



Double differentiation in a cross-national comparison of populist political movements and online media uses in the United States and the Netherlands

new media & society

15(2) 183–202

© The Author(s) 2012

Reprints and permission:

sagepub.co.uk/journalsPermissions.nav

DOI: 10.1177/1461444812450685

nms.sagepub.com



Jacob Groshek

University of Melbourne, Australia

Jiska Engelbert

Erasmus University Rotterdam, The Netherlands

Abstract

In a context of highly visible and politically influential populist movements, this study considers the online self-representation of the Tea Party Patriots (TPP) in the United States and the Party for Freedom (PVV) in the Netherlands. A multi-methodological approach was adopted to compare the discursive manifestation of key populism concepts: leadership characteristics, adversary definition and mobilizing information. Analyses reconstruct and account for similarities and differences in discursive framing strategies of 'double differentiation' through which both movements attempt inclusion in and exclusion from the political establishment, and, in doing so, mobilize communities of support. Altogether, this study advances the understanding of what constitutes 'unmediated' content that is presented through user-generated media production, and how self-determined media spaces have facilitated shifts in populist media legitimation and political representation in two politically unique countries.

Corresponding author:

Jacob Groshek, University of Melbourne, School of Culture and Communication, Department of Media and Communication, Parkville, Melbourne, VIC 3010, Australia.

Email: jgroshek@gmail.com

Keywords

Cross-national comparative politics, double differentiation, framing, mobilization, online media, populism

This study examines political populism and online media uses as two interdependent trends that are central features in rapidly evolving socio-political landscapes. While both of these trends have been developing for decades (Bos et al., 2010), the shift from traditional models of top-down broadcast media towards many-to-many networks of media production and distribution has noticeably altered political organization and campaigning (Gibson and Römmele, 2007). Similarly, and perhaps somewhat unsurprisingly, differing forms of political populism have increased in presence and influence in numerous countries around the world (Zaslove, 2008).

Though the concept of political populism and internet use has a long history (Bimber, 1998) and others have explored populism more generally within a globalization framework (Kriesi et al., 2006), relatively few studies have jointly examined populist political movements and their self-representation in media. Among those that have, there has been a tendency towards examining traditional mass media outlets such as newspapers (Bos et al., 2010; Koopmans and Muis, 2009) or non-partisan online entities (Hooghe and Teepe, 2007). While a fair amount of research has examined candidate websites (see Druckman et al., 2007), there has been little explicit attention to populist candidates and parties on the internet, and no previous research has bridged these political parties with their uses in social networking sites (SNS).

This study fills a gap that exists in the literature by exploring these media uses as performances of double differentiation (Kriesi, 2011) and then comparing two prominent populist political movements cross-nationally. The dialogue constructed by and within each of the parties is examined, thereby linking the processes of leadership, party-adversary identification, and mobilization that are crucial to the success of populism (Abts and Rummens, 2007). Considering that populist political movements have now come to loom large in political climates, this study starts by examining the ‘unmediated’ media spaces (Fogarty and Wolak, 2009) of two highly visible and influential populist movements: the Tea Party Patriots (TPP) in the United States and the Party for Freedom (Partij voor de Vrijheid; PVV) in the Netherlands.

Here, similarities and differences between national political cultures and the political organizations themselves will be brought to bear, as will parallels or points of departure in online media strategies. A key component of this study is the concept of double differentiation (Hutter, 2011; Kriesi, 2011) in which populist political actors simultaneously distance themselves from extremist groups and the political establishment while still demonstrating an ability to exert influence within the political order. Of course, much has been made of the potential for political invigoration through online media and SNS in particular (see Zhang et al., 2010), but little of this work has considered the actual impact of such media for the viability of populist political parties, especially cross-nationally.

Given the somewhat historic outcomes of the US midterm and Dutch parliamentary elections of 2010 (when the Tea Party and the PVV surged in representation), this study

examines double differentiation in online media as a potential explanatory mechanism for these successes. This comparative framework is then applied to media uses in populist political movements more generally.

Theory and literature review

As audiences in general and populist movements in particular create (or co-create) and distribute more media widely and quickly, understanding what is presented to whom through which channel has taken on increasing importance (Shirky, 2010). In this context, the self-representation of populist political movements in online media channels may be considered major discursive spaces that exist within the margins, but that still have a transactional relationship to mainstream media and agendas (Davis, 2009).

Along these lines, a number of longstanding theoretical frameworks have been utilized to understand the ways in which media content can enact certain roles. Among these approaches are framing (Entman, 1991) and mobilizing information (Hoffman, 2006), which can both be extended to examine the specific features of within-party and user-generated content (Woolley et al., 2010). Considered jointly, these constructs are particularly well suited to explicating self-representation that exists in unmediated (Fogarty and Wolak, 2009) but official online spaces for the Tea Party Patriots and the PVV. As components of double differentiation, it is critical to examine framing not only through which keywords, phrases and concepts are employed to identify a shared ideology, but also in what manner this information makes it possible for supporters to mobilize, both symbolically and physically. Such mobilizing information is of increasing political importance and effectiveness in the digital era (Kobayashi et al., 2006), notably as a mediator between affective orientations and behavioural responses (Rojas and Puig-i-Abril, 2009).

In particular, the distances between political actors, citizens and one another have been reduced through media technologies (Park and Thelwall, 2008), while the potential for political organizing and mobilization has concurrently increased (Kraidy and Mourad, 2010). The parameters for political legitimation and participation have thus spread beyond mainstream media and through unmediated, online forms of communication that can link networks of citizens (Davis, 2009; Zaslove, 2008). Considering populism as non-elite, more democratically direct, and centred on the general will of the people (Abts and Rummens, 2007), advances in communicative technologies dovetail with these interests, particularly because online media lower barriers for participation (Ignatow and Schuett, 2011).

Twenty-first-century populism

Definitions of populism have considerable range, but one that is particularly useful focuses on its overarching ideological aspects, specifically that populism 'pits a virtuous and homogeneous people against a set of elites and dangerous "others" who are together depicted as depriving (or attempting to deprive) the sovereign people of their rights, values, prosperity, identity and voice' (Albertazzi and McDonnell, 2008: 3). Considering that movements of the political left, centre, and right have all employed populist

strategies, this definition thus facilitates focusing on the '*common symbolic space* in which democratic conflicts can be represented and integrated' (Mouffe, as cited in Abts and Rummens, 2007: 419).

Here we focus on two comparable, relatively right-wing movements that emerged uniquely but under similar issue conditions with the understanding that double differentiation is a broader practice of populist politics. In the cases of the TPP and the PVV, examining common symbolic media spaces can identify self-articulated expressions of charismatic leadership figures and adversary conceptualizations. These features are cornerstones of populism, and Kriesi (2011) has identified a strategy of 'double differentiation' where populist political movements simultaneously rely on, yet distance themselves from, party politics. Within this arena the TPP and PVV must negotiate a path from liberal political organizations and positions without also appearing too connected to and enmeshed within the established elite political apparatus.

