facebook News Feed between fake news sites and established and respected news outlets. In the same vein, Page Rank, an algorithm used by Google Search to rank websites in their search engine results, decrease the diversity of news sources that people see, reinforcing confirmation bias and contributing to what has been called a ‘filter bubble’ effect (Iosifidis and Andrews, 2019).

These types of engagement with social media are highly questionable in preserving political consensus and have exposed the deficiencies in modern democracies. Therefore, from these examples, a mixed picture has occurred with regard to the usage of online techniques in representative democracies and there are still many questions about whether they actually encourage a greater form of public efficacy. Most observers today concur that especially in regard to social media, modern communication technologies have impacted profoundly on politics and participation. But the problem is that there is still no overarching agreement in terms of how and to what extent this impact takes place, and what significance it has for democratic politics. In the cases of Trump’s Twitter strategy both in his campaign (and within the early period of his Presidency) and the use of social media by Brexiteers, it is clear that the social media engagement has been highly controversial in relation to democratic deficits and that the usage of online techniques has left open questions as to whether democratic consensus can be achieved.



This is not the place to identify potential solutions to the above concerns, but it would be suffice to say that some noticeable research work has been conducted with regards to overseeing social media. Wu (2016) argued that social media like Facebook should serve the public (rather than their own interests) by becoming ‘public benefit corporations’. Napoli and Caplan (2017) favoured the articulation of new or modified frameworks that reflect the hybrid nature of social media platforms – content producers, but also investors in platforms for connectivity (Iosifidis and Andrews, 2019) called for a new category of ‘information utilities’ which would encompass truly dominant internet intermediaries such as Facebook and Google. But more ideas are needed.

## **Conclusion**

In this paper, we have argued that the phenomenon of globalisation is currently being challenged by the rise of populism and nationalism, as part of a reaction against the global liberal policies of the last three decades in many regions of the world. The paper examined some possible reasons for the rise of nationalism and populism, ranging from economic issues relating to the global economic slowdown, cultural factors and value shifts, inequality, uncertainty and the rise of immigration, all of which lower support for globalisation. In effect, more and more societies draw on nationalism of some sort to define relations between the state, the citizen and the world beyond the nation. A striking example is US President Donald Trump, who promised the American people withdrawal from multilateral trade treaties, a wall on the Mexican border, and deportation of illegal immigrants, in order to “Make America Great Again”. Britain’s vote in 2016 to leave the EU was also the result of a nationalist turn. Anticipating Trump, the Brexiteers’ main slogan was “we want our country back.” Elsewhere in Europe, nationalism is rising and populist, predominantly right-

wing political parties are united in the belief that each individual country should do what is best for its own sovereignty, rather than build co-operative relations between countries. Traces of the same trend can be found in the BRICS and other developing countries. Jair Bolsanaro of the far-right PSL party won the 2018 election by taking a populist stance and promising to “make Brazil great again”.

Looking beyond these immediate phenomena, we need to consider the extent to which globalisation and nationalism are not necessarily polarised discourses. Contrary to the ‘alt-right’ critiques of globalism as an ideological movement opposed to the nation-state, it is important to reiterate that global economic expansion, and the development of legal and institutional frameworks that enable international trade, investment and the movement of people, have for the most part been promoted by nation-states, with national governments perceiving greater integration to be in their economic interests. The rise of Trump has not led to a decline in U.S. trade with the rest of the world, nor has Brexit been associated with economic protectionism: by contrast, a major strand of argument for leaving the European Union has been that the U.K. can forge its own free trade agreements with other parts of the world, notably the U.S., India and China. The majority of right-populist parties in Europe do not seek to leave the European Union, but rather to see greater Europe-wide restrictions on migration from other parts of the world, notably Africa and the Middle East, and there is considerable evidence that they have influenced EU migration policy accordingly.

There are therefore limits, as Norris and Inglehart (2019) have argued, to viewing the rise of populism as being associated with demands for alternative economic policies, although this is most

characteristic of left-populist movements. Further research on populism and globalisation will need to give attention to the relationship between ‘territorial’ and ‘non-territorial’ identities – those defined primarily by the nation-state and national identity and those defined by identities or principles not primarily linked to national identity, such as feminism, environmentalism, LGBT rights, human rights, and the rights of racial, ethnic and religious groups. Two important research questions are the extent to which nationalist movements have adopted an ‘identitarian’ frame (e.g. a ‘white’ or ‘European’ identity), and the extent to which the rise of competing populisms is in itself a contestation around the meaning of nationalism and national identity: inclusive or exclusive framing of national identity, and majoritarian or multicultural definitions of the nation-state?

