Populist Time: Mediating Immediacy and Delay in Liberal Democracy

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The conduct of politics is, in part, constructed by conceptions of time, and this happens through an interplay between mechanisms of governance and different media systems and technologies. This article argues that we are witnessing an increasing divergence between the mechanisms of delay built into liberal democracy and a "politics of impatience" that is part of a larger populist communications style. Furthermore, we contend that social media—particularly Twitter—help pave the way for this growing populist impatience, creating what we label "populist time." In theoretical terms, the article draws on journalism studies, on research on social media and populism, on mediated time, and, finally, on the temporalities of democratic governance. Our contribution is to bring these literatures together in order to posit three distinct building blocks for the formation of populist time, which are part of the communication on Twitter: feelings of "realtimeness," "unmediation" and "impulsivity." This article thus aims to suggest conceptual building blocks for more nuanced investigations of how temporal processes and perceptions play into the performance of populism on social media.

Keywords: mediated time, populism, social media, realtimeness, unmediation, impulsivity

This article interrogates issues related to the intersection of political and mediated temporalities by positing that social media have certain characteristics that lend themselves to the construction of what we call *populist time*, which, we argue, is to be seen as a political communication style focused on acceleration.[1] While we are not alone in relating populism to social media—Gerbaudo (2018), for instance, talks about an "elective affinity" between social media and populism—our contribution is to approach this affinity as an intersection between technological and political temporalities. By enabling certain feelings of realtimeness, unmediation, and impulsivity, we argue that Twitter is a platform for the performance of temporalities that

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we collectively conceptualize as populist time. We illustrate this conceptual argument through tweets from @realDonaldTrump.[2]

We present this piece—deliberately provocative at times—as a jumping-off point for more empirically rigorous studies that try to unearth the affinities between political developments and media affordances. In this, we openly harken back to some of the more conceptual pieces of media theory that formed part of the "media ecology" school of communications theory (Havelock, 1982; Innis, 1950; Ong, 1982). This theory, while often criticized, opened the door for a great deal of interesting empirical work and conceptual development. Recall also much of the writing on digital technology in the late 1990s through the mid-2010s. There is little doubt that, while many of the predictions of early Internet theorists have proved to be wildly exaggerated, their claims were useful for the purposes of spurring creative methodologies, identifying problems that needed scholarly attention, and providing new frameworks for thinking about political cultures. Our aim is for this article to do similar work.

The article has two main sections. In the first, we discuss the relationships among politics, time, and journalism. Given the complexity of the issues at stake, the arguments presented serve as a broad backdrop to the more specific conversation about the temporal relations between politics and social media. There is a meaningful relationship, we argue, between political processes and digital technology, a relationship increasingly (also) cultivated outside conventional journalism. In particular, there are structural affinities between the populist temperament of modern, mediated life and the use of real-time or quasi-real-time social media. In the second section, we lay out three interrelated ways in which social media (here, Twitter) perform the social temporalities through which we can analyze populist time: realtimeness, unmediation, and impulsivity. Each of these ways is explored by looking at how they intersect across different layers of meaning and how they can be understood through—and add up to—the concept of populist time. In the final section, we conclude by discussing both the implications and limitations of our argument and some paths for future research.

The Temporalities of Political Communication

In this opening section, we detail our central starting points with regard to the relationships among political processes, democratic cultures, journalism, and digital technologies. We first lay out key aspects of time and democracy and how these have been linked to journalism. After this, we narrow our focus to look at populism as a specific temporal style of communication and discuss how this may be shaped by social media and their shifting notions of time and temporal action. What we call populist time should thus be seen as a specific mode of mediated communication that builds on or constructs temporal relations related to, or in opposition to, broader temporal regimes and political styles. Finally, in this section, we go through the more specific analytical perspectives that we describe and illustrate in the second section.

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[2] We think that a discussion of @realDonaldTrump is generative in ways that an analysis of @POTUS is not. The @realDonaldTrump account has a massive following, with 3 million more followers than @POTUS. Trump's account—his own personal take on the world—thus offers a view into a mode of communication that aligns with the image and audience that Trump wishes cultivate as a politician.

Slow Democracy, Fast Media

We should be clear here that populism has a complex relationship with "slowness" and "speed," with populist communicative styles sometimes favoring acceleration and sometimes favoring delay. The specific temporal mode obviously depends on the actual policies in focus, and the exact "meaning" of populist time is thus only discoverable empirically. Yet, given that populism most often is "anti–status quo" and often linked to perceived crises (as will be described later), there is, we contend, within populism a specific leaning toward the acceleration of established political processes; this might, of course, coexist with attempts to slow down other processes.

Temporal processes of politics are deeply intertwined with journalism and media, with each institution (i.e., politics and journalism) constituting both interlinked and distinct temporalities; the specific processes of democratic governance and the related rhythms of journalistic production and consumption thus play into each other in complex ways that together form public perceptions of how society is, or may be, moving in time. We can, if we follow Rosa (2005), say that "time in politics" interacts with "politics in time," i.e., "the temporal structures, patterns and horizons of other social spheres" (p. 446).

