

## **“None of Us Is an Island”: Toward the Conception of Positive Populism Through the Analysis of Pope Francis’s Twitter Communication**

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In this article, we construct a concept of positive populism in which some negative elements of classical populism are missing, modified, and even replaced by positive counterparts. As an empirical test, we used mixed-methods analysis on 1,057 tweets of Pope Francis to ask whether a very popular religious influencer’s rhetoric on social media could be understood as a manifestation of positive populism. We found that the pontiff’s populism is confined to simple and appealing rhetoric, emotionalization, and some other aspects of populism, but his rhetoric is also different because his communication style goes without enmity and division remains on an abstract level. Our analysis shows that the main features of his communication style are its comprehensibility, emotionally positive nature, and characteristically imperative mood, and that it includes some level of a unifying integrative nature.

*Keywords: populism, Twitter, social media analysis, Pope Francis, positive populism*

Augustine, the great ancient church Father, was one of the first philosophers to recognize the role of rhetoric in telling the truth to people. In his *De Doctrina Christiana* (Augustine, 1996), he argues that rhetorical technics should be conceived as neutral tools that could be used for either evil or good purposes. Manicheans, members of an antique sect, were active in Augustine’s time, and the division between good and evil people was a central tenet of their religion/heresy, and therefore, they can be considered protopopulists in this respect. Manichean ideology and socioreligious practice divided “the elect” from “hearers,” and their rhetoric reflected this divided worldview. Augustine spent nearly a decade as a Manichean and devoted his later life to arguing against heresies, including Manichean division. He did recommend that leaders pursuing the good should use rhetoric, but for Augustine, dividing people from one

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another is not a neutral rhetorical tactic: It is a heretical error that simply cannot turn people to God. For Augustine, on the other hand, populist rhetoric, in his age, could mean a variety of ancient sophism: that the speaker insinuates itself into the people's favor. He realized that, because rhetorically polished communication is effective, speakers of evil will use it without fail; therefore, if speakers of good want to overcome speakers of evil, they have to use it, too. Appealing to the feelings of the people, without devising them and without abandoning the truth, could be considered, albeit anachronistically, a positive populism that is acceptable, even desirable, for a communicator.

But because the opinion of Augustine proved to be a minority report among philosophers, later theoreticians also tend to neglect the possible positive aspects of populist rhetoric. Research on populist communication usually concentrates on the role of populist leaders (Demeter, 2017; Engesser, Ernst, Esser & Büchel, 2017), and most researchers conclude that, with populist communication, something wrong is happening. The typical examples in the literature for populist leaders are Norbert Hofer in Austria, Marine Le Pen in France, Viktor Orban in Hungary, Geert Wilders in the Netherlands, and most of all, Donald Trump in the United States (Engesser, Fawzi, & Larsson, 2017). While ascertaining the conjunction that there is something wrong with populism, researchers of the field make a serious effort to define populism in testable terms and to make distinctions among populist style, populist ideology, and populist strategy. Most researchers admit that populism is a "thin ideology" (Abromeit, 2017; Bracciale & Martella, 2017; Kramer, 2017), but the core of populism's concept is the antagonism between the bad political, cultural, or economic elite and the "good" homogenous people. A substantial body of literature has agreed that populism, whether left or right, embodies division, antagonism, and polarization (Block & Negrine, 2017; de la Torre & Mazzoleni, 2019; Moffitt, 2016; Stavrakakis & Katsambekis, 2014). The distinction among populist style, populist ideology, and populist strategy is, however, a rather important one given that it is not obvious that all actors with populist rhetoric share populist ideology as well. Thus, some researchers tend to refer to populism as merely a communication style (Jagers & Walgrave, 2007) or a political style (Moffitt & Tormey, 2014). On populist style or populist rhetoric, most researchers mean the presence of some key indicators such as emotionalization, instrumental actualization, intimidation, simplification, storytelling, taboo-breaking, and even vulgarism (Bracciale & Martella, 2017). As we can see, there are common features in populist ideology and populist style, but the analytical differentiation between them is rather useful when we investigate a particular dimension without necessarily setting up statements on other aspects of the complex phenomenon usually referred as populism.

