

**Popular Politics // Authentic Australians:
A study of political leaders' Facebook posts during the 2019
Australian Federal Election**

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Written on Kaurana Land

Statement of Originality

This is to certify that to the best of my knowledge; the content of this thesis is my own work.

This thesis has not been submitted for any degree or other purposes.

I certify that the intellectual content of this thesis is the product of my own work and that all the assistance received in preparing this thesis and sources have been acknowledged.

Signature:

Cameron Bruce McTernan

Abstract

This thesis examines political communication on Facebook. In doing so, it addresses a surprising gap in empirical research on political communication on social media in Australia which to date has largely focussed on Twitter. Furthermore, in the aftermath of the shock election result that was a Coalition win in the 2019 federal election, little has been said among scholarly publications regarding social media use by politicians during that period. Therein, a notable gap in knowledge exists regarding the use of Facebook by Australian politicians or the use of social media surrounding the 2019 federal election. This thesis is a response to that gap, offering three linked studies of Facebook use by six of Australia's federal party leaders in the lead up to the election. The three studies offer the results of a content analysis guided by frameworks of ideational populism, mediated authenticity and open coding applied to a collection of Facebook Page posts collected from Meta's CrowdTangle platform. The results of this analysis identify that appeals to populism and authenticity were widespread, but rarely present in the majority of posts. Comparisons between supply-side communication and user engagement also identify that authenticity appeals performed better on the platform than populist appeals. Indexing of the issues raised by politicians also identifies the economy, domestic locations, and health and emergency services at the forefront of their online campaigning. Collectively these studies provide a broad-ranging analysis of how Australian party leaders approached their communication practice on Facebook ahead of the 2019 federal election, affirming notions of fragmentation and the hybrid media system, and raising new questions regarding the role of news sharing by politicians.

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Acronyms

ABC	:	Australian Broadcasting Corporation
ALP	:	Australian Labor Party
ICT	:	Information Communication Technology
LNP	:	Liberal National Party
ONP	:	One Nation Party
QANTAS	:	Queensland and Northern Territory Aerial Services Ltd
UAP	:	United Australia Party
UK	:	United Kingdom
US	:	United States of America

Definitions

meme	:	An iterative form of web content, typically humorous in nature
Page	:	A specific Facebook product used as a public broadcast medium that users can ‘like’ or ‘follow. This feature is distinct from a Facebook profile or Facebook account
post	:	The main form of content expression on Facebook; short-form multimedia content
sharepost	:	A function within Facebook whereby users can share posts from other accounts and Pages on their own walls

Symbols

$M=$:	Indicates the calculated mean average
$n=$:	Indicates a descriptive numerical value

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Chapter 1 – Introduction

Facebook's use as a tool for political communication is now ubiquitous among Australian parliamentarians. At the time of writing, every sitting member of the 46th Parliament of Australia's House of Representatives now has an active public Facebook Page (see Appendix A); the same of which cannot be said for Twitter. Yet despite this feat, and as the latter parts of this chapter indicate, the use of Facebook by Australian politicians has received far less empirical attention within the academic literature than Twitter. Like the nation's politicians, user uptake of Facebook by the Australian public vastly outperforms that of Twitter (Sensis, 2017), but still, we know little about how the platform is being used by Australian politicians or how its users are engaging with them. This thesis seeks to bridge this gap in knowledge through an exploratory study of the use of Facebook pages by party leaders in the period leading to the 2019 Australian federal election. Using quantitative content analysis, it will identify the frequency of key themes and stylistic appeals made from posts on these pages within a context of broader conversations regarding populism (Engesser, Ernst, Esser, & Büchel, 2017) and authenticity in the media (Enli, 2014). Utilising engagement data, this thesis will also attempt to gauge user interest in specific appeals of populism and mediated authenticity by contrasting supply-side communication with user engagement.

Background

On the 19th of May 2019, citizens of Australia visited polling booths across the country to elect their parliament in a federal election. Australia's compulsory voting system has historically favoured two major parties, the Australian Labor Party (ALP) and the Liberal/Nationals Coalition (LNP), both of which were in contention for governance. The leaders from both parties, Bill Shorten and Scott Morrison, had toured parts of the country for months and together participated in three leaders' debates (29th April, 3rd May and 8th May of 2019). This election was foregrounded by more than a decade of leadership instability from

both parties. From 2007 to 2019 Australia had been led by 5 different Prime Ministers (Tiffen, 2017). The period between the 2019 federal election and the prior 2016 federal election was also a time of party instability. Internal leadership struggles with the LNP led to a change in leadership for both parties within the Coalition; The Nationals in February of 2018 and The Liberals in August of the same year. The last two elections had been won by the LNP Coalition and consistent polling by Newspoll, Roy Morgan, Essential and Galaxy had suggested that the incumbent LNP was less preferred as a party than the ALP based upon preferential voting methods (Muller, 2020). Journalists had labelled this as an unlosable election. Despite the opinion polling that preceded it, including the exit poll, the LNP claimed a third victory and remained the federal governing party of Australia.

This result of a third consecutive LNP victory came as a surprise to the Australian media. The outcome was likened by some to that of the UK's 2014 Brexit referendum result and the election of Donald Trump as US president in 2016. One theory put forward for international shock election results is a "spiral of silence" (Thurre, Gale, & Staerklé, 2020); as the media push the idea of a change of leadership, conservative-leaning voters may have become increasingly disinterested in participating in polls and surveys or were not willing to be open with interviewers. This was also a theory put forward to explain the disparity between polling and the 2016 US election result (Whiteley, 2016). Acknowledging the "failure" of traditional opinion polling methods, a report conducted by the Australian Parliamentary library (Muller, 2020) offered a range of non-definitive explanations for the discrepancy including herding by polling companies, the "shy Tory" effect, a late swing to the Coalition, last minute decision making by voters and poor sampling procedures. In the instances of shock voting results, there has been an increased interest in the role of social media during elections and political campaigns. In previous elections the results of media polling had been relatively consistent in predicting election outcomes in Australia. The

results of this election and the ineffective ability of a multitude of media polls have put into question this previously well-regarded method of collecting data.

In the wake of shock polling results abroad, the growth and influence of 21st-century populism and its relationship to social media has been raised. An antagonism that positions the sovereignty of the people against corrupt elites, populism is a form of political ideation that is at odds with the values of liberal democracy. It “fundamentally rejects the notions of pluralism and, therefore, minority rights as well as the ‘institutional guarantees’ that should protect them” (Mudde & Kaltwasser, 2017). The rise of populism in western democracies has been attributed in part to the shock voting results of 2016 that became the UK’s Brexit and the election of Donald J Trump as US president (Freeden, 2017; Norris & Inglehart, 2019). Populism’s influence has been identified across a spectrum of conservative and progressive politics and in numerous countries abroad including the United Kingdom, United States, Greece, Spain, France, Germany, The Netherlands and also Australia (Flew & Iosifidis, 2019; Moffitt, 2018). The “thin” or vague quality of populism means it can be adopted and co-opted by politicians of varying ideological persuasions (Mudde & Kaltwasser, 2017). This feature of populism is too part of the reason for concern and why some have deemed it a threat to democracy. As politicians adopt more populist rhetoric, the political discourse becomes less focused on key issues of ideological difference or policy and instead more concerned with vague and sensationalist notions such as “the people” versus “the elites” (Bang & Marsh, 2018; Liddiard, 2019). The recent uptake of populism across western democracies has been explained in part due to insecurities among the populace regarding mass immigration and globalisation, financial downturns and reduced trust in democratic institutions. But alongside these changing global economic and social conditions the influence of social media has also been noted for its relationship to the shifting political paradigm (Flew & Iosifidis, 2019; Gerbaudo, 2018). Social media allows populist actors to circumvent the critique of traditional

media gatekeepers and create a direct line to their publics. Unfettered use of social media also allows for a greater spread of propaganda, disinformation and fake news. Therein populism has a new position among political discourse due to changing political conditions among western democracies, but its spread is supported in part by technological changes that have enhanced its spread and diluted institutional capability to combat it.

Scholars have also recognised a unique relationship between authenticity and populism. Fieschi argues that, like populism, authenticity “allows for a politics rooted in instinct rather than reason” and that “claims to authenticity are populism’s way of legitimizing that politics of the gut” (Fieschi, 2019, p. 40). Empirical research of Norwegian voters affirms this notion, suggesting that “populist politicians might come across as more “real” and “authentic” than traditional or moderate politicians” (Enli & Rosenberg, 2018, p. 7). Like populist ideation, authenticity appeals may well lend themselves to social media. In the context of authenticity on social networking sites, Gaden and Dumitrica (2015) argue that “politicians adapt to the logic of the dominant medium of communication in order to reach large numbers of voters”. Serazio (2017) argues that “the increasing centrality of branding logic, authenticity schemes, and emotional angles within strategic communication is occurring at a time of significant change as new models of networked, digital politics emerge.” and that political consultants “maintain a logic or sensibility that emphasizes simplistic differentiation amidst semiotic clutter” (Serazio, 2017, p. 228 & 238). With the limited attention windows associated with social media and constraints on message complexity, populism and authenticity may well have more *cut through* than other political appeals.

While this thesis does not seek to attribute populism and its appeals of authenticity to Australia’s own shock election result, exploring its presence on Facebook is warranted considering its rise abroad. Furthermore, examining its prevalence during an election period

may also be of use for future studies hoping to examine its effects. It is the position of this thesis that there is an intersection between populism, authenticity, and social media that is worth examining in the context of the 2019 Australian federal election. Populist rhetoric is facilitated in part by the affordances of social media, and authenticity is populism's currency. So, what can studying Facebook use by politicians tell us about this notion?

Focus and scope

This thesis is a study of the intersection of populist ideation, the performance of authenticity and the political use of Facebook against the backdrop of the 2019 Australian federal election. This research is aligned with current studies of Australian political communication on social media. Social media has become a key communications tool for politicians both in Australia and abroad. Indeed, the scale and sophistication of social media use in federal election campaigns have been increasing in Australia since 2007 (Macnamara & Kenning, 2011), matching local and global trends of increased user uptake for Facebook, Twitter, YouTube and other popular platforms. Having garnered the attention of researchers, there is now a robust and rapidly developing field of literature dedicated to the study of social media use by politicians, campaigns, parties, governments, and other political actors. Current studies of political social media within Australia have predominantly focused on Twitter (Bruns, 2017; Bruns & Burgess, 2011; Bruns & Highfield, 2013; Bruns & Moon, 2018; Burgess & Bruns, 2012; Fuller, Jolly, & Fisher, 2018) whereas empirical studies of Facebook have been significantly less abundant (Fisher, Marshall, & McCallum, 2018; Macnamara & Kenning, 2014; McSwiney, 2020). Facebook is often compared to Twitter by scholars and journalists alike. They both are social networking sites with masses of users and they both share common features such as profile pages, followers, user engagement functions and the ability for users to post short-form multimedia content. The reach of both of these platforms is also well documented. While they are both functionally similar, Facebook socially and

economically well-surpasses Twitter with its larger user uptake and share of market capital. Given that Facebook uptake by the Australian public dramatically outnumbers the uptake on Twitter too (Sensis, 2017), it stands to reason that the use of the Facebook platform by politicians should be given further attention than it currently has. If election campaigns in Australia are happening on Facebook and the userbase is significant, then it is reasonable to assume that the platform is contributing to political discourse and electoral outcomes. This, combined with the fact that it is an understudied area, is a germane justification to explore the topic further.

In studying populism and social media Postill (2018, p. 762), citing Ang (2006), problematises the issue of effects. While it is difficult to observe the full influence of populism solely using Facebook data, digital methods can allow researchers to observe the prevalence of populist rhetoric online and gauge salience and interest on social media platforms through engagement metrics. This research project aims to further understand the role of populism and social media during the 2019 Australian federal election by collecting and analysing data from Facebook Pages used by party leaders in Australia. This study is not only concerned with the supply side of online political communication but also with user engagement with that content. Sometimes referred to as “production side communication”, this supply side communication is the communication extruding from political actors and their campaigns (Xenos, Macafee, & Pole, 2017, p. 828). For this study that supply side communication is the posts made by politicians on Facebook Pages. Engagement in this research project is limited to the observable methods by which users can interact with content on Facebook, such as likes, reacts, comments and shares. It is intended that this research will reveal how Facebook Page posts were used by Australian politicians during the election including appeals to populism and authenticity, subject matter and style, and what effect these factors may have had on user engagement.

This research will use Meta's CrowdTangle platform to collect the content and metadata from the posts of Australian federal party leaders' Facebook Pages including the content of their messaging, timestamps and engagement metrics. While it is possible to collect Page data from politicians in Australia as far back as their creation, this research collects data from the select period of January 1st 2018 until May 31st 2019. This range will encompass the full length of the official 2019 Australian federal election campaign (April 10th 2019 to May 18th 2019) and will capture data from the entire previous year. The benefit of collecting data across this period instead of the approximate two months in which the election occurred is threefold: First, there is the notion of the "always on" or permanent campaign (Larsson, 2016). Therein, politicians do not just work to be re-elected during an election period but across much of their candidature. So, while the election was announced on April 10th 2019, one could argue that the campaign might have started much earlier. Second, the benefit of choosing this timeframe, and perhaps the most important, is that the approximate 17 months leading up to the election were a newsworthy time within Australian federal politics. A representation of this timeline is available in Appendix C, but in short this, timeframe saw a change in leadership for the governing party, an exodus of long-serving politicians and an international tragedy perpetrated by an Australian citizen. Choosing this timeframe allows the researcher to not only include the election but explore the reactions of politicians to these events and their impact on their social media engagement. Third, the election itself was announced a little more than a month before the polling day. Selecting a sample this size might not capture enough data to be reliably analysed. Therefore, a larger sample encompassing the entire previous year before the election day and two weeks afterwards allows the researcher to examine contextual events that preceded the election and also a snapshot of its aftermath as they occurred on these political Facebook Pages.

Therein, this study of Australian federal party leaders' Facebook Page posts from January 1st 2018 to May 31st 2019 will be analysed using content analysis using frameworks of populism and authenticity.

Hypothesis and research questions

A lack of research regarding the use of Facebook by Australian politicians and social media use during the 2019 federal election leaves a gap in current knowledge for social media scholars. Questions arise about the prevalence of populism on Australian Facebook Pages and how this platform was used by politicians in 2019. This thesis aims to bridge that gap and provide an original contribution to knowledge. The hypothesis for this study is that since populist and authenticity appeals have been made in online political campaigns in other western democracies that it is likely that Australian political campaigning might also make these appeals. Recognising a relationship between populism and authenticity and their prevalence on social media, this study seeks to answer the following research questions:

RQ1. To what extent were populist appeals apparent in the Facebook posts of federal party leaders leading to the 2019 federal election?

RQ2. What were the responses these populist appeals generated among users in terms of engagement?

RQ3. To what extent were authenticity appeals apparent in the Facebook posts of federal party leaders leading to the 2019 federal election?

RQ4. What were the responses these authenticity appeals generated among users in terms of engagement?

RQ5. What other contextual themes and communication styles were apparent in the content of leaders' Facebook posts in the lead up to the election?

Using content analysis, we can not only observe the presence of populist and authenticity appeals in Australian Political Social Media content, but we can demonstrate the effects it may have on engagement by pairing it with CrowdTangle data extracted from Facebook.

Overview of structure

The following chapters comprise a literature review, methodology, three studies and a conclusion. The literature review provides an overview of the overlapping subject areas in which this thesis is situated including the complex and hybridised media systems of contemporary political communication, elections and social media, and politics and elections on Australian social media. The method chapter then describes the data collection methods, sampling and frameworks of the content analysis. The first study, *Popular Politics*, presents the results of the content analysis, observing the frequency of populist appeals by federal party leaders on Facebook followed by a discussion of those results within the context of the research questions and broader literature. The second study, *Authentic Australians*, uses a similar structure to the first to observe the frequency of authenticity appeals, providing both results and a discussion. The third study describes the results of the open coding and discusses these results within the context of the literature. Collectively these studies will provide a broad-ranging analysis of how Australian party leaders' approached their communication practice on Facebook ahead of the 2019 federal election. Further discussion is provided in the conclusion to connect the results and discussions of the three studies, offering profiles of the subjects of study. It also identifies the limitations of these studies, summarises the findings and makes demarcations for areas of future study.

Chapter 2 – Literature Review

The intersection of social media and politics has been a keen area of interest for scholars of mass communication. Reviews of the extant literature on social media research identify political campaigns and political participation among the most acutely studied areas within the field alongside social and political activism, public opinion and socio-political conflicts (Kapoor et al., 2018). Meta-analysis also shows that there is a “positive relationship between informational, relational, political, and expressive uses of social media and political participation” (Skoric, Zhu, Goh, & Pang, 2016). Key scholars within the field have, and are, discussing the role of social media in politics and the state (Trottier & Fuchs, 2014), the hybrid media ecology (Chadwick, 2013) and the public sphere (Fuchs, 2014; Shirky, 2011). Shared themes within these theorisations are the changing structures and relationships within the political media ecology, the changing logics of the new media landscape (Chadwick, 2013; Ulrike & Jakob, 2015) and the need for emerging models to account for the complexity within this space (Bruns & Highfield, 2015; Chadwick, 2013; Loader & Mercea, 2011).

This thesis situates itself within this broader context of political communication on social media. This literature review provides an overview of social media use within politics including emerging frameworks, theories and topic areas, including that of political social media in Australia. It is also intended that the following review provides context and contrasting ideas of which to be revisited in the discussions presented later in this thesis.

Complex and Hybridised Systems

Networked Public Sphere

Understandings of the role and influence of online media within democratic societies often draw upon Habermas’s theorisation of the media and the public sphere (Chen, 2013; Friedland, Hove, & Rojas, 2006; Fuchs, 2014; Shirky, 2011). MacNamara and Kenning

(2014) posit that “Political and social science scholars widely agree that media collectively comprise the primary discursive site of the public sphere in contemporary democracies”. In their original notion of the public sphere Habermas writes:

By “the public sphere” we mean ... a realm of our social life in which something approaching public opinion can be formed. Access is guaranteed to all citizens. A portion of the public sphere comes into being in every conversation in which private individuals assemble to form a public body. They then behave neither like business or professional people transacting private affairs, nor like members of a constitutional order subject to the legal constraints of a state bureaucracy. Citizens behave as a public body when they confer in an unrestricted fashion ... about matters of general interest. In a large public body, this kind of communication requires specific means for transmitting information and influencing those who receive it. Today, newspapers and magazines, radio and television are the media of the public sphere. (Habermas, 1989, p. 136)

This theorisation positions, and argues for, the public sphere as an essential component of deliberative democracy, wherein the democratic process is facilitated via the dialogue and deliberation of the public sphere. Therein, we arrive at the important role of the media in transmitting information to, and its influence upon, the public within deliberative democracy.

