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Populism and social media: a global perspective

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Abstract
The link between the spread of social media and the recent surge of populism around the world remains elusive. A global, rather than Western, theory is required to explore this connection. Such a theory would need to pay particular attention to five questions, namely, the roots of populism, ideology and populism, the rise of theocratic populism, social media and non-populist politicians, and the embedding of social media in larger systems of communication. In this essay, I draw from a range of cross-cultural examples to argue that social media are inextricable from a dense web of highly diverse online and offline communicative practices. Like most other forms of political communication, populism is twice hybrid, in that it entails the ceaseless interaction between old and new media as well as between online and offline sites of communication. Populists never operate in a vacuum or indeed in a filter bubble: they share hybridly mediated spaces and arenas with other populists and with non-populists. Over time, these varied political actors have co-evolved media strategies and tactics in full awareness of one another's existence.

Keywords
communication, cross-cultural comparison, ideology, politicians, politics, populism, social media

In his essay to this Special Issue, Paolo Gerbaudo makes a timely contribution to current discussions about the link between social media and the recent rise of populism exemplified by Brexit, Trump and Le Pen on the right and by Sanders, Corbyn and Podemos on the left. For Gerbaudo, the new wave of populism results from the convergence of two

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global trends: worsening economic prospects for large sectors of the population and swift technological changes opening a gulf between ordinary citizens and the elites. This convergence, he argues, has carved 'a space for populist movements to interpellate a digital[ly] connected but politically disgruntled electorate'. With Laclau (2005), he contends that all populisms appeal to the entire political community 'against common enemies, and in particular unresponsive political elites'.

Gerbaudo identifies an 'elective affinity', that is, a strong match, between social media and populism, with social media providing an ideal platform 'for the populist appeal to ordinary people against a liberal establishment by [those who] feel victimised'. Despite being engineered and owned by capitalist corporations based in Silicon Valley, social media, notes Gerbaudo, provide a social imaginary for 'the people's voice' (opinion-building) as well as a superb venue for 'the people's rally' (movement-building). Citing Pariser (2011), he further observes that social media's 'filter bubble' effect strengthens people's sense of belonging and commitment to a populist cause.

He then warns against rash dismissals of populists like Trump or Farage and their 'appeals to the basest sentiments of the populace'. While there may be some truth to this assertion, says Gerbaudo, it still fails to trace the root of the problem to 'the failure of the neoliberal system'. He ends with another note of caution by stating that 'we are still far from possessing a convincing theory of the affinity between social media and populism'.

There is much to recommend in Gerbaudo's piece. Although he sets himself an ambitious task – to elucidate the complex relationship between social media and neopopulism – he proceeds with care, avoiding premature conclusions about the selected examples. He also proposes an original schema that posits the duality of social media as key sites for current populist discourse ('the people's voice') and collective action ('the people's rally'). Moreover, his intriguing hypothesis about the elective affinity between populism and social media is worthy of further empirical investigation.

That said, and in the spirit of collaborative theorising invoked in his essay, I wish to frame my response around one general epistemological point and five more concrete suggestions on how to further our understanding of the link between social media and populism.

My general point is simple: if we really wish to develop a general explanation of that link, we must first expand the scope of the inquiry through greater geographical breadth and historical depth. At present, Gerbaudo – and indeed most commentators in the English-speaking world – is limiting the analysis almost exclusively to recent events in the United States, Britain and Europe. To overcome this geographical bias, below I draw from my own anthropological research in Indonesia, Malaysia and Spain as well as on secondary examples from Iran, Brazil, France, the Philippines and other countries. If our shared working assumption is that populism and social media are global phenomena, then we should expand our empirical repertoire accordingly. Otherwise we would be reproducing the double parochialism of time and place exhibited by much of the international media on this topic.