As Kriesi noted:

Leaders and followers of the new populist right try to set themselves apart from their adversaries on the left, who are viewed as 'chaotic' protesters, as well as from the extreme and neo-fascist right ... If those who openly advocate the most right-wing and racist ideologies take part in the mobilization by populist right parties, then the populists run the risk of being equated with them. (2011: 12)

Thus, how such movements create and brand their identity becomes paramount to their success not only through charismatic leadership figures but also through the media by which they present themselves.

Looking at the TPP and its development as compared to the PVV, there is a strong case for considering these two movements as being of a most different systems research design (Pfetsch and Esser, 2004). This design tries 'to unearth similarities in the systems that differ the most; that is, the approach stresses intercultural similarities' (Dimitrova and Strömbäck, 2005: 400–401). The formation and growth of these movements followed quite different paths, though the United States and the Netherlands share many similarities as highly developed countries with institutionalized democratic structures and practices. While it is possible to find more different cases, the goal of this design is to identify countries that 'share basic characteristics such as being economically and democratically developed countries ... within the framework of advanced (post)industrial democracies' (Dimitrova and Strömbäck, 2005: 401).

In these countries, the applicability of the most different systems is demonstrated by a number of disparate political features. To begin with, the United States is best understood as a constitutional republic and representative democracy, while the Netherlands is a constitutional monarchy and a parliamentary democracy. Notable systematic differences thus include the election of presidents in America, compared to the royal appointment of prime ministers in the Netherlands. Also, there is an entrenched two-party political system in America whereas the Netherlands has a multiparty system based on the formation of a coalition cabinet government. Other dissimilar aspects of these political cultures include the American system being typically more individualistic, confrontational and conservative, but often with lower participation rates than the historically more liberal

and collectivistic Dutch sensibility of shared social responsibility, participation and consensus-building based on the polder¹ model (Almond and Verba, 1989; Bos et al., 2007; Helmke and Levitsky, 2004; Mokken, 1969; Wolfinger et al., 1990).

In order to provide more background on the populist political movements considered within this most different design, the TPP and the PVV are briefly outlined separately.

Tea Party Patriots. The Tea Party movement began in early 2009 by protesting against a series of ‘bailouts’ by the Obama administration in efforts to stimulate the economy. Core Tea Party positions include strong conservative values of fiscal responsibility, reduced spending and taxes, and constitutionally limited government. Over 80 per cent of Tea Party members have been shown in polls to strongly favour Republican representatives (Weisman, 2010), though a high level of dissatisfaction among Tea Partiers with mainstream Republicans paradoxically gave rise to the movement (Washington Post, 2010).

The TPP is self-reported to be the largest of many loosely affiliated Tea Party organizations with over 2800 local groups across the United States (Crockett, 2010). For this reason and the size of its budget – buoyed by an anonymous donation of one million dollars – the TPP was selected for analysis in this study as a proxy for the broader Tea Party movement. Though it is not formally or universally recognized, the TPP describes itself as the ‘official’ arm of the Tea Party movement and it maintains a considerable political presence, including a national summit in March 2011.

Polling data has also shown that the Tea Party adopted former Alaska Governor Sarah Palin as a symbolic leader (Rasmussen and Schoen, 2010), even though she no longer holds any political office and abstained from running in the 2012 presidential campaign, noting that she could have more political influence and be ‘more effective and more aggressive’ (Shear, 2011) if not campaigning herself. Though the Tea Party began after the unsuccessful bid of the McCain/Palin ticket for the 2008 presidential election, there has been a high degree of interaction between the Tea Party movement and Palin, including her speaking at rallies, joining fundraising tours and endorsing candidates. As such, the relationship between the Tea Party and Palin can best be described as symbiotic but not binding: she engages with the movement to extend her popularity and the TPP likewise piggybacks on her public recognition as a means to enhance their political legitimacy.

The extent to which Palin can be considered the symbolic leader of the Tea Party in general, or the TPP in particular, reflects the nature of the movement itself. It is fluid and adaptive, as could be observed during the 2012 Republican primaries when a number of candidates entered the field with varying degrees of implicit or explicit Tea Party support (Jonsson, 2011). For each candidate, there was considerable discussion about which politicians most closely match Tea Party ideals, and which would draw the most Tea Party support (Bai, 2012). As such, the structure and representation of the Tea Party are largely by ideological association, though it does have caucuses in Congress and 28 Tea Party-supported candidates prevailed in the 2010 midterm elections. While Palin may not be conceived of as the only potential leadership figure of this movement, it is likely that other politicians that take on this role will carry out a similar process of double differentiation.

Partij voor de Vrijheid. The forerunner to the PVV was the Wilders Group, an independent one-seat association that parliamentarian Geert Wilders founded in 2004 after he left the Dutch Liberal Party (Vereniging voor Vrijheid en Democratie; VVD) but controversially held on to his Liberal parliamentary seat. Wilders clashed with VVD party leaders and he illustrated this dissent in deviating from the official party stance by openly speaking out against Turkey's proposed membership of the European Union. The Wilders Group officially became the PVV during the 2006 general elections.

After an initially small success in those elections (9 out of 150 seats), the PVV later showed an upsurge in the elections for the European Parliament in 2009 when it became the second-largest Dutch party (4 out of 25 seats). Notably, these elections were approximately one year after the release of Wilders' controversial film *Fitna* but just a few weeks after the announcement that Wilders was being prosecuted for inciting hatred (he was later cleared). At the conclusion of the June 2010 general elections, the PVV had the third-largest number of representatives in the Dutch Parliament with 24 seats. In addition, the PVV entered the provincial elections for the first time in March 2011 and became the fourth-largest party in the country at that level.

Related to this rise in electoral representation, in October 2010, after months of negotiations, the PVV was officially presented as the 'partner' that 'tolerates' the minority government of the Liberal Party and the Christian Democrats under Prime Minister Mark Rutte. Even though the PVV was not technically part of this coalition government, Rutte's cabinet was commonly known as the 'Wilders cabinet', not least because of the coalition's increasingly strict politics of limiting (non-Western) immigration and its rejection of multiculturalism and austerity programmes, which effectively caused the Dutch government to collapse in April 2012.

Referring to this Dutch cabinet as having been implicitly dictated by the politics of Wilders himself, rather than those of PVV as a party, signals an interesting dimension to the PVV: Wilders is not just the party leader: he is also the only official member of the PVV. That is, unlike most other Dutch political parties with parliamentary representation, the PVV refers to itself as a movement, and is therefore not based on open membership where citizens can join as party members to help determine candidates and other party functions. Though there are other elected PVV representatives that hold political office on both national and local political levels, Wilders has often asserted tight control over the party. This strict management has been defended by Wilders and the PVV as an attempt to avoid the chaos and power clashes that occurred in the party of Pim Fortuyn, the Dutch populist politician who was assassinated in 2002 and whose policies and political career foreshadowed Wilders'.