Within the broader field of mass communication, the theorisation of the public sphere has its proponents and detractors, most of whom are not the subject of this review. This said, it is worth at least noting that the idealist or normative assumptions of Habermas’s public sphere framework have led some scholars to argue that its assumptions fail to account for power relations and antagonism within the democratic process (Mouffe, 1999) and alternative collective realms (Susen, 2011). While Habermas has latter come to recognise that the public

sphere may be understood as a multitude of spheres (Friedland et al., 2006), the context of social media and its transformative effect on the public sphere means that the digital networks created by information communication technology (ICT) help to establish a layered and more complex structure for these spheres.

The networked public sphere emerges as a response to, and refinement of, Habermas's original notion of the public sphere and the need to account for media transformation in the ICT era. Specifically, it has been argued that there is a need to rethink assumptions made in Habermas's theorisation of the public sphere to account for the complexity emerging from network integration in "the economy, political system, civil society and the lifeworld" (Friedland et al., 2006). Scholars have identified among these complexities the role of social media and fragmentation within the public sphere. In their critique of the public sphere, Bruns and Highfield (2015) argue that "the idea of structural transformation can—and should—be extended beyond the public sphere as singular: a more complex system of distinct and diverse, yet inter-connected and overlapping, publics can be identified which represent different topics and approaches to mediated communication" (Bruns & Highfield, 2015). In promoting the networked public sphere and their hierarchy of influences model, Reese and Shoemaker (2016, p. 394) state "As an orienting concept, the network captures the blurring of lines between professional and citizen, and between one organization and another, as they develop more collaborative partnerships across digital platforms."

Friedland et al. (2006) identify the central role of ICT networks within 21st-century democracies recognising that they have helped to establish a tier of socialisation within the public sphere that exists online. This structural change has implications for both user-citizens and user-politicians. Batorski and Grzywińska (2018) suggest that this complexity creates a fragmentation among the public sphere where the structural affordances of social networking

sites such as Facebook, which allow for selective exposure, lead to the siloing of audiences whom prefer users and content that reinforce their views. Indeed the implications of social media and the networked public sphere may “allow politicians to stage their own multidimensional personae on a continuous basis” (Enli & Skogerbø, 2013, p. 770).

It would seem then that the revised notions of the networked public sphere embody the recurring theme of contemporary media studies; that the transformative effect of ICT has shaped and continues to shape, the processes of democratic participation and our understanding of those processes.

Hybrid Media

The typology of an old and new media had previously been popular among mass communication scholars, but within the topic area of social media and politics there has been a push to reconsider the rigidity of this framework. The old and longstanding media channels such as radio, print and television have been contrasted against new, ICT-based, media such as websites, social media platforms and apps. The use of these terms can be seen in the work of prominent scholars (Flew, 2008; Hansen, 2004; Manovich, 2001) and the names of prominent journals such as *New Media and Society*, *Television & New Media* and *The International Journal of New Media, Technology and The Arts*. This demarcation has been useful for several reasons, but for social scientists this has been primarily due to the shift in institutional power (Bennett, 2003; Mansell, 2004) that has come from new media, the changing logic associated with new media platforms (Van Dijck & Poell, 2013), and the convergent nature of these channels (Jenkins, 2006; Jenkins & Deuze, 2008).

Chadwick argues that scholarship requires a “holistic approach to the role of information and communication in politics, one that avoids exclusively focusing either on supposedly “new” or supposedly “old” media, but instead maps where the distinctions between newer and older media matter, and where those distinctions might be dissolving”

(Chadwick, 2013). As a response, Chadwick argues for and defines a hybrid media system; “The hybrid media system is built upon interactions among older and newer media logics”(Chadwick, 2013). This framework accounts for the changing media landscape whereby old and new media do not operate separately but intersect and rely upon each other in a number of ways. This includes media borrowing content, style, formats, information and actors. Old and new media also draw attention to each other, offering critique and reporting on each other. On an industrial scale the old and new are also blurred, as actors, agents and entities strategically employ both, in conjunction with one another, to broaden the reach of their campaigns. Examples include media giants having both a strong old and new presence (Nielsen, 2012), as well as companies, organisations and governments using both technologies to communicate with the public. Indeed new media spaces are increasingly becoming territorialised by old media institutions, pushing out smaller voices (Hutchinson, 2021) and diminishing the egalitarian aspirations (Chen, 2013, p. 74) once had for these platforms. Finally, this model also challenges the notion of media elitism. Within the hybrid media model, politicians and talking heads must now compete with common users on new media platforms who also have the potential to go viral and affect change in society. In summary, the established model of old media versus new media is facing disruption within the field of social media and politics with an emerging framework of understanding that recognises the hybridity between content creators and the mediums they choose to use.

Politics and Social Media

A new environment.

Much has changed for politicians and parties when it comes to campaigning and communication in the social media era. Changing media logics (Chadwick, 2013; Klinger & Svensson, 2015; Van Dijck & Poell, 2013), increased access to information, fragmentation (Bright, 2018; Engesser et al., 2017; Karlsen, 2011; Mancini, 2013), and lowered thresholds

for political engagement (Highfield, 2017) are among the key drivers for change among political communication practice. One of the defining features of the new media era for electoral campaigning, according to Johnson and Perlmutter (2011), is the diminished control that candidates have over their messages. Campaign voices now must compete with the voices of everyday users who are creating their own content and directly engaging with campaigns in online spaces (Highfield, 2013; T. Johnson & Perlmutter, 2011). Indeed, it has been argued that social media platforms lower the threshold for entry into political activity with their ease of access to information sharing and networking capability (Gustafsson, 2012). A small scale study examining political engagement from university students in the month before the 2008 US Presidential election found that political engagement on Facebook was a significant predictor of offline political participation such as the signing of petitions, volunteering and political organising (Vitak et al., 2011). Similar research of US college students found that social media use during the 2008 US presidential election led to greater political involvement from users (Kushin & Yamamoto, 2010). So, while politicians could historically communicate to a mass audience via legacy media such as radio, television and print, politicians must now consider a communication ecology that has many competing voices and where political engagement from the public is easier than before.

The style and content of political communication in the social media era is changing, with a particular interest by scholars on the topics of authenticity and populism. It has been suggested that changing conditions in electoral politics mean that appeals made in countries such as the UK, Australia and US are no longer based on class conditions and that instead, authenticity appeals are used to reach a broader category of voters (Manning, Penfold-Mounce, Loader, Vromen, & Xenos, 2017). Some have also suggested that political communication on social media is more likely to be “directly interactive and conversational” than in legacy media (Chen, 2013, p.74). This new approach is in part enabled by social

media use that is arguably more effective at communicating authenticity (Duncombe, 2019; Manning et al., 2017). For instance, surveys have found that younger voters desire more authentic and accessible politicians on social media platforms but at the same time wanted a clearer distinction between public and personal social media use by politicians and that the imitation of celebrity behaviour on social media by politicians was not always viewed favourably (Manning et al., 2017). It has been argued that emotional authenticity is indeed a “commodity of power” on social media (Duncombe, 2019, p. 420) and that it serves to counterbalance the limited ability of users to process and consider information rationally in these spaces. Alongside authenticity appeals, it has been suggested that the role of self-informing that comes from social media has also made voting publics more susceptible to populist communication strategies (Hendrix, 2019). Indeed, populist actors are now able to create a direct link with their publics. The affordances of social media allows for the circumvention of scrutiny and mediation from traditional gatekeepers such as journalists, editors, and news producers (Engesser et al., 2017). A study of how politicians in four European countries used Facebook and Twitter for populist purposes found that populist rhetoric was present in both left and right-wing party messaging (Engesser et al., 2017). The same study also suggests that populist appeals are more likely to come in a fragmented form, whereby, rather than posts embodying many discursive appeals, instead different individualised appeals are spread across multiple posts. Similar results were identified in a study of Italian political communication on social media whereby fragments of populist rhetoric were identified across the political spectrum on Facebook (Mazzoleni & Bracciale, 2018). The presence of populist ideation on political social media has been considered by various scholars (Bartlett, Birdwell, & Littler, 2012; Enli & Rosenberg, 2018; Groshek & Koc-Michalska, 2017; Krämer, 2017; Mazzoleni & Bracciale, 2018). Its presence has been attributed to the affordances of the platforms, wealth inequality and growing nationalist tensions globally (Bartlett et al., 2012; Flew & Iosifidis, 2019). Indeed new research positions

authenticity appeals not as a distinct communication strategy but instead as one embedded as a feature of populist politics (Enli & Rosenberg, 2018; Fieschi, 2019).

The reporting of social media content by traditional news outlets invites the researcher to further consider the network complexity of the hybrid media ecology. It has been recognised that traditional media has played a role in creating hype surrounding social media use and elections for example Finnish tabloid headlines describing elections being “held on Facebook” (Strandberg, 2013). Research regarding the 2010 UK general election observed the developing trend of journalists incorporating social media commentary into their work as a way of inferring public opinion (Anstead & O’Loughlin, 2015). Content from candidates was also frequently used as a source for news by tabloid journalists during both the 2010 UK and Dutch general elections (Broersma & Graham, 2012). This observation supports notions of hybridity and the complex relationship between old and new media institutions as it relates to elections. The phenomena of traditional media reporting on content from social media, specifically Twitter, has not been reflected in studies on media behaviour during Norwegian local election campaigns though (Skogerbø & Krumsvik, 2015). This gap suggests that hybridisation, while present, is still a culturally mediated phenomenon and therein local conditions will still determine the extent of resource sharing between old and new media.

While media reports might suggest something special or unique about social media and elections, pockets of research suggest that online behaviour is for the most part reflective of offline behaviour. One of the more sophisticated efforts to study social media use in the 2008 US Presidential election attempted to identify how users engage with politics on Facebook and how it differs from offline behaviour. At that time, it was found that users were limited in their political engagement during the election cycle, suggesting that claims by the media at that time regarding political engagement on social media were overstated (Carlisle & Patton, 2013). Likewise, a study of the 2011 Finnish parliamentary elections found that

online electoral behaviour was mostly normative and as such reflective of typical offline patterns (Strandberg, 2013). While social media's logics might be new and the gatekeepers for information and politics might be changing, these studies suggest that issues and interest groups may still remain tethered to normative offline societal affairs.

Social Media and Elections

Research into the efficacy of social media behaviour to predict electoral outcomes has some promise. A study attempting to forecast the result of the US Senate elections in 2012 found that fan participation and mobilisation metrics on Facebook were an accurate predictive tool for electoral outcomes (MacWilliams, 2015). Another study using comparative indexing methods of the 2014 municipal elections in Taiwan also suggests a relationship between Facebook popularity and successful election outcomes (Lin, 2017), specifically that having more fans led to more votes. Research into the ability of social media network quality to predict electoral outcomes has been conducted for the 2011 New Zealand general election using Facebook and Twitter data (Cameron, Barrett, & Stewardson, 2016) also demonstrating efficacy. A comprehensive attempt to evaluate the effectiveness of using the measurement of Facebook likes to predict the outcome of the 2015 Finnish parliamentary election too found that these metrics were significant indicators of electoral outcomes but with the caveat that they were not as reliable as traditional polling or incumbency at predicting results (Vepsäläinen, Li, & Suomi, 2017). A three-country comparative approach to predicting electoral outcomes using sentiment and network analysis of Twitter data from India, Pakistan and Malaysia was also conducted with varying degrees of accuracy (Jaidka, Ahmed, Skoric, & Hilbert, 2019). At the same time, there are limits to the accuracy and depth of these studies. Caveats for predictive models of social media and elections include the need for multilingual resources to accommodate for countries with large and distinct ethnolinguistic groups and the gap between online and offline behaviour (Jaidka et al., 2019).

The results of these studies suggest, that while there are limitations to the use of metrics to predict election results, there is demonstrable efficacy in their predictive ability. Alongside traditional methods such as polling, these metrics could prove to be a valuable tool for journalists and campaigners during an election period.

The years 2006 to 2012 could be considered the landmark period for social media and elections. In 2008, at the same time the United States held its 56th Presidential election, Facebook began its steep ascent towards ubiquity among western democracies with rapid uptake across the year, closely following the success of YouTube (OWD, 2021). This uptake by the populace was matched by politicians too. Studies have found that there was a rapid uptake in the adoption of the Facebook platform by US congressional candidates between 2006 to 2008 (Williams & Gulati, 2013). This phenomenon was not only endemic to the United States either. During this same period, Malaysia held its general election which researchers observed social media as an “important instrument for observing democracy” (Sani & Azizuddin, 2014, p. 123).

The involvement of social media during the 2011 Arab Spring has also been a hotbed for discussion. The role of Twitter, Facebook, YouTube and instant messaging services have been attributed to the dissemination of political information (Stepanova, 2011) and stories of oppression (Howard et al., 2011), the mobilising of citizens and an increase in protest activity (Wolfsfeld, Segev, & Sheafer, 2013). Discussions of this period push against notions of technological determinism. Wolfsfeld, Segev and Shaefer (2013) argue in the context of the Arab Spring that the role of social media cannot be fully understood without understanding the political environment in which they operate, while others argue that the revolution was a product of the people and social media acted as an “accelerant” (Frangonikolopoulos & Chapsos, 2012). In the context of the unique socio-political environment seen in the region at

that time, Stepanova argues against applying “direct lessons” from the Arab Spring to other regions (Stepanova, 2011).

Expressions of sentiment and emotional appeals from both politicians and voters on social media have been another area of interest for scholars. Often these studies are developed using natural language processing and computational linguistics (Yue, Chen, Li, Zuo, & Yin, 2019, p. 648), but manual or human-coded analyses do exist. Content analysis of the Facebook Page posts during the 2008 and 2012 US Presidential elections by Barack Obama, John McCain and Mitt Romney’s campaigns identified stark differences in the style of communication (Borah, 2016). While Obama’s campaign used humour and enthusiasm to appeal to users, the Republican candidates made more fear appeals and criticism. A similar study of the 2008 US presidential election analysed the content of Facebook Groups of Obama and McCain supporters and yielded similar results (Woolley, Limperos, & Oliver, 2010). Obama supporters were significantly more positive in their sentiment in these Facebook Groups compared to McCain supporters.

Social media use during the 2016 US Presidential election is perhaps one of the more studied subjects among scholars of social media and politics. The prolific and unbridled use of Twitter by Donald Trump, Russian interference, the abundance of disinformation and the controversial result of the election outcome has made it a locus for discussion (Allcott & Gentzkow, 2017; Enli, 2017; Hendricks & Schill, 2017; Kreiss & McGregor, 2018; McDonnell & Wheeler, 2019). Research has shown that the 2016 US presidential election was unprecedented in the scope by which social media was engaged with as a tool for campaigning. Indeed, electioneering extended beyond the mainstay platforms such as Twitter, Facebook, Instagram and Reddit, and branched out into other digital platforms too such as Quora, Pinterest, Tumblr and LinkedIn (Hendricks & Schill, 2017). During the 2016 US Presidential election, tech companies such as Microsoft, Facebook, Google and Twitter

were also directly engaged with the campaign (Kreiss & McGregor, 2018). These companies offered digital resources to both the Trump and Clinton campaign, and some even offered advice on how to better target voters using their platforms, including the curation of content. Of particular interest in the 2016 US Presidential election is the prevalence and effect of fake news. Studies showed that most American adults saw fake news stories on social media in the election period and that stories favouring Donald Trump were significantly more likely to become shared (Allcott & Gentzkow, 2017). Research has shown that Trump supporters were also likely to be more passive receivers of political communication, i.e. people who do not actively express their political opinions online (Groshek & Koc-Michalska, 2017). Research into the use of Twitter during the 2016 US Presidential election by candidates Hillary Clinton and Donald J Trump saw distinct differences in communication styles (Enli, 2017). While Clinton's campaign employed a professionalised campaign style, Trump used a de-professionalised approach to communication with appeals to authenticity.

Australian Politics and Elections on Social Media

From the review of studies into Australian political social media two categories relevant to this thesis emerge. One is the way in which the general public and groups engage with politics on social media, and the second is the institutional use of social media by political parties, with an emphasis on electoral campaigns. These categories broadly align with user engagement and supply-side communication, although there is considerable overlap between the two.

Highfield's work on social media and everyday politics (Highfield, 2017) emphasises the mundane and informal acts of political participation that come from social media in Australia. Through memes and content sharing, users participate in politics online in a manner that is lower stakes, passive and less formal than active political engagement such as protests, party meetings and lobbying. The lowered barrier for entry into political

participation created by social media is supported by other research within the field (Gustafsson, 2012). Studies have shown that in countries such as Australia, the UK and the US, social media use has suggested a positive relationship between social media use and political engagement (Xenos, Vromen, & Loader, 2014). This positive relationship had been demonstrated to increase participation through information sharing, self-expression and planned action (Vromen, Loader, Xenos, & Bailo, 2016). The matter of self-expression on social media has also been considered in Australia from the perspective of Indigenous peoples and the presence of the settler gaze on Twitter and Facebook (Carlson & Frazer, 2020). Twitter has been observed as a space where news media has enhanced online mobilisation for protests in Australia which plays a role in ‘brokerage and bridging between communities’ (Bailo & Vromen, 2017). Indeed detailed social media network analysis has shown the complex interplay between competing interest groups on Twitter regarding the controversial Adani Carmichael mining project in Queensland (Hobbs, Della Bosca, Schlosberg, & Sun, 2020), with genuine democratic deliberation contending with small networks of fake opinion accounts.

