

Paula Čatipović

Faculty of Political Science, University of Zagreb, Lepušićeva 6, Croatia

paulacatipovic.sluzbeni@gmail.com

The Role of Emotions in the Dissemination of Populism and fake News Phenomena

Abstract

Based on the assumption that human emotions have an influence on their decisions and attitudes, this paper explores the relationship between emotions and the challenges democracy faces in the 21st century. Focusing on fake news and populism, the paper explores the role of emotions in these phenomena. Some of the emotional patterns analyzed in this paper are the appearance of fear, insecurity, and anger, which are manifested through the creation of “enemies” and “antagonists” embodied by immigrants, political elites, and mainstream media. In the end, by reviewing significant research on this topic, a fundamental distinction is revealed in the interpretation of the mentioned phenomena, considering whether people approach them from an emotionally challenged or reason-driven position. Therefore, a systematical overview of work on this topic can make a significant contribution to the further understanding of these phenomena.

Key words: emotions, identity, public sphere, populism, fake news, media.

1. Introduction

Numerous papers problematize the role of emotions in politics (Abu-Lughod and Lutz, 1990; Goodwin, Jasper, and Polletta, 2001; Hoggett and Thompson, 2012; Wahl-Jorgensen, 2012, Nussbaum, 2013; Massumi, 2015; Wahl-Jorgensen, 2018). By defining emotions, their role and influence, it becomes evident how significant they are for the conceptualization of the public sphere and how potentially exclusionary it is to ignore them. Applying this to contemporary society and the problems of illiberal turnaround that democracies face today, this paper studies the role of emotions in the dissemination of populism and fake news phenomena. The strictly rational political public sphere in this sense is criticized by the author with arguments that it excludes many aspects of human participation and ignores the personal component. By reviewing relevant work that is categorized here based on keywords and concepts, this paper seeks to give an insight into the role that emotions play in the context of the public sphere, contemporary society, democracy, the challenges it faces today and the normative role of the media. The papers were chosen based on their relevancy and connection to the topic. At the beginning of the paper key concepts are defined, followed by a systematized presentation of relevant findings. Furthermore, papers presented here explain the connection between populism and fake news, the role of emotions and how it all relates to concepts of identity (Jasper, 1998). Finally, considering contextual factors such as socioeconomic changes driven by globalization and economic deregulation, this paper emphasizes the importance of the emotional domain in discipline and research related to this topic.

2. Emotions

Emotions are defined as evaluation states that have physiological, cognitive, and neurological elements (Lawler, 1999, p. 219). Turner and Stets (2011) in *Sociology of Emotions* explain that emotions are socially constructed, that is, that they very much depend on socialization and social structures. The authors refer to William M. Wentworth, emphasizing the role of emotions in relation to culture, society, socialization, and communication. Turner and Stets (2011, p. 297) argue that for Wentworth emotions are the original form of communication, that is, the medium of communication. Furthermore, the authors explain that emotions play an important role in regulating attention, learning from experience, observing themselves and others, and claim that without emotions people would not be able to know situations or adapt to them and function in their environment. Therefore, they allow individuals to take roles, read dispositions, and communicate in ways through which they can gain a sense of intersubjectivity with other people (2011, p. 299). While Solomon (2008) argues that almost all emotions are also reflected in behavior, Frijda (1986, p. 6) explains how emotions are evoked by significant events, which are considered as such when they involve actual or expected concerns of the subject. Furthermore, according to Nussbaum (2013), emotions are not just impulses, but contain estimates that consequently have evaluation content, and Goodwin, Jasper and Polletta (2001) emphasize that emotions in political research

have fallen into the background, even though they used to be the center of many studies. In their words, emotions have lost their place in the “rationalistic, structural, and organizational models that dominate academic political analysis” (2001, p. 1). Nevertheless, much of the authors continue to point out that emotions are incorporated into all pores of life and society, such as relationships, ideology, consumerism, globalization, economics, culture (Jasper, 1998; Goodwin et al., 2003; Salmela and von Scheve, 2017; Wahl-Jorgensen, 2012; Spruyt, Keppens and Van Droogenbroeck, 2016) implying in this way that they are an inevitable part of many disciplines and research.

“What moves people is a function of their sense of their nation’s history, traditions, and current problems, and leaders attempting to generate emotional support for valuable projects must engage with people as they are, their particular historically and socially shaped loves and cares – even if ultimately to lead them to a place altogether new” (Nussbaum, 2013, p. 200-201).

Given the fundamental question this paper addresses, on the role of emotions in contemporary challenges to democracy, their aspects in political discourse are emphasized. Taking this into context, it is imperative to explore the phenomenon of the public sphere and how it is reconceptualized when considering the phenomenology of emotions.

3. The public sphere

Given the claims about how social interactions manifest themselves in the structure of the public sphere, it is important to emphasize that the history of discussions on this subject is very rich. Aristotle (1954) wrote in *Rhetoric* about emotions and the persuasive role they can play, through world-renowned philosophers who have made their contributions (Smith, 1959; Hobbes, 1968). While Kant (1998), for example, argued that bad behavior in society has its roots in human nature, Habermas (1989) described his prominent idea of the public sphere through rational discussion of topics within the community and explained the normative concept of public debate as incorporated into the context of democracy. Nevertheless, one should be careful while approaching this debate. If emotions are seen as a constitutive part of the individual as they create individual opinion (Lutz, 2007, p. 26), and if humans are inseparable from the social structures they obtain, then are emotions not an indispensable part of politics and social discourse? Wouldn’t then their practice in society make them part of the politics as well of everyday life, as well as many other disciplines, such as, obviously, anthropology and linguistics? Habermas (2004, p. 2) himself emphasized that his work is dominated by the conceptual triad of the public sphere, discourse, and reason. But the very idea that rational, public issues, without private interference, excluded from self-interests, can be addressed in the public sphere, could be dangerous and somewhat delusional. As Hoggett and Thompson (2012) explain; the phenomenology of the public sphere and debate fails to take the affective dimension into account. Wahl-Jorgensen (2012) emphasizes that emotions have historically been studied as contrary to reason, but points to more and more research that provides evidence of the central role of emotions in shaping political participation. Furthermore, the author encourages