We concentrate here on populist style, represented by a charismatic leader (Korkut, 2012; Mudde, 2016), that refers to the simple, emotional, taboo-breaking characteristic of someone's communication style that also includes at least one kind of rhetorical division: typically, antielitism (Bracciale & Martella, 2017; Laclau, 2007). For our empirical analysis, we have chosen the Twitter communication style of Pope Francis, whose "epideictic"—or, in other words, "praise or blame"—rhetoric (Lynch, 2017) could be considered populist, but we could also expect that it will set aside the negative aspects of populism such as hate speech, sarcasm, labeling, and incendiaryism (Gonawela et al., 2018). It is a unique approach because, despite much research that admits the importance of religion as a source of social change (Thomson, Perreault, & Duffy, 2018), the Pope's role in society (Schlag, 2018), or the emotional effects of the Pope's tweets (Ballona, Prado, Torres, & de Almeida, 2015), we do not have an in-depth analysis of papal communication in social

media in terms of populist communication. Hence, our current research will contribute to the literature of populist communication and the literature of religious communication through social media as well.

### **Papal Communication**

The use of such social media sites as Facebook or Twitter is rather common among not just political leaders, but also among many kinds of cultural entrepreneurs given that social media are considered useful tools to keep in touch with people (Bastos & Mercea, 2018). It is not a surprise then that as head of the Catholic Church, the Pope uses social media sites to reach his people and even the uninformed. But the relationship of the Church and mass media did not start with social media sites. It was Pope Pius XI who launched Vatican Radio as early as 1931, and the Popes have become quite active mass media agents on an international scale (Radwan & Pressman, 2018). In 1967, Pope Paul VI inaugurated World Communications Day, which became an annual occasion for the actual head of the Church to reflect on the global issues regarding communication technologies, mass communication events, and the increasing role that communication plays in modern society (Andok, 2018; Roncakova, 2017). Given that the media sphere has radically changed since then, and social media have become the most important channel of communication, it is not surprising that the current Pope of the Catholic Church directly referred to the problems of social media in his latest speech at World Communications Day 2018 (Francis, 2018).

The Pope is in real earnest when emphasizing the role of communication. As a regular Twitter user, he (or his communication team) posts messages under the name Pope Francis @pontifex in English every day to his 17.7 million followers. Because the same content appears in eight languages (Latin, German, Spanish, Portuguese, Polish, Italian, French, and Arabic), it reaches 47.4 million followers. This global audience is comparable to the number of the followers of the best-known populist politicians such as Donald Trump (53 million) or those of other popular international influencers (e.g., Oprah Winfrey: 43 million; Bill Gates: 45.5 million). Caused by his extraordinary popularity, the Pope has been sometimes referred to as a celebrity or a populist leader (Lorusso, 2018). But we have to distinguish two rather different meanings of religious or Christian populism. The first refers to so-called political Christianity in which populist ideologies of the Hungarian Fidesz party (Demeter, 2018), Italy's Lega Nord, or the Austrian Freedom Party (Spencer, 2017) frequently refer to Christianity, but they use Christianity as a powerful tool for identity and, in many cases, nationality, and do not deal with theological or spiritual issues (Marzouki, McDonnell, & Roy, 2016). The way Pope Francis uses Christianity is the direct opposite because, in this case of Christian populism, Christianity is not a tool to acquire political power but a foundational notion from which any political action derives.

Zijderveld (2017) stresses that religious leaders cannot legitimize their authority in the public sphere by referring solely to tradition or religious sources anymore: They have to "become personal brands with their own mythology, central message and media channels, adapted to the styles and symbols of popular culture" (p. 124). However, other authors emphasize the distinction between populist and popular leaders and classify the Pope as a member of the latter category (O'Connell, 2017). The Argentine priest Carlos Maria Galli maintains that although the Pope is populist in the sense that he uses the language of the people, he loves the people of the world, and thus the people say, "I understand this Pope." (O'Connell, 2017). Thus, although it is not unusual to call the Pope or his communication style populist, most authors emphasize his "special kind" of populism. Cherry (2015) describes the Pope's criticism of capitalism and his

affirmation of human dignity and workers as directly populist. Others might consider his populism as left-wing populism given that his rhetoric is inclusive, as opposed to typically European right-wing populism:

Two factors are crucial for understanding these different regional patterns: on the one hand, the way in which populist actors define who belongs to “the people” vis-à-vis “the elite,” and on the other hand, the ideological features that are attached to the particular populist ideology of the actors. (Mudde & Kaltwasser, 2013, p. 148)