Early research into elections and social media in Australia identified the role of these media in improving communication access to activist and special interest groups (Macnamara, 2008). It was also identified that the use of these platforms by parties, circa-2010, conformed more to traditional broadcast media logics and ignored the potential for dialogue and engagement found on social networking sites (Macnamara & Kenning, 2011). Among scholars of Australian political social media, activity on Twitter has been the prevailing subject for discussion. Research has articulated how between the 2007 and 2010 Australian federal elections, social media practice became increasingly embedded in campaigns and that Twitter and its hashtagging capability allowed for coordinated discussions of these elections and the creation of ad hoc issue publics (Bruns & Burgess,

2011). These hashtags have become discursive anchoring points for dialogue between the Australian political Twitter commentariat, a collection of Australian citizens, journalists and politicians on Twitter (Highfield, 2013). Research into the use of Twitter during the Victorian 2014 state election campaign suggests that politicians had begun using a more conversational style approach to their social media use (Lukamto & Carson, 2016), signalling a development in use from earlier studies of Twitter at a federal level (Macnamara & Kenning, 2011). Analysis has also shown that on Twitter, users during election time were less likely to share candidates' tweets than they were to discuss the accounts and candidates themselves (Bruns, 2017). Comparative studies of the 2013 and 2016 elections as they were discussed on Twitter find that the majority of Australian politicians own Twitter accounts and Facebook Pages and that politicians' enthusiasm and activity on Twitter had increased during that time (Bruns & Moon, 2018). Studies have also examined the early use of social media by both state and federal electoral management bodies to attempt to improve voter engagement and account for the role of fragmentation (Macnamara, Sakinofsky, & Beattie, 2012).

The notions of populism and authenticity in the context of Australian social media have also been explored, albeit in isolated studies. Fischer, Marshall and McCallum (2018) observed the use of live-streamed and pre-recorded video by One Nation party leader, Pauline Hanson. Their analysis suggests that Hanson's approach to social media use forms a central element of their populist media strategy as a means of bypassing traditional media gatekeeping; a process known as *disintermediation* (Steiner, 2009, p. 382). Adopting the analytical framework of mediated authenticity (Enli, 2014), Fuller, Jolly and Fisher identified Malcolm Turnbull's approach to Twitter exemplified authenticity appeals to predictably, spontaneity and immediacy through the former Prime Minister's public dialogues with both journalists and constituents (Fuller et al., 2018).

Alongside research regarding public engagement and electoral politics on social media, there are also a range of studies considering campaigns and institutional politics. Henriks, Duus and Ercan (2016) consider the meaning-making of Australian environmental politics on social media. Their findings show that performances on Facebook pages are staged to be personal and multisensory. In their analysis ordinary people and townfolk are observed being positioned at the centre of these performances. The use of Facebook for international diplomacy has also matter of interest (Spry, 2018, 2019a). Spry's study of social media use by governments in the Asia Pacific region, including Australia, identified that the popularity of the country's diplomatic Facebook pages is linked to the economic power, location and size of countries. Popular pages tend to come from countries that are smaller, poorer and closer together (Spry, 2019a).

Summary

These studies demonstrate a broad range of theoretical and methodological approaches to understanding an election as it relates to social media from the involvement of industry to the diversity of communication strategies employed, and to the behaviour of the voting public on these platforms. The current literature is robust, emphasising the role of social media within democratic participation across the globe. Research into Australian politics on social media presents important empirical work from which to ground future studies but currently preferences Twitter over Facebook as a subject of study. The research on populism and Australian social media is also lacking. As research into Australian political social media continue to develop, the work of scholars following social media abroad offers a range of potential directions for researchers to orient their studies. This thesis, having identified this gap and the potential for new research into Australian political social media, will address this using a novel approach outlined and rationalised in the following methodological chapter.

Chapter 3 – Methodology

This research is guided by theoretical frameworks of ideational populism (Engesser et al., 2017), mediated authenticity (Enli, 2014) and grounded theory (Charmaz, 2014) to identify and operationalise codes for the quantitative content analysis of political Facebook posts. Data was collected using the CrowdTangle platform and sampled using a randomised and purposive sample. These combined frameworks are used in this study to identify themes and styles present in the Facebook posts of politicians.

Content Analysis

Content analysis is a systematic process to generate data about texts by analysing their content using defined content categories. Defined as “a research technique for making replicable and valid inferences from texts (or other meaningful matter) to the contexts of their use” (Krippendorff, 2018, p. 18), content analysis is among the more commonplace methods of empirical analysis in the academic field of mass communication. Content analysis has been used to research political communication online in similar studies; examining campaign strategies on Facebook (Borah, 2016), political memes (Chagas, Freire, Rios, & Magalh, 2019), diplomatic efforts on social media (Spry, 2018, 2019a) and user-generated content in political Facebook groups (Woolley et al., 2010). Historically it has been used for a range of applications including observing racial profiling in the news, the sexualisation of video games and at its earliest identifying themes in Nazi propaganda during World War II (Riff, Lacy, & Fico, 2019).

To conduct content analysis, researchers first identify specific units of analysis, typically media texts such as newspaper articles or transcripts. Then using a series of defined codes and categories, the researcher systematically observes and records the frequency of specific qualities within these media texts (Neuendorf, 2017). The results will then show the

prevalence of these qualities within the chosen sample of texts by which inferences can be made about their purpose and context. The content analysis used within this research project treats each Page post collected as a codable unit. The variables were operationalised using a coding schema for populism, mediated authenticity, and open coding (see Appendix B).

Like with any research method, content analysis comes with its own limitations and questions regarding reliability and validity. Key concerns are typically subjectivity and consistency (Krippendorff, 2018). For large studies requiring multiple coders, a process of intercoder reliability measurement can be undertaken to identify the consistency of coding between researchers. While this method can be effective for measuring intersubjectivity between coders and signalling a need for retraining of coders where necessary, its suitability for single coder projects, such as this one, are questionable. Riff et al (2019, p. 134) argue that “We ought not to assume that such ambiguities can always be resolved, but resolving ambiguity can often be accomplished by connecting content measurements to previous research”. This thesis attempts to reduce ambiguity and improve reliability by instead using predefined and tested frameworks for analysis, ideational populism (Engesser et al., 2017) and mediated authenticity (Enli, 2014), alongside a detailed and comprehensive codebook (see Appendix B). Clear descriptions of how the content categories are operationalised are also shown in the relevant chapters with examples of posts and their coding.

While other methods for analysis for this study would also have been viable for addressing the gap in knowledge this thesis is addressing such as interviewing politicians and strategists, quantitative content analysis has the benefit of providing descriptive statistics by which to compare politicians and their appeals and do so in an unobtrusive manner. Therein, researchers can “draw inferences about the conditions of its production without making the communicators self-conscious or reactive to being observed while producing it.” (Riff et al.,

2019, p. 10). It is also more suitable for examining large collections of content in a manner that is systematic and efficient.

Data Collection

Data for this project was collected using Meta's CrowdTangle Platform.

CrowdTangle is Meta's official data resource tool available to researchers, journalists and industry partners. The tool interfaces with Facebook and Instagram's API. It offers a variety of functions including tracking of Pages, groups and posts. It is also able to provide data visualisations in-browser showing the engagement performance of posts and pages.

CrowdTangle has been used for many studies of Facebook Pages and Groups. In particular, it has been used as a data collection tool for content analysis regarding matters such as European elections (Haßler, Wurst, & Schlosser, 2021) and the 2020 Italian constitutional referendum (Punziano, Marrazzo, & Acampa, 2021), which also used populism as a conceptual framework. More recently it has also been used to cover user and news media discourse surrounding the COVID-10 global pandemic (Boberg, Quandt, Schatto-Eckrodt, & Frischlich, 2020; Canary, Wellman, & Martinez, 2022; Rianto & Pratama, 2021). The value of CrowdTangle to this study is the ability to collect the metadata of posts from any publicly available Page across a selected timeframe and publish it as a comma-separated values (.CSV) file. The data extracted includes the post text, account name, Facebook Id number, share status, page likes at posting, timestamps, URLs for the post and engagement metrics. The engagement metrics include the number of likes, comments, shares and reacts. During the analysis process it was necessary to also engage with the original posts to view the contents of the images and videos where applicable.

Sampling

Facebook Page posts were collected from 6 Australian politicians who were party leaders at the time of the 2019 federal election. At the time of the 2019 Australian federal

election, 38 parties were registered at the Australian Electoral Commission. Only 7 of these parties were able to achieve more than 1% of the public vote. These were the Australian Labor Party, Liberal, The Greens, Liberal National Party of Queensland, The Nationals, United Australia Party and Pauline Hanson’s One Nation. The respective leaders of the parties at the time were Bill Shorten, Scott Morrison, Richard di Natale, Michael McCormack, Clive Palmer and Pauline Hanson. While there were 7 parties, the Liberal National Party of Queensland is the state-based registered party of the federal Liberal and National Coalition party and therefore redundant for the selection of a party leader as they are already represented in this study by Morrison and McCormack.

Posts were collected with publication dates ranging from January 1st 2018 until May 31st 2019. The election itself was called on April 10th 2019 and held on May 18th 2019. The broader date range was selected based on the notion of the always-on election and to help capture discourse surrounding several high-profile political events from that period (listed in Appendix C). A detailed explanation of this rationale is provided in the introduction to this thesis. A total of $n=5933$ posts were captured from this timeframe.

Table 3.1

Total posts collected for each party leader from January 1st 2018 until May 31st 2019

Party	Party Leaders	Number of posts
Liberal	Scott Morrison	909
Australian Labor Party	Bill Shorten	1294
Pauline Hanson’s One Nation Party	Pauline Hanson	745
The Greens	Richard di Natale	1225
The Nationals	Michael McCormack	678
United Australia Party	Clive Palmer	1082

This research project uses two samples with which to analyse and compare. Both samples are methodically derived from the complete corpus ($n=5933$). The first sample is a random sample using 100 random posts from each leader's page ($n=600$) from the complete data set. The posts were randomised in Excel by assigning a random number to each using Microsoft Excel's random number function and then putting them in order and selecting the first 100 hundred (Function =*RAND* () then selecting smallest to largest). The random sample is included to represent a normative sample akin to a control group and represents 10.1% of all posts from the period. This can be used to establish the frequency of content categories and as a baseline by which to compare the top engagement sample. This is indicative of the supply-side communication from party leaders during the period. The second sample is of the top 100 posts in terms of engagement for each leader's page ($n=600$). Engagement is calculated by combining the total reactions, shares and comments of a post. This sample is used to determine which categories of content received the most engagement from users. For many of these pages the top engagement sample group and the randomised sample group will have some overlap of posts. Attempting to avoid redundancy between sampling groups would in effect reduce the veracity of both samples. The totality of both samples was a combined 1109 posts with a 14% overlap of posts for both groups.

At this time there is insufficient research to determine what is exactly the most appropriate sample size to make generalisable inferences for a study of this kind. For guidance, we could look to studies of content analysis sampling of news stories, but suggested figures, equated as percentages, range from as low as 3% (Hester & Dougall, 2007) or as high as 38% (Kim, Jang, Kim, & Wan, 2018). These cited studies examined news cycles using constructed weeks attempting to identify recurring patterns as opposed to recurring themes. It is also unclear if either is making inferences for descriptive or inferential statistics, of which this thesis is the former. To determine the accuracy of this study's sample

size the qualtricsXM online sample size calculator was instead used (qualtricsXM, 2022). This tool estimates that a population size equal to the total post capture of this study ($n=5933$), the total sample size of 15.2% ($n=905$) is required for a 95% level of confidence and a 3% margin of error. The total sample of this study sufficiently exceeds that threshold, representing 18.6% of the leaders' posts from the timeframe.

Engagement

This thesis considers engagement through a comparative method derived from Spry (2019b). The contrasting of a randomised sample against a purposive sample of top engagement posts allows the researcher to observe user salience and interest for the appeals made by these party leaders. In defining and characterising engagement, Johnston and Taylor (2018, p. 39) identify three tiers of engagement. The first indicates the presence of activity. The second measures connections and relationships. The third is a measure of social impact or social action. This thesis examines engagement through measures that firmly rest within the first tier. Sometimes referred to as vanity metrics (Rogers, 2018), this lower tier engagement is on its own unable to demonstrate these second and third tiers of engagement. While maligned by some, this platform data is still useful and is still considered a reliable measure by others of "how well someone is doing online" (Rogers, 2018, p. 450). While platform data might not be able to demonstrate relationships or measure action relevant to an election such as whether their online campaign resulted in a citizen voting for the candidate, there is still important meaning to be gleaned from this data. Social media engagement demonstrates salience. Engaging with a post suggests to some degree, that the user is aware of the content and that they felt it was worth interacting with. Social media engagement also enhances the spread of and further interactions with content. Dolan et al (2016, p. 265) argue that user input "facilitates the engagement and interaction of other members". Consideration should also be given to the algorithmic controls of Facebook feeds which prioritise content

with high user engagement (Merrill & Oremus, 2021). Therein there is value in identifying which appeals made by politicians received higher engagement. While it does not indicate explicitly who citizens will vote for, it does imply salience of issues and with it the potential of those posts for perpetuated engagement.

Analytical Frameworks

Content analysis benefits from conceptual and theoretical frameworks for which to operationalise as content categories and therein interpret the corpus and generate new data. This thesis seeks to observe the presence of populist appeals on social media, but in doing so seeks to generate robust contextual data. Alongside an a priori framework of ideational populism (Engesser et al., 2017) this study also operationalises a framework of mediated authenticity. In previous studies, Enli and Rosenberg (2018) suggest that “populist politicians might come across as more “real” and “authentic” than traditional or moderate politicians” and that authenticity plays a critical role in generating trust among voters. The inclusion of a framework that typifies authenticity appeals (Enli, 2014) allows for a contrasting theory and further contextual robustness. To the same end this study also incorporates a grounded theory approach using open coding to identify key issues from the election, and additional elements of style and formatting. As there is little to no publicly available analysis of Facebook content from politicians during this period the use of open coding will add broader contextual information to the discussion of this thesis. Conceptual frameworks of populism, mediated authenticity and grounded theory are as follows.

Ideational Populism

Conceptually populism is an ideology observable in political communication that positions the sovereignty of the people against political and/or media elites. For this study its presence is marked by several distinct features or ideas adopted from previous studies of populism on social media. Engesser et al present a list of 5 features for categorising populist

ideology on Twitter and Facebook. They are: “emphasizing the sovereignty of the people, advocating for the people, attacking the elite, ostracizing others, and invoking the ‘heartland’” (Engesser et al., 2017). This framework for populism derives from Mudde’s (Mudde, 2017) ideational theorisation of populism. Ideational populism is a particular branch of thought on populism and is distinct from other theorisations of populism such as political-strategic (Weyland, 2017) and socio-cultural performative frameworks (Ostiguy, 2017). It observes populism as a collection of ideas and represents a thin ideology that can be enriched with other ideas from other political ideologies. As such it can be observed on multiple ends of the political spectrum, attached to capitalist, nationalist or socialist ideation. Political-strategic and socio-cultural notions of populism each have their merits and are not entirely incompatible with ideational populism, but a framework that understands populism based upon a collection of shared ideas is more useful for a study of political communication online as those ideas can be readily operationalised. As such this study takes an ideational approach to populism and adopts the five features presented by Engesser above, using these as a priori content categories for analysing posts.

Mediated Authenticity

Scholars have also recognised a unique relationship between authenticity and populism. Fieschi argues that, like populism, authenticity “allows for a politics rooted in instinct rather than reason” and that “claims to authenticity are populism’s way of legitimizing that politics of the gut” (Fieschi, 2019, p. 40). Empirical research of Norwegian voters that affirms this notion suggests that “populist politicians might come across as more “real” and “authentic” than traditional or moderate politicians” (Enli & Rosenberg, 2018, p. 7). To study authenticity alongside populist appeals, a framework which identifies authenticity through specific qualities or appeals is needed. Mediated Authenticity is a framework for authenticity by which Enli argues that “authenticity is a currency in the

communicative relation between producers and audiences” (Enli, 2014, p. 1). They posit that content producers of news, reality television and political media, use authenticity as a form of social currency. Enli further suggests that “in the context of the media, authenticity is generally seen to be positive, and audiences appreciate seemingly raw and unscripted moments” (Enli, 2014, p. 2). Enli’s framework, adopted by this thesis, argues that authenticity is constructed by the producers of media and then accepted by the audience. There is also a tacit agreement between the producer and audience labelled an authenticity contract. The construction of authenticity in the media happens via a number of codes that will be used for this thesis including predictability, spontaneity and confessions among others. Enli’s analysis shows that appeals to authenticity are evident in content produced by former US president Barack Obama and in Norwegian political campaign videos (Enli, 2015). In these instances, predictability, spontaneity, ordinariness and imperfection are present in their content, eliciting illusions of authenticity. Their work also demonstrates the role of social media in helping to mediate authenticity. They argue that the perceived authenticity of a Facebook post is bolstered if widely shared by users (Enli, 2014, p. 89). These frameworks for populism and authenticity are alike in that they both are: appeals made to publics, present in political communication, have clearly defined typologies and have been observed in social media campaigning.

Open Coding

To identify emergent themes and styles from the corpus, an open and reflexive framework for analysis such as grounded theory is applicable to this study. Grounded theory consists of “systematic, yet flexible guidelines for collecting and analysing qualitative data to construct theories from the data themselves” (Charmaz, 2014). Unlike a priori content analysis, grounded analysis takes an inductive approach whereby content categories are developed through open coding. The researcher is active in the construction of those content

categories and is reflexive in their analysis as those categories emerge. For this study, a grounded approach is used to develop a framework for analysis that is wide enough in scope that it might be used to analyse Facebook posts for future election periods. Definitions of grounded theory suggest that a successful study will result in an emerging theory (Cho & Lee, 2014) but for this study, the use of open coding and a grounded approach is intended to be exploratory rather than explanatory and is undertaken to observe the subject and style of these posts. I.e. ‘what were...?’ rather than ‘why were...?’. As a result, the use of this method within this study ends with the development of an exploratory framework for analysis and the results of that analysis, without any explanatory theory of Australian political communication on Facebook.

Chapter 4 – Popular Politics

This chapter presents the results of the content analysis as it relates to populism alongside a detailed discussion of those results. This chapter works to address two of the research questions of this thesis: “To what extent were populist appeals apparent in the Facebook posts of federal party leaders leading to the 2019 federal election?” (RQ1) and “What were the responses these populist appeals generated among users in terms of engagement?” (RQ2). To answer these research questions, posts from 6 federal politicians’ Facebook pages were coded and analysed for their populist appeals. Two samples were generated, one was a randomised sample ($n=600$) while the other was a purposive sample using the first 100 top engagement posts from each politician’s page ($n=600$). The randomised sample represents the supply side communication from these politicians while the top engagement sample is used to identify user interest.