experts to explore the ways in which concrete emotions affect participation, and in what ways they undermine it, and points out that it is crucial to analyze the impact this has on audiences. While one of the most prominent ideas Habermas (1989) pursues is deliberation, it “must be capable of engaging with the emotional content of experiences that are brought into the deliberative sphere. Deliberation cannot be restricted to the purely rational or cognitive because to do so is to exclude many of those directly affected by the policy decisions that may flow from deliberation” (Hoggett and Thompson, 2012, p. 33). So, as the authors point out, the goal is not to imply a complete rejection of everything rational, but ignoring the emotional component is not acceptable either. Certainly, by denying emotions as an integral part of man, the public sphere as such is also denied. The truth is that not a day goes by in a democracy without a whole spectrum of emotions, such as anger, guilt, regret, love, disgust, fear (Nussbaum, 2013). Analyzing Habermas’ depiction of the public sphere and his view of the relationship between the public sphere and democracy, the question of the normative role of the media arises, regarding these emotional characteristics. Therefore, in the next chapter, different views of the authors are presented on the topic of an ideal forum for discussion and manifestations of emotions in this area.

4. Normative role of the media and democracy

The normative role rises within Habermas’ (2004) notion that the public sphere has an irrefutable relationship with the normative evaluation of democracy, or, as Hänska (2019, p. 14) emphasized, Habermas’ famous complaint on the rise in publicity and entertainment that feudalized the public sphere. Hänska (2019) raises the question of justice in the discipline of communication and explains that it deals with the issues of the organization of society and politics through their relationship. Along these lines, many actors encounter the normative role of the media through the phenomenon of the public sphere: “Politicians, journalists, and social scientists play different, though often intertwined, roles in creating a relationship between truth and democracy” (Nielsen, 2020, p. 238). Consequently, commercialization of the media and media organizations is being discussed and linked with broader trends in contemporary society (McNair, 2003; Blumler and Cushion, 2014). McNair (2003) argues that in capitalist societies, the focus is no longer on the traditional understanding of the public sphere but on sensations and scandals, and Enli and Rosenberg (2018) state that the decline in trust in the media is not only related to media change but also to institutions and politics. Furthermore, the proliferation of the fake news phenomenon cannot only be attributed to technological advances that allow for quick and easy content sharing with the masses. Rather than that, what is at stake is a complete transformation of the news industry and the creation of new types of news audiences (Nielsen, 2020). Relating norms to emotions, Turner and Stets (2011, p. 22) see the construction of emotions through cultural ideologies, beliefs, and norms and their influence on social structures that determine what emotions will be experienced and how culturally determined emotions will be expressed. Moreover, an obvious uncertainty exists when it comes to the existence

of the public sphere as originally described, not only in its lack of cultural sensitivity but also in its skepticism about the whole idea of an ideal forum for discussion and rational deliberation. Referring to new media, forums, blogs, comments, and social networks in general, Massumi (2015) suggests that there is an evident shift towards inarticulate expression of emotions. In this regard, Wahl-Jorgensen (2012) argues that emotional involvement can have a polarizing impact, which makes civilian debate impossible and does not lead to constructive solutions and consensus. Abramson, Arterton, and Orren (1988) describe similar problems in their explanation of abrupt expressions of opinion, suggesting that the idea of relying on rational discussion and the consequent production of ideal democracy is incomplete and Corner (2017) highlights how important it is to put fake news in the broader context of media research and link it to the root problems of journalism. Additionally, addressing the fake news phenomenon as a problem of fundamental change in journalism can be associated with digital media and changes in modern media democracies, concluding that fake news has an enormous impact on journalism (Egelhofer and Lecheler, 2019) and also the way newsrooms operate and lean towards commercialization and sensationalism. Bastick (2021) points to research results that have confirmed that exposure to fake news significantly modifies the unconscious behavior of individuals and points to the consequent undermining of democracy. Fake news potentially leads to misconceptions and inequality in political knowledge, and this is detrimental to democracy (Van Aelst et al., 2017, p. 19, cit. according to Egelhofer and Lecheler, 2019, p. 111–112).

“Post-truth calls into question the normative vision of journalism as a critical link in democratic public life based on fact-based arguments“ (Waisbord, 2018, p. 1875).

This antidemocratic turn doesn't involve only the fake new phenomenon. Research on emotional use by populist parties versus mainstream parties concluded that populist, and especially radical right appeals, can have a very negative impact on democracy, which mostly refers to negative stereotyping of minorities and frequent attacks on the media (Widmann, 2021, p. 176). Thus, considering the illiberal turn and challenges democracies face today, like populism and fake news, the authors conclude that emotions play a crucial role in their proliferation and manifestation. By appealing to emotions when practicing these phenomena, audiences experience a subjective sense of involvement and expression of emotions that do not always have a constructive contribution to democratic principles. In view of the above, the chapters that follow deal specifically with the issue of populism and fake news and illuminate the possible ways in which actors use emotions in the dissemination of these phenomena. The next chapters analyze these phenomena and the role of emotions in them, but also how this affects the understanding of the entire discipline in which these phenomena are studied.