A critical issue concerns the democratic implications of the temporal nexus between politics and journalism, an issue that is deeply related to interconnected developments within politics, journalism, and media technologies. The temporalities of democratic governance are (to some extent) bound by constitutional structures and thus adapt to larger temporal developments rather slowly, which has given rise to discussions of a lack of synchronization between social time and political time. This is the main thrust of Rosa's (2005) argument, which sees "modernity as acceleration"[3]; this creates a situation in which "the temporal patterns" of "democratic politics" may become "irreconcilably out of step with the time structures of the global age" (p. 454).

The intertwining temporalities of democratic governance are linked to the practices within and among the legislative, executive, and judicial branches, each of which has its specific traditions, practices, and rhythms—see, for instance, Palonen's (2018) discussion of "parliamentary time as a medium of politics" (p. 169). Indeed, democratic governance takes time. Although democracy is premised on the idea that societies are governed by and for the people, many democratic systems have built-in measures of delay, which (first) act as buffers between sudden public whims and the continuity (or "controlled" development) of society, and (second) ensure that political decisions are based on a form of deliberation that takes into account the complexities of the issues addressed and the possible consequences of legislative or executive measures. Democratic governance thus has an inbuilt tension between the accelerating nature of economic, technological, social, and cultural changes, and the temporality of political rule (Rosa, 2005): "Beyond a certain temporal threshold," he says,

> the dynamic forces of society are too strong for democratic political *self-determination*.
> Collective will-formation, deliberation and action require a certain degree of centralization,

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[3] This view of modernity was developed by Rosa in book form in German in 2005 and translated into English in Rosa, 2013.

> public stability and political identity which might not be compatible with the most dynamic
> forms of society. (p. 450, emphasis in original)

At the same time, the processing of legislation often results in what Goodin (1998) calls "democratic consolidation," leading to constraints that "that subsequently make it 'not the right time,' politically, for further reforms" (p. 40). Rosa (2005), in turn, points out ways in which "democratic will-formation and decision-making are in fact *slowing down* rather than *speeding up*" (p. 451, emphasis in original); he gives different reasons for this, for example, more heterogeneous societies with many interests to reconcile and a future that is less predictable in terms of the consequences of legislation. Thus, while society seems to be accelerating (see Saward, 2017, for a useful overview of work on the social acceleration thesis), the processes of governance have been slowing down. This exacerbates the inbuilt tensions identified by Rosa (2005).

Historically, at least, the institution of journalism has been central for mediating between politics and other social processes. Journalism has, following the earlier discussion, been instrumental in processes of both acceleration and delay (e.g., through its gatekeeping functions and its publishing rhythms). And although different of types of journalism (broadsheets vs. tabloids, for instance) have had different levels of patience with processes of governance, it has broadly made sense to link journalism to the rhythms of public life and thus society as such (e.g., Carey, 1989; Kleis Nielsen, 2017). While this linkage happens through the registration (and construction) of a wide variety of happenings and events, the ongoing monitoring of national politics has been a significant element in the construction of the temporality of public life. Journalism has thus been a significant element in the construction and maintenance of the temporalities of politics and society.

When national and regional legacy news media constituted the backbone of the institution of journalism, one could argue that political processes and news were largely synchronized as journalism aligned itself with the rhythms of democratic institutions. This was, of course, never entirely the case, and there have been recurrent discussions of how the temporalities of news also work against democratic processes. That "news time is deliberately short-sighted" (p. 55) thus becomes, according to Patterson (1998), an increasing problem when democratic institutions are no longer setting the pace of public discussions; he also points out that "political time has greater variation and is more complex than news time" (p. 60). Although this may be so, Patterson does not talk about how journalism also tracks events over time or how new media may affect such processes. Patterson is largely looking backward and seeing a discrepancy of temporalities because of broader developments within political cultures. He does, however, point toward an important issue, which is pointedly phrased by Ananny (2016): namely, that "power to make time is the power to make publics" (p. 419).

One aspect of this, within a digital media landscape, is that the "public sphere" is transformed into dispersed "performative publics" (Lünenburg & Raetzsch, 2018) or "public assemblages" (Anderson, 2013; Marres, 2007). This is connected to an increasing amount of time that citizens (and politicians) spend on more personalized media, media that constitute temporalities as complex sets of relations among dispersed people, institutions, and technologies. Another important aspect of this is the increasing practice of politicians bypassing the gatekeeping of journalism. Measures of delay within both politics and journalism

are increasingly challenged when the established seriality of journalistic publishing is pushed toward almost continuous updating, while simultaneously, many political discussions take place in online fora somewhat unconnected to conventional journalism. This makes more visible or exacerbates the already existing tension between public opinion formation and demands, and the temporal processes of democratic institutions. We may speculate along with Rosa (2005), who argues that some "critical point in the development of modernity" will result in "a serious de-synchronization between politics and other social systems" (p. 450). This calls attention to some of the democratic implications of the discrepancies between the temporalities of mediated discussions of politics (in journalism and/or outside) and delaying features of democratic governance.