The following findings are divided into 5 themes representing the content categories for populism used in this study. They are *emphasizing the sovereignty of the people*, *advocating for the people*, *attacking elites*, *ostracizing others*, and *invoking the heartland*. These content categories are derived from a framework developed by Engesser et al (2017). Engesser et al (2017) conceptualise populism as a thin ideology that can be employed by political actors alongside more substantial ideologies such as socialism, nationalism or liberalism. As a result, one might be able to identify populist appeals across multiple dimensions of the political spectrum. According to Engesser et al (2017, p.1111) “The core of the populist base-line ideology consists of four key elements: popular sovereignty, pure people, corrupt elite, and dangerous others”. Definitions of these appeals and how they have been operationalised are presented at the start of their respective sections. To improve the visual clarity of figures, the content categories are sometimes referred to by their codenames, e.g. PO1 or PO2, but are clearly labelled when used.

The findings show how common these appeals were from Australian federal politicians in the lead up to the 2019 federal Election and how the frequency of these appeals differs between a baseline randomised sample and a purposive sample group of top engagement posts. The discussion section addresses the research questions based upon evidence from these results and also considers their implications within the context of the broader literature.

Results

PO1: Emphasising the sovereignty of the people

Appeals that emphasise the sovereignty of the people will promote the rights of the populace to ultimately decide its governance (Engesser et al., 2017). It identifies the people as the absolute authority within the political process and positions them against a corrupt elite who are depriving the populace of their rights. These rights may be typified as constitutional or as universal rights.

Emphasising the sovereignty of the people was present but generally rare among posts from the randomised sample. The mean average between pages for emphasising the sovereignty of the people was $M=2.5$. Although rare, Morrison ($n=3$), Shorten ($n=2$), Hanson ($n=4$), Di Natale ($n=2$) and Palmer ($n=4$) made some occasional appeals while no instances were identified among McCormack's posts ($n=0$).

Among the top engagement sample, the average was also low ($M=1.6$). Di Natale ($n=4$) and Palmer ($n=4$) had the most appeals while Morrison ($n=0$), Shorten ($n=0$) and McCormack ($n=0$) had none. Hanson had appeals present among the top engagement sample but they were fewer in number than the results of the randomised sample ($n=2$).

Table 4.1*Frequency of appeals emphasising the sovereignty of the people between party leaders*

	Morrison	Shorten	Hanson	Di Natale	Palmer	McCormack	Mean
P01 – Random	3	2	4	2	4	0	2.5
P01 – Top Engagement	0	0	2	4	4	0	1.6

When sovereignty was discussed by Hanson it was used in relation to elections and citizenship. One such post criticised Labor’s proposed adoption of the UN Global Compact for Migration. Hanson retorts that “In simple terms, the United Nations would dictate the regulation of how many people would come to Australia and not the citizens or Government of this country”. Examples from Di Natale came in the discussion of democracy, corporate donations and political transparency. One post criticises the privatisation of essential services, arguing for public ownership of education, health, and media services. In one video posted by Palmer, he argues for Australia’s democracy and freedom of speech with the intimation that is being either denied or oppressed.

PO2: Advocating for the people

Appeals advocating for the people treat the Australian public as a unified or homogenous whole whose interests stand in contrast to elites (Engesser et al., 2017). Policy decisions may be criticised as being in the interest of elite or privileged groups or promoted as being to the benefit of the people above other interests. In this study posts that advocate for the people are identified by the discussion of the will of Australians, the people of Australia, working-class Australians or everyday citizens.

Advocating for the people was the most frequently observed populist appeal made across the randomised sample posts. On average over one-third of posts feature appeals advocating for the people ($M=36.5$). Shorten’s account had the highest observed instances

($n=68$) while McCormack had the lowest ($n=11$). Morrison ($n=42$), Hanson ($n=38$) and Di Natale ($n=40$) all had a frequency of appeals higher than the mean average. Palmer's appeals were generally lower than his peers ($n=20$).

Advocating for the people was on average ($M=19.6$) significantly less represented among the top engagement sample. McCormack was the only page to have a higher instance among the top engagement sample ($n=18$) than their randomised sample. Morrison ($n=26$), Shorten ($n=32$), Hanson ($n=22$), Di Natale ($n=15$) and Palmer ($n=5$) all had trended downwards with the frequency of appeals among the purposive sample.

Table 4.2

Frequency of appeals advocating for the people between party leaders

	Morrison	Shorten	Hanson	Di Natale	Palmer	McCormack	Mean
P02 – Random	42	68	38	40	20	11	36.5
P02 – Top Engagement	26	32	22	15	5	18	19.6

An example of Shorten's appeals includes arguments for the improvement of middle-class and working-class wages. In this instance, Shorten positions workers and middle-class Australians as 'the people'. Morrison's appeals emphasise the benefits of his party's policy for "the people of Australia" or "all Australians". He also makes advocacy for the will of "the people" or the will of "Australians". For Palmer, advocating for the people was manifested through the use of the catchphrase "Put Australia First" seen in a number of posts.

P03: Attacking the elites

Populist appeals take the discursive strategy of positioning ‘the people’ against an elite antagonist. The framing of the elite will shift upon ideological and cultural context but are typically characterised as having “unjustified control over their rights, well-being, and progress” (Engesser et al., 2017, p. 1112). The distinction is also hierarchical, with the elites subordinating the people.

While attacks on the elite were observable in the sample (see Table 4.3), appeals were less frequent than advocating for the people and invoking the heartland. The mean average for attacks on the elite was $M=13$. Hanson’s page recorded the highest instance ($n=33$) while Morrison ($n=0$) and McCormack ($n=0$) has the lowest.

Among the top engagement sample, fewer appeals were attacking the elites ($M=9$). Hanson ($n=7$), Di Natale ($n=14$) and Palmer ($n=7$) had fewer appeals among their top engagement samples. Shorten ($n=16$) was the only leader to have greater representation among the top engagement sample. Consistent with the randomised sample, Morrison and McCormack had no observed appeals attacking the elites.

Table 4.3

Frequency of appeals attacking the elites between party leaders

	Morrison	Shorten	Hanson	Di Natale	Palmer	McCormack	Mean
P03 – Random	0	10	33	18	19	0	13.3
P03 – Top Engagement	0	16	17	14	7	0	9

The identification and subsequent attacking of the elite varied between candidates. For instance, Di Natale and Shorten would identify banks, large multinational corporations

and millionaires who do not pay tax as examples of the elite. By comparison, Hanson and Palmer target the major parties (LNP and ALP) as the elites. Palmer also denounces media elites who are out of touch with the everyday Australians. A formulation of the elite is notably absent for Morrison and McCormack.

PO4: Ostracising others.

The characterisation of others as antagonists of the people is another discursive appeal made by populist actors. While elites are hierarchical in their opposition to the people, others are laterally opposed. Othering can emanate from factional, racial or class divisions (Engesser et al., 2017).

Ostracising of others was rare among the posts from the randomised sample (see Table 4.4). The mean average was $M=3.8$ among posts but this is skewed by Hanson's page which the analysis observed a frequency of $n=17$. For the remaining leaders, Morrison ($n=1$), Shorten ($n=0$), Di Natale ($n=0$), Palmer ($n=4$) and McCormack ($n=1$) the frequency was much rarer.

The frequency of observations among the top engagement sample was quite similar to the randomised sample. The mean average was slightly higher among the top engagement sample ($M=4.1$). This again is skewed by observations from Hanson's page ($n=19$) which were significantly higher than her peers. The frequency of appeals from Morrison ($n=1$), Shorten ($n=0$), Di Natale ($n=0$), Palmer ($n=4$) and McCormack ($n=1$) were identical to the randomised sample.

Table 4.4*Frequency of appeals ostracising others between party leaders*

	Morrison	Shorten	Hanson	Di Natale	Palmer	McCormack	Mean
P04 – Random	1	0	17	0	4	1	3.8
P04 – Top Engagement	1	0	19	0	4	1	4.1

Examples from Hanson include the discussion of “African gangs”, criticism of migrants, and criticism of youth climate activists. For Palmer, ostracising others came in a more subtle form, with targeted criticism of Chinese communist ownership of companies operating out of Australia and ostracising welfare recipients through memes. The single instance of McCormack ostracising others refers to the denouncing of “unauthorised” arrivals coming to Australia in hundreds of ships. Clear examples of *others* were notably absent for Shorten and Di Natale among both sample groups.

PO5: Invoking the heartland

The heartland is defined by an “idealised conception of the community” (Taggart, 2004 in Engesser et al., 2017). Culturally specific, this invocation draws upon a nostalgic and idealised past. It is rhetorically an emotional appeal and is not necessarily grounded in fact.

Invoking the heartland was, alongside advocating for the people, the most frequently occurring populist appeal within the sample. The mean average for this content category was $M=29.3$. The most frequent appeals were made by McCormack ($n=42$) and Morrison ($n=41$) while the least was from Di Natale ($n=13$) and Hanson ($n=17$).

The average frequency of Invoking the Heartland appeals ($M=20.3$) among the top engagement sample was less than that of the randomised sample. Fewer appeals were observed from Morrison ($n=27$), Shorten ($n=15$), Hanson ($n=9$) and Di Natale ($n=7$) and

Palmer ($n=22$). Unlike his peers, McCormack’s frequency of appeals among the top engagement post ($n=42$) was consistent with the randomised sample.

Table 4.5

Frequency of appeals invoking the heartland between party leaders

	Morrison	Shorten	Hanson	Di Natale	Palmer	McCormack	Mean
P05 – Random	41	31	17	13	32	42	29.3
P05 – Top Engagement	27	15	9	7	22	42	20.3

The way that the heartland was expressed was different from party leader to party leader. While McCormack’s posts commonly discuss and represent farmers and members of regional communities, Shorten and Di Natale were more likely to use metropolitan examples. A common approach employed by Morrison is to include small stories about “regular Australians”. Examples include people struggling with their power bills, and stories about locals when he is offering a speech at a location. One example from Shorten showed himself being interviewed by a small group of pensioners at a retirement home.

Summary of averages

A collation of averages between candidates for both the randomised sample and top engagement sample demonstrates trends for the overall frequency of each populist appeal and how they differed between sample groups.

The mean averages for appeals among the randomised sample varied in frequency (see Table 4.6). While some appeals such as advocating for the people ($M=36.5$) and invoking the heartland ($M=29.3$) were commonplace, other appeals such as emphasising the

sovereignty of the people ($M=2.5$) and ostracising others ($M= 3.8$) were present but significantly rarer.

Mean averages among the top engagement post indicate fewer appeals among the purposive sample group (see Figure 4.1; Table 4.6). Emphasising the sovereignty of the people ($M=1.6$), advocating for the people ($M=19.6$), attacking the elite ($M=9$) and invoking the heartland ($M=20.3$) were lower in frequency than among the randomised posts while only ostracising others ($M=4.1$) was observed to have a marginally higher frequency.

Figure 4.1

A graph showing the mean frequency of populist appeals between random and top engagement samples

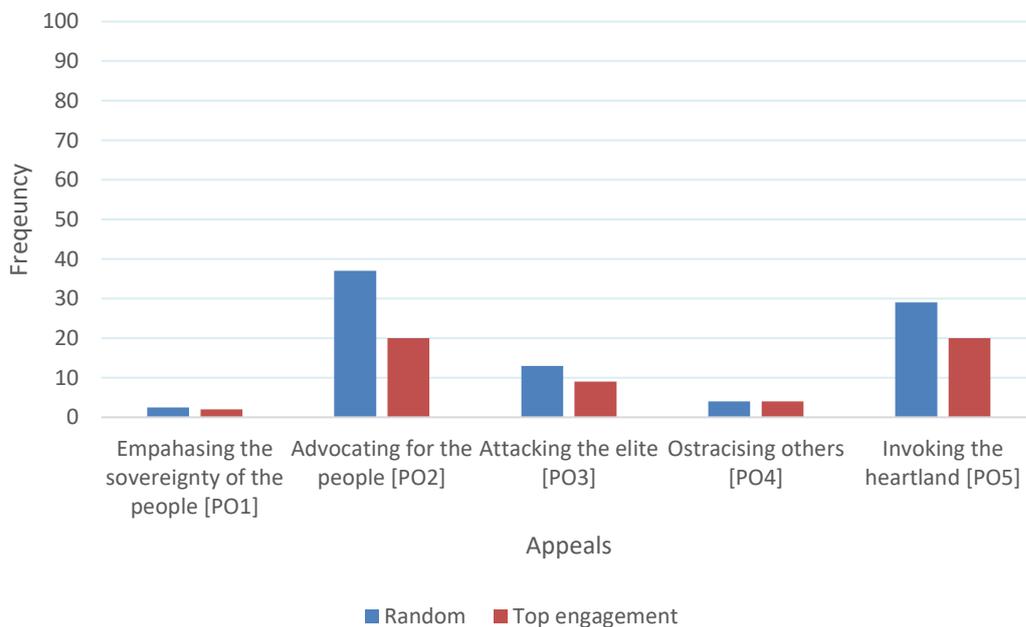


Table 4.6

Mean frequency of populist appeals between random and top engagement samples

	PO1	PO2	PO3	PO4	PO5
Average - Random	2.5	36.5	13.3	3.8	29.3
Average - Top engagement	1.6	19.6	9.0	4.1	20.3

Discussion

With the shock voting results that were Brexit in 2014 and the election of Donald J Trump in 2016, a rise in populism was flagged as an explanation for why voters may have steered from expectations. During and after the 2019 federal election in Australia, with the failure of polling to accurately predict an outcome, questions also arose about the influence of populism. Johnson argues that, alongside “populist parties” United Australia Party and One Nation, the Liberal party and Labor employed their own populist strategies during the campaign (C. Johnson, 2020). The results of analysis from this thesis would suggest there is some merit to this claim.

It is clear based on the results of this content analysis that populist appeals were indeed present in the posts made by the core party leaders leading into the 2019 federal election, but the qualities and distribution of those appeals varied from page to page, with each party leader making varied combinations of populist appeals. Liberal and Labor party leaders, Morrison and Shorten, made populist appeals but the style and balance of their appeals were different to that of United Australia Party and One Nation leaders, Palmer and Hanson. This result supports the theorisation of populism as a *thin* ideology – the notion that populist appeals are vague enough that they can be applied alongside a range of political ideologies. Distinct qualitative differences between how Hanson and Di Natale make appeals such as emphasising the sovereignty of the people and attacking the elites exemplify this

phenomenon. While Hanson uses immigration as the foundation for their populist appeals, Di Natale uses anti-corporate ideation.

The fragmented distribution of populist appeals observed by Engesser et al (2017) in European general elections is also observed within this study. Distinctions between the left-leaning and right-leaning parties can be observed in the distribution of appeals. For both the Liberal and Nationals leaders, Morrison and McCormack, attacking the elites were absent from their palette of appeals. Likewise, for both Labor and The Greens leaders, Shorten and Di Natale, ostracising others was absent from their appeals. While both types of appeals were generally low among sample groups, this distribution might demarcate a point of difference between political alignments and their populist appeals. These results suggest that populist appeals from party leaders were presented alongside a range of political ideologies and in a fragmented form ahead of the election

Advocating for the people was the most commonplace appeal made by politicians among the normative sample and was frequently used by each individual politician. As a representation of the supply side communication, this could indicate that the appeal was one that politicians thought might resonate with voters. Notably, its prevalence among the randomised sample was consistently higher than that of the top engagement sample with the exception of posts from McCormack's page. Unlike ostracizing others, advocating for the people is likely a less divisive appeal for party leaders to make. On this basis, it makes sense that it is one of the more frequent appeals.

Invoking the heartland was, alongside advocating for the people, one of the more commonplace appeals among candidates. Even the lowest occurrences from Di Natale were higher than the mean averages for emphasising the sovereignty of the people and ostracising others. Like advocating for the people, its frequency among the normative sample was consistently higher than that of the top engagement sample, again with the exception of posts

from McCormack's page. This result might suggest that while this appeal was widespread, invoking the heartland was not met with the same enthusiasm from users as was provided by the supply side. The equal representation among samples for McCormack could suggest that users who viewed his content were more interested in this kind of appeal than the other candidates' user bases. Similar studies have also noted the role of everyday people and "townsfolk" in the construction of Australian political narratives on Facebook (Hendriks et al., 2016), an aspect of invoking the heartland. This result suggests that while it is observable from the supply side, user engagement does not match that supply.

Emphasising the sovereignty of the people, attacking the elites and ostracising others were considerably less present among both sample groups. This further supports the fragmentation thesis presented by Engesser et al (2017). Their study found that it was rare for politicians to use all populist appeals at once and instead that these appeals were spread out among posts with occasional pairings or trios of appeals. Possible explanations provided by Engesser (2017, p. 1122) include a need to reduce communication complexity due to the constraints of the platform, attempting to keep the ideology malleable or trying to "fly under the radar" akin to the notion of dogwhistling.

One of the pertinent outcomes of this study was a consistently lower representation of populist appeals among the top engagement sample when compared to the randomised sample. This thesis began with questions regarding the engagement response that these populist appeals had (RQ2). Four out of the five appeals, emphasising the sovereignty of the people, advocating for the people, attacking the elite and invoking the heartland were less prevalent on average among the top engagement sample. Though ostracising others had slightly higher representation among the top engagement, the averages from both samples demonstrated that these appeals were uncommon. While some scholars have suggested that populism might be facilitated by social media (Hendrix, 2019) the result of the analysis offers

an additional perspective to this notion. Populist appeals are apparent in the posts made by these Australian politicians, but the lower frequency of appeals among the top engagement sample compared to the random sample would suggest that there is a misalignment between the supply side for these appeals and the interest of the userbase. Populist appeals do receive some engagement, so it is clear that it is not a turn off for users, but among the sample of posts that users were most engaged with, it had less representation. This might suggest that there are other things that the user base is more interested in from the candidates than populist appeals.

In summary, populist appeals were evident among the posts made by party leaders, supporting the initial hypothesis of this study. This thesis asks questions about the extent of populist appeals (RQ1) and the results found that while populist appeals were apparent, they did vary in their distribution and expression among leaders. This study affirms the fragmentation thesis that on social media, populist appeals are made in parts rather than cohesively. This study also suggests that in the Australian context, some of these appeals were significantly more commonplace than others, namely advocating for the people and invoking the heartland. finally, while populist appeals were present, comparisons between supply-side communication and user engagement samples suggest that users were not as engaged with these appeals as they were supplied.

Chapter 5 – Authentic Australians

This chapter addresses two research questions from this thesis: “To what extent were authenticity appeals apparent in the Facebook posts of federal party leaders leading to the 2019 federal election?” (RQ3) and “What were the responses these authenticity appeals generated among users in terms of engagement?” (RQ4). This chapter presents the results of the content analysis specific to appeals to authenticity. It is then followed by a discussion of those results.