The politics of Wilders and Fortuyn share an anti-immigrant stance, but also explicitly position themselves against the political establishment. Fortuyn had been actively involved in the Dutch Labour Party (Partij van de Arbeid; PvdA), but he challenged its political hegemony and its role in upholding the Dutch polder model of consensus politics. Similarly, in dissenting from and then leaving the Dutch Liberal Party, Wilders has accused what he terms the elitist political left of favouring Muslim immigrants over working-class Dutch citizens. Wilders has thus built on the legacy of Fortuyn's double differentiation from the political left in accusing them of privileging a foreign minority

while simultaneously positioning himself as needing to act – as an outsider able to exert influence – within the political establishment on behalf of a marginalized majority.

An important similarity to Wilders' explicit leadership of the PVV can be seen in Palin's symbolic alignment to the TPP. Specifically, populist *outside* positioning is pursued by politicians with explicit *inside* ties to the political establishment, both through former ties to political parties and through the founding of or engaging with movements that are bound by the conventions of the existing political landscape. Indeed, the cleavages in political cultures across the two countries provide a useful framework to examine the application and extent of double differentiation as a political practice.

Hypotheses

In outlining two populist politics movements, the Tea Party and the PVV, we have distinguished central features of leadership, adversaries and mobilization that previous research has noted as critical to populism more generally. These features are now explicitly measured and compared by placing double differentiation techniques within the self-represented online media of the TPP and PVV into hypotheses derived from the unique political cultures of the United States and the Netherlands.

Owing to American political and civic culture being built on a history of individualism (Almond and Verba, 1989; Wolfinger et al., 1990) rather than the collectivism and consensus-building found in Dutch politics (Helmke and Levitsky, 2004; Mokken, 1969), when considering leadership, it can be expected that:

H1: Palin will appear (a) more frequently and (b) conceptually more independently in self-represented TPP online media than Wilders in comparable self-represented PVV online media.

With regard to adversaries and how they are defined in generally more (US) and less (Netherlands) confrontational and polarized political cultures (Helmke and Levitsky, 2004), it can likewise be expected that these differences would be evident as each organization adapted to the prevailing political culture. Thus:

H2: TPP adversaries will appear (a) more frequently and (b) contextually more extreme in self-represented TPP online media than PVV adversaries in comparable self-represented PVV online media.

Finally, when considering mobilizing information, the typically more conservative approach of American politics (Almond and Verba, 1989; Wolfinger et al., 1990), as well as a relatively lower level of civic and electoral participation in the US (Putnam, 2000) differs distinctly from the more liberal Dutch tradition of shared social responsibility informed by the polder model in which all actors have – and are expected to have – a say (Bos et al., 2007; Mokken, 1969). Yet, the core causes of both the TPP and the PVV are also fairly similar in nature (varying by degrees on taxation, government budgets, health care, welfare and immigration) and are both dependent on voters. Therefore:

H3: Mobilizing information will appear (a) more frequently but (b) topically equivalent in self-represented PVV online media when compared with self-represented TPP online media.

Methods

In order to fully examine the key populism concepts considered here, a multi-methodological approach was adopted. For these purposes, several media channels are especially pertinent to and were analysed for this study. The official websites of both parties (www.teapartypatriots.org and www.pvv.nl) are central to understanding how these organizations construct meaning in their own self-represented online media, and data was captured from those sites on 24 and 25 February 2011. Collected material included outgoing 'endorsed' links and blogs from pages on these sites, which had a variety of date ranges and frequency of posts.

The social networking hubs of the TPP and PVV leaders are likewise important to double differentiation in these movements. Thus, the SNS presences of Sarah Palin and Geert Wilders on Twitter (@SarahPalinUSA and @geertwilderspvv, respectively) were also examined. The timeframe for this data extended from 22 May 2009 (Wilders' first tweet), and continued until 3 March 2011 (one day after the Dutch provincial elections). Though Palin had begun tweeting before that time, her tweet activity was also bound to this timeframe and same number of tweets as Wilders to create comparable media data.

Altogether, there were 83 separate 'documents' with a total count of 190,399 words. Documents were identified for each official webpage denoted by the navigation tabs identified by each movement (e.g. home, events, media) as well as links on these pages. Two of the most common sources for additional outside pages were the blogs on the TPP site and the 'in de media' page found on the PVV site.

All tweets for each leader were treated as one document. Links from those tweets were treated as separate documents but in order to maintain an even comparison, only the first seven links shared by Palin were incorporated into analyses to match the output of Wilders. While it is possible that all of Palin's links-in-tweets could have been included, this content would have overwhelmed the otherwise fairly even distribution of media activity, and a good proportion of these links were redundantly incorporated into more than one tweet, thus increasing the likelihood of potentially biasing the findings.

All written material that appeared on each page was incorporated, including both static material such as navigation menus as well as more dynamic stories, tweets, updates and links. This strategy captured all raw data and allowed the most possible relationships to be observed in constructing a good level of comparability and standardization in material that regularly changed within several different presentation modes.

This approach ensures a high degree of validity, since framing categorizations and analytic schemes are not artificially introduced from outside the body of analysed texts. In addition, there are both formal statistical comparisons and interpretative subjective contrasts and discussion that examine dimensions of the texts, which would not be possible otherwise. Quantitatively, frequencies of keywords and concept associations were analysed through a series of concept maps, dendrograms and proximity plots through the software program WordStat (Simon and Jerit, 2007).

A key statistic in determining these relationships was Jaccard's coefficient. Statistically, Jaccard's coefficient examines the number of pairs of objects (in this case words and phrases) that appear jointly within the same clusters (here, media documents) relative to the instances where those words or phrases appeared separately without one another (Tan et al., 2006). The coefficient has a range of 0.0 to 1.0, where 0.0 signifies no overlap in frequency of appearance and 1.0 indicates perfectly paired co-occurrences where one term or phrase always appears with another term or phrase.

The results of these quantitative analyses proceeded inductively through the qualitative analyses to place more specific examples and overall thematic explorations of these most different cases in the findings and discussion. Jointly, content from the TPP and the PVV are compared across these separate but interrelated perspectives.

Findings

To begin with, all TPP documents were analysed by examining the frequency of keywords. In sum, all pages of *teapartypatriots.org*, 198 tweets from Sarah Palin, and the selected blogs and endorsed pages that linked out from these spaces comprised a total of 42 documents.