5. Populism

5.1. Defining the phenomenon of populism

Populism is quite famously defined as an invitation to people against the established structures of power and dominant ideas as well as society's values (Canovan, 1999, p. 3). Given the fact that populism is often referred to as ideologically thin-centered (Mudde, 2004), because of its connection to different and sometimes even contradictory ideologies, its connection to the media is interesting. For example, Wodak (2013) argues that right-populist parties depend on modern media democracies and that their growth is deeply linked to their presence in the media. If the focus turns to populist leaders that are often quite successful in capturing the media's attention, Kirk Hawkins (2003, p. 1140) contextually expands the definition of populism by arguing that populism is a charismatic technique that embodies the will of the people, while Canovan (1999, p. 14) argues that populist movements mainly contain charismatic leaders who personalize and mediate politics. While explaining populism as a communication phenomenon, some emphasize the contribution that communication processes make to the 'construction' of populist ideas (de Vreese et al., 2018, p. 425), and some refer to populism as a political communication style and point to its tendency to indicate closeness to people and distancing from the establishment (Jagers and Walgrave, 2007). This leads to a well-known populist polarization of "pure people" versus the "corrupt elite" (Mudde, 2007, p. 23), which creates the idea of ideally homogeneous people on the one side and the ones that are excluded, "the others," on the other side of the spectrum. The ones that are portrayed as excluded from the discourse are more than often immigrants, the media, the institutions, or simply political enemies and rivals of differing opinions (Salmela and von Scheve, 2017; Barbeito and Iglesias, 2021; Widmann, 2021) and the relationship between "people" and "elites" is often referred to through the concept of crisis and anger towards those responsible (blamed) for the crisis (Homolar and Scholz, 2019). Moreover, stigmatized groups find "people" in "empty signifiers" and develop a tendency towards a group perspective through which they then create their positive identities in order to cope (Spruyt, Keppens and Van Droogenbroeck, 2016, p. 335-336). There are even claims in the field that the study of populism is essentially the study of identity (Boss et al., 2020), and arguments that the more a specific group position forms a fundamental part of identity, the more people will define themselves as part of the "common man" category and the more they will be attracted to populism (Spruyt, Keppens, and Van Droogenbroeck, 2016, p. 344). If the persuasive power of populism, which lies in populist communication, really is inherently more tied to emotions than communication used by non-populist parties (Wirz, 2018, p. 1131), then taking positions and interpreting one's own roles in society is extremely important in the context of this paper. It is precisely through the specifics of human identity and man's need for self-identification that the authors emphasize the role of emotions in populism. For example, Salmela and von Scheve (2017) refer to fundamental social changes that have influenced the rise of populism, especially the radical

right, and suggest that identification-created emotional processes are an additional explanation for these phenomena. The authors put this in context by linking concrete emotions to the current situation in society and the role of populism, which is further discussed in the following chapter.

5.2. The role of emotions and identity in the dissemination of populism

Great democratic leaders have always understood the cultivation of appropriate emotions and discouraged those that hampered the progress of society (Nussbaum, 2013), and identity theories also associate positive emotions with the development of stable social structures (Turner and Stets, 2011). Not only that, but Nagel (2021) argues that emotions are the core of identity, either in the context of Freud's narcissism theory, Jung's conceptualization, or any other psychoanalytic perspective, and implies that identity is always constructed in relation to other people. Furthermore, the power of identity lies precisely in emotional traits, which can be seen through collective identity. This phenomenon is described through strong emotions towards the group, or, maybe even more importantly, a strong antipathy towards those who do not belong in the group (Goodwin, Jasper, and Polletta, 2001). Therefore, collective identity brings a sense of solidarity and togetherness, but also strictly constructed boundaries of belonging and, thus, clear distinctions. It has been shown that, in the domain of online political participation, the radical right provokes stronger emotional reactions than the parties of the center (Doroshenko and Tu, 2022). Additionally, Bos et al. (2020) clarify how exactly populist communicators rely on strategies that influence people's judgment and their political engagement. The authors call this "populist identity framing" because "ordinary people," as an internal group, are portrayed as threatened by outside groups. Before getting into the psychological mechanisms behind identity framing, it is important to outline the concept of identity itself. Therefore, Bauman (2004) argues that identity itself is the goal of effort, an entity of construction and choice that is protected through struggle, and "for the struggle to be victorious, the truth of the precarious and forever incomplete status of identity needs to be, and tends to be, suppressed and laboriously covered up" (Bauman, 2004, p. 15–16). This is especially important in the context of populists, who tend to monopolize the notion of nationality.

"Cultural identities—religious, national, regional, and ethnic identities—are more fluid and may be either public or private depending upon historical context. Democracy tends to legislate religious, regional, and ethnic identities out of the public sphere and to invoke selectively the affective dimensions of nationalism to support the nation-state" (Berezin, 2001, p. 85).