Posts from 6 federal politicians’ Facebook pages were coded and analysed for their authenticity appeals to answer research question 2. Two samples were generated, one was a randomised sample ($n=600$) and the other was a purposive sample using the first 100 top engagement posts from each politician’s page ($n=600$).

The results section is structured around 7 themes derived from a framework for mediated authenticity. Mediated authenticity is the “communicative process” and “symbolic negotiation” of authenticity as it appears in the media (Enli, 2014, p.2). This conceptualisation of authenticity recognises that it is ultimately culturally defined and subject to “tastes, beliefs, values, and practises” (Enli, 2014, p.2). These themes are *predictability*, *spontaneity*, *immediacy*, *confessions*, *ordinariness*, *ambivalence* and *imperfection*. Definitions of these appeals and how they have been operationalised are presented at the start of their respective sections. To improve the visual clarity of figures, the content categories are sometimes referred to by their codenames, e.g. MA1 or MA2, but are clearly labelled when used.

The results section shows the frequency of appeals among the two sample groups to gauge the effect that these appeals may have had on user engagement. By using a randomised sampling method, the first sample group provides a baseline for the supply-side

communication made by these politicians' pages. The purposive sample then shows which appeals were prevalent among the high engagement posts. The comparative approach using samples of high engagement posts addresses research questions regarding engagement. The discussion then considers the standalone implications of the results and their implications within the context of broader research within the domain of political communication online.

Results

MA1: Predictability

Predictability is defined as the “consistent use of genre features and conventions for mediated communication” (Enli, 2014, p. 136). In the context of political communication on social media, this can be observed through both broad genre conventions between pages and specific forms of predictability that are particular to the politician. Politicians may use common formats for social media posts or adopt popular trends as they emerge. Predictability may also be evident through the particular formatting and style preferences of that politician's page.

Among the randomised sample group, the results of the content analysis observed that posts made by each politician were generally predictable in terms of the style and format of their content. The mean average across all pages was 84 for predictability. The frequency of predictability among Morrison ($n=79$), Shorten ($n=78$), and Hanson's ($n=85$) posts deviated less than 6 from the mean. McCormack and Di Natale's post had the highest rate of predictability ($n=99$) while Palmer had the lowest ($n=66$). Palmer's posts not only showed the least predictability but also has the greatest deviation from the mean (18).

Among the top engagement posts, predictability was lower for Morrison ($n=76$), Di Natale ($n=90$) and McCormack ($n=90$). For Shorten ($n=86$), Hanson ($n=88$) and Palmer ($n=94$) predictability was higher. There was a significant difference between predictable posts

from Palmer between the Random and Top engagement samples. From the top engagement sample, Palmer had the highest measure of predictability ($n=94$) than his peers, but then had the lowest for the randomised sample ($n=66$). This also represented the largest difference between samples for a single page.

Table 5.1

Frequency of predictability appeals between party leaders

	Morrison	Shorten	Hanson	Di Natale	Palmer	McCormack	Mean
MA1 -Random	79	78	85	99	66	99	84.3
MA1 -Top engagement	76	86	88	90	94	90	87.3

Predictability was specifically evident in the posts' formatting styles and subject matter. Examples include the sharing of press conference footage, live footage of speeches on the floor of parliament, and selfies and photos with constituents at events. Each politician had their individually predictable formatting trends too. For instance, both McCormack and Palmer would post media releases on their pages. Morrison would feature high production interviews with himself and his family discussing aspects of his life at home. For Palmer, predictability was also observed through the frequent posting of memes and other web format humour. Hanson would frequently post videos from morning shows, featuring her debates with hosts or fellow federal politician Derryn Hinch.

MA2: Spontaneity

Spontaneity is identified as posts that appear to be improvised and impulse driven. These posts stand in contrast to content that appears to be planned and strategic (Enli, 2014). Spontaneity is a somewhat paradoxical category as performances may be planned to appear

spontaneous but still be scripted or working within genre conventions. There is no requirement that these posts be genuinely spontaneous but instead have the appearance of spontaneity or improvisation.

Spontaneity was one of the least commonly observed appeals among the random sample. The mean average ($M=36.5$) for instances of spontaneity appeals was relatively low. The highest occurrences observed were among Morrison's ($n=11$) and Palmer's ($n=12$) posts. The lowest observed occurrences were among McCormack's ($n=1$) and Di Natale's ($n=2$) posts. Shorten's ($n=7$) and Hanson's ($n=5$) frequency of appeals was close to the mean average.

Among the top engagement sample, more spontaneous posts were observed in the pages of Morrison ($n=18$), Shorten ($n=11$), Di Natale ($n=6$) and McCormack ($n=5$) compared with the randomised sample. While Hanson's ($n=3$) and Palmer's ($n=2$) top engagement posts demonstrated fewer appeals than their randomised samples.

Table 5.2

Frequency of spontaneity appeals between party leaders

	Morrison	Shorten	Hanson	Di Natale	Palmer	McCormack	Mean
MA2- Random	11	7	5	2	12	1	6.3
MA2- Top engagement	18	11	3	6	2	5	7.5

Examples of spontaneity can be seen on live handheld footage recorded by Morrison with his spouse. These were often performed on location during the campaign trail with Morrison recanting the events of the day. For Palmer, these came in the form of off-the-cuff remarks as status updates about the news of the day. One example of spontaneity came from Shorten

posting a selfie on location with a simple campaign message “I’m ready to deliver a fair go for Australia, Who’s with me?”.

MA3: Immediacy

Immediacy manifests as posts that are either explicitly or implicitly *live* (Enli, 2014). Facebook facilitates the recording of live video content which is then archived as a post. Liveness can also be characterised by posts that are specific to matters of the day or are produced “in the now” such as a status update reacting to events unfolding on television.

Immediacy was on average the second most frequent authenticity appeal present among the randomised sample. The mean average across all posts was 31 for immediacy appeals ($M=31$; see Table 5.3). Morrison ($n=44$) and McCormack ($n=41$) had the most appeals while Palmer had the lowest ($n=14$). Shorten ($n=36$) and Hanson ($n=32$) and similar frequencies of appeals while Di Natale’s ($n=24$) frequency of appeals was below the mean average.

Immediacy was slightly more prevalent on average among the top engagement sample. For Morrison ($n=53$), Shorten ($n=40$), Hanson ($n=43$) and McCormack ($n=43$), immediacy was more prevalent among their top engagement posts than from the randomised samples. For Di Natale ($n=18$) and Palmer ($n=8$), immediacy was less prevalent among their top engagement posts.

Table 5.3

Frequency of immediacy appeals between party leaders

	Morrison	Shorten	Hanson	Di Natale	Palmer	McCormack	Mean
MA3-Random	44	36	32	24	14	41	31.8
MA3-Top engagement	53	40	43	18	8	43	34.1

It was common to see the candidates upload videos of themselves speaking on the floor of parliament, at press conferences or as candid moments speaking directly to their audience. An example of the latter can be seen by Morrison making a handheld video on election day and espousing his political philosophy. McCormack and Hanson would also record live videos using standing cameras, often on location at regional centres. Palmer would post his videos from rally speeches or humorous handheld footage from his office.

MA4: Confessions

Confessions are characterised by disclosures of personal information about the political actor. Confessions as authenticity appeals may come in the form of intimate storytelling which Enli argues is important for political actors to win over voters (Enli, 2014, p. 116). It may also be documenting the confessions of others too, such as a friend, family member or constituent.

Confessions were on average quite rare ($M=5.3$) among the randomised sample. From the candidates, confession appeals were observed the most frequently among Morrison's posts ($n=15$). Palmer ($n=2$) and McCormack ($n=2$) were the lowest. Shorten ($n=4$), Di Natale ($n=3$) had a frequency below the mean, while Hanson's was marginally higher ($n=6$).

While still generally uncommon, confessions were on average ($M=8.1$) more likely to appear among the top engagement sample than among the randomised sample. Confessions were more frequent ($n=19$) among Morrison's top engagement posts than his peers. Shorten's page had more than double the number of confessions posts among his top engagement sample ($n=11$) compared to the randomised sample. Hanson ($n=8$) and McCormack ($n=7$) had frequencies of appeals close to the mean, while Di Natale ($n=2$) and Palmer ($n=2$) had rare occurrences in line with the randomised sample.

Table 5.4*Frequency of confessions appeals between party leaders*

	Morrison	Shorten	Hanson	Di Natale	Palmer	McCormack	Mean
MA4-Random	15	4	6	3	2	2	5.3
MA4-Top engagement	19	11	8	2	2	7	8.1

Not all confessions among these posts were directly from the politicians themselves. Some confessions were from family members, colleagues, or members of the public. Scott Morrison's brand of confession often comes as anecdotes about or from his family. It was common for Morrison to insert stories about his wife, children, or parents into political speeches posted on his page. The page also posted a video series of interviews with his family discussing their life and values. Another example is from Hanson which features an interview with a young woman who wrote to her while she was in prison 16 years earlier. Both share their experiences candidly on camera before, Hanson, who is hiding in the other room, comes in to surprise her. For Shorten there were also examples of storytelling from his personal life, recounting memories of one of his parents after their passing.

MA5: Ordinariness

Ordinariness is characterised in contrast to glamour. The mundane aspects of the political actors' experiences may be publicised, making them appear more relatable (Enli, 2014). This includes the espousal of their non-political life and engaging in activities that mirror the perceived life of the general public.

While all pages demonstrate appeals to ordinariness, their presence among the randomised sample was on average generally low ($M=6.8$). Morrison ($n=13$) and Shorten ($n=13$) were equal in the number of appeals made. Their peers, Hanson ($n=3$), Di Natale

($n=3$), Palmer ($n=7$) and McCormack ($n=2$) were considerably lower in the frequency of appeals.

Among the top engagement posts, there was a higher average of appeals to ordinariness ($M=10.3$). compared to the randomised sample. Significantly more appeals were found among the top engagement posts from Morrison ($n=21$) The frequency of appeals for Hanson ($n=5$), Di Natale ($n=3$) and Palmer ($n=8$) was much closer to the random sample. Shorten ($n=12$) and McCormack ($n=13$) had higher than average appeals, with McCormack's top engagement posts having a significantly higher frequency of *ordinariness* appeals compared to the random sample of their posts.

Table 5.5

Frequency of ordinariness appeals between party leaders

	Morrison	Shorten	Hanson	Di Natale	Palmer	McCormack	Mean
MA5-Random	13	13	3	3	7	2	6.8
MA5-Top engagement	21	12	5	3	8	13	10.3

Common examples of ordinariness came in the form of Mother's Day or Father's Day posts. Morrison, McCormack, and Shorten each had posts that showed pictures of their parents or photos with them and their parents with a tribute. Other examples include Morrison taking a selfie on holiday in Fiji or Shorten taking selfies while participating in a fundraiser running race.

MA6: Ambivalence

Ambivalence is identified as the shirking of the typified political persona. It stands in contrast to the promotion of political prestige and can manifest as a form of reluctance to perform as a politician.

Observation of ambivalence was generally uncommon among the sample group. The mean average was $M=2.8$ but this number is skewed by Palmer's post where ambivalence was present in 13 of their posts. For Morrison ($n=0$), Hanson ($n=0$) and Di Natale ($n=0$), ambivalence was not observed in any instance and for Shorten ($n=3$) and McCormack ($n=1$) it was rare.

Ambivalence appeals were more frequently observed among the top engagement sample both individually and on average ($M=16$). For Palmer, ambivalence was significantly higher among the top engagement sample ($n=72$) than the randomised sample. While frequency was generally low among the rest of the party leaders, Morrison ($n=1$), Shorten ($n=7$), Hanson ($n=3$), Di Natale ($n=6$) and McCormack ($n=7$) all had higher frequencies of appeals among their top engagement samples.

Table 5.6

Frequency of ambivalence appeals between party leaders

	Morrison	Shorten	Hanson	Di Natale	Palmer	McCormack	<i>Mean</i>
MA6-Random	0	3	0	0	13	1	2.8
MA6-Top engagement	1	7	3	6	72	7	16

Palmer's ambivalence was demonstrated through political and non-political memes, typically of low production quality and making cultural references specific to the Australian

context and young people. The bulk of Palmer's ambivalence appeals can be accounted for by this style of content. One example from Di Natale was the posting of a picture of himself with running shoes photoshopped onto his feet. This is likely a reference to an incident where a photo released by Morrison's team had poorly photoshopped sneakers onto his feet.

MA7: Imperfection

Imperfection is created through low production values and stands in contrast to polished and rehearsed political performances (Enli, 2014). Spelling errors, stuttering, mispronunciation, low-resolution images and shaky handheld camera footage are characteristic of this appeal.

Imperfection appeals were rare among most pages of the randomised sample. While the mean average for imperfection was $M=9.5$, the results are skewed. Morrison ($n=3$), Shorten ($n=4$), Hanson ($n=2$), McCormack ($n=0$) and Di Natale ($n=1$) had frequencies less than half of the mean average in this content category while Palmer's ($n=47$) appeals were significantly higher.

Although the mean was less among the top engagement sample, for candidates Morrison ($n=8$), Shorten ($n=5$), Hanson ($n=3$) and McCormack ($n=5$) there was an increase in the frequency of appeals. Di Natale's ($n=1$) frequency of appeals stayed the same while Palmer's ($n=24$) top engagement sample had considerably fewer appeals.

Table 5.7*Frequency of imperfection appeals between party leaders*

	Morrison	Shorten	Hanson	Di Natale	Palmer	McCormack	<i>Mean</i>
MA7-Random	3	4	2	1	47	0	9.5
MA7-Top engagement	8	5	3	1	24	5	7.6

Examples of imperfection were commonly observed in low production memes and web-based humour from Palmer. These posts would frequently use low-quality clip art, low-resolution images and poorly cropped graphics. For Morrison and other leaders, often handheld footage was also representative of imperfection, with low resolution, poor lighting and unflattering angles.

Summary of Averages

A collation of averages between candidates for both the randomised sample and top engagement sample demonstrates trends for the overall frequency of each authenticity appeal and how they differed between sample groups.

On average, appeals among the randomised sample were present but typically low in their frequency (see Figure 5.1; Table 5.8). Spontaneity [MA2], confessions [MA4], ordinariness [MA5], ambivalence [MA6] and imperfection [MA7] were each present on average in less than 10 of the posts. Predictability [MA1] and immediacy [MA3] were outliers in their average frequency among posts. Predictability was observed in 84 of the posts while immediacy was observed among 32 posts.

Among the top engagement sample, appeals to authenticity were, with one exception, marginally more frequent. Predictability, spontaneity, immediacy, confessions, ordinariness and ambivalence were more frequent while imperfection was less frequent. Ambivalence was

significantly higher among the top engagement sample, but this is skewed by overrepresentation among Palmer’s posts.

Figure 5.1

A graph showing the mean frequency of authenticity appeals between random and top engagement samples

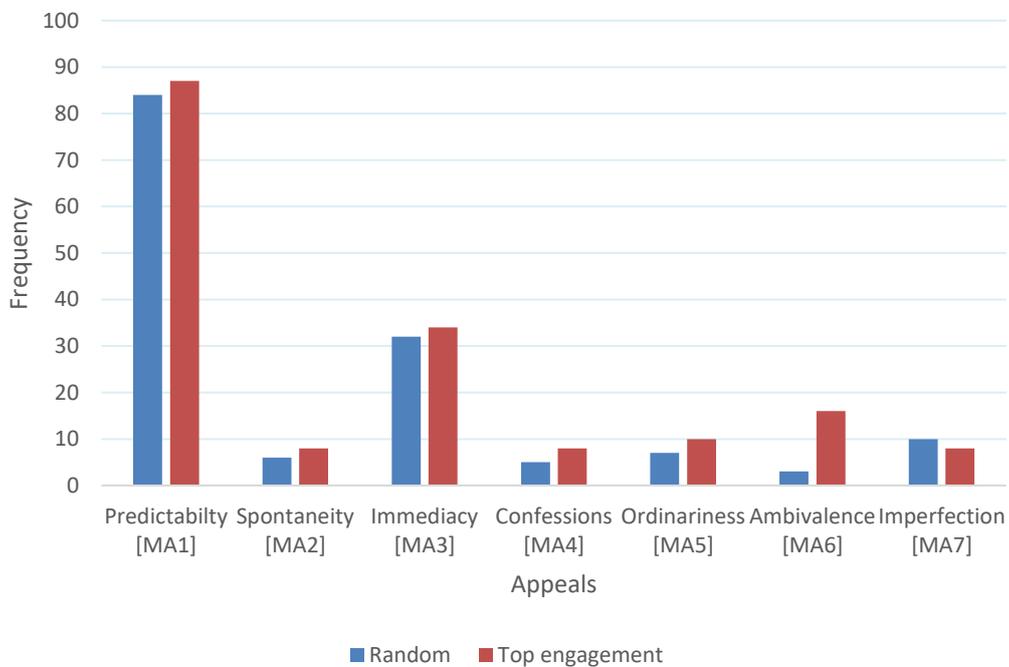


Table 5.8

Mean frequency of authenticity appeals between random and top engagement samples

	MA1	MA2	MA3	MA4	MA5	MA6	MA7
Average - Random	84	6	32	5	7	3	10
Average - Top engagement	87	8	34	8	10	16	8

Discussion

This chapter began with questions about the prevalence of authenticity appeals from party leaders (RQ3) and the engagement they received from users (RQ4). The results of this study indicate that authenticity appeals were indeed apparent among party leaders, but the distribution of these appeals differed between leader's pages and between samples.

Each of the appeals were represented among a summary of averages (see Table 5.1), with mean averages among the randomised samples ranging from $M=3$ for ambivalence to $M=84$ predictability. The range for average frequency of appeals was slightly higher among the top engagement sample, ranging from $M=8$ for spontaneity, confessions, and imperfection, to $M=87$ for predictability. The results indicate that not only were authenticity appeals present but that their representation was higher among posts that users were interested in. Of the seven appeals, only imperfection was less frequent among the top engagement sample. Rogers (2018, p. 450) suggests that platform engagement metrics can be seen as a measure of "how well someone is doing online". By this measure, appeals to authenticity from federal party leaders are doing well on Facebook.

It should also be considered that for six of the seven appeals, the difference in average frequency between samples was either 2 or 3 points. The outlier appeal in this regard was ambivalence, which had a difference of 13 points between the randomised and top engagement samples. This would suggest that even though these appeals are performing well, engagement only has a slight edge on the supply. By comparison, analysis of the outlier category of ambivalence suggests that this appeal might be significantly more engaging for users. Comparisons of ambivalence appeals between pages show that Palmer's use of this appeal had a much higher representation among the top engagement sample (see Table 5.6).