Excluding common English words from the analysis (such as 'at', 'the', 'of', 'about' and single letters), the most frequent ten keywords were: (1) 'Wisconsin', (2) 'party', (3) 'state', (4) 'Palin', (5) 'tea', (6) 'Obama', (7) 'government', (8) 'Sarah', (9) 'people', (10) 'America'. These keywords were then grouped with all others in the dataset based on agglomeration order following Jaccard's coefficient of occurrence to determine the distance between the most central concepts (Tan et al., 2006).

In order to facilitate a visual representation of these relationships, thematic clusters (out of a possible 450) were identified as a standard to form conceptual grouping ($R^2 = 0.22$, stress = 0.43). These results are summarized in Figure 1, where the linkages and spatial relationships between prevalent keywords formed by unique phrases such as 'Tea Party Patriots', 'Sarah Palin', 'health care' and 'fiscal responsibility' are evident.

Similarly, the body of text from the official PVV website was collected, along with all tweets posted by Geert Wilders. These data also included selected blogs and outside websites, comprising 41 total documents with 189 tweets. Among this sample, excluding common Dutch words, the most frequent keywords were: (1) 'Wilders', (2) 'PVV', (3) 'Geert', (4) 'Nederland', (5) 'favorite', (6) 'mensen' [people], (7) 'onze' [ours], (8) 'moeten' [must], (9) 'partij' [party], (10) 'Twitter'. Using Jaccard's coefficient criteria, these keywords were also agglomerated to measure distances between other concepts vital to the PVV. The same number of 450 clusters was again applied ($R^2 = 0.25$, stress = 0.42) to identify a comparatively different mapping of connections between leading figures and party identification from the TPP.

As graphically depicted in Figure 2, Geert Wilders is the primary node in the network of keywords for the PVV. Indeed, even his proximity to *Partij voor de Vrijheid* is relatively removed, and the importance of all other concepts is secondary to Wilders directly. As is evident by contrasting these relationships to those of the TPP, a much more centralized hierarchy of populist ideology emerges here.

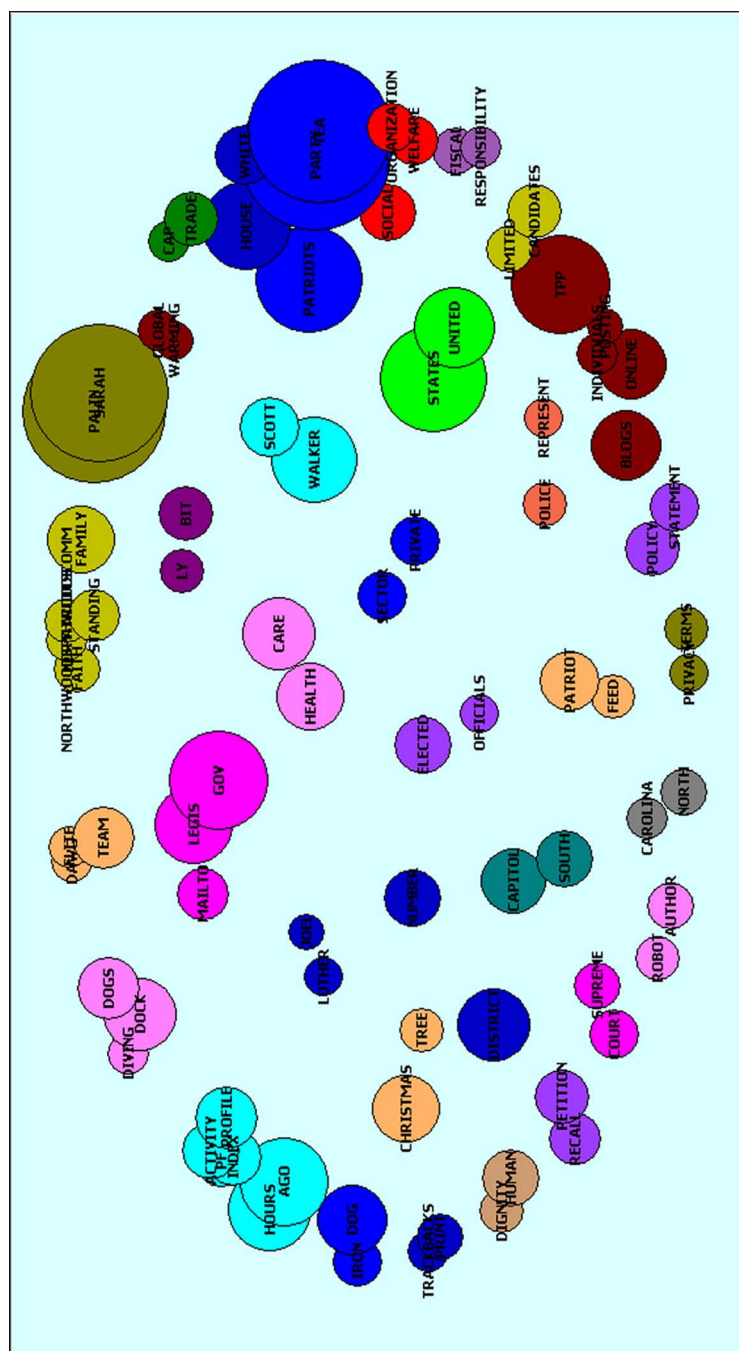


Figure 1. Cluster graph of conceptual distances from keywords within TPP texts.

Note: $R^2 = 0.22$, stress = 0.43.

When analysing the concept of leadership further in self-represented texts, the names of Palin and Wilders, as symbolic and official leaders, were directly compared by frequency in their respective texts. Contrary to expectations, results show that Wilders was far more visible than Palin. The words 'Geert Wilders' appeared 331 times out of a possible 34,729 words or phrases, whereas the words 'Sarah Palin' occurred in only 294 instances in a field of 79,251 total words or phrases. A difference of proportions test indicated a statistically significant difference between these distributions of leadership recognition ($Z = -12.25, p < .001$), the opposite of the direction predicted. Thus hypothesis 1(a) was not supported.

The names of each leader were also hypothesized in relation to other phrases and concepts that were presented. In doing so, a more detailed depiction of not just count but also framing techniques that were used to surround leadership figures were determined. Here, the words 'Sarah Palin' most regularly co-occurred (as ranked by Jaccard's coefficient within the same document) with conservative journalist 'Michelle Malkin' ($J = 0.43$). That relationship was followed by 'hard working' ($J = 0.42$), 'health care' ($J = 0.40$), 'big government' ($J = 0.39$), and 'Middle East' ($J = 0.39$). Other relationships of note included conservative talk radio host 'Rush Limbaugh' ($J = 0.36$), 'Tea Party' ($J = 0.36$), 'budget proposal' ($J = 0.33$), 'American thinker' ($J = 0.33$), 'common sense' ($J = 0.29$), 'God bless' ($J = 0.29$), and 'free market' ($J = 0.27$). This network of descriptors used to position Palin is thus at once personal and highly interconnected with other individuals associated with the movement. In other words, contrary to the expectations of H1(b), her leadership is asserted from within a grassroots framework of co-production, and not as an independent actor.