To my mind, there are five areas requiring particular attention as we collectively search for a global theory of social media and populism, namely, the roots of populism, ideology and populism, the rise of theocratic populism, social media and non-populist

politicians, and the embedding of social media in larger systems of communication. To break down this proposal into its main components, I am arguing that

1. The roots of populism are often knotty and cannot be reduced to 'the neoliberal system' or to economic causes alone (identitarian, existential, and other causes must be considered as well);
2. Halfway between leftist and rightist populism, there exist centrist, often technocratic, forms of populism (e.g. Jokowi, Ahok, Macron, and Rivera) that we should not overlook;
3. In addition to technocratic/centrist populism, we must add *theocratic* populism to our typologies; this variant is particularly strong in, but not exclusive to, the Global Southeast, that is, North Africa and the Middle East, and South and Southeast Asia;
4. Social media are not the monopoly of neopopulists – from Obama in the United States to Prabowo in Indonesia or Rajoy in Spain, establishment politicians have been as adept as their populist rivals in the use of social media;
5. Social media are not insulated from the rest of the 'hybrid media system' (Chadwick, 2017); on the contrary, social and mainstream media feed off one another in recursive loops of 'viral reality' (Postill, 2014); for instance, Podemos would not have reached a wide constituency without a hybrid media (or transmedia) strategy; in turn, our hybrid media systems are embedded in even larger communication systems that include transport networks as well as public spaces like mosques, churches, squares and slums where face-to-face populist communication often thrives.

I will now develop each of these propositions in turn, starting with the socio-psychological underpinnings of populism.

The tangled roots of populism

As just noted, Gerbaudo blames the recent worldwide rise of populism on 'the failure of the neoliberal system'. While the 'It's the neoliberal economy, stupid' refrain is common among contemporary analysts of the phenomenon (Pannini, 2017), some authors add to it a second potential cause: a destabilised cultural identity. Thus, in a recent paper, Inglehart and Norris (2016) draw from a series of surveys to assess the relative weight of cultural values versus economic insecurity as predictors of electoral support for populist parties. They find strong evidence for the 'cultural backlash thesis' trumping economic concerns. In other words, voting for a populist party is 'a retro reaction by once-predominant sectors of the population to progressive value change'. In Europe and the United States, these are generally older, less educated, White voters who feel that their social status and values have been eroded and that 'they're no longer respected' (Pippa Norris, quoted in Illing, 2017).

While this may well be the case in contemporary Western nations, if we look further afield other potential factors immediately arise. For instance, in crime-ridden societies such as the Philippines, Brazil, or Mexico, a 'populism of fear' (Chevigny, 2003) can sometimes

prevail over strictly economic or cultural concerns. During ethnographic research in the Philippines, Curato (2017) found that Rodrigo Duterte's electoral success was largely due to his 'penal populism'. This was based on two mutually reinforcing political logics: 'the politics of anxiety and the politics of hope'. Curato takes issue with simplistic dismissals of populist leaders and their voters, for example, Hillary Clinton's 'basket of deplorables' label to refer to Trump supporters. My own informal conversations with Filipinos and Filipinas from different walks of life suggest that even some liberal cosmopolitans are quietly in sympathy with Duterte's harsh handling of drug-related crime.

In many localities and countries around the world, the fight against crime can become an ecumenical issue that brings together otherwise disparate constituencies around a perceived existential threat. I observed this first-hand during anthropological fieldwork in the Kuala Lumpur suburb of Subang Jaya, where crime remained a local political staple throughout the 2000s and beyond (Postill 2011). The same applies to the fear of terrorism, a fear that is unevenly distributed around the world (e.g. high in Europe, the United States and the Middle East; low in Latin America and the Caribbean). Right-wing populist leaders in countries repeatedly struck by terrorists will often bank on this existential concern for their political fortunes.

Therefore, in most countries and localities, the roots of neopopulism are likely to be thick tangles of economic, cultural, existential, and other factors yet to be thoroughly investigated. These factors are not always directly traceable to 'the neoliberal system' except at a high level of abstraction in that in today's world order all roads lead, as it were, to Washington, DC (and Silicon Valley).

Left, right and centre

In his essay, Gerbaudo suggests that leftist and rightist variants of populism share an anti-establishment stance, a claim to defend ordinary people and an opposition to some of the maxims of neoliberalism. There are two problems with this claim.

First, although this is a fair portrayal of the two ends of the ideological spectrum, there is a missing middle here: centrist populism. This intermediate space matters a great deal because its occupiers are typically favoured precisely by the very capitalist interests that Gerbaudo is concerned about, for example, by the influential pro-market newspaper *The Economist* (see, for instance, their support for Macron, *The Economist*, 2017). It is no coincidence that centrist populists are often accused of being opportunistic technocrats who borrow some of the populist rhetoric and blend it with a pro-market language of job flexibility, entrepreneurship and economic growth. Moreover, centrists' interstitial location puts them in a classic sociological bind known as 'role conflict': while to voters and analysts on the left they can come across as pro-establishment conservatives, those on the right will often regard them as left-liberal 'softies'.