Predictability was one of the outliers in this study in terms of its frequency among appeals. Unlike the other categories, predictability was apparent in most posts. Predictability is

established through the “consistent use of genre features and conventions” (Enli, 2014). Interpreting these results through the lens of the typology presented by Enli, this would suggest that these pages have a set of norms and conventions that they seldom deviate from. Qualitatively there is evidence to support this notion too. Consistent formatting conventions within and across pages do appear to be present. Examples included sharing videos from the floor of parliament, clips from morning shows, live updates at locations across the country, selfies, text-based campaign advertising and press releases. This content category also captures the inherent rigidity of posting on a platform like Facebook too though. Unpredictable posts would require some highly creative use of the platforms posting tools or content that is far removed from the sphere of political communication. For instance, Morrison, Shorten and McCormack would make tribute posts to their parents and families, which while apolitical, still helps to develop a sense of personal brand and intimate storytelling. The result is this content category is unlike the others in that it is likely to be observed in a wide variety of posts on Facebook.

Spontaneity was relatively uncommon among the authenticity appeals made by party leaders. The frequency of appeals was typically higher among the top engagement sample the with exception of Hanson and Palmer’s pages which instead had more appeals among the randomised sample. This suggests that although their supply was low, users were still interested in these kinds of posts. Interest may be determined in part by the qualitative differences in its application and the demographics of the pages’ user bases too. Future studies may want to consider methods to account for these factors to better evaluate the efficacy of this appeal.

Immediacy was the second most commonly represented appeal among both samples. A strong emphasis was placed on content being created live. Short length and low production video from handheld devices were often uploaded by Morrison, Hanson and McCormack,

some of which were live-cast on location. Enli (2014, p. 34) likens this kind of performance to “breaking news” and helps to impart a shared sense of now with the audience. This result also reaffirms notions of the hybrid media ecology (Chadwick, 2013). We can see live footage as a shared media logic for these politicians on Facebook, drawing upon conventions used by broadcast news productions.

Confessions and ordinariness had similar patterns of distribution between party leaders. While generally less common than other appeals, the distribution patterns show Morrison making both of these appeals more frequently than his peers. Unlike the other authenticity categories, confessions and ordinariness could be considered to be quieter, more personal and more intimate. This is reflected in the continued use of behind-the-scenes footage of Morrison and his family. Enli (2014, p. 115) observes these same appeals from former US President Barack Obama. The use of confessions can be used to create “compelling and memorable storytelling” to win hearts and minds. Morrison’s leading use of these appeals suggests a more compelling and strategic approach to storytelling than that of his peers.

As discussed earlier, appeals to ambivalence were considerably higher among the top engagement posts than they were among the randomised sample. This suggests that these appeals attract more interest from users than is typically associated with the rest of the appeals within the framework. This content category captures much of the humorous content produced by the leaders’ pages as well as the subtle digging at their opponents and rebuffs of media criticism. This would suggest that users may prefer content that is designed for humour and shareability, and that shirks the stoic personality traditionally associated with politicians. For Palmer in particular the use of memes was highly successful. Palmer’s 100 top engagement sample featured 72 posts that made appeals to ambivalence compared to the 13 present in the randomised sample. When interpreting these results, consideration should be

given to the tailoring of this appeal to specific audiences. While ambivalence appeals were significantly more frequent among the top engagement posts, the results demonstrate there were qualitative differences between candidates. It is also important to recognise that the user bases for each of these pages might be constituted of completely different people. Palmer's ambivalence could be an appeal to the more casual and loosely engaged voters. The sharing of political memes and humorous political content on social media has been associated with the more mundane and "everyday" rituals and practices of political engagement (Highfield, 2017). This practice is more low stakes and informal compared to the sharing of speeches and policy announcements from candidates. While ambivalence appears to be a successful approach for engaging users for Palmer, these appeals may not be as effective for other accounts.

Imperfection, like ambivalence, appeared to be commonplace for Palmer while comparatively rarer for the other party leaders. For Palmer imperfection and ambivalence coalesce, emanating from his use of low production memes and web humour. Beyond the use of memes, imperfection is also observable through poorly staged photographs or unrehearsed videos. Unlike the other authenticity content categories, this was the only category to have, on average, lower representation among the top engagement sample than among the randomised sample. The difference between this frequency is quite narrow and may not represent a decreased interest in the appeal. Comparisons between party leaders show that for most leaders, imperfection performed slightly better (see Table 5.7), but the average result was skewed by significant underrepresentation of imperfection on Palmer's page. Possible explanations could be that too much imperfection is undesirable or there may be a significant qualitative difference to be discovered between Palmer's imperfection and that of his peers.

These results make for interesting comparisons to the results of a prior study of mediated authenticity using Malcolm Turnbull's Twitter posts (Fuller et al., 2018). The

findings of their content analysis identified predictably, spontaneity and immediacy as appeals exemplified by the former Prime Minister. While the results of this chapter didn't find spontaneity to be much of an outlier, predictability and immediacy were significantly more frequent in their occurrence. Since Fuller et al. (2018), didn't publish their tabulation, it isn't possible to make truly accurate comparisons, but this does raise questions about these platforms or the logics of Australian politics on them. Are there shared affordances between Twitter and Facebook that would encourage these specific appeals, or is it a reflection of a common practice by party leaders in their communication?

In summary, authenticity appeals were evident among the posts made by party leaders. This thesis asks questions about the extent of authenticity appeals and the results found that while indicators of mediated authenticity were apparent, they did vary in their distribution and expression between leaders. Predictability and immediacy were significantly more prevalent than other authenticity appeals. This study affirms notions of the hybrid media system wherein new media producers are drawing upon conventions and logics of traditional media systems. Finally, comparisons between the randomised sample and top engagement sample suggest that authenticity appeals performed well with engagement being slightly higher in representation than supply.

Chapter 6 – Themes and Style; the results of Open Coding

The findings and discussion of this chapter address the last research question of this thesis: What other contextual themes and communication styles were apparent in the content of leaders' Facebook posts in the lead up to the election? A grounded theory approach to analysing the content was employed to identify potential content categories for analysis. Open coding that focused on the subject matter, the direction of criticism, shared content and humour was undertaken on the randomised sample group simultaneously with a priori content categories of populism and mediated authenticity which were presented in the previous chapters of this thesis. Axial coding was then used to develop content categories. The list below represents the final content categories derived from the axial coding, the core categories of which are used as the structure of the findings. Unlike the previous studies contained within this thesis, this aspect of the study is solely focused on the supply side communication from party leaders. As such, it draws its results exclusively from the randomised sample.

The results of the initial open coding identified 25 categories, ranging from the cost of living, the economy, infrastructure, memes, shared posts and criticism. The majority of these categories could be identified as the topic of the content and are focused on particular issues, ideas or policy matters that the politicians raise. For this analysis, they are organised under a core category of topics. Politicians also frequently would post content from other pages or websites. These shareposts are categorised under a core category of sharing. Some posts would also criticise or acclaim specific political actors such as candidates or parties. A fourth core category was also identified which observes the use of memes and humour from the leaders' pages. The following results are organised around these 4 core categories: Topics, Sharing, Criticism and Acclaim, and Memes and Humour.

Table 6.1*Content categories derived from first phase open coding*

Core category	Categories
Topics	Aboriginal Australia Celebrities Children, young people and education Cost of living Domestic locations Economy Elections Employment Environment Family Health and Emergency Services Infrastructure International politics Military and veterans National security Natural disasters Politicians Retirees and the aging Sport Women
Sharing	Sharepost
Criticism and Acclaim	Acclaim Criticism
Memes and Humour	Meme Humour

Results*Topics*

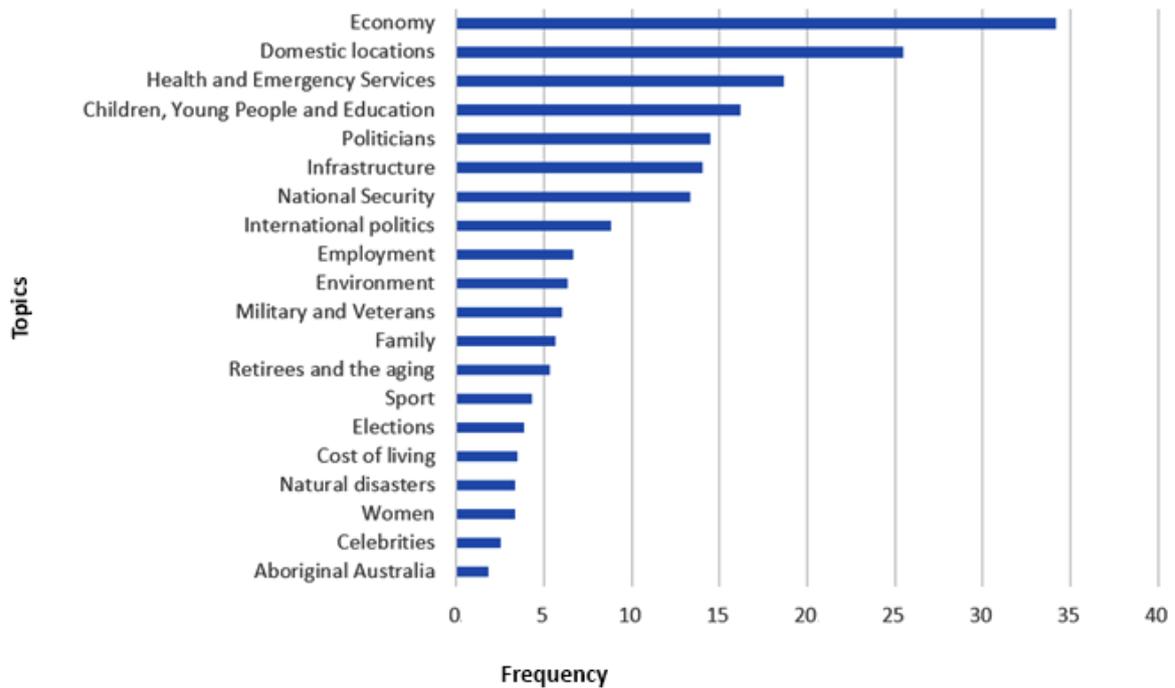
This section describes the frequency by which specific topics were raised by the federal party leaders among the randomised sample group. The results provide insight into which subjects these politicians prioritise in their communication on Facebook during the

period ahead of the 2019 election. These topics are mostly concerned with legislative and policy issues like the economy and health but also include how frequently politicians appeared at or discussed specific locations in Australia, discussions of the election itself and appearances with other politicians or celebrities. This section first addresses which topics were prioritised based upon mean averages and then describes trends between specific pages.

Based on a mean average ($M=34.2$), the economy was the topic of primary concern between leaders and was the most frequent topic for Morrison, Shorten and Palmer. The topic of *domestic locations* was the second most common on average ($M=25.5$). While this result was the second most common topic for Morrison ($n=36$) and Hanson ($n=24$) this result is likely skewed based on how frequently it occurred in posts by McCormack ($n=73$). The third most common topic on average was health and emergency services ($M=18.7$). This topic was the most frequent for Di Natale ($n=36$) while the second most frequent after economy for Shorten ($n=37$). The results of the averages suggest that the economy and domestic locations were the key subject matter of interest for politicians followed by the second tier of topics that covered health and emergency services, children, young people and education, politicians, infrastructure, and national security.

Figure 6.1

Frequency of topics raised by federal party leaders on Facebook



The distribution of the frequencies of these topics varied from candidate to candidate. The following results are the key topics discussed by politicians in order of their frequency of use (see Table 6.2). For Morrison, the economy, domestic locations, family and politicians were the most frequently discussed. Shorten also prioritised the economy alongside health and emergency services and children, young people and education. Hanson prioritised national security, domestic locations and international politics. Di Natale prioritised health and emergency services, environment and children, young people and education. Palmer prioritised the economy, international politics and politicians. McCormack prioritised domestic locations, infrastructure and the economy.

Table 6.2*Most frequently discussed topics per party leader*

Rank	Morrison	Shorten	Hanson	Di Natale	Palmer	McCormack
1st	Economy	Economy	National Security	Health and Emergency Services	Economy	Domestic Locations
2nd	Domestic Locations	Health and Emergency Services	Domestic Locations	Environment	International politics	Infrastructure
3rd	Family and Politicians*	Children, Young People and Education	International politics	Children, Young People and Education	Politicians	Economy

* Family (n=23) and politicians (n=23) were equal third for Scott Morrison

The total summation of the frequency of these topics also yielded notable results. Often posts would discuss multiple topics at once, especially content such as speeches at press conferences or rallies. Summarising the total count of these topic expressions from each candidate provides an account of how saturated their content was. Some politicians made more frequent expressions of these issues than others (see Table 6.3). Morrison ($n=311$) demonstrated the most abundant use of these topics. Hanson ($n=220$) and McCormack ($n=234$) had close results. Shorten ($n=187$) and Di Natale ($n=184$) had fewer results and were also within a close range to each other. Palmer's ($n=51$) topic frequency was significantly less than his peers.

Table 6.3

Frequency of topics derived from open coding including mean average between politicians

Categories	Morrison	Shorten	Hanson	Di Natale	Palmer	McCormack	Mean
Aboriginal Australia	1	3	3	3	1	0	1.8
Celebrities	7	1	2	2	1	2	2.5
Children, Young	17	33	7	21	1	18	16.2
People and Education							
Cost of living	1	6	9	2	2	1	3.5
Domestic locations	36	9	24	8	3	73	25.5
Economy	68	50	21	20	14	32	34.2
Elections	5	3	11	3	0	1	3.8
Employment	14	0	5	3	2	16	6.7
Environment	1	3	8	24	2	0	6.3
Family	23	1	2	3	0	5	5.7
Health and Emergency Services	18	37	10	36	1	10	18.7
Infrastructure	19	11	8	12	1	33	14.0
International politics	12	4	23	4	10	0	8.8
Military and Veterans	12	1	6	0	3	14	6.0
National Security	17	1	36	19	2	5	13.3
Natural disasters	8	0	9	3	0	0	3.3
Politicians	23	6	19	17	5	17	14.5
Retirees and the aging	13	14	2	0	0	3	5.3
Sport	13	0	7	1	3	2	4.3
Women	3	4	8	3	0	2	3.3
Total	311	187	220	184	51	234	

Sharing

The sharing of content was commonplace among pages. For Di Natale ($n=56$) and Hanson ($n=44$), a significant proportion of their content was not original content sourced from their page. For Morrison ($n=11$), Shorten ($n=11$), Palmer ($n=11$) and McCormack ($n=25$) this frequency was lower but still commonplace.

Table 6.4*Frequency of posts from federal party leaders using the share function on Facebook*

	Morrison	Shorten	Hanson	Di Natale	Palmer	McCormack
Shareposts	11	11	44	56	11	25

For Morrison, shareposts came from a number of sources including the Liberal Party’s Facebook page, Malcolm Turnbull’s page, the Cronulla Sharks, and news stories from The Australian, Channel 9 News, The Daily Telegraph and the ABC. For Shorten their shareposts came from the ABC, Herald Sun, The Guardian, 9 News, Sydney Morning Herald, SBS, The Daily Telegraph and Labor owned campaign pages. For Hanson the sources of shared posts were extensive and included the One Nation official website, Pauline Hanson’s official website, ABC Brisbane, News.com.au, Newsweek, The Daily Telegraph, Courier Mail, The Australian, The Guardian, Sydney Morning Herald, Mark Latham’s Facebook Page and Daily Mail UK. Like Hanson, Di Natale’s sharing came from a wide range of sources including, The Guardian, Ten Daily, Sydney Morning Herald, the ABC, Australian Financial Review, Canberra Times, a number of Facebook pages from Greens colleagues and The Betoota Advocate. Di Natale also would post videos from question time recording of himself delivering speeches to the floor of parliament. For Palmer, the majority of their shareposts were from the United Australia Party Facebook page, but also there was shared content from Queensland Nickel’s Facebook page – a company owned by Palmer, and a video from YouTube. McCormack’s shared content originated from a variety of sources including FarmOnline.com.au, Infrastructure Magazine, 7 News Wagga, The West, Parkes Champion Post, The Daily Advertiser, QANTAS newsroom and Michael McCormack’s official website.

Acclaim and Criticism

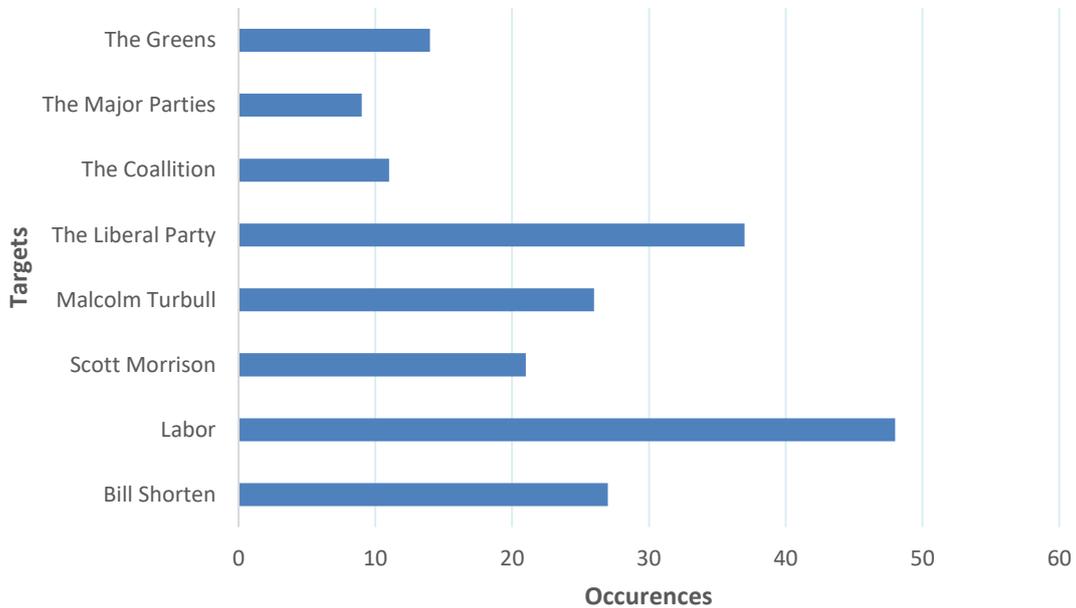
The results of the acclaim and criticism content categories from the randomised sample demonstrated that leader's pages were more frequent in their criticism than their acclaim of others (see Table 6.5).