The other major issue rising is around social media and politics. Until relatively recently, much of the academic literature focused on the benefits of social media for social movements and unrests like the “Arab Spring”, and the potential their offered for networked and post-institutional forms of political mobilisation (Bennett & Segerberg, 2012; Castells, 2012). In this paper, we have drawn attention to the extent to which social media platforms are being used by anti-democratic, authoritarian or ultra-nationalist forces. At one level, this may be both predictable and healthy: tools and technologies can be adopted by all sides in political communication, and the exposure to a diversity of views on social media such as Twitter and Facebook open up opportunities for dialogue and difference. What we have found is that new communication tools also accelerate the spread of nationalism, by allowing people to organise in groups and rallies with others who also lost faith in global free-market capitalism, and despised the government for not shielding them from its depredations. While this can be seen as the ‘democratisation of voice’ as people and messages can bypass the traditional gatekeepers of the mainstream media, it has also opened up a

pathway to electoral success that can be based upon misinformation and even disinformation, propaganda and ‘fake news’. Benkler, Faris and Roberts (2018) identified the extent of this in the 2016 U.S. presidential elections, observing the wider risks to democracy and pluralism from not only the rapid online circulation of such disinformation by motivated political actors, but also the prospect of ‘echo chambers’ where citizens are no longer exposed to the viewpoints of their adversaries, except in the most crudely caricatured ways.

This means that political engagement through social media has exposed the fissures in modern democracies, and there is the risk of a feedback loop operating between political polarisation, misinformation, the accumulation of user attention and engagement on politically preferred online sites, and the impossibility of consensus on core policy issues. The crisis of expertise is connected to this, as all information is potentially politicised and rendered able to be motivated by malign intent (Waisbord, 2018). Therefore, from the examples presented above, a mixed picture has occurred with regard to the usage of online techniques in democratic societies and there are still many questions about whether they actually encourage a greater form of public efficacy. It is clear that social media engagement has been highly controversial in relation to democratic deficits, and that more research needs to be conducted with regards to the connection between social media, populism and ‘post-truth’ politics.

## References

Bannon S (2018) *Orban and Salvini are redefining democracy in Europe*. [online] The Spectator. Available at: <https://www.spectator.co.uk/2018/06/orban-and-salvini-are-redefining-democracy-in-europe/> [Accessed 5 Jan. 2019].

Beck U (2007) *Cosmopolitanism: A Critical Theory for the Twenty-first Century*. In: Ritzer G (ed) *The Blackwell Companion to Globalisation*. Malden, MA: Wiley-Blackwell, pp.162-176.

Benkler Y, Faris, R and Roberts H (2018) *Network Propaganda: Manipulation, Disinformation, and Radicalization in American Politics*. New York: Oxford University Press.

Bennett W L and Segerberg A (2012) The Logic of Connective Action: Digital media and the personalization of contentious politics. *Information, Communication & Society*, 15(5): 739-768.

Berg E and Besharov D (2016) Patterns of Global Migration. In: Besharov D and M Lopez (eds) *Adjusting to a World in Motion: Trends in Global Migration and Migration Policy*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, pp.57-76.

boyd d (2010) Social network sites as networked publics: Affordances, dynamics, and implications. In: Papacharissi Z (ed) *Networked Self: Identity, Community, and Culture on Social Network Sites*. New York and London: Routledge, pp. 39-58.

boyd d (2014) *It's Complicated: The social Lives of Networked Teens*. London: Yale University Press.

Castells M (2009) *Communication Power*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Castells M (2012) *Networks of Outrage and Hope: Social Movements in the Internet Age*. Cambridge: Polity.

Cummings D (2017) How the Brexit referendum was won, *Spectator*. Available at: <https://blogs.spectator.co.uk/2017/01/dominic-cummings-brexit-referendum-won/> (accessed 6 January 2019).

Dahlgren P (2009) *Media and Political Engagement: Citizens, Communication and Democracy*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

AUTHOR REF.

Dicken P (2003) "Placing" Firms: Grounding the Debate on the "Global." In: J Peck and H Yeung (eds) *Remaking the Global Economy*. London: Sage, pp.27-44.