It is precisely within this "de-synchronization" that we locate the notion of populist time. Populist time can be seen as a continuation of established ways of dealing with the tension between societal speed and the slowness of governance, for example, a "disproportional predominance" of "executive decision-making . . . over politics by proper democratic legislation" (Rosa, 2005, p. 453). But it can also be seen as newer attempts to oppose institutional delays in the ways populist leaders openly align themselves through social media with popular perceptions of impatience, in opposition to elite temporalities of postponement.

Populism as a (Mediated) Political Style of Acceleration

Seeing populism as impatience clearly points in the direction of populism as a particular mode of communication or political style. Political subjects can obviously be impatient for a number of ideological reasons while relying on various strategies. Our approach to populism thus builds on Moffitt's (2014, 2016) discussion of populism as a political style instead of—or, rather, supplement to—other ways of seeing populism as, respectively, "ideology, logic, discourse or strategy" (Moffitt, 2014, p. 382). What we are interested in is how we can understand populist time as a specifically mediated style of communication, which obviously has ideological, logical, discursive, and strategic implications; while these implications are not our main concern, it must be added—as will become clear in the following—that it is not entirely possible to separate elements of style from such wider implications. The different characteristics (e.g., style, ideology, and strategy) can, as Pappas (2017) points out, "go well together as none in principle refutes the others" (p. 269). Focusing on populism as a style is thus more a question of emphasis or perspective than it is an ontological choice (i.e., a specific argument about what populism *is*).

Moffitt (2016) broadly defines political style "as the repertoires of embodied, symbolically mediated performance made to audiences that are used to create and navigate the fields of power that comprise the political, stretching from the domain of government through to everyday life" (p. 25). Based on inductive studies of the communication of a range of populist leaders, he distills the notion of populism as "*a political style that features an appeal to 'the people' versus 'the elite', 'bad manners' and the performance of crisis, breakdown or threat*" (p. 35, emphasis in original). As Trump consistently has talked about Washington as a swamp to be drained, has repeatedly breached decorum, and has reacted to immigration as a state of emergency, these features seem highly relevant in relation to Trump's online communication. Indeed, when presenting the main tenets of Moffitt's book (2016), Pappas (2017) writes, "Just think of Donald Trump's electoral campaign and you get the idea" (p. 269). Following this, it should be added that Moffitt (2016)

writes that he was unable to include more "'recent' populists" such as, for instance, "Donald Trump" (p. 33), in his study.

The three features listed by Moffitt are intricately linked to temporality. The notion of political crisis is linked to "the demand to act decisively and immediately" (Moffitt, 2014, p. 391), an urgency that is linked to "bad manners" or "common sense" as a way of cutting through the "'appropriate' modes of acting in the public realm" (Moffitt, 2016, p. 34). Our focus in this article is thus on the ways in which Trump's performance on Twitter can be understood as the merging of key temporal features of populism as a political style and the more specific temporalities afforded by the social media platform.

While the building blocks of what we call populist time do not map neatly unto the Moffitt's three features and their temporal underpinnings—people vs. elite, bad manners, and crisis—the notions of "realtimeness," "unmediation," and "impulsivity" are to be understood as specific temporal repertoires within populism as an online political style. A recent article by Baldwin-Philippi (2019) follows a somewhat similar track as it looks at how Trump's 2016 campaign "performed populism using digital technologies, and how those technologies afford a particularly digital performance of populism" (p. 377). As this article makes clear, Trump did, more so than his opponents, employ a range of measures to "center 'the people' through digital means" (p. 380)—means that include "controlled interactivity," "amateur and antiprofessional content" (p. 384), memes, and non-data-driven campaigning across social media. In contrast, our focus is on the intersections of discourse and style in relation to temporality. Indeed, it is somewhat difficult to wholly separate style (form) and discourse (content), which Moffitt's definition also makes clear in the sense that populism as style is seen as both specific ways of talking (bad manners, plain language) and specific appeals and values (e.g., anti-elite). As such, this particular style gains a significant measure of meaning from being in opposition to the "features of the technocratic style" (Moffitt, 2016, p. 35) whose aim for "emotional neutrality and 'rationality'" is linked to "stability or measured progress" (p. 35). This is broadly why we conceptualize populist time as a (mediated) political style of acceleration. This perspective will be expanded in the context of social media and the more specific analytical categories.

Social Media and Populist Time

We may, as outlined earlier, be witnessing the de-synchronization of the temporalities of news coverage from the more traditional rhythms of national politics. This may in turn be linked with a growing impatience inculcated by the acceleration of "news" transmissions and ever-increasing updates on news sites and social media. All of this then takes us to the central concept of this article, which is the notion of populist time. Key to this—and we will expand on each of these items in the following section—are the ways in which some politicians speak directly to constituencies and thus bypass the (temporal) mediation of more established forms of both political communication and journalism. Put differently, populist time performs a confrontation, disassembling or circumvention of ingrained practices of delay in both political and media cultures. In some contexts, and at its most extreme, this can be linked to plebiscitary-style populism—or what Gerbaudo (2018) refers to as a "'mobocratic' tendency" (p. 751)—in which the social media streams of some politicians (e.g., Trump) may redefine the "temporal situation" of politics through attempts to short-circuit political change itself by playing to feelings of impatience within an electorate poised against "slowness as a 'privileged tempo'" (Sharma, 2014, cited in Ananny, 2016, p. 417) of those who can afford

a slow democracy. The elites can, in many instances, afford to wait and to follow the rules of the liberal order. The people, angry and suffering as they are, cannot.