One of the key tenets of populism is to create an 'Other' (immigrants, refugees and so on for rightists; corrupt politicians and bankers for leftists). For centrist populists, by contrast, there are two distinct 'Others': *the establishment and 'radical' populists.* Centrist populists aim to reassure prospective voters that if elected they will pursue a sensible third way between the proven failures of a corrupt establishment and the dangerous extremism of rival populists.[1]

The 2017 French presidential elections are a case in point. All three positions on the populist scale were taken as the campaigns gathered momentum, namely, leftist (Mélenchon), rightist (Le Pen) and centrist (Macron). The eventual winner, Emmanuel Macron, presented himself as a political outsider but was, in fact, closer to the French establishment than he cared to admit. Bordignon (2017) rightly argues that Macron developed a highly effective 'anti-populist populism' – or 'soft populism' – that capitalised on the current anti-establishment climate in France. Another observer notes that Macron applied populist techniques to 'the policies of centrism' (Sheridan, 2017). One of these techniques (or tactics) was to stress the sense of urgency that rightist populists like Trump or Le Pen had brought to contemporary politics, symbolised in France by recent terrorist attacks and a perceived state of 'economic sclerosis'. Macron took this 'populist rhetoric of hurry' and ran with it, telling his supporters that 'In just one year we have changed the face of French political life'. As a result, a third of French voters regarded both Le Pen and Macron as dynamic candidates 'embodying change' (Jones, 2017).

A second example of centrist populism is Albert Rivera, the young leader of Ciudadanos, currently Spain's fourth political party. It is telling that his rhetoric, programme and physique bear an uncanny resemblance to those of Macron. To borrow Manuel Delgado's tongue-in-cheek critique of the new 'citizenism' (ciudadanismo) in post-indignados Spain, I would suggest that both Macron and Rivera embody

> a conservative variant of citizenism [that] emphasises the more liberal aspects of democratic radicalism and takes upon itself the mission of guaranteeing the renewal of the right, but always avoiding any reference to this side of its nature, since – as is well known – citizenism is neither left-wing nor right-wing. (Delgado, 2016: 18; my translation)

My third and final example comes from the eastern hemisphere. Indonesia's 2014 presidential campaign pitted the centrist, technocratic populist Joko Widodo, popularly known as Jokowi, a middle-class furniture entrepreneur from central Java, against a member of the country's ruling elite: a retired army general named Prabowo, who is the son-in-law of the late dictator Suharto. While Prabowo's campaign was bankrolled by his billionaire brother, Jokowi relied on a robust track record as the mayor of Solo and Jakarta for his strong grassroots support. Both candidates made extensive – and creative – use of social media to reach the country's younger urban voters. In Jokowi's case, this included countering a 'black campaign' (*kampanye hitam*) in which he was falsely accused of being a Christian of Chinese descent (in fact, he is a Javanese Muslim). Eventually, Jokowi emerged the winner, but only by a narrow margin (Postill, 2014).

Another problem with Gerbaudo's leftist versus rightist populism binary is that we cannot assume that both ideological strands will be present in all countries at all times. For instance, in comparison with most other European nations, Spain's far-right, xenophobic populist scene is both miniscule and insignificant. An early sign of this anomaly, and a portent of things to come in 2011, was the 2004 Madrid train bombings which killed nearly 200 people and injured around 2000. Despite the bombings being 'al-Qaeda inspired', the ire of large sectors of the population was directed not at the terrorists or at Islam but at the ruling conservative party, Partido Popular (PP), for seeking to blame

Basque separatists for the attacks despite having received intelligence to the contrary (Torcal and Rico, 2004).

While Spain has no sizeable rightist populism, in Indonesia the situation is the exact reverse: it lacks a strong strand of leftist populism. After the end of Suharto's military dictatorship in 1998, the leftist PRD (Democratic People's Party) took part in the elections but managed to garner no more than 0.07% of the votes. Unlike the Philippines, where leftist activists are concentrated in three parties with socially progressive agendas, in Indonesia they are widely scattered across the party political landscape. For Mietzner (2013: 33), the failure of the left in Indonesia has two main causes. First, Suharto's New Order demonised 'leftist-egalitarian sentiments, grassroots mobilisation and union activism' – a legacy that persists to this day. Second, deep sectarian and personal cleavages within civil society have prevented the emergence of a single leftist party or movement in Indonesia, hence the absence of leftist populism.