Table 6.5

Frequency of posts that acclaim or criticise by federal party leaders

	Morrison	Shorten	Hanson	Di Natale	Palmer	McCormack
Acclaim	9	5	4	1	3	12
Criticism	19	35	92	68	43	5

Tabulation of that criticism revealed that 41 subjects were targets for criticism, most of which emanated from Hanson and Di Natale. The following graph (see Figure 6.2) shows targets that received criticism on more than 5 occasions. The results indicate that the Labor party ($n=48$) and Liberal party ($n=37$) received the most criticism from the normative sample. Combining the results targeting the Coalition ($n=11$) and the Liberal party produces a result equal to the criticism of the Labor party. This was then followed by their respective party leaders, with Bill Shorten ($n=27$) receiving the most criticism from posts, followed closely by former Liberal leader Malcolm Turnbull ($n=26$) and then replacement leader Scott Morrison ($n=21$).

Figure 6.2*Targets of criticism and its frequency****Memes and Humour***

It was apparent during the initial open coding process that Palmer’s page was making abundant use of memes and humour-based content. This was then revisited upon all pages during the second phase of coding. The final results indicated that among the randomised sample, most party leaders did not use humour or memes stylistically in their content. One exception came from Shorten’s page which did post a video making a reference to his widely publicised “space invader” comment during the leaders’ debates.

Table 6.6*Frequency of Facebook posts that use humour or memes by federal party leaders*

	Morrison	Shorten	Hanson	Di Natale	Palmer	McCormack
Memes	0	0	0	0	41	0
Humour	0	1	0	0	20	0

Discussion

In considering what themes and communication styles were apparent in the content of leaders' Facebook posts in the lead up to the election (RQ5), it is clear that a number of key topics and patterns of communication practice were evident in the leaders' posts. These include the economy, young people and education, locations across Australia, infrastructure and health and emergency services. It was also evident that the use of shared content was also a common feature in posts and that criticism of other politicians and parties was far more frequent than acclaim. Memes and humorous content were generally rare from party leaders' pages, except Palmer for whom it was a present in the majority of the posts from their page.

The analysis of topics discussed by politicians provides insight into what issues the leaders prioritised during the timeframe. Drawing upon that analysis, it is evident that the economy was the foremost prominent issue between politicians. Not only was it the most commonly occurring, but it was also the issue most likely to be apparent among key agendas from each politician. For Morrison and Shorten it significantly outclassed the other topics for discussion, but it was also a key issue for Palmer and McCormack. Domestic locations were also frequently discussed by party leaders. While it was a key issue for Morrison, Hanson and McCormack, its ranking as a key issue is somewhat overrepresented as a result of the extensive use of this appeal by McCormack. Indeed, this appeared to be far less of a priority for Shorten, Di Natale and Palmer. Results which calculated the combined frequency of all these topic categories are also telling. While these results do not encompass every idea discussed by these politicians, it does provide some insight into how topic rich their content was. It would appear that Morrison's posts were much denser in the number of topics it covers than that of his peers. Conversely, Palmer's content was considerably much lighter on these matters. Instead, Palmer's page invested heavily in the use of memes and humorous content to communicate. This demarcates a clear distinction in the approach to using the

Facebook platform to engage with users for Palmer. While the other party leaders seemed to be working within a shared collection of key topics, Palmer's page distinguishes itself from that of his peers by focusing on memes and internet humour.

The results of the open coding of topics also affirm ideological differences between party leaders, manifested in their posts on Facebook. Morrison and McCormack are respective leaders of the Liberal and National party coalition, parties which both are known to be socially conservative-leaning with a pro-business focus. The Nationals distinguish themselves from the Liberal party with a stronger emphasis on farmers and regional communities. By comparison, Labor and the Greens, of which Shorten and Di Natale are the respective leaders, are seen as the more socially and economically progressive parties. The Greens publicly distinguish themselves from Labor with a greater emphasis on environmental issues and also having a critical stance on both major parties. The key issues presented on their Pages affirm these differences but also offer additional insights. Both Morrison and McCormack emphasised the economy, but it's noteworthy that Morrison shared a regional focus with McCormack via an emphasis on domestic locations in their posts. Shorten and Di Natale shared health and emergency services alongside children, young people and education as key issues.

Analysis of the frequency of criticism and acclaim generated notable results regarding their distribution and targets. The results identify that party leaders' pages were considerably more likely to criticise others than to show acclaim. Each politician demonstrated a ratio of greater criticism than acclaim, with the exception of McCormack. Indeed, the frequency by which criticism was displayed by politicians Hanson and Di Natale, one could argue that it is typical of their posting style. Previous studies of US presidential candidates using social media had found opposing balances of acclaim and criticism for Barack Obama and Mitt Romney (Borah, 2016). In this context, Borah (2016, p. 334) argues that purpose, focus and

emotional appeals are “fundamental to understanding campaign strategies”. Their understanding of criticism of others identifies it as a sign of how aggressive their campaigning is. Within this context, the results of this study suggest that most party leaders were aggressive in their approach to criticism and acclaim, with Di Natale and Hanson at the forefront of that aggression. McCormack was the only politician to be identified taking a more positive approach. Examining the targets of that criticism also identified that the ALP and the LNP were more likely to be the targets of criticism than any specific party leader. Combining the results which showed the Coalition and the Liberal party as targets of criticism, would indicate that both the ALP and LNP received similar amounts of criticism from party leaders and that Bill Shorten, Malcolm Turnbull and Scott Morrison also received similar levels of criticism. Considering party leadership of the LNP passed from Malcolm Turnbull to Scott Morrison during the period sampled, the close margin of criticism between major party leaders might suggest that Morrison may have become the target of concentrated criticism closer to the election date. Future studies could consider comparing timestamps against instances of criticism to verify this. Further to this point, collectively Morrison and Turnbull received more criticism than Shorten and The Coalition and the Liberals cumulatively received more criticism than Labor. This diffusion of criticism marks a significant difference in the way that both major parties were targeted by criticism. Even from the position of opposition, Shorten and ALP were a larger or more cohesive target for party leaders than Morrison and the LNP.

Results of the open coding reveal that the sharing of content was commonplace among the normative sample. Politicians would frequently post content such as news stories, media releases and commentary from other Facebook pages, news sites and official webpages from respective politicians and parties. Analysis of the posts shared by politicians found that news media were the most commonly used content for shareposts. For Di Natale shareposts

constituted more than half of their posts and for Hanson, it was approaching half. For the remaining leaders, sharing was common but less frequent than that of Di Natale and Hanson. While most politicians relied on news sources for their sharing, Palmer deviates from this trend. Instead, when sharing content, Palmer's page almost exclusively republished content from their official United Australia Party Facebook page. This result reaffirms and adds further contextual dimension to the notion of a hybridised media system (Chadwick, 2013; Chadwick, Dennis, & Smith, 2015) as the sharing of news stories by politicians on their pages means that politicians are not only the subject of news, but they are active in the dissemination of the news online. Future studies may also want to consider the role of this phenomenon within the Agenda Setting (McCombs & Shaw, 1972) and Agenda Building (Tedesco, 2011) frameworks. With this kind of data, it would be possible to identify what kinds of stories and sources politicians prefer to promote and which are ignored. Finally, this also connects to a broader discussion of populism and social media. Engesser et al argue that "populists may turn towards social media in order to circumvent the media institutions and journalistic gatekeepers" (Engesser et al., 2017, p. 1113). But the sharing of news stories on social media instead affords politicians the opportunity to co-opt the news agenda.

The use of memes and humorous content in posts by leaders offers another point of difference in terms of style. The results of the open coding observed that memes and humorous content were nearly non-existent among the randomised sample, with the exception of Palmer's page. When excluding Palmer's results, only one instance was observed from Di Natale of humour and no instances of memes. Palmer by comparison made the use of memes and humorous content a distinct feature of their posting style. While Palmer has referred to his unorthodox posting style as "poetry" (Wright, 2017) it also demonstrates a style of posting in line with notions of everyday politics on social media (Highfield, 2017).

Among the many outlier qualities of Palmer's page, this abundant use of memes and web humour is perhaps the most prominent.

It is clear from the discussion of the open coding that a number of key themes and communication styles were evident in the post made by the party leaders. First, the economy was the most discussed topic between politicians and was a primary focus for the major party leaders. Second, criticism of other politicians and parties was far more commonplace than any acclaim. Third, the use of Facebook's sharing function was widespread between candidates but also a prominent feature of Hanson and Di Natale's style. Finally, humour and memes were uncommon with the exception of Palmer of whom it was a clear and distinct feature of their approach to posting.

Chapter 7 – Conclusions

The first two studies presented in this thesis addressed questions regarding the prevalence of populist and authenticity appeals from party leaders in the lead up to the 2019 Australian federal election. The results demonstrated that these categories of appeals were widespread but varied in frequency. The fragmented expression of populism online seen in European political spheres is also seen in Australia. Authenticity, the currency of populism (Fieschi, 2019), was observed demonstrating that traditional media logics for negotiating meaning with audiences was also on display. Furthermore, these categories of appeals differed in the levels of engagement they received. While both populist ideas and mediations of authenticity were present, engagement was higher for authenticity appeals than it was for populism, relative to its supply. This result suggests that the performative aspects of populism were more engaging than the actual ideas of populism, at least to an audience of Facebook users.

Further contextual information was provided in the third study by using open coding to identify key themes and styles. These results found that issues such as the economy, domestic locations, and health and emergency services were more commonly discussed among the supply side communication of politicians, on average, than most of the populist or authenticity appeals. The use of shared content and the criticism of others were also prevalent among politicians. This suggests that while populist and authenticity appeals were present, they were not the dominant features of the political communication from party leaders on Facebook at that time.

So, what does this mean for Australia and its deliberative democracy? In the lead up to the 2019 election, it would seem, that matters relating to policy still remained at the fore on Facebook. Recognising the issues that populism poses to democratic communication

(Waisbord, 2018), its presence on Facebook from party leaders ahead of the election was notable but far from ubiquitous. Indeed, user engagement with the populist appeals identified were generally lower than what was supplied. By comparison, some authenticity appeals, but not all, were in abundant supply. Comparisons with supply-side and high engagement posts saw a slight increase, the inverse of which was seen for populist ideation. This finding is significant. While the framework for analysis to identify populist rhetoric in this thesis is aligned with notions of ideation populism (Mudde, 2017), the framework for identifying authenticity is more closely aligned with socio-cultural performative definitions of populism (Ostiguy, 2017). This raises further questions about how scholars understand and identify populism, for instance, is one more accurate than the other when it comes to online content? It also raises questions regarding what appetite users on Facebook might have for the performance of populism versus populist ideas. The results presented in this study are still explorative and further refinement of the method of analysis may allow for a more granular understanding of this phenomenon.

On the Leaders

In the summation of this study, it is worth in short, giving final consideration of the findings as they relate to the specific leaders: Morrison, Shorten, Hanson, Di Natale, Palmer and McCormack. Profiles emerge from the three studies regarding the shape and form of the leaders' individual approaches to using Facebook during this time.

Scott Morrison's content distinguished him from his peers by making family one of the key themes in his campaign alongside the economy, domestic locations, and photo ops with other politicians (see Table 6.3). His content was also more topic-rich than that of his peers with a greater density of issues among his posts than that of his peers. Like his fellow Coalition leader Michael McCormack, his posts were significantly less critical of politicians and parties and had a more positive emphasis than that of his peers (see Table 6.6). When it

came to appeals to authenticity, Morrison was often a frontrunner among content categories. His posts made more frequent use of spontaneity, immediacy, confessions and ordinariness appeals than most of his peers. This represents the broadest and most prolific presence of authenticity appeals between candidates. By comparison, Morrison was typically less likely to manifest populist ideation in his posts than his peers. While he did make frequent appeals advocating for the people, and like McCormack was a group leader for appeals invoking the heartland, appeals in other populist categories were either quite low or non-existent.

Bill Shorten's Facebook content demonstrated some overt similarities and differences between that of Morrison and his peers. Like Morrison, Shorten made the economy the primary topic of his posts, but distinguished himself by placing a greater emphasis than Morrison on health and young people. Shorten's tone was more critical than Morrissions and less likely to provide praise, although not on the scale of Hanson, Di Natale or Palmer. Shorten and the Labor party were also the biggest targets for criticism than that of any other leader or party (see Table 6.7). Shorten was rarely a leader or laggard for authenticity appeals. This could imply that his appeals in this regard were less distinct than that of his peers. This was also true for populist appeals. Notably though, he was the only politician to have a greater representation of attacking the elite among his top engagement posts. This might suggest his attacks on corporate elites was more effective than that of other party leaders.

Pauline Hanson's posts ahead of the 2019 election could be surmised as considerably more pessimistic and critical than that of the LNP and ALP leaders. Hanson prioritised national security, domestic locations and international politics over the economy. A significant proportion of their posts were the original content of other pages, making significant use of Facebook's sharing function to promote news stories; a trend shared with Di Natale (see Table 6.5). Perhaps the most distinguishing feature of her posts was the

frequent use of criticism against others (see Table 6.6). Like Shorten, she was rarely a leader or laggard for authenticity appeals although appeals to ordinariness was less than half of the mean average (see Table 5.5). In terms of populist appeals, Hanson does indeed stand apart from their peers. Hanson was more frequent in their attacks on the elite and ostracising others. Indeed, Hanson was significantly more frequent in ostracising others, which was an appeal rarely made by her peers.

Richard Di Natale's Facebook posts demonstrated appeals and themes similar to both Shorten and Hanson. Like Shorten, Di Natale emphasised health services and young people among his topics but also included, as one might expect from The Greens leader, the environment (see Table 6.4). Like Hanson, Di Natale's page was also highly critical (see Table 6.6) and the immediate majority of his posts were also shared content (see Table 6.5). Their supply-side communication generally had a lower frequency of authenticity appeals than the majority of his peers. The same was mostly true for populist appeals also, with the exception of attacking the elites and advocating for the people.

One of the recurring observations of this thesis is how different Clive Palmer's use of social media is compared to his contemporaries. Palmer's patterns of use and style differed in a number of significant ways including their pattern of authenticity appeals, the lower richness of their subject matter, the use of memes and humour and the sources of their shared content. The normative results of the authenticity study identified Palmer always at the higher or lower end of appeals, never among the middle. The results of the open coding also revealed that Palmer's posts were significantly less topic rich (see Table 6.3). Instead of consistently discussing key issues such as the economy, education or health, Palmer instead relied more on entertainment values. His prolific use of memes and humour to engage with users was completely counter to trends observed among party leaders. Finally, while Palmer's peers used content sharing to promote news stories, he instead would prefer content from the

United Australia Party's official Facebook page. These results indicate the Palmer's strategic approach to social media during the period was markedly different in the subject and style of their content – reaffirming his well-curated position as a political outsider.

Michael McCormack's Facebook posts are distinguished from the other voices by offering a more positive tone. McCormack was the only party leader to offer less criticism than acclaim on their Page (see Table 6.6). Their posts were also unique in the frequency by which they emphasised specific domestic locations. As the deputy leader of the government and as a regional voice in parliament this may well be an appeal to voters outside of the metropolitan areas. Like Morrison, Shorten and Palmer he also emphasised the economy, but more uniquely his posts emphasised the infrastructure projects (see Tables 6.3, 6.4). McCormack's authenticity appeals demonstrated a strong emphasis on predictability and immediacy. His page made significantly fewer populist appeals than his peers with the only exception of invoking the heartland by which he was the category lead.

In summary, we observe a range of approaches to supply side communication coming from these party leaders. With Morrison, we observe a politician balancing both a strong emphasis on mediated authenticity appeals and content that emphasises issues at a greater density than his peers. With Shorten, we can observe a near equivalent emphasis on the economy, but also a great emphasis on public services and greater advocacy for *the people*. Hanson and Di Natale both provided significantly more critical voices to Facebook than that of their peers but were still divergent on the specific issues they raise. These far-right and far-left voices also shared significantly more content from other sources, for the most part news stories. This observation may benefit from further inquiry in future studies. With Palmer we see a politician who is consistently an outlier in how they approach the discussion of issues and the style of their appeals. With McCormack we can observe a more positive and less

intense communication style. One that emphasises regional locations and consistently invoking the heartland.

Limitations

With any quantitative study, it is important to identify the limits of using numeral data to represent information and draw inferences from it. While it isn't necessary at this moment in the thesis to draw out epistemological debates about the validity of qualitative and quantitative data, it is still worth reflecting on the limitations a quantitative study like this creates. This study examines a large arrangement of rhetorical features and tabulates them using a coding schema. Such a method is ideal when examining posts from a population as large as the one presented in this study (Riff et al., 2019, p. 29). While this can allow the researcher to see this subject area from a larger macro level lens, it also is examining features of Facebook posts that are often detail-rich and context dependent. With this in mind, it is necessary to recognise that with comparative analysis of quantitative data, such as what has been presented in this study, there are limitations to the inferences that can be made. This study recognises that populist and authenticity appeals were present in these posts alongside a large range of other issues such as the economy and infrastructure. Drawing inferences based upon the frequency of these appeals is dependent on the manner in which we choose to dissect specific content categories. For instance, the content category children, young people and education could also have been presented as three distinct categories. Conversely, the economy could also have been amalgamated with cost of living and employment. Furthermore, similar arguments could be made for authenticity and populism analytical frameworks employed in this study. As such it is important that the settings of the research instrument used, like any method, are going to affect the interpretation of the results. To overcome some of the detail loss that can come with quantitative content analysis, brief qualitative descriptions with examples were provided in the body of this research.

Further study could also be undertaken to address some of the key limitations of this thesis, specifically regarding the frameworks used. Mediated Authenticity has demonstrated its usefulness in interpreting the leaders' posts as a "currency in the communicative relation between producers and audiences", but further refinement of this framework may be necessary to improve its suitability for larger quantitative studies such as this. The prevalence of *predictability* among the authenticity appeals was overt and a more granular approach to this content category may be preferable. It is the opinion of this researcher that the definition provided by Enli (2014, p. 136-137) and used in the codebook (see Appendix B) for this thesis are less precise than the other six definitions. A refinement between the predictability of the actors and predictability across the medium may allow for clearer identification of trends. This could be especially helpful for ascertaining intercoder reliability in larger studies that require multiple coders. Further exploration of the relationship between authenticity and populism is also worth considering. While Engesser et al (2017) theorise populism, as a constellation of ideas, Enli's (2014) mediated authenticity appears to be situated in a performative space akin to socio-cultural (Ostiguy, 2017) theorisations of populism. Scholars wishing to observe performative populism on social media may find Enli's theorisation of authenticity useful. Finally, a notable absence within this thesis is the comparison of randomised samples with high engagement samples among open coded results. Limitations of time and resourcing meant that such further analysis wasn't possible, but a larger research team may well be able to address such a gap.