Narbona (2016), who investigated the leadership style of the Pope through his Twitter communication, calls him a “transcendent leader” who is charismatic, has a vision, acts as a role model, calls for direct actions, and also tries to develop the transcendent motivation of followers. Most of these characteristics are essential for a populist leader as well. As Zúquete (2008) ascertains, especially left-wing populism “should be understood as a form of political religion characterized by a dynamic relationship between a charismatic leader and a moral community that is invested with a mission of salvation against conspiratorial enemies” (p. 91). Scannone (2016) argues, however, that the Pope’s populism is a “mystical populism” that is antielitist, but in a positive sense because it recognizes a *mística popular* (the spirituality of the people; pp. 130–131); thus, his populism is a mystical populism:

He is a great leader; he is populist in many aspects. He is popular as a celebrity, but he has managed to shape his celebrity, not as mere notoriety: he is a “mystical populism”—a form of identification in which the divine and the earthly dimensions are superimposed. (Lorusso, 2018, p. 62)

Gage (2017) hails Pope Francis for his populist leadership style, and also emphasizes the Pope’s antielitist rhetoric. In short, the current literature on the communication style of Pope Francis frequently raises the issue of populism, but most authors agree that his populism is rather different from ordinary political populism:

If with these traits we find in Pope Francis the very important features of a popular (and maybe populist) leader and global celebrity, we do have to say, however, that he is obviously a celebrity of a particular kind and a populist *sui generis*. (Lorusso, 2018, p. 60)

### **Toward a Deductive Concept of Positive Populism**

If, in accordance with current literature, we suggest that populist communication style or rhetoric does not necessarily include populist ideology (Abromeit, 2017; Bracciale & Martella, 2017; Kramer, 2017), we could agree with a natural conceptualization of populism:

There is a shift in perspective in which populism loses all negative connotations and becomes “colourless,” evolving into a communication strategy for the man on the street that is based on simplicity, straightforwardness and clarity. (Bracciale & Martella, 2017, pp. 1310–1311)

But we could go even further: We could assume that populist rhetoric, which is a simple, clear, and straightforward way of reaching people, could be value-based or even positive. Similar to the positive turn in psychology (Snyder & Lopez, 2007) in which researchers turn to the normal or positive phenomena of human psyche instead of pathologies, we try to define *positive populism* and we test it through the analysis of the Twitter communication patterns of Pope Francis. Positive populism in this sense does not just refer to the special characteristic of the Pope's populism that was earlier called "mystical" or "transcendental" populism (Lorusso, 2018), but it also refers to its positive character.

As mentioned earlier, a comprehensive definition of *populism* is very hard to provide (Arnold, 2018; Laclau, 2005). It does not mean, however, that the term is meaningless or vague because we have at least two ways besides the strict definition when we would like to determine its meaning (Panizza, 2005). The first is what Laclau (2005) proposes: We could consider populism a special logic of making politics. According to Laclau, "All its defining features are exclusively related to a specific mode of articulation—the prevalence of the equivalent over the differential logic—independently of the actual contents that are articulated" (p. 44). In the context of our present research, we could assume that, to be considered populist, the Pope's communication style should contain at least some elements of this equivalential or simplistic logic. The second way of constructing the meaning of populism is a more empirical endeavor, and we have two perspectives here, too. The first is an inductive approach when researchers analyze allegedly populist texts by content analysis and looking for the most frequent linguistic features by which they could characterize populist communication. As a result, researchers get a dictionary of populism with the most typical terms, expressions, and even longer linguistic units (Aslanidis, 2017; Bernhard, Kriesi, & Weber, 2015; Hawkins, 2009). The second perspective is the deductive approach in which researchers use a dictionary-like codebook to try to ascertain whether a given text is populist or not (Hawkins & Kaltwasser, 2018). Thus, researchers start from either the main features of populism or from allegedly populist texts when they want to circumscribe the characteristics of populist communication.

The other term, namely *positive*, is almost as hard to define as populism itself. Fortunately, we have the good practice of positive psychology here, and we argue that we use the term *positive* in the case of positive populism as psychologists use it in the case of positive psychology. Whereas most considerations regarding positive psychology date back at least to William James and Abraham Maslow (Froh, 2004), the founding fathers of the recent version are Seligman and Csikszentmihalyi (2000), who define positive psychology as the study of how human beings prosper in the face of adversity. Seligman and Csikszentmihalyi make a more social definition of positive psychology by stating that "at the group level, it is about the civic virtues and the institutions that move individuals toward better citizenship: responsibility, nurturance, altruism, civility, moderation, tolerance, and work ethic" (p. 5). We see from these definitions that the term *positive* is used in an ideologically saturated way, and it contains mainly moral elements.