It follows from the discussion so far that a theory of populism with global aspirations cannot assume that the only significant ideological orientations will be rightist and leftist – that is, we must also consider the ideologically awkward position of centrists like Jokowi, Macron, or Rivera. Moreover, we cannot expect that all countries will follow 2017 France in meeting the theoretical possibility of having significant leftist, rightist and centrist forms of populism at any given point in time. Mathematically, the total set of possible combinations is eight, ranging from no significant populism at one end of the spectrum to all three populisms at the other, through various other combinations (e.g. Indonesia with only centrist and rightist variants, Spain with only centrist and leftist, etc.).

Theocratic populism on the rise

The Indonesian example brings us nicely to another important expression of populism excluded from most Western discussions, namely, theocratic populism. Gerbaudo argues that populism cuts across ideological distinctions because of its 'transversal political logic' centred on the principle of 'popular sovereignty'. Similarly, in their comparative study of populism in Europe, Engesser et al. (2017: 1111) find that emphasising popular sovereignty is one of five key elements of populist rhetoric, along with advocating for the people, attacking the elites, scapegoating others and invoking a heartland.

However, this model does not quite apply to the numerous forms of theocratic populism found around the world today. This strain of neoconservative populism has been on the rise globally since the 1970s, especially in the Muslim world and also in Christian-majority countries across Africa and the Americas (where neo-Pentecostalism has flourished), as well as among Hindus in India and Buddhists in Burma, for instance. A clear exponent of theocratic populism from the global Southwest is the new mayor of Rio de Janeiro, Marcelo Crivella of the Brazilian Republican Party. Crivella is a bishop of the Universal Church or UCKG, the largest neo-Pentecostal church in Brazil, founded in the late 1970s by Crivella's uncle, the media tycoon Edir Macedo. Crivella's support base came from the poorer neighbourhoods of Rio where evangelical churches have made major inroads in recent decades. His voters' convictions were 'coloured by paranoia and post-factual Internet propaganda' (Fiori, 2016).

Approached from a religious vantage point, two items from Engesser et al.'s (2017) populism list stand out: the principle of popular sovereignty and the invocation of a heartland. First, while theocratic populists vary widely cross-culturally, most of them stress the sovereignty of God, not of the people. For example, the Iranian revolution of 1979, technologically supported by cassette tapes, leaflets and other 'social media' of that age (Sreberny-Mohammadi, 1990), was driven by Shi'a populism:

> Theocratic populism in Iran corresponds closely to the Latin American movements in its urban character and with populism in general in terms of its xenophobia, its 'worship' of the people, and its manipulative aspect. However, while the stated intention of the theocratic leadership is to elevate the social position of the disinherited, the 'worship' of the people has a particular Shi'i twist that serves to reinforce the leadership position of the clergy within the movement. *Sovereignty, it is claimed, resides exclusively in God*, and, by extension, in his temporal deputies: to wit, the ulama. (Afrachteh, 1981: 193; my emphasis)

In Indonesia, the key struggle today is not between leftist and rightist forms of populism, but rather between technocratic (centrist) and theocratic (rightist) populism. Thus, on 4 September 2016, a mass demonstration was held in central Jakarta against the incumbent governor, known as 'Ahok', who is an ethnic Chinese Christian. Ahok is a technocrat and a close ally of President Jokowi. The Islamic Defenders Front (FPI) and other hardline Muslim organisations, including Hizb ut-Tahrir, exhorted all Muslims not to allow a non-believer, a *kafir*, to govern them. To drive home their argument, they cited a verse in the Qur'an warning Muslims against making alliances with Jews and Christians (Jones, 2016). After 3 weeks, Ahok made the mistake of mentioning the Qur'an during an official speech, pointing out that Muslims had been lied to about not being allowed to vote for a non-Muslim. Although he apologised for unintentionally causing offence, a doctored version of his comments was widely shared on social media, rendering his comments more offensive, which further angered large swathes of the Muslim population. In May 2017, he was found guilty of blasphemy and is currently serving a 2-year prison sentence.