One particular set of political affordances of social media in general, and Twitter in particular, thus allows politicians to "hack" the public sphere by using the temporal rhythms of the platform to engineer and/or align with feelings of political impatience and instability. Populist time emerges from (and is retrospectively the creator of) the political style of particular people on social media platforms. Particularly Twitter. And particularly the Twitter feed of Donald Trump.

A populist moment could thus be seen as the "now-ness" of "messianic time" in the sense of historical struggles condensing into a specifically charged now that promises to "make the continuum of history explode" (Benjamin, 1968, p. 395). Pushing it, one may say that the eternal struggle of throwing off the shackles of the elite within a presidential Twitter stream takes on the appearance of a "now-time, which . . . comprises the entire history of mankind in a tremendous abbreviation" (Benjamin, 1968, p. 396). This abbreviation is thus a specific moment of hesitation and/or promise created at the intersection of a specifically mediated "realtimeness" and the embodiment of an unknown future, a person, the president, Trump—this "ghost"; or, as Derrida (1994) says of messianic figures: "One may deem strange, strangely familiar and inhospitable at the same time (*unheimlich*, uncanny), this figure of absolute hospitality" (p. 168; emphasis in the original).

Indeed, a significant aspect of populism is the idea of someone of, and like, yet different from, the people who has a "superior capacity to discern the common good" (Müller, 2014, p. 486) and who thus in effect embodies its will. This is, most often, someone from "outside traditional politics" with "a strong, direct bond" to "citizens who feel neglected by mainstream parties" (Müller, 2014, p. 486), and social media is indeed a suitable avenue to cut "'out the middleman' and try to rely as little as possible on parties as intermediaries between citizens and politicians" (p. 486). This is somehow linked to the potential of cutting off politicians altogether in the sense that parts of the business community, not least within high-tech, seem to suggest that private enterprise is a faster and more efficient way to deal with public issues. What Chesneaux (2000) wrote with regard to Berlusconi is thus also applicable to Trump: his "experience as a speed-concerned businessman clearly did not prepare him to comply with the time-demanding procedures of a democratic, constantly debating society" (p. 409).

While calling Trump a messianic figure may be taking it too far, there lingers some trait of the uncanny in the connections between the prophetic language of Trump—"The Tax Cut Bill is getting better and better. The end result will be great for ALL!" (2017, November 28)—and his many devout followers seemingly more focused on promises than on actual results. Indeed, many of his tweets are characterized by what Papacharissi and Oliveria (2012) call "an anticipatory tendency" (p. 275) through which the anti-elitist "revolution" seems just about to happen. Indeed, what Papacharissi and Oliveria (2012) write about Twitter news streams in times of social upheaval is oddly applicable to the Trump stream. "Characterized by premediation, affective . . . streams may," they write, "be filled with anticipatory gestures that are not directly predictive of the future, but instead communicate a predisposition to frame it, and in doing so lay claim to the latent forms of agency that are also affective and networked" (p. 280).

Analyzing Populist Time: Realtimeness, Unmediation, and Impulsivity

The ensuing discussion of the tweets of @realDonaldTrump takes place in relation to three interrelated repertoires of a populist communication style on social media that are distinctly linked to temporality. In the first section, which sets the scene for the rest of the discussion, we talk about "realtimeness" as a way of constructing a specific sense of political immediacy, that is, "real" problems that need to be solved now (the notion of crisis identified by Moffitt, 2016). One specific aspect of this construction relates to notions of the "unmediated," namely, the creation of a sense that the political community being constructed (i.e., the "people") is based on unfiltered communication. This is, finally, linked to the notion of "impulsivity" and the political as "ordinary" and "authentic" (Aiello & Dickenson, 2014; Banet-Weiser, 2012), that is, something that precedes political and strategic discourses. The three repertoires of realtimeness, unmediation, and impulsivity are thus, as will become clear in the analysis, highly interrelated.