After this short discussion regarding the puzzles of defining the terms *populism* and *positive*, we try to approve a possible conceptualization of positive populism. In our conception, positive populism is a rhetoric style that is

1. expressed extensively by a charismatic leader (Korkut, 2012; Mudde, 2016);
2. has at least some features of the populist communication style discussed by the literature, namely
  - a. is prone to irrational demands (Laclau, 2007; Wilkin, 2018),
  - b. is simplistic, homogenizing, and people-centric (Bracciale & Martella, 2017; Laclau, 2005; Moghadam, 2018),
  - c. criticizes liberal principles (Abts & Rummens, 2007; Korkut, 2012),
  - d. has a utopian vision (Fassin, 2018)
  - e. is taboo-breaking (Bracciale & Martella, 2017),
  - f. contains emotionalization (Bracciale & Martella, 2017),
  - g. contains vulgarism (Bracciale & Martella, 2017),
  - h. professionally and extensively uses the media (Block & Negrine, 2017),
  - i. contains blame, an enemy, and anger (Laclau, 2005),
  - j. has a "zeitgeist" vision (Mouffle, 2005), and
  - k. is antagonistic, antielitist, and antiestablishment (Arnold, 2018; Aslanidis, 2017)
3. has at least some positive elements (Seligman & Csikszentmihalyi, 2000) of social virtues such as
  - a. responsibility,
  - b. nurturance,
  - c. altruism,
  - d. tolerance,
  - e. civility, and
  - f. moderation.

We could reasonably suppose that the Pope's communication is an ideal candidate to analyze the possible occurrence of positive populism. Regarding Item 1 of our conception, the Pope is charismatic by definition as the leader of the Catholic Church, which states that all Popes are bearers of Christ's charisma. Of course, Francis's charisma had been stated in not just religious but also in profane context, since, for example, he became the 2013 *TIMES* Person of the Year, and he is called Pope Francis: The People's Pope. Regarding Item 2, we could also suppose that the Pope's tweets include at least some of these features given that he is a representative of a tradition that is irrational in the sense that it is based on faith and not on empirical facts and logical argumentation, is likely to resist many liberal principles as a rather traditional institution, has a utopian vision of mankind, and is definitely people-centered and thus antielitist or antiestablishment. Finally, we could also hypothesize that the Pope's messages contain many positive elements listed in Item 3 because he is globally recognized as not just a religious leader, but as a popular humanist as well (Ruffinatto, 2018).

Accordingly, our research questions ask whether the Pope's communication style could be regarded as positive populism in the above-delineated sense. Our first research question relates to the communication style of the Pope in general:

*RQ1: Which communication style does Pope Francis use on Twitter, and which features characterize this style? Could we apply the operationalization of populist communication rhetoric to his Twitter communication?*

In the next step, we analyze the positive characteristic of the Pope's messages:

*RQ2: What is the relationship between the adoption of a populist communication style and the presence of positive messages?*

Finally, we investigate whether the Pope's communication style could be regarded as positive populist rhetoric:

*RQ3: Which features of positive populism are found in Pope Francis's tweets?*

### **Method**

Our sample consisted of 1,057 tweets posted by Pope Francis from June 2, 2015, to June 6, 2018. The starting point was determined because this was the date when the Pope started to post daily tweets, presumably because of the culmination of the migration crisis. We conducted a mixed-methods analysis of tweets from Pope Francis @pontifex. First, we mined the most frequent verbs, nouns, and adjectives, and, after carefully cleaning the data from universal, meaningless, or too general words (e.g., personal pronouns, conjunctives, and auxiliaries), we contrasted the results with the most frequent words of Donald Trump during his presidential campaign because it was essential to compare our results with another influencer generally considered a populist speaker (Rosefielde, 2017). For the comparison, we measured the emotional character of the most frequent words with different coders. We used dual coding and a three-point numerical rating scale throughout the process (Bernhard et al., 2015) and conducted intercoder reliability tests.

Second, we coded each tweet from the sample individually to identify main themes. The coding process was conducted by two trained coders separately, and we conducted intercoder reliability tests. We also used MAXQDA 12 qualitative data analysis software throughout the analysis for checking the manual coding process and for finding correlations between categories.