Second, specifically within the Muslim world, when it comes to Engesser et al.'s 'heartland', we find a highly consequential split between religious populists calling for a global Caliphate (e.g. The Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant (ISIS), Hizb ut-Tahrir) and those with a nationalist agenda (e.g. Indonesia's FPI). While the undisputed heartland, the *axis mundi*, of the Islamic universe is of course Mecca (Dakake, 2011), theocratic populists will emphasise either the global *ummah* of believers or a given nation-state – in FPI's case, Indonesia. The FPI's agenda is 'explicitly nationalist' (Duile, 2017). This was patently obvious when the FPI accused Ahok of undermining the country's multifaith ideology, *Pancasila*; violating the constitution; and threatening the unity of Indonesia with his blasphemous remarks. Countless FPI memes shared during this time made use of national symbols such as the *Garuda* eagle, the national flag or the shape of the Indonesian archipelago. They all served the FPI's same ultimate objective: to transform Indonesia into 'a unitary state based on Islamic law' (Duile, 2017).

Social media are no populist monopoly

Having problematised the concept of populism, we can now finally turn to its communicative dimensions, in particular to Gerbaudo's main thesis about the elective affinity

between populism and social media. Gerbaudo argues that social media have provided a platform against the (neo)liberal elites not only to right-wing populists like Donald Trump or Marine Le Pen but also to leftist populists like Pablo Iglesias or Bernie Sanders.

I have three main objections to this thesis. First, populists are hardly the only political actors who are social media savvy. Indeed, the most celebrated early adopter of social media for a political cause was none other than the cerebral, Ivy League educated, non-populist Barack Obama in the 2008 presidential campaign. As the Black comedian and Obama supporter Chris Rock hilariously put it during the 2012 campaign, 'President Obama is a White president you can trust!' (*Newsone*, 2012).

More recently, the same campaign team credited with returning Obama to the White House in 2012 also helped Spain's Conservative (PP) leader, Mariano Rajoy, secure an unlikely victory during the 2016 general elections. Led by the American political advisor Jim 'The Fixer' Messina, Rajoy's team used social media analytics to target carefully selected Facebook users who had previously voted for the centrist populist party Ciudadanos. By contrast, the leftist Podemos concentrated its efforts on Twitter where it had a clear advantage over the Conservatives (Mucha and Negre, 2016).

A similar social media split was evident during the Indonesian presidential elections of 2014, where the establishment candidate, Prabowo Subianto, amassed the highest number of fans on Facebook, while his populist rival, Joko Widodo, had far more Twitter followers. Both candidates made sophisticated use of a wide repertoire of social media tools (Abdillah, 2014).

The dual hybridity of populist communication

My second objection is that it would be an error to regard social media as a realm apart from the rest of the media environment. Instead, social media are an integral *part of* the total media system. Chadwick (2017) has theorised the emergence of 'hybrid media systems' that encompass legacy and social media. This is the simple but powerful cybernetic notion (Craig, 1999) that our current media environments are a web of old and new media technologies, practices and actors interacting in emergent, non-teleological ways. In such systems, social and mass media feed off one another in recursive loops of 'viral reality' (Postill, 2014) whereby populist leaders and their followers co-create news and opinion, often through 'trending' hashtags that straddle the social versus mass media divide. For instance, the telegenic leader of Podemos, Pablo Iglesias, skyrocketed from obscurity to fame because he pursued a highly effective hybrid media (or transmedia) strategy with a strong television footprint, and not a purely social media one.[2] In contrast, the hacktivist formation Partido X steered clear of television, relying almost exclusively on social media, for which it paid a heavy price at the ballot box (Postill, in press). Precisely the same transmedia logic operates across Indonesia's rambunctious hybrid media system, as we saw in the case of the governor of Jakarta, the technocratic populist Ahok, whose theocratic enemies succeeded in viralising a doctored video of him allegedly insulting Islam.

My third and final objection is that, just as social media are nested within larger hybrid media systems, these systems are themselves part of even larger *communication systems* that include transport and telecommunications networks as well as public spaces

like mosques, churches, squares, slums, and so on. In these differentiated sites, communication comes in many forms, including intrapersonal, interpersonal, group, mass, and public communication, both online and offline (Griffin and Bone, 2013: 7–8). In addition, when tracking the worldwide rise of populism, we must take into account marked cultural differences in communicative practices. Thus, Rinke and Röder (2011) draw from research in Egypt to contrast the communication cultures of the Middle Eastern and Western worlds, notably the significant part played by Friday mosque gatherings in the political communication of Muslim countries (p. 1275).