Realtimeness

The goal of real-time has a long history within journalism (and other media forms). Attempts have been made to continually reduce the time between the event itself and its transmission; with the Internet, we are arguably approaching a nearly synchronous relationship between events and their mediation. Yet events remain mediated, and this means that events unfolding at a distance always come to spectators through various technological and ideological filters that construct temporal unfoldings in certain ways. This is the focus of Weltevrede et al. (2014), who wish to understand how "various platforms create distinct real-times" (p. 127). While they do acknowledge the importance of technology and transmission, their aim is broader in the sense that they wish to identify the web's "distinctive 'real-time cultures'" (p. 137) by taking "into account the social arrangements and cultural practices that they [different platforms] incorporate and enable" (p. 127). One of the platforms they look at is Twitter, which (together with Facebook) is seen as a "prototypical stream platform" (p. 138) on which realtimeness is as an interplay among updating, ordering according to either freshness or relevance, and, finally, interaction—that is, how a specific user engages with or, perhaps more precisely, enacts a specific realtimeness. The main point, as suggested earlier, is that the notion of real-time is not only a question of the speed of transmission, but rather something "assembled through the technicity of platforms," that is, the ways in which an interplay between distinctive front- and back-end features coalesces into a specific (experience or feeling of) realtimeness.

For the purposes of studying the political construction of populist time on Twitter as a specific variation of realtimeness, we can think of this as a result of the collision between specific political cultures and the operation of Twitter as a platform (cf. the approach by Baldwin-Philippi, 2019). As the Web—and Twitter with it—is "characterized by an interplay between permanence and ephemerality" (Weltevrede et al., 2014, p. 126), one may see the notion of populist time on Twitter as an interplay among the rhythm of updating, the seemingly unfiltered content, sharing and liking, and the permanence inscribed by the office of the president, i.e., a specific platform or stream endowed with a more permanent authority and that in this instance is linked to the feed of @realDonaldTrump, who speaks the language of the people (which as an "entity" carries its own elusive permanence). While Weltevrede et al. mainly analyze the ordering, freshness, and relevance of streams, an understanding of the specificity of realtimeness of populist time

produced by the presidential stream is also produced by the content (and links) of the individual tweets and their interrelations.

A key issue is here the continued focus on immediate action. This has been a feature of Trump's approach and image management right from the start and connects with the populist notion of (a) defining a problem and then (b) immediately suggesting a simple solution. To solve the problem of immigration from the Mexico and Central America? Build a wall. Because this was not immediately realizable, the president sought a ban of immigrants though executive order, an order that initially was halted by the courts. Following this, Trump tweeted:

> Just cannot believe a judge would put our country in such peril. If something
> happens blame him and court system. People pouring in. Bad!
> (@realDonaldTrump, February 5, 2017)

> The threat from radical Islamic terrorism is very real, just look at what is
> happening in Europe and the Middle-East. *Courts must act fast*!
> (@realDonaldTrump, February 6, 2017, emphasis added)

> (Both tweets cited in Kreis, 2017, p. 613)

What is constructed here is a temporality of immediate action against the slowness of the judicial and legislative system. Promises of a speeded up political process were part of the election strategy and have continued to be a significant aspect of the Twitter stream:

> ISIS is making big threats today - no respect for U.S.A. or our "leader" - If I win it will be
> a very different story, *with very fast results.*
> (@realDonaldTrump, February 9, 2016, emphasis added)

> The weak illegal immigration policies of the Obama Admin. allowed bad MS 13 gangs to
> form in cities across U.S. We are removing them *fast*!
> (@realDonaldTrump, April 18, 2017)

> Despite the long delays by the Democrats in finally approving Dr. Tom Price, the repeal
> and replacement of ObamaCare is moving *fast*!
> (@realDonaldTrump, February 17, 2017)

Trump is, in these and other tweets, aligning himself with the immediacy of felt threats stemming from a broken system, threats that are seen as neglected by the judicial and legislative branches (mainly those controlled by Democrats). This is, in other words, an opposition between what may be termed the "realtimeness" of the "people"—as constructed on Twitter—and the delaying structures of the "swamp," which seemingly halts or prevents any real action because of dysfunctional relations between people in power, which include the mainstream press:

> Drain the Swamp should be changed to Drain the Sewer - it's actually much worse than
> anyone ever thought, and it begins with the Fake News!
> (@realDonaldTrump, July 24, 2017)

What is constructed is thus an opposition between recognizable problems—for example, threats from immigration and the immediacy of doing something about this—and a fossilized system of contacts in which people are more concerned with remaining in power than in actually doing something about the concerns of the people. This is indeed a well-known trope that is not only American and populist. There is, however, in the ways it comes out through Trump, a specific inflection that aligns with aspects of the American frontier myth where problems are immediately solved by "real" people rather than through bureaucratic structures. There is thus a wedding here between populism and a deep core of American anti-big-government feelings, both of which pose an "authentic people, often symbolically identified with . . . a heartland" (Müller, 2014, p. 486). Through this Twitter-enabled immediacy, Trump aligns himself with the "real" concerns of the people while distancing himself from bureaucratic delays. Populists are, says Müller (2014), "impatient with procedures (and that can include referenda, which are procedures as well, after all) and elections at regular intervals" (p. 489). The realtimeness performed by Trump may thus be termed a *politics of impatience* and is very much linked to the idea that social media seemingly allow almost instantaneous, unmediated communication.