Two psychological mechanisms are seen as links between populism and national identity. They are identified behind the rise of the radical populist right. The first mechanism concerns negative emotions and the construction of enemies, such as migrants, while the second mechanism refers to emotional distancing from social identities that cause shame in favor of identities that are perceived as more stable and concern phenomena such as nationality (Salmela and von Scheve, 2017). An experimental study conducted in fifteen European countries ($n = 7286$) showed that the anti-elitist

identity framework has the potential to convince voters (Bos et al., 2020). The results have shown that, due to anti-elitist consideration of identity, voters are more likely to agree with the messages and become involved with them. It also confirmed a thesis on populist references to social topics as problems that are caused by the elites, thus confirming that people who feel very deprived have benefits from blaming the elite (2020, p. 20). Schulz, Wirth, and Müller (2020) argue that social identity theory is an appropriate framework for linking populist attitudes, public opinion, and the media, as they found common patterns in the countries they studied. They argue that found characteristics, such as having stronger populist attitudes going together with a less friendly perception of the media, unite populist citizens and that these perceptions are potentially driven by mechanisms of social identity (2020, p. 217). Another study (Widmann, 2021) showed that Twitter has raised both populists' and mainstream politicians' levels of anger and disgust, but also joy and pride. The author argues that actors mostly resort to emotions of anger and disgust when they want to attack the elites, media, rivals, or, for example, when referring to refugees. Furthermore, by using language associated with fear and sadness, populists identify with "the people." While creating a positive identity that is usually based on nationality, at least for right-wing populist parties, the author argues that actors prefer emotions of joy and pride. Non-populist actors use emotions of joy and pride when focusing on their past successes. Moreover, research showed that political party Podemos manifests emotions through love and hope while discussing solutions, and Vox, in addition to using tools of undefined fear while referring to the future, practices powerful negative appeals such as fear of cultural extinction, hatred, revenge, and punishment (Barbeito and Iglesias, 2021). Finally, it is important to note that, while emotions can play an integrative role, they can also spread intolerance and hatred (Wahl-Jorgensen, 2012), which is perhaps best explained through the categorization of emotions that stand out the most in relation to this subject.

5.2.1. The role of negative emotions in populism

Collective emotions socially construct common ailments (Kemper, 1981). In this context, negative emotions that attach to identity, such as guilt or shame (Goodwin, Jasper, and Polletta, 2001), are often being discussed. Other strong emotions, like fear, anger, and resentment, are related to the public space in the context of the rise of populism and ideological polarization (Rosas and Serrano-Puche, 2018, cit. according to Serrano-Puche, 2021, p. 232). Salmela and von Scheve (2017) address the socioeconomic changes that have led to the strengthening of populism but argue that they cannot be considered the sole cause and focus on emotional processes and identity building while interpreting the growth of the radical populist right. While doing so, they focus on fear and shame as emotions that are especially manifested in individualized capitalist societies. Shame is seen as the emotion of failure and a consequence of neoliberalism and individualization (Hoggett and Thompson, 2012). Moreover, fear and anxiety are seen as emotions that grow during a crisis, but they can allegedly be regulated, among other strategies, by authentic leaders (Nagel, 2021),

or fear and insecurity can be turned, through shame, into anger and hatred of the “enemies,” who are most often immigrants, elites, or the mainstream media (Salmela and von Scheve, 2017). Hidalgo-Tenorio and Benítez-Castro (2021) refer to fear and anger as dominant components of Trump’s rhetorical style, arguing that he is mobilizing people through them against populistically constructed “enemies.” Furthermore, it is suggested that Trump’s so-called “angry populism” is based on attracting media and audience attention by deliberately expressing emotions of anger and rage (Wahl-Jorgensen, 2018). The author studied the appearance of the words “anger” and “angry” in the period between the election and the day after his inauguration. After the election to the day after Trump’s inauguration, there were 3,828 stories containing the terms “anger” or “angry” versus 1,449 for Obama. Wahl-Jorgensen (2018, p. 774) concludes that Trump’s “emotional regime” has become part of the framework of political life and suggests it is critical to his brand of populism, with the public focusing on Trump’s production of spectacle, which has affected the way journalists produce news (Ananny, 2018, p. 103, cit. according to Gutsche, 2018, p. 2). Finally, populism is associated with feelings of dissatisfaction and stigmatized groups that are struggling to create positive social identities. Therefore, populism is addressed as a strategy for coping with unsavory situations and is associated with human vulnerability (Spruyt, Keppens, and Van Droogenbroeck, 2016):

“In addition, people who are characterized by a strong sense of lack of political efficiency, people who believe they live in a world that is unfair and where they don’t get what they deserve, or people for whom the world is changing too quickly and are losing themselves, they all support populism” (2016, p. 342).

5.2.2. The role of positive emotions in populism

On the other hand, the appearance of positive emotions in populism has different aspects. Arendt (1958) interprets the human tendency for promises through the claim that without attachment to promises, we would not be able to maintain our identities at all. Thus, she refers to the public, which is manifested through the presence of others, who then determine the identities of those who promise and those who fulfill (1958, p. 237). Naturally, emotions of hope and euphoria appear as antagonism to fear and skepticism (Jayme Montiel and Uyheng, 2020), and how important this discourse of hope and promise is in the context of emotions and populism is clear through the statement that natural human uncertainty about the future can be seen as prey. For politicians, the concept of the future has an ideological and rhetorical function because the future itself is unpredictable and promises create an impression of optimism in voters (Dunmire, 2005, p. 484). For instance, Podemos uses positive emotions of hope and love explicitly when talking about the future (Barbeito and Iglesias, 2021), and right-wing populist parties, on the other hand, use positive emotions of joy and pride when referring to identity through nationality (Widmann, 2021). Populists have a strong narrative of the future, unlike liberals, who have failed to create it, and liberals will be able to compete with populists only when they create their own discourse of a promising future (Kuisz and Wigura, 2020):

“The empty ideological space was occupied largely by populists who packed it with a reactive dislike of the West, supplemented by a xenophobia-tinged promise of well-being for the national community. In times filled with uncertainties—about the economy, about social identities, about institutions, about the global climate—this promise offers voters a sense of sanctuary and security” (2020, p. 51).