Of particular importance to most populists is the ability to demonstrate to their supporters their regular physical presence 'on the ground', among ordinary people. In Malaysia, this direct presence is known as *turun padang* (Postill, 2011: 9), while in Indonesia the technocratic populist president, Jokowi, perfected the art of *blusukan* – an 'impromptu visit' to a locality aimed at 'overseeing developments and communicat[ing] with the people' (*Tempo*, 2014). Similarly, the Philippines' 'penal populist' president, Duterte, cancelled a trip to Brunei in September 2016 to speedily reach Davao City after a bomb blast. Prior to that incident, he was the first local government official to visit Tacloban in the immediate aftermath of supertyphoon Yolanda (Garcia, n.d.).

'Being there' combined with a strong transmedia strategy are necessary but not sufficient conditions for populist success. The story of the downfall and imprisonment of the governor of Jakarta, Ahok, is an apt illustration of this fact. The ethnographer Ian Wilson argues that there is more to Ahok's unhappy ending than Islamist bigotry against the ethnic Chinese and Christian governor. Ahok was famous for his direct, sometimes brutally honest, style of communicating, for instance, when publicly shaming government officials or rival politicians for their alleged corruption. This style brought him both admirers – especially among the urban middle classes –and detractors. To Wilson, the crucial point is that many low-income Jakartans regarded Ahok as aloof, uncaring and patronising, as if he did not respect them.[3] This negative perception was exacerbated by his forced evictions of slum dwellers from areas earmarked for river sanitation projects. He may have not used Hillary Clinton's infamous 'basket of deplorables' phrase to refer to the lower classes, but in his words and deeds Ahok failed to communicate that he really cared.

Conclusion

In sum, social media are inextricable from a dense web of highly diverse online and offline communicative practices. Like most other forms of political communication, populism is twice hybrid, in that it entails the ceaseless interaction between old and new media as well as between online and offline sites of communication. Populists never operate in a vacuum, or indeed in a filter bubble: they share hybridly mediated spaces and arenas with other populists and with non-populists. Over time, these varied political actors co-evolve media strategies and tactics in full awareness of one another's existence.

The cross-cultural examples presented above suggest that Gerbaudo's thesis of an 'elective affinity' between populist parties and social media is problematic. Not only do establishment parties use social media as avidly as populist parties, but there may be significant variations among parties in how much time, effort, and money they devote to the

different available platforms, for example, to Twitter versus Facebook. For students of this phenomenon, this means that we must work right across the party political landscape, from old establishment parties at one end to new populist parties at the other, to determine *who used which social media for what purposes and with what consequences.*

Here, we come to the most intractable of all problems in media and communication studies: the perpetual question of media effects (Ang, 1991). Just because a populist – or indeed a non-populist – social media campaign preceded an electoral victory, we cannot assume that this triumph was a result of that campaign. These days we often hear claims about the decisive role of social media in populist campaigns such as Trump's presidential election or the Brexit referendum, most recently in connection to the Cambridge Analytica scandal (Hindman, 2018). But similar claims can be, and often are, made about the success of establishment candidates such as Obama in 2012 or Rajoy in 2016. The trajectory of the political strategist Jim Messina offers a cautionary tale in this regard. While he is widely credited with securing the Obama and Rajoy victories thanks to his social media analytics 'wizardry' (Mucha and Negre, 2016), we should not forget that Messina and his team also advised the Prime Minister of Italy, Matteo Renzi, on an unsuccessful referendum campaign leading to his resignation (BBC, 2016), as well as the British Prime Minister, Theresa May, whose 2017 elections results were, to say the least, lacklustre (Bush, 2017).

Future scholarship on social media and populism will have to take into account a larger set of interacting factors than those normally considered while carefully scrutinising claims about the direct effects of social media analytics, filter bubbles or fake news on the success or failure of populist candidates.

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Notes

1. I am grateful to Anastasia Kavada for raising this question.
2. Costanza-Chock (2011, 2012) urges scholars to consider the whole 'transmedia' repertoire of the new movements and not merely their digital or social media practices. He argues that Occupy activists 'make and circulate media elements across platforms … in processes elsewhere described as *transmedia mobilizations*' (Costanza-Chock, 2012: 4). In this essay, I argue for a greater holism than that, namely, for one that encompasses the entire communicative environment in which populist politicians and other political actors are embedded.
3. See Ian Wilson's panel discussion with Marcus Mietzner at Asia Research Centre (2017) Jakarta Gubernatorial Elections, Murdoch University, 27 April 2017, *YouTube*, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=p8r778g1Y2c

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