Third, we determined the categories that presumably contained populist content and analyzed them according to the populist categories of current literature (simplicity, antagonism, emotionalization, taboo-breaking, vulgarism, blame&enemy&anger, zeitgeist, utopia, criticism of liberal values, and irrationality). We used dual coding and a three-point numerical rating scale (Bernhard et al., 2015) throughout the process and conducted intercoder reliability tests.

Finally, we performed an in-depth analysis of a selection of tweets coded under "guide and community" in which traditional populist content could occur. We used dual coding and a three-point

numerical rating scale (Bernhard et al., 2015) throughout the process and conducted intercoder reliability tests. In this qualitative phase, we ascertained the main features of Pope Francis's rhetoric style in terms of positive populist features. We show typical examples of them in the following section.

### Findings and Discussion

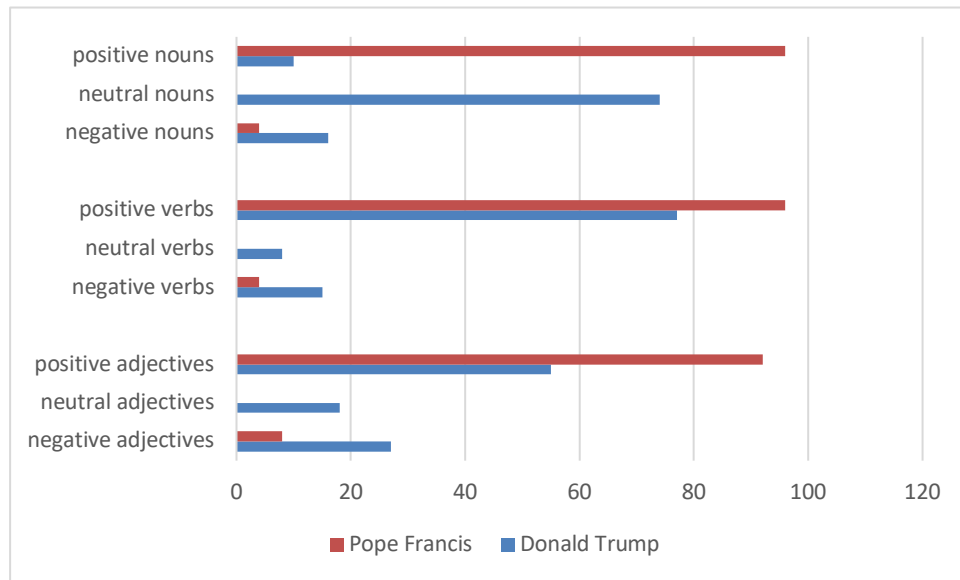
The most frequent words used by the Pope are, almost without exemption, emotionally positive (see Table 1).

**Table 1. The 10 Most Common Words Used by Pope Francis and Donald Trump on Twitter.**

Nouns		Verbs		Adjectives	
Pope Francis	Donald Trump	Pope Francis	Donald Trump	Pope Francis	Donald Trump
God	Hillary	love	thank	holy	great
Jesus	DonaldJTrump	mercy	join	human	crooked
life	Clinton	pray	vote	Christian	new
lord	MAGA	help	make	good	big
Christ	Draintheswamp	live	watch	new	American
world	debate	encounter	win	poor	bad
peace	schedule	work	live	dear	GOP
heart(s)	bigleagetrueth	ask	enjoy	young	safe
hope	America	give	support	close	first
faith	Facebook	care	change	living	national
joy	DonaldTrump	learn	repeal	great	rigged