Unmediation

In the vast literature on "new media," there has been a recurrent focus on the concept of "disintermediation," that is, how new types of technologies and platforms can allow for the more direct processes of distributing content (see for instance, Chircu & Kauffman, 1999). In relation to politics and news media, Blumler (2011) has talked about "disintermediation" as "circumventing mainstream news media via channels of more direct access to voters such as the Internet" (p. x). Despite recent analytical perspectives that largely unmask the notion of social media as direct, unmediated, or unfiltered communication between peers, this perception continues to be evident in how such media are used. And, this "directness" does—at one end of the scale—allow for what Sobré-Denton (2016) calls "virtual cosmopolitanism" and, at the other, more defensive and xenophobic expressions of unimpaired passion for the nation when "the ordinary [is] in crisis and the ordinary person [is] the real victim" (Hilhorst & Hermes, 2016, p. 223).

Hilhorst and Hermes (2016) are interested in a Facebook group focused on the Dutch Christmas tradition of Zwarte Piet (Black Pete) and talk about the long process of "the becoming ordinary of populism" (p. 230); they also draw attention to populism as "a logic of articulation" in a space that is "dichotomized in an 'us' and 'them' through which "unrelated issues are linked by the notion that 'the people' are being treated unfairly" (p. 227). The "affective community" is built on emotional and everyday language through which "suffering" becomes a political force and where the "ordinary or normative subject is reproduced as the injured party: the one 'hurt' or even damaged by the 'invasion' of others" (p. 227). This is an interesting parallel to the political subject constructed by @realDonaldTrump, and his language is here a significant marker.

        The realtimeness as a politics of impatience is thus linked to an impatience with translating or tempering anger and other emotions into what may be called a more civil language. In a tweet related to NFL kneeling while the national anthem is playing, Trump tweeted:

> The booing at the NFL football game last night, when the entire Dallas team dropped to its knees, was loudest I have ever heard. Great anger
> (@realDonaldTrump, September 26, 2017)

While this legitimizes anger as a direct political force (Wahl-Jorgensen, 2018), it is also a clear example of how Trump aligns himself with this emotion in a very simple yet effective way: "Great anger." This syntax is somehow a trademark of @realDonaldTrump in the sense that many tweets end with a suffix underlining the message—for example, "Mainstream Media must clean up its act, FAST!" (October 24, 2018). In an analysis of 200 tweets, Kreis (2017) argues that "President Trump's tweets demonstrate that his language is simple and direct and his messages are succinct" (p. 615); and this "succinctness" is opposed, implicitly or explicitly, to intervening language of "fake news":

> AP headline was very different from my quote and meaning in the story. They just can't help themselves. FAKE NEWS!
> (@realDonaldTrump, October 17, 2018)

The direct and relatively simple language is linked to a type of political community in which things are expressed as they "are." Hilhorst and Hermes (2016) write of social media (here, Facebook) as "a meshed network of friends groups [and] a digital space that invites you to speak your mind and especially to express your feelings: you are among friends" (p. 221). In relation to this, "unmediation" expresses a sense that what takes place on social media simply is "ordinary" language that has migrated onto a media platform. While a number of studies underline that this not simply so (as online discussions may be more polarizing; see, e.g., Bird, 2011), one may see Twitter utterances as a "blend [of] the traditions of a primary and secondary orality" (Papacharissi, 2014, p. 28) and thus closer to everyday spoken language than what is mediated through traditional mass media.

        The tweets may thus give rise to what Papacharissi and Oliveria (2012) term "instantaneity"—labeled as such here not because there are "updates streaming every few seconds" (p. 274), but rather because the stream from Trump seems sped up and instant when compared with rhythms usually characterizing high-office political communication. Such an experience of instantaneity is coproduced by "the modes of engagement, interaction and the speed at which responses to one's own actions are being shown" (Weltevrede et al., 2014, p. 129), and is visible on the platform through the increasing numbers of likes, shares, and comments. In @realDonaldTrump, this sense of unmediation is constantly communicated via the implicit and explicit opposition to "fake news," which is seen as inserting a distorting layer closely linked to an elite that is distanced from the will of the people. By constantly invoking the fake news of mainstream news media, Trump is positing his utterances as an unmediated and uncontaminated channel of communication, one that "circumvents the journalistic gatekeepers" (Kreis, 2017, p. 610).

Impulsivity

Populism is founded on the ability of a leader to somehow voice the concerns of the "authentic people" in opposition to "small minorities who are put outside" this constructed entity (Müller, 2014, p. 485). The leader thus needs to be seen, if we follow Müller (2014), as someone who "correctly discerns what we [the people] correctly think" (p. 486). Regardless of whether one finds Trump charismatic, he seems to be wording popular concerns in a way that resonates well with a substantial part of the electorate, and this is linked to an "image of a pre-procedural people" (Müller, 2014, p. 488)—one that may be seen as positing true, moral politics outside the established procedures of liberal democracy. This aligns well with the notion of the frontier mentioned earlier, an idea that also has been applied to the early Internet (see Bødker, 2004; Turner, 2006).