Some qualitative evidence for this finding can be observed in that Palin re-tweeted a link to an anti-abortion 'Walk for Life' rally that Malkin had posted. Likewise, a TPP-endorsed blog (*The US Liberty Journal*) made an explicit connection between Limbaugh and Palin in noting that liberals would attempt to censor conservative media but that the Tea Party was too popular and influential for the liberals to push their agenda against the will of the people.

The words 'Geert Wilders' were also measured by their co-occurrence with other keywords and phrases in PVV texts. Based on the concept map in Figure 2, it is somewhat unsurprising to see that Wilders is not as strongly linked to other actors in the political process, but more closely linked to the centre of political power in the Netherlands, 'Den Haag' [The Hague] ($J = 0.28$). This relationship was followed in strength by 'miljard euro' [billion euro] ($J = 0.25$), 'afgelopen decennia' [past decades] ($J = 0.25$), 'per jaar' [annually] ($J = 0.24$), and 'Henk en Ingrid' ($J = 0.24$). These topics generally had to do with excessive government spending, the acceptance of too many asylum seekers, and also the fictitious representations of the hard-working married white working-class Dutch couple, Henk and Ingrid – invented by the PVV and comparable in many respects to 'ordinary Joes' and their families in the United States.

In addition to these terms, others include 'Midden Oosten' [Middle East] ($J = 0.19$) as well as 'verdediging van onze' [defence of our] ($J = 0.19$), 'land weer' [country again] ($J = 0.19$), and 'agenda van hoop en optimisme' [agenda of hope and optimism] ($J = 0.19$). In context, these topics have largely to do with immigration and defending or returning land through a political agenda of anti-immigration. Wilders' biography on

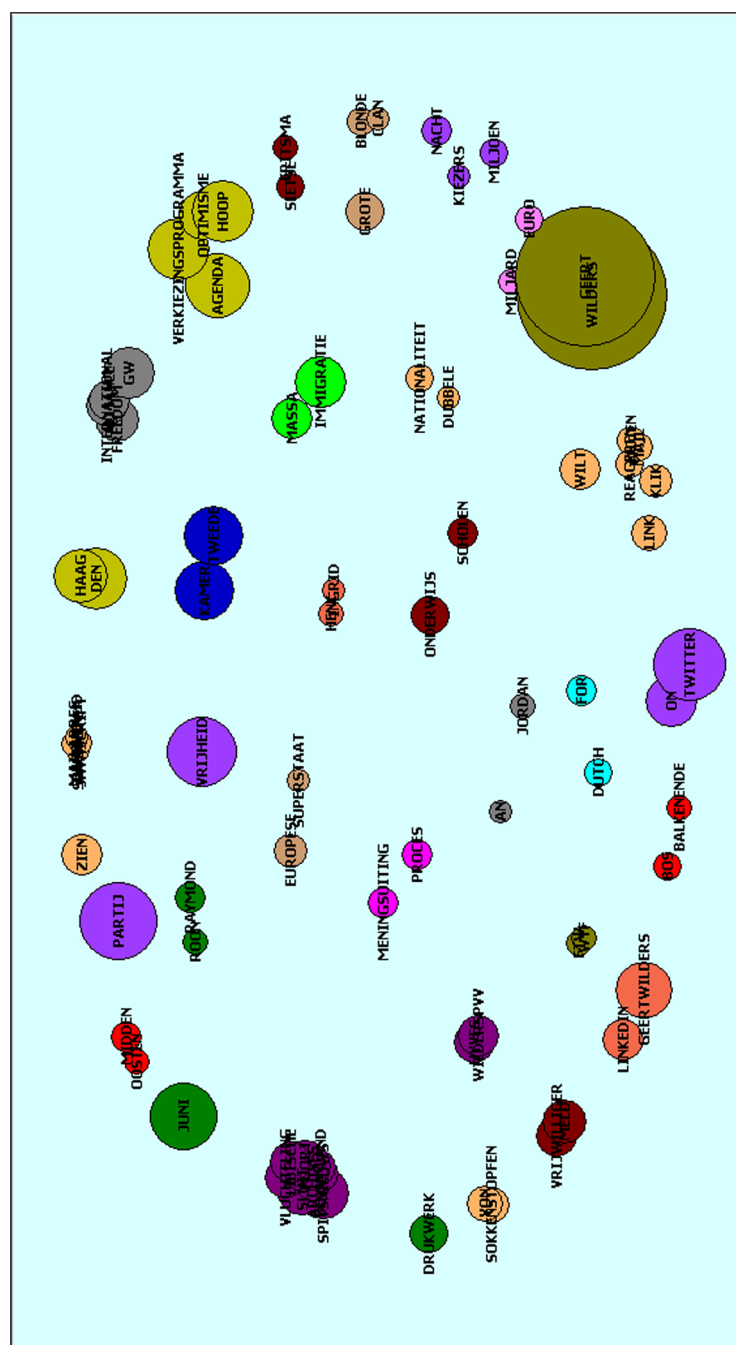


Figure 2. Cluster graph of conceptual distances from keywords within PV texts.

Note: $R^2 = 0.25$, stress = 0.42.

the PVV website presents a specific contextualized example of how he unites being both insider and outsider of the same political establishment, noting this position as a resource for Wilders' ability to challenge 'The Hague' as the centre of political power in the Netherlands.

As far as H1(b) is concerned, Wilders was clearly conceptualized more independently as a political actor than Palin in the self-represented online media texts of the PVV and TPP. Thus, while H1(b) was not supported, there is some fairly clear application of double differentiation processes, not only in terms of leadership figures but also because these findings generally go against the dominant political cultures and expectations for each country.

Notably, the concepts with which the leadership figures of the TPP and the PVV are associated depart to some extent in terms of topic. The TPP focuses more strongly on health care and budget than the PVV, which shows not only a concern for spending but also an explicit bias against immigrants and Muslims. In order to identify the adversary definitions that Kriesi (2011) noted as critical to populist political movements, this study chose two straightforward terms that characterize leftist political opposition in each country: 'left' as it appeared in TPP sites and 'linkse' as presented within PVV pages. The rationale for these particular comparative keywords was based on their highly overlapping linguistic and political meanings. While it would be possible to employ more specific keywords attached to certain parties, the goal was to measure all opposition to movements that are fairly right-wing within their respective political cultures.

The relative proportions of frequency distributions were again measured across the TPP and the PVV in testing H2(a). No significant difference in the amount of attention to political adversaries by frequency was observed ($Z = 0.63$, $p = 0.27$). The term 'left' was present 72 times by the TPP in 15 out of 42 separate documents (35.7 per cent), which was nearly equivalent to the 50 mentions of 'linkse' in 12 of 41 documents (29.3 per cent) in the PVV sample. Thus, H2(a) was not supported because there was not a difference in how frequently the adversaries of the TPP and the PVV appear in party-identified online spaces.