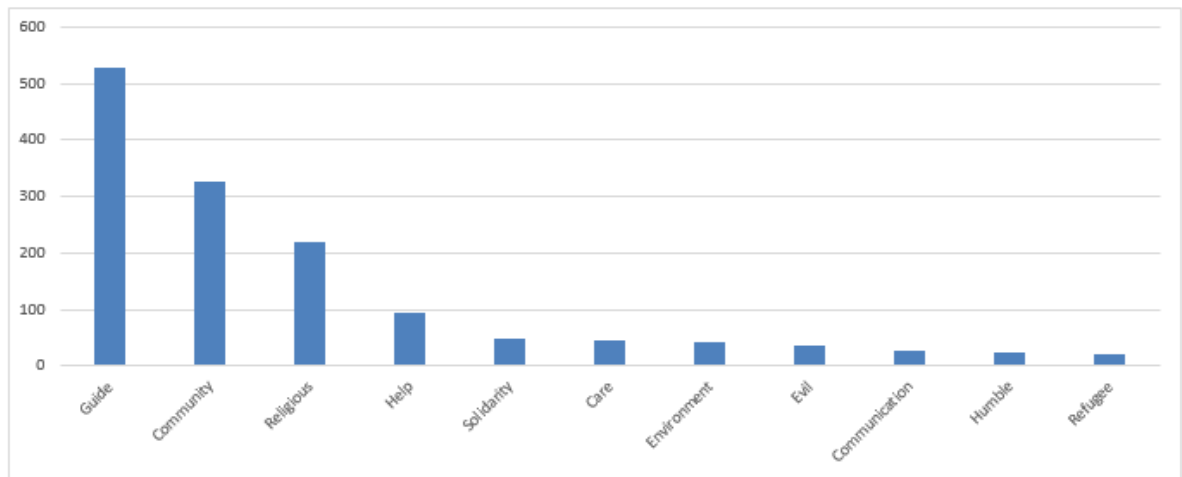
Our coders assessed the individual words as emotionally positive, neutral, or negative (intercoder reliability measured in Krippendorff alpha was between .377 and .785, which shows fair to substantial agreement). They coded only words with at least five occurrences in the full sample. The results show that Pope Francis uses mainly emotionally positive words, with some exceptions such as emotionally negative nouns (e.g., death and suffering), verbs (e.g., suffer and afraid), or adjectives (e.g., poor and evil). On the other hand, Donald Trump uses mainly neutral nouns, and despite the emotionally positive characteristic of his verb and adjective usage, the amount of emotionally negative words is far greater than that of Pope Francis (see Figure 1). We found the most significant differences in the case of the nouns when, as opposed to the obviously positive vocabulary of Pope Francis, Donald Trump uses mainly neutral and negative terms. The same differences were found, to a lesser extent, in the case of their verb and adjective usage. Because nouns are the objects and/or subjects of assertions, we can summarize these results as, whereas Donald Trump posts about mainly emotionally natural or negative issues, the Pope concentrates almost exclusively on positive topics. This might be the first feature of positive populism.





**Figure 1. The emotional character of the words used by Donald Trump and Pope Francis on Twitter.**

In the second phase of our analysis, we ascertained the main thematic clusters of Pope Francis, which resulted in 10 main categories (see Figure 2). We can also see the thematic correlations in individual tweets.



Code System	Care	Communicator	Community	Environment	Evil	Guide	Help	Humble	Refugee	Religious	Solidarity
Care	0	2	20	3	1	22	2	0	0	0	3
Communication	2	0	10	0	0	10	3	0	0	0	1
Community	20	10	0	12	7	165	33	4	8	1	15
Environment	3	0	12	0	1	19	1	0	1	0	1
Evil	1	0	7	1	0	16	4	0	0	1	0
Guide	22	10	165	19	16	0	40	14	7	2	21
Help	2	3	33	1	4	40	0	4	8	1	7
Humble	0	0	4	0	0	14	4	0	0	1	1
Refugee	0	0	8	1	0	7	8	0	0	0	3
Religious	0	0	1	0	1	2	1	1	0	0	1
Solidarity	3	1	15	1	0	21	7	1	3	1	0

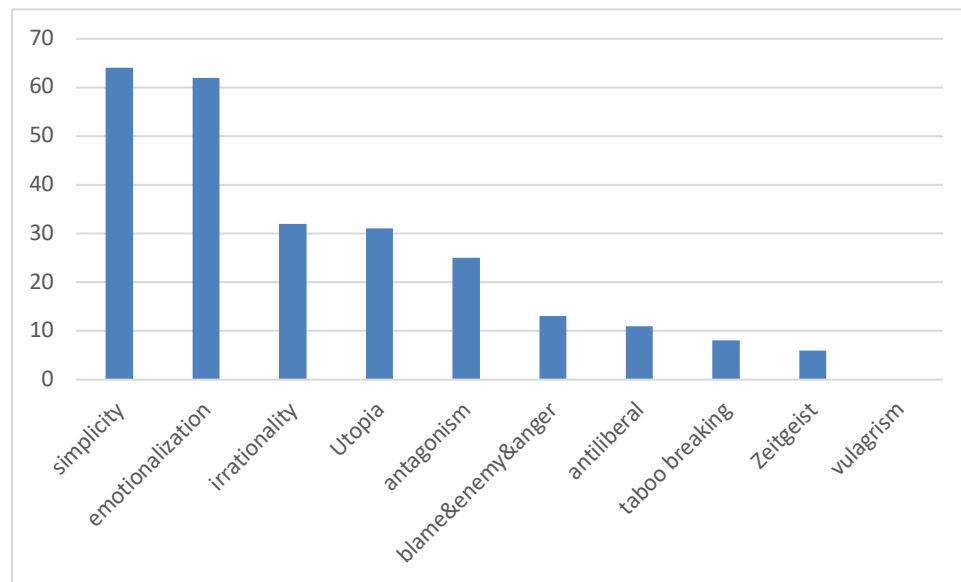
**Figure 2. Frequency of tweets in main thematic clusters and the correlations between them.**