Such a prototypical and moral politics is, as discussed earlier, performed through the appearance of an unmediated language, which partly means the lack of the intervening gatekeeping of mainstream media and partly nobody else interfering—not strategic communicators, or even one's own civility. These two inhibitions are related in the sense that Trump may be seen as "a candidate of impulse running against candidates of calculation" (Gabler cited in Ott, 2017, p. 63). The content and timing of Trump's tweets certainly create an impression of "impulsivity," which Ott (2017) sees as an inherent part of Twitter. Tweets are thus often, he writes, "sparked by an affective charge" (p. 61). The tweet that follows, which Trump sent from Air Force One on his way from the G7 meeting in Canada to the North Korea Summit in Singapore, is a good example of this:

> PM Justin Trudeau of Canada acted so meek and mild during our @G7 meetings only to
> give a news conference after I left saying that, "US Tariffs were kind of insulting" and he
> "will not be pushed around." Very dishonest & weak . . .
> (@realDonaldTrump, June 19, 2018)

Given the position of the United States and Canada, such a tweet seems deliberately lacking in civility and calculation in relation to future collaboration. Indeed, the tweet seems much closer to a subjective expression than a calculated political utterance. If we apply Papacharissi and Oliveria's (2012) notion of Twitter as "atomized stories and stories of subjectively experienced events" (p. 267), we could say that Trump's Twitter stream creates a type of authenticity in the sense that the president—as a person, not an office—speaks directly and that doing this creates a stream (of consciousness) that is very different from much more (or differently) managed modes of political communication.

What we see here gives the impression of pre-spin outbursts, evidence of whose authenticity can be found in the fact that Trump's own press secretaries later spend time describing what the president meant/said or did not mean/say. Was the Pocahontas comment demeaning? Was the retweeting of British right-wing videos discriminatory, etc.? What we seemingly get access to are unfiltered political reactions in the White house as they develop in everyday language, not something that has been filtered through a bureaucratic apparatus of communication managers. The stream thus gives a sense of being present as the thoughts form, that is, what the president "really" thinks, as opposed to this coming out much later in a candid biography or emerging from under many layers in a presidential library. Here, Twitter thus gives access to what Papacharissi

and Oliveria (2012) call "*premediated* situations" (p. 267; emphasis in original)—although they are here referring to news practices on Twitter in relation to quickly developing stories.

Here, the notion of "premediation" should be seen in relation to widespread both academic and popular perceptions of how political language increasingly has become professional and/or strategic. Political language is thus not only about expressing convictions, but also about being part of a strategic process of public opinion and, ultimately, votes. This means that a lot of political discourse—at least at a certain level— is undergirded by social science and various types of market data. By giving the impression of uttering political expression prior to such interventions, Trump's tweets give the impression of a "more amateurish yet authentic" politician (Enli, 2017, p. 54) who is "not even attempting the guise of professionalism" (p. 56). In taking on this stance—as he also did very successfully in the presidential campaign in 2016—Trump aligns himself with the "ordinary," which here is not threatened by outsiders, but by a distancing language of social science, theory, and, ultimately, education. This is an integral part of the opposition toward an elite that has appropriated concepts and discourses that are seen as distancing "real" experiences, a language that layers alienating concepts, theories, and strategies on top of "real life." Elites speak a "slow" language that needs some kind of translation or operationalization to be perceived as having an impact. It is a language poised against unmediation and impulsivity, and confronting this language signals an impatience with those who do not or cannot speak a simple and readily understandable language.

Authenticity, Populist Time, and Political Communication

By utilizing the repertoires of populist time, Donald Trump pulls a remarkable trick in the emerging canon of postmodern political performance—the ability to appear simultaneously entirely mediated and utterly authentic. It is in helping to resolve this tension between authenticity and mediation (Sorensen, 2018) that we think the concept of populist time has much to offer concepts of political communication. Consider that, as many scholars have pointed out, Trump's initial burst of political success lay in the fact that he was a bona fide media celebrity (Alexander & Woods, 2019 Street, 2019). Even more remarkable is that he has simultaneously managed to imbue this celebrity status with authenticity, at a moment when politicians of all stripes are criticized for their lack of seeming "realness" (Banet-Weiser, 2012; Serazio, 2017). It might be the case that Trump's twitter performance, complete with mangled syntax, easily recognizable spelling errors, and bizarre turns of phrase, plays a role in making him seem more like an ordinary person.

> Ted Cruz is totally unelectable, if he even gets to run (born in Canada). Will loose big to Hillary. Polls show I beat Hillary easily! WIN!
> (@realDonaldTrump January 31, 2016)

> How low has President Obama gone to tapp my phones during the very sacred election process. This is Nixon/Watergate. Bad (or sick) guy!
> (@realDonaldTrump March 4, 2016)

> Despite the constant negative press covfefe
> (@realDonaldTrump July 3, 2018)

But there is more to this story of grammatical massacre. As the *Boston Globe* first reported in 2018,

> It's not always Trump tapping out a Tweet, even when it sounds like his voice. West Wing employees who draft proposed tweets intentionally employ suspect grammar and staccato syntax in order to mimic the president's style, according to two people familiar with the process. (Linskey, 2018, para. 1)

The Trump errors are themselves at least partly staged acts, carried out (in some cases at least) by members of his staff, and perhaps by the president himself. But it is a form of staging that perhaps is far less obvious to the ordinary voter, who might see these performances as signaling an unmediated look into Trump's inner mind—one that spells things incorrectly, just like an ordinary person.