In addition, 'left' was measured for its presentation in TPP material as this term related to other concepts to examine the extent to which opposition was conceptualized differently by both groups. In this analysis, 'send' was the most closely related keyword ($J = 0.82$) per document. 'Cut' ($J = 0.71$), 'Sarah' ($J = 0.71$), 'hope' ($J = 0.68$), 'fact' ($J = 0.67$), and 'administration' ($J = 0.67$) followed most closely in co-occurrence ranking. While most of these linkages are fairly non-aggressive, many were used as techniques to encourage action on the part of participants by identifying specific instances of alleged non-truths. Additional terms of high co-occurrence focused on honesty and stopping excessive government spending.

Situated in context, the sentiment of actionably sending a message to the left by removing them from office was one that was consistently revealed in the rhetoric of TPP media spaces analysed here. A similar positioning of 'hope' was also applied in numerous TPP texts, often by sarcastically mocking President Obama's 2008 campaign slogan referring to hope and change.

When examining the Dutch equivalent of the leftist opposition, 'linkse', a fairly equally mixed series of terms was most prevalent. 'Beter' [better] was the most common

linkage ($J = 0.71$), and indicated straightforward claims on how the PVV could improve conditions. This type of construction was followed by 'minder' [less] ($J = 0.64$), 'elite' ($J = 0.64$), 'zorg' [health care] ($J = 0.64$), and 'Nederlanders' [Dutch people] ($J = 0.62$). Not unlike the TPP, many of these terms were not explicitly offensive but had more to do with identifying shortcomings and typifying choices of action based on a combination of services and nationalistic motivations. Other strongly associated terms included 'samen' [together] ($J = 0.62$), 'stop' ($J = 0.58$), and 'regering' [government] ($J = 0.58$) as well as 'Islamiseren' [Islamization] ($J = 0.57$).

These terms explicate the key stances of the PVV that differentiate it in substance and style from its leftist counterparts: reducing government spending and immigration, especially of Muslims. In one in-text example, the political left is derisively mocked by Wilders as dysfunctional and out of touch with the electorate. Wilders categorizes the left with the 'Canal Elite' (*grachtengordelelite*), signifying the very wealthy that traditionally live in the canal areas around central Amsterdam, to construct an insider/outsider discourse that was a pervasive feature of his tweets. 'Good to see there is a lot of support for the PVV manifesto. Too bad for the leftist Canal Elite, but good news for Henk and Ingrid.'

Moreover, this content also suggests solidarity and action amongst 'common' Dutch citizens, just as the TPP did in its framing of the opposition on related issues. When taken together in examining H2(b), there is little direct evidence quantitatively or in context that the adversaries of the TPP were depicted as being more extreme than the adversaries identified in self-represented PVV online media. The analysis performed here actually indicates that the leftist political adversaries of the TPP and the PVV were contextualized in very similar but not identical ways in terms of topic.

Considering H3(a) and mobilization information, this feature was operationalized with the term 'events' for the TPP and 'agenda' for the PVV – organizational keywords found in the navigation bar near the top of both websites. Comparatively, the PVV provided more on its actionable 'agenda' than did the TPP 'events' descriptor when measured with a difference of proportions test ($Z = 2.14, p = 0.02$). Specifically, TPP 'events' appeared 76 times in 26 of 42 separate documents (61.9 per cent). Though a robust figure, support was still found for H3(a) because this amount of TPP mobilizing information was still significantly less by proportion when compared to the 78 'agenda' instances indicated by the PVV in 82.9 per cent (34 of 41) of unique documents.

When examining the within-context presentation of mobilizing information, 'events' co-occurred with 'policy' more than any other term ($J = 0.79$) in TPP documents and was largely indicative of instances where existing policy was flawed, and changes to current administration policy were advanced by Tea Party supporters. This list continues with 'government' ($J = 0.78$), 'including' ($J = 0.78$), 'citizens' ($J = 0.75$), and 'tax' ($J = 0.75$), which were all issues that had largely to do with budgetary positions and debates that have been taking place in the United States, notably regarding the Obama healthcare programme and the collective bargaining confrontation in the state of Wisconsin. Another key term included 'candidates' ($J = 0.74$), which focused on which candidates should be endorsed.

When compared with the material presented by the PVV, a similar process of mobilization for purpose is evident. Following the provincial elections in which the PVV was

the party with the most votes, all website visitors were greeted with a message thanking them for their vote. Indeed, the first three keywords that appeared most closely and frequently with ‘agenda’ – ‘kamer’ [chamber] ($J = 0.97$), ‘tweede’ [second] ($J = 0.94$), and ‘verkiezingsprogramma’ [election manifesto] ($J = 0.94$) – had to do explicitly with elections and choices for governing bodies, namely increasing representation in the second house of the Dutch legislature. Other terms, like ‘fitna’ ($J = 0.94$), were about Wilders’ ongoing legal trial and more highly associated terms pointed to party objectives and candidates, specifically ‘partij’ [party] ($J = 0.92$) and ‘kandidaten’ [candidates] ($J = 0.91$).

Thus, there is demonstrable support for H3(b), since many of the mobilizing issues presented by the TPP and the PVV are quite similar despite their different backgrounds, political cultures and related but overtly distinct political goals. Clearly there is a strong sense of conceptual and practical overlap that, even in these most different cases, is apparent through double differentiation in the media of populist political groups as they self-define and organize in dedicated online spaces.

Discussion

Qualitatively, one of the most interesting insights found when interpreting and representing the two datasets in the proximity plots is that the language structure used on the websites of both populist movements reflects the different role and nature of leadership in them. As far as the TPP is concerned, it can be observed that Sarah Palin is actively aligned with the TPP *by the TPP* as the most appropriate signifier to ‘mean’ and embody the core values of the movement. This positioning literally means that despite the role of unofficial leader being assigned to Palin, *the TPP and its values precede Palin* and ownership of the movement lies with self-registered members.

This democracy of ownership is markedly different from the central and only leadership position occupied by and assigned to Wilders on the PVV website. Whereas Palin was presented as highly interconnected with other individuals associated with the TPP on their website, the PVV’s website defined a stark distinction between Wilders and other prominent PVV figures, namely members of the national Dutch Parliament, the European Parliament, or local PVV politicians. Furthermore, the website draws regularly on quotes from Wilders, all of which were made in other contexts, most notably in media performances and interviews.