After ascertaining the main clusters, two trained researchers coded a representative pattern ( $n = 150$ ) of the original sample ( $N = 1,057$ ); the reliability test showed sufficient positive agreement ( $\alpha = .563$ ). There were 69 tweets (6% of the total sample) that could not be clearly listed under a specific category. As can be seen in Figure 2, the main thematic cluster is "guide," which contains tweets in which the Pope directly calls on his audience for some action: The Pope's tweets are not typically descriptive but rather imperative messages that ask people to do something. This could be conceived as the second feature of positive populism in that, instead of blaming others or describing negative situations, it concentrates eminently on the action. The second most frequent category is "community," which includes tweets regarding social issues and humankind; this category is not restricted to the messages directed to the Christian community only. It is followed by the category "religion," which contains tweets with eminently religious messages without expressed profane content. The next three categories—help, solidarity, and care—express different features of the same social and human reality. According to our categorization, the help category contains tweets in which the Pope asks for some direct help in an ad hoc and urgent situation

such as migration; the care category refers to more general situations such as taking care of the elderly. The third category, *solidarity*, refers to issues in which the Pope asks for compassion and empathy, as contrasted with hatred or exclusion. Other, less frequent thematic categories are the environment, evil (as the only negative category), the role of communication, the importance of being humble, and the topic of refugees. There were significant correlations between different categories (see Figure 2), from which the most important was the correlation between the guide and community categories (165 instances). This means that the Pope does not just talk about the importance of communities in a modern society, but he positively urges his followers to build and maintain communities. This inspiring tone is characteristic of the Pope's communication style given that the guide category correlates with most other categories (e.g., help, solidarity, care, and environment). Thus, the Pope encourages his followers to actively work for their environment and their brothers and sisters in need.

In the third phase of our analysis, we took the most frequent correlations (guide and community) and tested whether those tweets had populist features. In accordance with current literature on this topic, we set up the following categories: simplicity, antagonism, emotionalization, taboo-breaking, vulgarity, blame&enemy&anger, zeitgeist, utopia, criticism of liberal values, and irrationality. Our trained coders assessed all tweets that had been coded under the categories guide and community ( $n = 166$ ; see the coding protocol and the intercoder reliability measures in Tables A1 and A2 in the Appendix). We had strong intercoder reliability values for all but one category: Because vulgarity was not found in the Pope's messages, we did not consider this category in our analysis.

The most frequent populist features of the Pope's messages are simplicity and emotionalization (around 60%; see Figure 3).