Duterte R (2017) *President Duterte to Filipinos: Emulate patriotism of heroes – Presidential Communications Operations Office*. [online] Presidential Communications Operations Office. Available at: [https://pcoo.gov.ph/news\\_releases/president-duterte-filipinos-emulate-patriotism-heroes/](https://pcoo.gov.ph/news_releases/president-duterte-filipinos-emulate-patriotism-heroes/) [Accessed 4 Jan. 2019].

Eatwell R and Goodwin M (2018) *National Populism: The revolt against liberal democracy*. London: Penguin.

AUTHOR REF.

Giddens A (2002) *Runaway World: How globalisation is reshaping our lives*. London: Profile.

Goodwin M (2018) *Why national populism is here to stay*. [online] *New Statesman*. Available at: <https://www.newstatesman.com/2018/10/why-national-populism-here-stay> [Accessed 13 Jan. 2019].

Hardt M and Negri A (2000). *Empire*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.

Held D (1997) Globalisation and cosmopolitan democracy. *Peace Review*, 9(3): 309-314.

Howard P and Hussain M (2013) *Democracy's Fourth Wave? Digital Media and the Arab Spring*. New York: Oxford University Press.

Ingelhart R and Norris P (2016) *Trump, Brexit, and the Rise of Populism: Economic Have-Nots and Cultural Backlash*. Faculty Research Working Paper Series RWP-16. Cambridge, MA: Harvard Kennedy School - John FR. Kennedy School of Government.

Interbrand (2019) *Best Global Brands*. [online] Interbrand. Available at: <https://www.interbrand.com/best-brands/best-global-brands/2018/ranking/> [Accessed 4 Feb. 2019].

Iosifidis P (2016) Globalisation and the Re-Emergence of the Regulatory State. In: T. Flew, P.

Iosifidis and J Steemers (eds) *Global Media and National Policies: The Return of the State*.

London: Palgrave Macmillan, pp. 16-31.

Iosifidis P and Wheeler M (2016) *Public Spheres and Media Social Networks in the Western Context and Beyond*. London: Palgrave Macmillan.

Iosifidis P and Wheeler M (2018) Modern political communication and Web 2.0 in representative democracies. *Javnost/The Public* 25(1-2). Epub ahead of print 29 January 2018.

DOI: [10.1080/13183222.2018.1418962](https://doi.org/10.1080/13183222.2018.1418962).

Iosifidis P and Andrews L (2019) 'Regulating the Internet Intermediaries in the Post-Truth World: Beyond Media Policy?', *International Communication Gazette*,

<https://doi.org/10.1177/1748048519828595>.

Judis J (2016) *The Populist Explosion: How the Great Recession Transformed American and European Politics*. New York: Columbia Global Reports.

Kaldor M (2003) *Global Civil Society*. Cambridge: Polity.

Kenny C (2018) *The Bogus Backlash to Globalisation*. [online] Foreign Affairs. Available at: <https://www.foreignaffairs.com/articles/united-states/2018-11-09/bogus-backlash-globalisation?cid=int-lea&pgtype=hpg> [Accessed 5 Jan. 2019].

Lewis P Clarke S Barr C Kommenda N and Holder J (2018) *Revealed: one in four Europeans vote populist*. [online] the Guardian. Available at: <https://www.theguardian.com/world/ng-interactive/2018/nov/20/revealed-one-in-four-europeans-vote-populist> [Accessed 13 Jan. 2019].

Lloyd J (2018) *The new Illiberal International*. [online] Newstatesman.com. Available at: <https://www.newstatesman.com/world/2018/07/new-illiberal-international> [Accessed 5 Jan. 2019].

Maldonado MA (2017) Rethinking Populism in the Digital Age: Social Networks, Political Affects and Post-Truth Democracies. Congreso AECPA, Santiago de Compostela, 20-22 Sept.



Mann M (1997). Has Globalisation Ended the Rise and Rise of the Nation- State? *Review of International Political Economy* 4(3): 472-496.

Mathews G (2000) *Global Culture/Individual identity: Searching for home in the cultural supermarket*. London: Routledge.

McKnight D (2018) *Populism Now! The Case for Progressive Populism*. Sydney: New South Press.

Mouffe C (2018) *For a Left Populism*. London: Verso.