Future Directions

At the time of writing this thesis, the 2022 Australian federal election campaign is now underway. Scott Morrison and Pauline Hanson are still the leaders of their respective parties, while the other four leaders from this study are now either retired or have returned to party rank and file. Future studies may want to consider if the themes, communication styles

and appeals from 2019 remain the same. Revisiting these methods for the post-pandemic electoral landscape could offer new insight into the evolution of populist and authenticity appeals in Australian political discourse. Is populism growing or subsiding on Facebook? Is the UAP's new leader, Craig Kelly, also using memes? Are users still more engaged with authenticity than populist appeals? Adopting the framework from the open coding could also reveal how key issues presented ahead of the 2019 election have changed in the years since.

Questions also remain about the broader impact of platforms such as Facebook on elections in Australia. In the months after the 2019 federal election, the Parliament of Victoria held the *Inquiry into the impact of Social Media on Elections and Electoral Administration*. The tabled final report identified several benefits of social media use for elections including the opportunity to respond to voters and keeping voters informed (Parliament of Victoria Electoral Matters Committee, 2021). Alongside its benefits, it also identified numerous structural problems with social media, one of which included the amplifying of sensationalist content. While the rise and influence of populism and its relationships to social media are still up for debate, studies such as this thesis should be repeated and refined to continue to monitor how Australia's politicians are using these platforms. Should Australian political discourse journey too far in the direction of populism's "politics of the gut" (Fieschi, 2019, p. 40) it may have serious implications for the efficacy of the nation's democratic process.

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Appendix A – Facebook Pages of the 46th Australian Parliament: House of Representatives

Accurate as of 28/04/2022

Parliamentarian	Facebook Page URL
Hon Anthony Albanese MP	https://www.facebook.com/AlboMP
Mr John Alexander OAM	https://www.facebook.com/JohnAlexanderMP
Dr Katie Allen MP	https://www.facebook.com/KatieAllenMP
Dr Anne Aly MP	https://www.facebook.com/anneazzaaly
Hon Karen Andrews MP	https://www.facebook.com/KarenAndrewsMP
Hon Kevin Andrews MP	https://www.facebook.com/kevinandrewsmp
Mrs Bridget Archer MP	https://www.facebook.com/BridgetArcherMP
Mr Adam Bandt MP	https://www.facebook.com/Adam.Bandt.MP
Ms Angie Bell MP	https://www.facebook.com/angiebell.mp
Ms Sharon Bird MP	https://www.facebook.com/sharon.bird.mp
Hon Chris Bowen MP	https://www.facebook.com/chrisbowenmp
Mr Russell Broadbent MP	https://www.facebook.com/russell.broadbent.94
Hon Scott Buchholz MP	https://www.facebook.com/ScottBuchholzMP
Hon Tony Burke MP	https://www.facebook.com/tony.burke.mp
Hon Linda Burney MP	https://www.facebook.com/LindaBurneyMP
Mr Josh Burns MP	https://www.facebook.com/joshiburnsmp
Hon Mark Butler MP	https://www.facebook.com/MarkButlerMP
Ms Terri Butler MP	https://www.facebook.com/butler4griffith
Hon Anthony Byrne MP	https://www.facebook.com/anthonybyrne
Dr Jim Chalmers MP	https://www.facebook.com/jim4rankin
Mr Nick Champion	https://www.facebook.com/NickChampionLaborTaylor
Hon Darren Chester MP	https://www.facebook.com/darrenchestermp
Ms Lisa Chesters MP	https://www.facebook.com/LisaChestersBendigo
Mr George Christensen	https://www.facebook.com/gchristensenmp
Hon Jason Clare MP	https://www.facebook.com/JasonClareMP
Ms Sharon Claydon MP	https://www.facebook.com/SharonClaydonforNewcastle
Ms Libby Coker MP	https://www.facebook.com/libbycokermp
Hon David Coleman MP	https://www.facebook.com/davidcoleman4banks
Hon Julie Collins MP	https://www.facebook.com/juliecollinsmp
Mr Pat Conaghan MP	https://www.facebook.com/PatConaghanNats
Mr Vince Connelly	https://www.facebook.com/vinceconnellymp
Mr Pat Conroy MP	https://www.facebook.com/PatConroyMP
Hon Mark Coulton MP	https://www.facebook.com/mark.coulton.1
Mr Milton Dick MP	https://www.facebook.com/MiltonDickMP
Hon Mark Dreyfus QC, MP	https://www.facebook.com/mark.dreyfus.mp
Hon Damian Drum	https://www.facebook.com/damiandrummp
Hon Peter Dutton MP	https://www.facebook.com/peterduttonmp
Hon Justine Elliot MP	https://www.facebook.com/JustineElliotMP
Hon Warren Entsch MP	https://www.facebook.com/WarrenEntschMP
Hon Trevor Evans MP	https://www.facebook.com/trevorevansbne
Mr Jason Falinski MP	https://www.facebook.com/JasonFalinskiMP
Hon Joel Fitzgibbon MP	https://www.facebook.com/JoelFitzgibbonMP
Hon Paul Fletcher MP	https://www.facebook.com/paulfletchermp
Nicolle Flint MP	https://www.facebook.com/NicolleFlintLiberal
Dr Mike Freeland MP	https://www.facebook.com/MikeFreelandMacarthur
Hon Josh Frydenberg MP	https://www.facebook.com/JoshFrydenbergMP
Hon Andrew Gee MP	https://www.facebook.com/andrewgeecalare
Mr Steve Georganas MP	https://www.facebook.com/memberforhindmarsh
Mr Andrew Giles MP	https://www.facebook.com/AndrewGilesScullin
Hon Dr David Gillespie MP	https://www.facebook.com/DavidGillespieMP
Mr Ian Goodenough MP	https://www.facebook.com/IanGoodenoughMP
Mr Patrick Gorman MP	https://www.facebook.com/PatrickGormanMP
Mr Luke Gosling OAM, MP	https://www.facebook.com/luke.j.gosling
Dr Helen Haines MP	https://www.facebook.com/helenhainesindi
Mr Garth Hamilton MP	https://www.facebook.com/GarthHamiltonLNP
Ms Celia Hammond MP	https://www.facebook.com/CeliaHammondMP
Hon Andrew Hastie MP	https://www.facebook.com/hastieandrew
Hon Alex Hawke MP	https://www.facebook.com/alex.hawke.mp
Mr Julian Hill MP	https://www.facebook.com/JulianHillMP
Hon Kevin Hogan MP	https://www.facebook.com/KevinHoganMP
Hon Luke Howarth MP	https://www.facebook.com/LukeHowarthMP

Hon Greg Hunt MP	https://www.facebook.com/greg.hunt.mp
Hon Ed Husic MP	https://www.facebook.com/ehusic
Hon Steve Irons	https://www.facebook.com/SteveIronsMP
Mr Stephen Jones MP	https://www.facebook.com/SJonesMP
Hon Barnaby Joyce MP	https://www.facebook.com/BarnabyJoyceMP
Hon Bob Katter MP	https://www.facebook.com/bobkattermp
Ms Ged Kearney MP	https://www.facebook.com/GedKearneyLabor
Mr Craig Kelly MP	https://www.facebook.com/CraigKellyMP
Mr Matt Keogh MP	https://www.facebook.com/KeoghMatthew
Mr Peter Khalil MP	https://www.facebook.com/PeterKhalilMP
Hon Catherine King MP	https://www.facebook.com/CatherineKingMP
Ms Madeleine King MP	https://www.facebook.com/madeleinekingmp
Mr Andrew Laming	https://www.facebook.com/lamingmp
Hon Michelle Landry MP	https://www.facebook.com/MichelleLandryMP
Mr Julian Leaser MP	https://www.facebook.com/JulianLeaserMP
Hon Dr Andrew Leigh MP	https://www.facebook.com/AndrewLeighMP
Hon Sussan Ley MP	https://www.facebook.com/SussanLeyMP
Hon David Littleproud MP	https://www.facebook.com/david.littleproud.1
Ms Gladys Liu MP	https://www.facebook.com/GladysLiuForChisholm
Hon Nola Marino MP	https://www.facebook.com/nola.marino.mp
Hon Richard Marles MP	https://www.facebook.com/richardmarlesmp
Dr Fiona Martin MP	https://www.facebook.com/FionaMartinmp
Ms Kristy McBain MP	https://www.facebook.com/kristymcbainlabor
Ms Emma McBride MP	https://www.facebook.com/mcbrideemma
Hon Michael McCormack MP	https://www.facebook.com/MichaelMcCormackMP
Mrs Melissa McIntosh MP	https://www.facebook.com/MelissaMcIntoshMP
Mr Brian Mitchell MP	https://www.facebook.com/brianmitchellforlyons2016
Mr Rob Mitchell MP	https://www.facebook.com/RobMitchellMP
Hon Scott Morrison MP	https://www.facebook.com/scottmorrisonmp/
Hon Ben Morton MP	https://www.facebook.com/BenMortonAU
Dr Daniel Mulino MP	https://www.facebook.com/daniel.mulino.1
Ms Peta Murphy MP	https://www.facebook.com/PetaMurphyDunkley
Hon Shayne Neumann MP	https://www.facebook.com/shayne.neumann
Mr Ted O'Brien MP	https://www.facebook.com/TedOBrienMP
Mr Llew O'Brien MP	https://www.facebook.com/llewobrienLNP
Hon Brendan O'Connor MP	https://www.facebook.com/BrendanOConnorMP
Mr Ken O'Dowd MP	https://www.facebook.com/kodowdmpflynn
Ms Clare O'Neil MP	https://www.facebook.com/ClareforHotham
Ms Julie Owens MP	https://www.facebook.com/JulieOwensMP
Mr Tony Pasin MP	https://www.facebook.com/TonyPasinMP
Ms Alicia Payne MP	https://www.facebook.com/AliciaPayneforCanberra
Mr Gavin Pearce MP	https://www.facebook.com/gavinpearcebraddon
Mr Graham Perrett MP	https://www.facebook.com/GrahamPerrettMp
Mrs Fiona Phillips MP	https://www.facebook.com/fionaphillipsforgilmore
Hon Keith Pitt MP	https://www.facebook.com/KeithPittMP
Hon Tanya Plibersek MP	https://www.facebook.com/tanya.plibersek
Hon Christian Porter	https://www.facebook.com/christianportermp
Hon Melissa Price MP	https://www.facebook.com/MelissaPriceDurack
Mr Rowan Ramsey MP	https://www.facebook.com/RowanRamseyMP
Hon Amanda Rishworth MP	https://www.facebook.com/rishworth
Hon Stuart Robert MP	https://www.facebook.com/sturobertmp
Ms Michelle Rowland MP	https://www.facebook.com/mrowlandmp
Ms Joanne Ryan MP	https://www.facebook.com/JoanneRyanLalor
Ms Rebekha Sharkie MP	https://www.facebook.com/makemayomatter
Mr Dave Sharma MP	https://www.facebook.com/davesharmamp
Hon Bill Shorten MP	https://www.facebook.com/BillShorten
Mr Julian Simmonds MP	https://www.facebook.com/JulianSimmondsMP
Mr David Smith MP	https://www.facebook.com/davesmithmp
Hon Tony Smith	https://www.facebook.com/tonysmithmp
Hon Warren Snowdon	https://www.facebook.com/warren.snowdon.mp
Ms Anne Stanley MP	https://www.facebook.com/anne.stanley.werriwa
Ms Zali Steggall OAM, MP	https://www.facebook.com/Zali4Warringah
Mr James Stevens MP	https://www.facebook.com/JamesStevensSturt
Hon Michael Sukkar MP	https://www.facebook.com/Michael.Sukkar.MP
Ms Meryl Swanson MP	https://www.facebook.com/MerylSwanson
Hon Angus Taylor MP	https://www.facebook.com/Angustaylor4hume
Hon Dan Tehan MP	https://www.facebook.com/DanTehanWannon
Ms Susan Templeman MP	https://www.facebook.com/susan.templeman
Hon Matt Thistlethwaite MP	https://www.facebook.com/ThistlethwaiteM

POPULAR POLITICS // AUTHENTIC AUSTRALIANS

Mr Phillip Thompson OAM, MP	https://www.facebook.com/PhillipThompsonOAM
Ms Kate Thwaites MP	https://www.facebook.com/KateThwaitesMP
Hon Alan Tudge MP	https://www.facebook.com/alantudgemp
Ms Maria Vamvakinou MP	https://www.facebook.com/maria.vamvakinoump
Mr Bert van Manen MP	https://www.facebook.com/bertvanmanen.page
Mr Ross Vasta MP	https://www.facebook.com/rossvastamp
Hon Andrew Wallace MP	https://www.facebook.com/wallace4fisher
Mr Tim Watts MP	https://www.facebook.com/TimWattsGellibrand
Dr Anne Webster MP	https://www.facebook.com/AnneWebster.Nationals
Ms Anika Wells MP	https://www.facebook.com/AnikaWellsMP
Mrs Lucy Wicks MP	https://www.facebook.com/LucyWicksMP
Mr Andrew Wilkie MP	https://www.facebook.com/andrewwilkiemp
Mr Josh Wilson MP	https://www.facebook.com/josh4fremantle
Mr Rick Wilson MP	https://www.facebook.com/RickWilsonMP
Hon Tim Wilson MP	https://www.facebook.com/TimWilsonMP
Hon Jason Wood MP	https://www.facebook.com/JasonWood.update
Hon Ken Wyatt AM, MP	https://www.facebook.com/KenWyattMP
Mr Terry Young MP	https://www.facebook.com/TerryYoungMP
Mr Tony Zappia MP	https://www.facebook.com/tonyzappia.mp
Mr Trent Zimmerman MP	https://www.facebook.com/TrentZimmerman

Appendix B – Codebook

Category	Definition	Examples
PO1: Emphasising the sovereignty of the people	‘the speaker refers to the people as the theoretical origin of power in democracy’ and/or ‘the speaker demands more power for the people’(Engesser et al., 2017)	Proclaiming the rights or autonomy of the people Emphasis on sovereignty or constitution
PO2: Advocating for the people	‘The act of advocacy is usually performed by stressing that the populist is a true representative of the people’(Engesser et al., 2017)	References to ‘the people’ or ‘hard-working’ people Claims of putting ‘the people’ or ‘everyday Australians’ first
PO3: Attacking the elite	‘The populist thus attacks, accuses, or blames the elite for the malfunctions and grievances of democracy’ (Engesser et al., 2017)	Criticising political elites Criticising media elites Criticising cultural elites Criticising corporate elites
PO4: Ostracising others	‘Various population segments can be the target of populist resentment, such as immigrants, ethnic minorities, religious groups, criminals, etc.’ (Engesser et al., 2017)	Criticism of minority groups
PO5: Invoking the heartland	‘Populists invoke the image of a virtual location which is occupied by the people, represents the ‘core of the community’, and excludes the ‘marginal or the extreme’’(Engesser et al., 2017)	Emphasising local communities, older voices and memorial history (e.g. the ANZACs)
MA1: Predictability	‘Mediated authenticity is crafted via a consistent use of genre features and conventions for mediated communication. Trustworthiness of mediated content is often evaluated on the basis of previous experiences with the media’(Enli, 2014, p. 136-137)	Obituaries Promo videos Event photography Campaign ads
MA2: Spontaneity	‘Performances are rehearsed, directed and pre-planned to seem improvised and spontaneous. The aim is to come across as personal, engaged and emotionally driven rather than calculated and strategic’(Enli, 2014, p. 137)	Accidental photography Unrehearsed moments with family, friends or colleagues
MA3: Immediacy	‘The immediate is closely related to “liveness” and imparts a sense of togetherness whereby the producers and the audiences are interconnected in a shared “now” in which they construct meaning	Live video Live reacting to events of the day

	and authenticity together’(Enli, 2014, p. 137)	
MA4: Confessions	‘Mediated authenticity is constructed from confession and disclosure of personal secrets or details about oneself that seem plausible because they are recognisable for the audience and resonate with their personal experiences’(Enli, 2014, p. 137)	Personal video with friends or family Recollections of personal or family history
MA5: Ordinariness	‘The more mundane and ordinary a media persona appears to be, the more authentic and representative of “the people” he or she seems. Plainness or ordinariness is seen as authentic because it contradicts the glamorously mediated’(Enli, 2014, p. 137)	Behind the scenes moments Flaunting or owning up to mistakes
MA6: Ambivalence	‘The ambivalent performance and the hesitant revelation of “the truth” seem more authentic in a mediated communication’(Enli, 2014, p. 137)	Self-deprecating humour Low-brow media and humour
MA7: Imperfection	‘The authentic performance or mise-en-scene often requires a degree of imperfection. Even the most perfect and polished scenes need an element of contrast where the illusion of authenticity is created by minor flaw or mistake’(Enli, 2014, p. 137)	Low-resolution images Blurry handheld/mobile video Unflattering photographs

Appendix C – Key events from 2018 to Federal Election Day 2019

The approximate 18 months leading up to the election were a notable period within Australian federal politics. Leadership instability, the departure of long-serving political figures, international tragedy and three leaders' debates preceded the election day.

2018

- 26th January – Australia Day
- 22nd February – Barnaby Joyce resigns as deputy Prime Minister
- 25th February – Michael McCormack is appointed the new deputy Prime Minister
- 21st August – First leadership spill for the Liberal party – Turnbull vs Dutton
- 24th August – Second and final leadership spill for the Liberal party – Malcolm Turnbull resigns and is replaced by Scott Morrison
- 26th August – Julie Bishop, Minister of Foreign Affairs, retires

2019

- 26th January – Australia Day
- 2nd March – Christopher Pyne, Minister of Defence, effectively retires (chose not to contest his seat)
- March 15th – Christchurch shooting
- 10th April – Election is called
- 11th April – Parliament is dissolved
- Leaders' debates with Scott Morrison and Bill Shorten
 - April 29th – First leaders' debate
 - May 3rd – Second leaders' debate
 - May 8th – Third leaders' debate
- May 18th – Day of federal election vote