Nielsen (2020) refers to the shift from liberal democracy to oligarchy by thematizing white supremacy, anti-immigrant attitudes, and populism, and talks about the role of the fake news phenomenon through the dangerous erosion of democracy, freedom, and deliberation. There is an open argument that, in recent years, elections in Western democracies have been linked to the spread of political online fake news, personalized online filters, and the significant electoral success of populist candidates (Cantarella, Fraccaroli, and Volpe, 2023). Akgül (2019) argues that populist politicians mostly regard fake news as a propaganda tool for their political agendas (2019, p. 32). In this way, the authors detect the link between populism and fake news phenomena in the context of the shift away from liberal democracy and the problems it entails. In accordance with the above, the next chapter first thoroughly defines the different forms of fake news and then connects this phenomenon with the role of emotions in their dissemination.

6. Fake news

6.1. Defining the phenomenon of fake news, misinformation, disinformation, malinformation

Fake news is defined as false information that mimics real information (Van der Linden, Panagopoulos and Roozenbeek, 2020). Cantarella, Fraccaroli and Volpe (2023) define political online fake news as deliberately fabricated misinformation of political content (2023, p. 1) and consequently emphasize their relationship with the success of populist candidates during elections. Wardle (2018) calls for caution while using that term by emphasizing that a lot of the content which is being discussed is not false per se but is taken out of context. Therefore, fake news is seen as a tool that the powerful use to suppress and curb free speech and undermine and circumvent free media (2018, p. 952). It is also important to distinguish between fake news as a genre and as a label (Egelhofer and Lecheler, 2019). Fake news as a genre is defined by the authors as “deliberately created pseudo-journalistic disinformation”, while fake news as a label is explained as a political instrument that serves to delegitimize journalism (2019, p. 98). Wardle (2018, p. 953) ranks seven types of “information disorders” of which he considers satire and parody the least dangerous and puts them at the beginning of the spectrum. At the end of the spectrum is fabricated content that was deliberately created to spread false information. Other categories distinguish content that is unrelated to headlines or visual representations such as clickbait, the use of visual materials or

quotes that change the context, the dissemination of accurate content beyond the original context, binding journalists' signatures and organizations to content that is not truly theirs and manipulating content for the purpose of deception. Wardle (2018, p. 954) explains that these seven categories can be classified into three camps, depending on the degree of veracity and intention to cause harm. Content that is false but not intended for intentional harm is called misinformation. Misinformation includes satire, clickbait or quotes and images that can have a misleading effect. Content that is false and intended to cause harm is called disinformation and therefore includes malicious lies, fabricated content, and manipulation campaigns. True information intended to harm is defined as malinformation (2018, p. 954).

6.2. The role of emotions in the dissemination of fake news

While explaining disinformation and affective polarization, the role of populism in the mobilization of emotions is crucial, especially considering the fact that nowadays some of the media are populist themselves (Krämer, 2014). Digitalization and mediatization are referred to as processes in which emotions become the center of political and social life, compared to earlier periods when the affective dimension was more limited to the private sphere (Serrano-Puche, 2021, p. 232). Consequences of the relationship between fake news and the emotional discourse, as well as the importance of their research, can be recognized in a study of emotional intelligence and university education in relation to fake news (Preston et al., 2021). Research results found that people who have high levels of emotional intelligence and university education are less likely to believe fake news than people who show low levels of emotional intelligence and college education. Along these lines, Martel, Pennycook, and Rand (2020) explored the link between specific emotions (fear, shame, enthusiasm, excitement, guilt, upset, etc.) and the fake news phenomenon. The first study found that increased emotionality predicts greater confidence in fake news, but not real news. Another study measured and manipulated reliance on emotion or reason through four experiments ($n = 3884$) and found correlation and causal evidence that reliance on emotions increases trust in fake news (2020, p. 1). Furthermore, Corbu et al. (2021) sought to investigate how likely users are to share fake news on social media ($n = 813$). The authors call it the "viralization effect" and explore it in relation to two positive emotions (enthusiasm and pleasure) and two negative emotions (anger and fear) as mediators of the aforementioned effects of viralization. The results showed that negatively biased fake news increase people's willingness to share the news, while positively biased fake news had no significant impact on viralization potential. The potential for viralization turned out to be mediated by negative emotions, but not by positive emotions (2021, p. 58). In research, fake news is often related to echo-chambers (Bakir and McStay, 2017). More precisely, echo-chambers are created while algorithmically selecting information based on the user's previous interests, purchases, publications, search history and the like. Bakir and McStay (2017) recall a 2014 Facebook study that, by collecting newsfeed material, without the knowledge and consent of

participants, found that people replicated positive/negative emotional content in their own posts. Referring to these results and “automatic journalism” (algo-journalism) which automatically uses data to create stories depending on preferences and target audiences, the authors warn about the emotional implications this may have. While fake news already represents an increase in emotional charge, automated news and journalism have the potential to make this situation worse (2017, p. 170). Bowman and Cohen (2020) explain exposure to the fake news phenomenon and highlight the ways in which this content is often created to resonate with us and our emotions, thus depriving us of the ability to become aware of our bias. The authors offer a solution in form of education in the field of media literacy with the goal of making media audiences more critical and aware of the circumstances in which they encounter such content.