Mudde C and Kaltwasser C (2017) *Populism: A Very Short Introduction*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Müller J (2016) *What is Populism?* Philadelphia, PA: University of Pennsylvania Press.

Napoli PM and Caplan R (2017) Why media companies insist they're not media companies, why they're wrong, and why it matters. *First Monday* 22(5), 1 May. Available at: <http://firstmonday.org/ojs/index.php/fm/article/view/7051/6124#21> (accessed 5 January 2019).

Norris P and Inglehart R (2019). *Cultural Backlash: Trump, Brexit, and Authoritarian Populism*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

OECD (2019) *General government spending - OECD Data*. [online]. Available at: <https://data.oecd.org/gga/general-government-spending.htm> [Accessed 4 Feb. 2019].

Papacharissi Z (2015) *Affective Publics: Sentiment, Technology, and Politics*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Phillips T (2018) *Jair Bolsonaro denies he is a fascist and paints himself as a Brazilian Churchill*. [online] The Guardian. Available at: <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2018/oct/30/jair-bolsonaro-denies-he-is-a-fascist-brazilian-churchill> [Accessed 4 Jan. 2019].

Ruccio D (2018) *Why Mainstream Economists Are Responsible for Electing Donald Trump*. [online] Evonomics. Available at: [http://evonomics.com/mainstream-economists-responsible-electing-donald-trump/?utm\\_source=facebook&utm\\_campaign=organic](http://evonomics.com/mainstream-economists-responsible-electing-donald-trump/?utm_source=facebook&utm_campaign=organic) [Accessed 5 Jan. 2019].

Rugman A and Oh C (2008) Friedman's Follies: Insights on the Globalisation/Regionalization Debate. *Business and Politics*, 10(4): 1-14.

Scholte J (2005) *Globalisation: A critical introduction*. Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan.

Sparks C (2007) *Globalisation, Development, and the Mass Media*. London: Sage.

Stahle M (2017) The secret Swedish troll factory. Available at: <https://www.ekuriren.se/sormland/the-secret-swedish-troll-factory/> (accessed 2 January 2019).

Steger M (2009) *Globalisation: A very short introduction*. New York: Oxford University Press.

Streeck W (2017) *How Will Capitalism End? Essays on a failing system*. London: Verso.

Sunstein C (2008) *Republic.com 2.0*. Princeton: Princeton University Press.

Tambini D (2017) How advertising fuels fake news. In: LSE Media Policy Project Blog. Available at: <http://blogs.lse.ac.uk/mediapolicyproject/2017/02/24/how-advertising-fuels-fake-news/> (accessed 10 January 2019).

Tomlinson J (2007) Cultural Globalisation. In: Ritzer G (ed) *The Blackwell Companion to Globalisation*. Malden, MA: Blackwell, pp.352-366.

Trump D (2017) *Remarks by President Trump at the Conservative Political Action Conference/ The White House*. [online] The White House. Available at: <https://www.whitehouse.gov/briefings-statements/remarks-president-trump-conservative-political-action-conference/> [Accessed 4 Feb. 2019].

Tufekci Z (2017) *Twitter and Tear Gas: The Power and Fragility of Networked Protest*. London: Yale University Press.

Waisbord S (2018) The elective affinity between post-truth communication and populist politics. *Communication Research and Practice* 4(1): 17-34.

Wardle C (2017) Fake News: It's complicated. 17 February. Available at: <https://firstdraftnews.com/fake-news-complicated/> (accessed 2 January 2019).

We Are Social (2018) *We Are Social-Digital Report 2018*. [online] Digitalreport.wearesocial.com. Available at: <https://digitalreport.wearesocial.com/> [Accessed 4 Feb. 2019].

Weiss L (1997) Globalisation and the Myth of the Powerless State. *New Left Review*, 225: 3-27.

World Bank (2019) *Trade (% of GDP) | Data*. [online] Data.worldbank.org. Available at: <https://data.worldbank.org/indicator/NE.TRD.GNFS.ZS> [Accessed 26 Jan. 2019].

Wu T (2016) *The Attention Merchants*. New York: Alfred A. Knopf.

Yandex News (2014) *Putin: The biggest nationalist in Russia is me.* [online] Yandex News.  
Available at: <https://vz.ru/news/2014/10/24/712269.html> [Accessed 4 Jan. 2019].