Here the difference with Palin is most visible: *Wilders precedes the PVV brand*. This is not only manifest in how the website of the PVV is centrally organized around tracking and documenting the actions and statements of Wilders; it is also visible in Wilders’ use of Twitter, which symbolically marks his outsider and anti-establishment status. In opposition to Palin – who still appears rather selective by having over 741,000 followers and only following 117 – Wilders follows nobody, thereby undermining the reciprocal principle of Twitter as a communicative medium. In this manner, Wilders positions himself on an explicitly PVV-endorsed media space as elusive and as unable to be restricted by contemporary protocol.

Yet Wilders and Palin also have an important commonality in their use of Twitter: the tweets of both negotiate and reconcile the potential conflict between their anti-establishment

image and their (past, current and potential) political affiliation. Both do so by typically tweeting from the perspective of *commentator*, in which the tweets engage with actions of either political opposition or past political affiliates. For Palin, this includes Democrats or Obama and moderate Republicans; for Wilders it comprises leftist parties and members of the 'tolerated' government. These opposition groups are thereby established as the incentive for tweeting. In other words, Palin and Wilders only perform as political actors with inside knowledge (and thus inevitably as members of the establishment) when they cannot *but* respond to what members of the political establishment have done wrong. In that way, Palin and Wilders engage in the very discursive practice that is so prevalent on the websites of both TPP and PVV: encouraging responsive action by identifying specific instances of alleged non-truths or abuse of political adversaries.

The characterization of these political adversaries is interesting for how it, by reflexive implication, can make available inferences on the values and political qualities of the TPP and the PVV. It thereby serves principally to define and legitimate the political focus of these movements. Both are anti-establishment and challenge traditions of central or federal power, yet need to create different discursive spaces within the domain and traditions of mainstream politics to showcase these characteristics. This finding signifies that these populist movements need a politics that stems *logically from and only from* perfectly opposing the political establishment. It is here that the specificity of national political cultures and traditions comes into play and that both groups outwardly and explicitly act in opposition to prevailing political cultures in their online media as a performance of double differentiation.

That is, considering the proximity plots of TPP with policy issues, the TPP positions itself as a responsible and frugal organization, as necessitated by the perceived fiscal irresponsibility of the political opposition. In this way, national health programmes (i.e. 'ObamaCare') can then be framed as recklessly spending the hard-earned money and opportunities of ordinary hard-working Americans, famously characterized by 'Joe the Plumber' in the 2008 national election campaign. For the PVV, the situation is slightly more complex, because some key PVV proposals have their counterparts in far-left politics (such as preserving the pension age). It could therefore be argued that to an important extent the PVV's anti-immigrant policies provide the PVV with highly suitable discursive resources to visibly perform being anti-leftist, and thereby support anti-establishment programmes. Immigration, then, can be framed as endangering the hard-earned money and opportunities of 'Henk and Ingrid'.

Thus the TPP and the PVV engage with qualitatively similar core issues, but in different manifestations that run against expectations derived from the dominant political cultures of each country. The TPP's main focus is on budget considerations, especially as it relates to nationalized healthcare, and the PVV's is on immigration as it relates to economic and patriotic considerations. This is not to suggest that there is no overlap across the groups or that immigration does not enter the TPP agenda, just as budget concerns can enter the PVV agenda. What these differences do suggest, however, is a fundamental suitability for direct comparison, which offers some striking insights into contemporary political populism as it exists in online media.

Conclusions

Importantly, the findings reported here advance the understanding of not only what is presented through user-generated media production, but also how those self-determined media spaces have facilitated shifts in media legitimation and political representation through a process of double differentiation in two politically unique countries. Though this study does not explicitly examine the processes of mediatization and mass media complicity (Mazzoleni, 2008), which may well benefit populist leadership figures and movements, Bos et al. (2010) have shown a high degree of media attention to populist figures, particularly authoritative ones, during recent campaigns. It therefore follows that self-representational online media that situate leadership figures, define adversaries, and mobilize support are crucial for engendering favorable mass media coverage as well as recruiting more supporters directly.

Populist groups have historically lacked representation in media and politics. However, such movements are now too large and influential to ignore (Koopmans and Muis, 2009; Kriesi et al., 2006), even if their representation is indirect or confined to existing party politics. As identified here, a process of double differentiation was apparent by uniquely applied anti-establishment-from-within-the-establishment presentation techniques by both Palin and Wilders. From these symbolic and official leaders, adversary characterizations were similarly manifest across the distinct issues of the TPP and the PVV. Finally, supporters were consistently provided with ideologically rich mobilizing information from within parties that were adapted to counter the inherent political cultures. In the United States, this took on a many-to-many approach, but in the Netherlands, Wilders was and is the party, though many of his messages were legitimized through cross-referenced media channels.

These findings demonstrate an important theoretical advance at the intersection of political populism and online media. The process of double differentiation was applied by disparate and unconnected movements in a somewhat similar manner in their online media, but populism itself was shaped by both groups *in opposition* to expectations derived from the prevailing political cultures of both nations. Indeed, it was not only that the TPP and PVV used online media to double differentiate from extremist views and their respective political establishments, but also that their self-represented online media broke from the larger political cultures of each country.

Altogether, this study has shown that even in most different cases, a high degree of similarity in populist framing and mobilization techniques that defy expectations based on prevailing political cultures can be observed through double differentiation. Building on the comparative work presented here, it is recommended that future empirical inquiries take this differentiation from dominant political culture(s) into account. Also, while this study innovated methodologically by blending quantitative and qualitative approaches through mining larger-scale data to unearth contextualized examples, further research should consider longer timeframes, probability samples, and incorporating social media spaces beyond Twitter, which are the limitations of the current study.

Nonetheless, as shown here, populist politics in self-representational online media demonstrates the utility of double differentiation that is facilitated, negotiated and *augmented* by the uses that are made of these media. Double differentiation is thus not just a

potential feature related to some aspects of populism in certain countries, but seems instead to be an integral mediated mechanism of branding and maintaining populist politics.

Funding

This research received no specific grant from any funding agency in the public, commercial, or not-for-profit sectors.

Note

1. '... the "polder model" refers to cooperation among Dutch farmers to protect their new polders (fields claimed from the sea and rivers) against the water; this cooperation, institutionalized some thousand years ago in water control boards (one of the oldest forms of democracy in Northern Europe) still exists' (Andeweg, 2000: 698).