7. Conclusion

By analyzing relevant work on the topic of emotions, populism and fake news, based on relevancy and connection to the topic, the need to incorporate the emotional dimension into the issues of the public sphere and the normative role of the media is clear. Neglecting this area completely marginalizes the entire aspect of research without which is impossible to get a complete insight into phenomenology. Nielsen (2020) explains the shift from liberal democracy to oligarchy through marginalizing vulnerable communities, anti-globalism, and white supremacy. Populist, and especially radical right appeals, can have a negative impact on democracy, which mostly refers to negative stereotyping of minorities and frequent attacks on the media (Widmann, 2021, p. 176). In times of vague social identities and questionable futures, populists have created identities based on divisions and roles, and this has produced feelings of belonging and purpose that culminate in emotions of victimism/supremacy and sacrifice searching (Nagel, 2021). In a crisis, anxiety and fear are reconstructed through the need for hope and identity (Nagel, 2021), and in these times, which are evidently filled with uncertainty, populists have offered voters a better version of the future than the liberals (Kuisz and Wigura, 2020). Doroshenko and Tu (2022) conclude that the radical right provokes stronger emotional reactions than the parties of the center, and in the context of socioeconomic change and individualistic identities, many authors highlight the emotion of shame (Goodwin, Jasper and Polletta, 2001; Hoggett and Thompson, 2012; Salmela and von Scheve, 2017; Martel, Pennycook, and Rand, 2020). Martel, Pennycook, and Rand (2020) reveal that increased emotionality predicts greater confidence in fake news, and research has also shown that people who have high levels of emotional intelligence and university education are less likely to believe fake news (Preston et al., 2021). Emotions such as anger, when it comes to fake news, are associated with a greater chance of active user engagement (Corbu et al., 2021). Finally, in a modern society, shaped by polarizing divisions, dissonances in emotions and identity, new technology and media, the unlimited space available for expression is not necessarily favorable for democracy and is changing the normative role of the media. Therefore, some authors oppose the idealization of a version of the public sphere

which implies that higher participation and discussion automatically mean a positive impact on democracy (Abramson, Arterton and Orren, 1988; Wahl-Jorgensen, 2012; Massumi, 2015). On the contrary, Wahl-Jorgensen (2012) points out that the moment came to discuss how to create forums that will generate empathy and solidarity in times when people are, almost entirely, able to express any opinions and emotions freely. Nevertheless, one thing is for sure - ignoring the power of emotional public sphere only means not seeing the wood from the trees.

References:

- Abramson, J.B., Arterton, F.C., and Orren, G.R. (1988). *The Electronic Commonwealth: The Impact of New Media Technologies on Democratic Politics*. New York: Basic Book.
- Abu-Lughod, L., and Lutz, C. (1990). Emotion, Discourse, and the Politics of Everyday Life. In: C. A. Lutz and L. Abu-Lughod (Eds.), *Language and the Politics of Emotion*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Akgül, H. (2019). Fake News as a Tool of Populism in Turkey: The Pastor Andrew Brunson Case. *Polish Political Science Review*, 7(2), 32-51. <https://doi.org/10.2478/ppsr-2019-0012>
- Arendt, H (1958). *The Human Condition*, Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press.
- Aristotle. (1954). *Rhetoric*. New York: Modern Library.
- Bakir, V. and McStay, A. (2017). Fake News and the Economy of Emotions, *Digital Journalism*, 6 (2), 154-175, <https://doi.org/10.1080/21670811.2017.1345645>
- Barbeito, R. I. and Alonso, A. I. (2021). Political emotions and digital political mobilization in the new populist parties: the cases of Podemos and Vox in Spain, *International Review of Sociology*, <https://doi.org/10.1080/03906701.2021.1947948>
- Bastick, Z. (2021). Would you notice if fake news changed your behavior? An experiment on the unconscious effects of disinformation, *Computers in Human Behavior*, 116, 1-12. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.chb.2020.106633>
- Bauman, Z. (2004). *Identity: interviews with Benedetto Vecchi*. Pelago: Zagreb.
- Berezin, M. (2001). Emotions and Political Identity: Mobilizing Affection for the Polity. In: J. Goodwin, J. Jasper and F. Polletta, (Eds.), *Passionate politics: Emotions and Social Movements*. Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press. <https://doi.org/10.7208/chicago/9780226304007.003.0006>,
- Blumler, J.G., and Cushion, S. (2014). Normative perspectives on journalism studies: Stock-taking and future directions. *Journalism*, 15(3), 259–272. <https://doi-org.ezproxy.nsk.hr/10.1177/1464884913498689>