In this instance, we might argue that Twitter serves as an essential counterpoint to the obviously staged aspects of the Trump presidency (the ritualized bill signings, the performative press conference, the desire for a large military parade) and does so partly through a temporal communications style we term *populist time* and that, in various ways, signals a preempting of and/or short circuiting of the temporal machineries of government that carry on in all its ceremonial aspects, stabilizing ritualized, deliberative chronology of representative democracy, moving forward at a steady pace*.* Trump's twitter performance thus highlights a seeming backstage zone in which time is a social and quotidian temporality (of impatience) that moves forward through the realtimeness of Twitter. While Walter Benjamin (1968) certainly did not have Trump's misspelled tweets in mind when he wrote about "the 'time of the now' which is shot through with chips of Messianic time" (p. 263), there is no doubt that these periodic outbursts of illegibility serve to disrupt the normal, steady chronological order of microscale historical progress. The notion and deployment of "covfefe" is far less humorous, and far more politically disruptive, than it first appears.

Conclusion

By introducing the concept of populist time, this article attempts to understand political communication on social media, and Twitter in particular, as situating itself within the emerging de-synchronization between social acceleration and the temporalities of democratic governance.[4] Populist time is thus a performance, to put it more directly, that attempts to disrupt or circumvent the delays built into liberal democracy. This amounts to the constructed opposition between a wish for quick changes—legitimized by being vested in the will of the people—and established sectors of society that rest on and (perhaps) propagate (moderating) delays.

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[4] One interesting recent development on Twitter has been the aggressive algorithmic attempts to downplay or even eliminate the "real-time" elements of the platform in favor of an algorithmically curated feed. These moves have been strongly resisted by the bulk of Twitter's core user base, and many have opted to retain their chronological timeline. Although we lack the ability to go more fully into these issues here, one interesting future empirical study could attempt to compare temporal populist political styles before and after the introduction of the algorithmic timeline.

The notion of populist time thus calls attention to how such an opposition plays out in relation to media, language, and (political) strategy. While the notion of unmediation was applied earlier with respect to social media, it might also be applied more widely in the sense that the notion of populist time is premised on an idea that unmediation is indeed possible—that is, that the "real" in certain ways *can* come across somehow untainted by the mediation of media, language, politics, and strategy. It is precisely by being against the distorting/delaying measures applied by the elite within such processes that an immediate "normality" appears as liberating. Because all the tweets may not come directly (without "mediation") from Trump himself, we do not really know to what extent the propagated unmediation is a conscious strategy—and it may not matter. What we can say is that this practice and/or strategy is opposed to what may be seen as the de-affectivization of delays, that is, ways to make sure that once politic demands are turned into legislation, it is based on rational choices. Unmediation in political communication is thus also a legitimization of anger—that of both those seemingly represented by the populist leader and those who are vehemently angry at this turn of events.

Following on from this, we do hope and think that the notion of populist time as proposed here— and particularly its social media affordances—may be a fruitful point of departure for further discussions of the relationships among the temporalities of politics, journalism, and digital communication. But, before outlining some of the directions that such further studies may take, we wish to call attention to some of the limitations of this study. Obviously, in this introductory article, we could not fully explore all the various pathways down which a technologically imbricated notion of populist time might take us. In particular, we would like to draw the readers' attention to three limitations.

First, we think it remains an open question just how far this concept might "travel" empirically. Does the notion of populist time apply to other populist leaders (and their Twitter feeds) beyond @realDonaldTrump? Does it manifest itself equally among politicians across the political spectrum, on both the right and the left? About any issue? Obviously, we do not address any of these possibilities here. In the end, all these suggestive remarks can only be confirmed or dismissed through empirical work, and it has been our hope in this piece to encourage work on social media platforms that focus on the intersections of political and technological temporalities.

This remark takes us to our second limitation—and suggestion for future scholarship—which is that this piece only analyzes Twitter. Twitter is obviously not the most important social media platform for the production of politics; indeed, many scholars have written about their frustration with the number of "Twitter studies," as opposed to analyses of Facebook, Instagram, WhatsApp, and so on. We sympathize with this complaint. In this regard, it would be interesting to analyze the forms of political temporality that manifest themselves across media platforms to see if different politicians enact different forms of temporal populism, if these styles converge into a complex form of digital personhood, and so on.

Finally, we have devoted little time to the discussion of the mediation of populism in any historical sense, perhaps giving the impression that the "digital" enacts a particularly powerful intersection when it comes to the relationship between temporality and populism. Given that we are writers who have done significant historical work, this is far from our intent. Indeed, we are actually convinced that a great deal of classic media history deals with these issues, though not always using the terminology and conceptual

apparatus we deploy here. There is certainly much fruitful work to be done in synthesizing this scholarship and pushing it in new directions.

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