References

- Abts K and Rummens S (2007) Populism versus democracy. *Political Studies* 55: 405–424.
- Albertazzi D and McDonnell D (eds) (2008) *Twenty-First Century Populism: The Spectre of Western European Democracy*. New York: Palgrave Macmillan.
- Almond GA and Verba S (1989) *The Civic Culture*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press.
- Andeweg RB (2000) From Dutch disease to Dutch model? Consensus government in practice. *Parliamentary Affairs* 53: 697–709.
- Bai M (2012) The tea party's not-so-civil war. *New York Times*, 15 January 2012.
- Bimber B (1998) The internet and political transformation: populism, community, and accelerated pluralism. *Polity* 31(1): 133–160.
- Bos D, Ebben M and Te Velde H (eds) (2007) *Harmonie in Holland: het poldermodel van 1500 tot nu*. Amsterdam: Bert Bakker.
- Bos L, Van der Brug W and De Vreese C (2010) Media coverage of right-wing populist leaders. *Communications* 35: 141–163.
- Crockett P (2010) Tea party patriots receives \$1,000,000 donation. *Liberty Observer*, 21 September 2010.
- Davis R (2009) *Typing Politics: The Role of Blogs in American Politics*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Dimitrova DV and Strömbäck J (2005) Mission accomplished? Framing of the Iraq war in the elite newspapers in Sweden and the United States. *Gazette: The International Journal for Communication Studies* 67(5): 399–417.
- Druckman JN, Kifer M and Parkin M (2007) The technological development of congressional candidate web sites: how and why candidates use web innovations. *Social Science Computer Review* 25(4): 425–442.
- Entman R (1991) Framing U.S. coverage of international news: contrasts in narratives of the KAL and Iran Air incidents. *Journal of Communication* 41(4): 6–26.
- Fogarty BJ and Wolak J (2009) The effects of media interpretation for citizen evaluations of politicians' messages. *American Politics Research* 37: 129–154.
- Gibson RK and Römmele A (2007) Political communication. In: Caramani D (ed.) *Comparative Politics*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, pp. 473–492.
- Helmke G and Levitsky S (2004) Informal institutions and comparative politics: a research agenda. *Perspectives on Politics* 2(4): 725–740.

- Hoffman LH (2006) Is internet content different after all? A content analysis of mobilizing information in online and print newspapers. *Journalism & Mass Communication Quarterly* 83(1): 58–76.
- Hooghe M and Teepe W (2007) Party profiles on the web: an analysis of the logfiles of non-partisan interactive political internet sites in the 2003 and 2004 election campaigns in Belgium. *New Media & Society* 9: 965–985.
- Hutter S (2011) Globalization and the transformation of national protest politics: an appetizer. In: Kouki H and Romanos E (eds) *Protest Beyond Borders: Contentious Politics in Europe Since 1945*. Oxford: Berghahn Books, pp. 188–200.
- Ignatow G and Schuett JL (2011) Inter-organizational digital divide: civic groups' media strategies in the trinity river corridor project. *First Monday* 16(11). Available at: <http://firstmonday.org/htbin/cgiwrap/bin/ojs/index.php/fm/article/view/3696/3078>.
- Jonsson P (2011) Tea Party fuels rise of Herman Cain. So how can it be racist? *Christian Science Monitor*, 13 October.
- Kobayashi T, Ikeda K and Miyata K (2006) Social capital online: collective use of internet and reciprocity as lubricants of democracy. *Information, Communication & Society* 9(5): 582–611.
- Koopmans R and Muis J (2009) The rise of right-wing populist Pim Fortuyn in the Netherlands: a discursive opportunity approach. *European Journal of Political Research* 48: 642–664.
- Kraidy MM and Mourad S (2010) Hypermedia space and global communication studies lessons from the Middle East. *Global Media Journal* 9(16): 1–19.
- Kriesi H (2011) The changing political preconditions for political communication: the forces that shape the political elites' ability to control the citizen public. Keynote speech presented at the Conference on Political Communication in Europe: 'Changing Contexts. Changing Contents', Amsterdam, The Netherlands, 7 January.
- Kriesi H, Grande E, Lachat R, et al. (2006) Globalization and the transformation of the national political space: six European countries compared. *European Journal of Political Research* 45: 921–956.
- Mazzoleni G (2008) Populism and the media. In: Albertazzi D and McDonnell D (eds) *Twenty-First Century Populism: The Spectre of Western European Democracy*. New York and London: Palgrave Macmillan, pp. 49–64.
- Mokken RJ (1969) Dutch-American comparisons of the 'sense of political efficacy'. *Quality & Quantity* 3(1–2): 125–152.
- Park HW and Thelwall M (2008) Developing network indicators for ideological landscapes from the political blogosphere in South Korea. *Journal of Computer-Mediated Communication* 13: 856–879.
- Pfetsch B and Esser F (2004) Comparing political communication: reorientations in a changing world. In: Esser F and Pfetsch B (eds) *Comparing Political Communication: Theories, Cases, and Challenges*. New York: Cambridge University Press, pp. 3–22.
- Putnam RD (2000) *Bowling Alone: The Collapse and Revival of American Community*. New York: Simon & Schuster.
- Rasmussen S and Schoen D (2010) *Mad as Hell: How the Tea Party Movement Is Fundamentally Remaking Our Two-Party System*. New York: HarperCollins.
- Rojas H and Puig-i-Abril E (2009) Mobilizers mobilized: information, expression, mobilization and participation in the digital age. *Journal of Computer Mediated Communication* 14: 902–927.
- Shear MD (2011) Palin says she's not running. *New York Times*, 6 October.
- Shirky C (2010) *Cognitive Surplus: Creativity and Generosity in a Connected Age*. New York: Penguin.
- Simon AF and Jerit J (2007) Toward a theory relating political discourse, media, and public opinion. *Journal of Communication* 57: 254–271.

- Tan P, Steinbach M and Kumar V (2006) *Introduction to Data Mining*. New York: Addison-Wesley.
- Washington Post (2010) Tea party canvass results, category: 'what they believe' a party face. *Washington Post*, 24 October.
- Weisman J (2010) GOP in lead in final lap. *Wall Street Journal*, 20 October.
- Wolfinger RE, Glass DP and Squire P (1990) Predictors of electoral turnout: an international comparison. *Policy Studies Review* 9(3): 551–574.
- Woolley JK, Limperos AM and Oliver MB (2010) The 2008 presidential election, 2.0: a content analysis of user-generated political Facebook groups. *Mass Communication and Society* 13: 631–652.
- Zaslove A (2008) Here to stay? Populism as a new party type. *European Review* 16(3): 319–336.
- Zhang W, Johnson TJ, Seltzer T, et al. (2010) The revolution will be networked: the influence of social networking sites on political attitudes and behavior. *Social Science Computer Review* 28(1): 75–92.

Jacob Groshek (PhD, Indiana University) has recently been appointed Lecturer at the University of Melbourne. His research focuses on communication technologies in shaping political change but also includes applied econometric analyses, data mining and media ethics. Recent publications have appeared in the *Journal of Communication*, *Journalism* and *International Communication Gazette*, among others.

Jiska Engelbert (PhD, Aberystwyth University) is an Assistant Professor at Erasmus University, Rotterdam. Her research, part of the Erasmus Research Centre for Media, Communication and Culture, focuses on how (media) discourse features in late modernity. Recent publications have appeared in *Critical Discourse Studies* and *Media, War & Conflict*.