- Bos, L. Schemer, C., Corbu, N., Hamelers, M., Andreadis, I., Schulz, A., Schmuck, D., Reinemann, C. and Fawzi, N. (2020). The effects of populism as a social identity frame on persuasion and mobilisation: Evidence from a 15-country experiment. *European Journal of Political Research*, 59: 3-24. <https://doi.org/10.1111/1475-6765.12334>
- Bowman, N. D. and Cohen, E. (2020). Mental Shortcuts, Emotion, and Social Rewards: The Challenges of Detecting and Resisting Fake News. In: M. Zimdars and K. McLeod, (Eds.), *Fake News: Understanding Media and Misinformation in the Digital Age*. The MIT Press. <https://doi.org/10.7551/mitpress/11807.001.0001>
- Canovan, M. (1999). Trust the People! Populism and the Two Faces of Democracy, *Political Studies*, 47, 2-16.
- Cantarella, M., Fraccaroli, N., and Volpe, R. (2023). Does fake news affect voting behaviour? *Research Policy*, 52(1), 1-12. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.respol.2022.104628>
- Corbu, N., Bargaoanu, A., Durach, F. and Udrea, G. (2021). Fake News Going Viral: The Mediating Effect of Negative Emotions. *Media Literacy and Academic Research*, 4 (2), 58-85.
- Corner, J. (2017). Fake news, post-truth and media-political change. *Media, Culture & Society*, 39(7), 1100-1107. <https://doi-org.ezproxy.nsk.hr/10.1177/0163443717726743>
- De Vreese, C. H., Esser, F., Aalberg, T., Reinemann, C., and Stanyer, J. (2018). Populism as an Expression of Political Communication Content and Style: A New Perspective. *The International Journal of Press/Politics*, 23 (4), 423-438. <https://doi-org./10.1177/1940161218790035>
- Doroshenko, L. and Tu, F. (2022) Like, Share, Comment, and Repeat: Far-right Messages, Emotions, and Amplification in Social Media, *Journal of Information Technology & Politics*, <https://doi.org/10.1080/19331681.2022.2097358>
- Dunmire, P. L. (2005). Preempting the future: rhetoric and ideology of the future in political discourse. *Discourse & Society*, 16 (4), 481-513. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0957926505053052>
- Egelhofer, J., L. and Lecheler, S. (2019). Fake news as a twodimensional phenomenon: a framework and research agenda. *Annals of the International Communication Association*, 43(2), 97-116. <https://doi.org/10.1080/23808985.2019.1602782>
- Enli, G. and Rosenberg, L.T. (2018). Trust in the Age of Social Media: Populist Politicians Seem More Authentic, *Social Media + Society*, 1-11.
- Frijda, N. H. (1986). *The Emotions*. Cambridge University Press.
- Goodwin, J., Jasper, J., and Polletta, F. (2001). Introduction: Why Emotions Matter. In: J. Goodwin, J. Jasper and F. Polletta, (Eds.), *Passionate politics: Emotions and Social Movements*. Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press.

- Goodwin, J., Jasper, J. M., Polletta, F. (2003). Emotional Dimensions of Social Movements. In: D. A. Snow., S. A. Soule, H. Kriesi, (Eds.), *The Blackwell Companion to Social Movements*. Blackwell Publishing.
- Gutsche Jr., R. (2018): Trump and the Media, *Digital Journalism*, 7(10), 1348–1349. <https://doi.org/10.1080/21670811.2018.1530064>
- Habermas, J. (1989). *The structural transformation of the public sphere*. Cambridge, UK: Polity Press.
- Habermas, J. (2004). *Public Space and Political Public Sphere – The Biographical Roots of Two Motifs in my Thought*. Commemorative Lecture, (Kyoto, November 11, 2004). http://ikesharpless.pbworks.com/f/Kyoto_lecture_Nov_2004,%20Jurgen%20Habermas.pdf.
- Hänska, M. (2019). Normative Analysis in the Communications Field: Why We Should Distinguish Communicative Means and Ends of Justice. *Journal of Information Policy*, 9, 14–36. <https://doi.org/10.5325/jinfopoli.9.2019.0014>
- Hawkins, K. (2003). Populism in Venezuela: The Rise of Chavismo. *Third World Quarterly*, 24 (6), 1137–1160.
- Hidalgo-Tenorio, E., and Benítez-Castro, M. A. (2021). Trump’s populist discourse and affective policies, or on how to move “the People” through emotion. *Globalisation, Societies and Education*, 1–24. <https://doi.org/10.1080/14767724.2020.1861540>
- Hobbes, T. (1980). *Leviathan*. Preface: C.B. Macpherson. Penguin Books, New York.
- Hoggett P. and Thompson S. (2012). Introduction. P. Hoggett and S. Thompson (Eds.), *Politics and the emotions: the affective turn in contemporary political studies*. Continuum.
- Homolar, A. and Scholz, R. (2019). The power of Trump-speak: populist crisis narratives and ontological security, *Cambridge Review of International Affairs*, 32 (3), 344-364. <https://doi.org/10.1080/09557571.2019.1575796>
- Jagers, J. and Walgrave, S. (2007). Populism as political communication style: An empirical study of political parties’ discourse in Belgium. *European Journal of Political Research*, 46: 319-345. <https://doi-org.ezproxy.nsk.hr/10.1111/j.1475-6765.2006.00690.x>
- Jasper, J. M., (1998). The Emotions of Protest: Affective and Reactive Emotions In and Around Social Movement. *Sociological Forum*, 13(3), 397-424.
- Jayne Montiel, C. and Uyheng, J. (2020). Mapping Contentious Collective Emotions in a Populist Democracy: Duterte’s Push for Philippine Federalism. *Political psychology*, 41 (4), 737.
- Kant, I. (1998). *Religion within the Boundaries of Mere Reason*. York. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

- Kemper, T. D. (1981). Social constructionist and positivist approaches to the sociology of emotions. *American Journal of Sociology*, 87(2), 336–362.
- Krämer, B. (2014). Media Populism: A Conceptual Clarification and Some Theses on its Effects, *Communication Theory*, 24 (1), 42–60. <https://doi.org/10.1111/comt.12029>
- Kuisz, J., and Wigura, K. (2020). The pushback against populism: Reclaiming the politics of emotion. *Journal of Democracy*, 31 (2), 41-53. <https://doi-org.ezproxy.nsk.hr/10.1353/jod.2020.0035>
- Lawler E. J. (1999). Bringing emotions into social exchange theory. *Annual Review of Sociology*, 25, 217–244.
- Lutz, C. (2007). Emotion, Thought, and Estrangement: Emotion as a Cultural Category. In: H. Wulff. (Eds.), *The Emotions: A Cultural Reader*. Berg Publishers, Oxford, UK.
- Martel, C., Pennycook, G. and Rand, D.G. (2020). Reliance on emotion promotes belief in fake news. *Cogn. Research* 5 (47), 1-20. <https://doi.org/10.1186/s41235-020-00252-3>
- Massumi, B. (2015). *Politics of affect*. Cambridge, UK: Polity Press.
- McNair, B. (2003). *An introduction to political communication*. Zagreb: Faculty of Political Science.
- Mudde C. (2004). The populist zeitgeist. *Government and Opposition*, 39, 541-563.
- Mudde, C. (2007). *Populist Radical Right Parties in Europe*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Nagel, C. (2021). On the psychodynamics of hope and identity in times of crisis: why they are needed when basic assumption victimism/supremacism prevail. *Organisational and Social Dynamics*, 21(1), 56-77. <https://doi.org/10.33212/osd.v21n1.2021.56>
- Nielsen, G. (2020). Populism, Fake News, and the Flight From Democracy. In K. Dalkir and R. Katz (Eds.), *Navigating Fake News, Alternative Facts, and Misinformation in a Post-Truth World*. IGI Global. <https://doi.org/10.4018/978-1-7998-2543-2.ch01>
- Nussbaum, M. (2013). *Political emotions*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.
- Preston, S., Anderson, A., Robertson, D.J., Shephard, M.P. and Huhe, N. (2021). Detecting fake news on Facebook: The role of emotional intelligence. *PLoS ONE* 16 (3), 1-13. <https://doi.org/10.1371/journal.pone.0246757>
- Salmela, M. E. and von Scheve, C. (2017). Emotional roots of right-wing political populism. *Social Science Information*, 56 (4), 567-595. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0539018417734419>
- Schulz, A., Wirth, W. and Müller, P. (2020). We are the people and you are fake news: A social identity approach to populist citizens' false consensus and hostile media perceptions. *Communication research*, 47 (2), 201-226.

- Serrano-Puche, J. (2021). Digital disinformation and emotions: exploring the social risks of affective polarization, *International Review of Sociology*, 31 (2), 231-245. <https://doi.org/10.1080/03906701.2021.1947953>
- Solomon, R. C. (2008). The philosophy of emotions. In M. Lewis, J. M. Haviland-Jones and L. F. Barrett (Eds.), *Handbook of emotions*. The Guilford Press.
- Smith A. (1959). *The Theory of Moral Sentiments*. Indianapolis, IN: Liberty Fund.
- Spruyt, B., Keppens, G., and Van Droogenbroeck, F. (2016). Who supports populism and what attracts people to it? *Political Research Quarterly*, 69 (2), 335-346.
- Turner J. H. and Stets J. E. (2011). *Sociology of emotions*. Zagreb: Autumn and Turk.
- Van der Linden, S., Panagopoulos, C. and Roozenbeek, J. (2020). You are fake news: political bias in perceptions of fake news. *Media, Culture & Society*, 42(3) 460–470.
- Wahl-Jorgensen, K. (2012). Future directions for political communication scholarship: considering emotion in mediated public participation. In: Valdivia, A. N. (Eds.), *The International Encyclopedia of Media Studies*. Wiley-Blackwell.
- Wahl-Jorgensen, K. (2018). Media coverage of shifting emotional regimes: Donald Trump's angry populism. *Media, Culture & Society*, 40 (5), 766–778. <https://doi-org.ezproxy.nsk.hr/10.1177/0163443718772190>
- Waisbord, S. (2018). Truth is What Happens to News. *Journalism Studies*, 19 (13), 1866-1878. <https://doi.org/10.1080/1461670x.2018.1492881>
- Wardle, C. (2018). The Need for Smarter Definitions and Practical, Timely Empirical Research on Information Disorder, *Digital Journalism*, 6 (8), 951-963. <https://doi.org/10.1080/21670811.2018.1502047>
- Widmann, T. (2021). How Emotional Are Populists Really? Factors Explaining Emotional Appeals in the Communication of Political Parties. *Political psychology*, 42 (1), 163-181. <https://doi-org.ezproxy.nsk.hr/10.1111/pops.12693>
- Wirz, D. S. (2018). Persuasion Through Emotion? An Experimental Test of the Emotion-Eliciting Nature of Populist Communication. *International Journal of Communication*, 12: 1114–1138.
- Wodak, R. (2013). Anything Goes - The Haiderization of Europe. In R. Wodak, M. Khosravinik, and B. Mral (Eds.), *Rightwing Populism in Europe: Politics and Discourse*. Bloomsbury.

Uloga emocija u širenju populizma i fenomena lažnih vijesti

Sažetak

Na temelju pretpostavke da ljudske emocije imaju svojevrsni utjecaj na odluke i stavove, ovaj rad istražuje odnos između emocija i izazova s kojima se demokracija suočava u 21. stoljeću. Usredotočujući se na lažne vijesti i populizam, rad istražuje ulogu emocija u tim fenomenima. Neki od emocionalnih obrazaca analiziranih u ovom radu su pojava straha, nesigurnosti i ljutnje, koji se manifestiraju kroz stvaranje „neprijatelja“ i „antagonista“ koje utjelovljuju imigranti, političke elite i mainstream mediji. Na kraju, pregledom značajnih istraživanja na ovu temu, otkriva se temeljna razlika u tumačenju navedenih fenomena, s obzirom na to pristupaju li im ljudi iz emocionalno ili razumno izazvane pozicije. Sustavni pregled radova na ovu temu stoga može dati značajan doprinos daljnjem razumijevanju ovih fenomena.

Ključne riječi: *emocije, identitet, javna sfera, populizam, lažne vijesti, mediji.*



This journal is open access and this work is licensed under a Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial 4.0 International License.