**Figure 3. Presence of different populist categories in the Pope's tweets in percentages ( $n = 166$ ).**

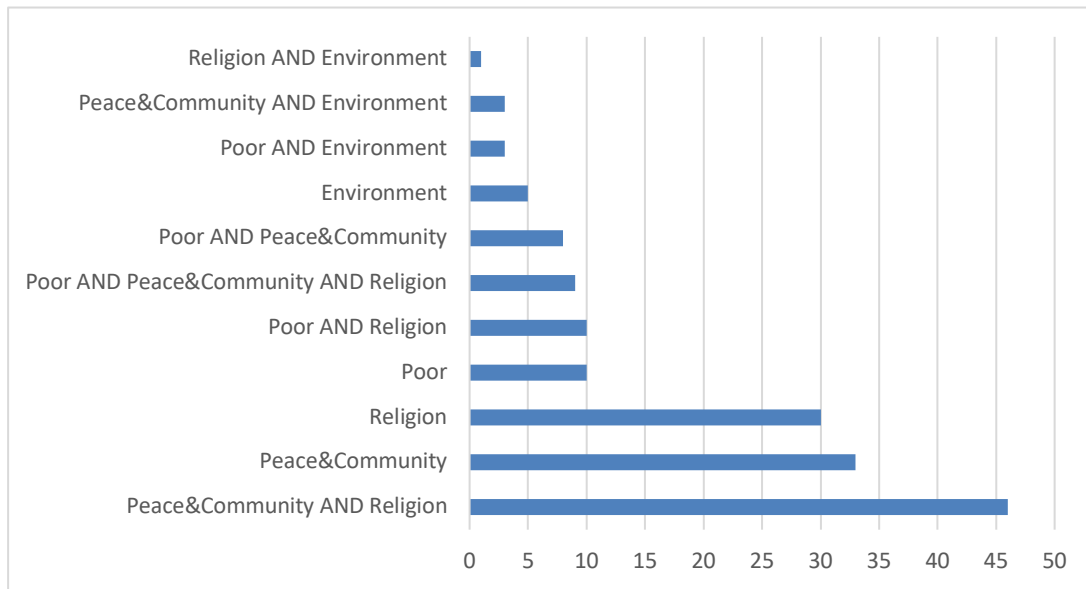
He communicates in a very easy-to-understand way by sending simple or, in some instances, even simplified messages. The emotionally saturated context of his messages is also obvious, but he almost always evokes positive emotions such as love, compassion, joy, or hope. When negative emotions occur, they are in a denier context such as "don't be afraid." The second most characteristic features of his messages are irrationality (32%) and utopia (31%). One could assume that being irrational and utopist might be the result of being religious, but we could also argue that, from the repertoire of Christian ideology, the Pope could select which aspects to concentrate on. For example, it could be possible to concentrate on dystopia instead of utopia. In this case, the Pope would frighten with Hell instead of the promise of Heaven, but Francis chooses utopia by frequently delineating his visions of a world without suffering, hunger, and pain.

We also found a significant amount of messages (25%) that contain some level of antagonism. In this case, antagonism refers to the fight between good and evil, which is a foundational narrative of populist rhetoric. The difference here is that, as opposed to classical populists, the Pope does not name any concrete person, group, or world power as the representative of evil, but he always refers to evil or bad habits or processes. The occurrences of the remaining categories were around 10%. The category blame&enemy&anger comprises messages with a clear picture of an enemy, messages with war rhetoric, or tweets with accusations.

In most cases, however, these accusations are only indirect, for example, speeches against human trafficking or human exploitation. We could assume, however, that in the case of human exploitation, there are exploiters as well even if they are not named explicitly. The most frequent taboos that the Pope addresses are religious taboos and they could be interpreted as taboos in the context of conservative Catholicism such as the question of radical ecumenism that includes not just Christians of any denominations, but also Jews, Muslims, and even atheists. Finally, the zeitgeist category refers to the fact that populist leaders tend to emphasize the special and extremely important significance of their time. The Pope uses this feature mostly for environmental issues when he argues that this is our last chance to stop the destruction of our planet.

Based on the above findings in terms of the most frequent populist features of the Pope's messages, we analyzed again the same sample (community and guide) to identify main thematic clusters. Two trained coders categorized the sample; the reliability tests showed good conformity with Krippendorff  $\alpha = .329$ . As a result, we got four quadrants. The first is labeled "poor" and includes tweets regarding marginalized social groups such as the poor, the old, refugees, and the ill. The second quadrant, peace and community, contains messages regarding the role of building peace and the importance of community and family issues. The third quadrant, religion, includes tweets with purely religious content. Finally, the fourth quadrant, environment, has posts with a focus on environmental issues. Figure 4 shows the frequency of tweets in the four quadrants and the combinations as well, because, in most cases, a tweet was classifiable to more than one category.

We see from Figure 4 that the most frequent instances of tweets are those dealing with peace&community and religion. It means that, for the Pope, religious issues are not separated easily from active social work. We can also see, however, that purely social (peace&community) and purely religious (religion) posts are frequent, but the single most recurrent tweets are still the combination of the two categories.



**Figure 4. Frequency of tweets in the four quadrants and their combinations (n = 158).**

Turning now to the four quadrants of Pope Francis's positive populist style on Twitter, we provide a qualitative description of each quadrant, and we also illustrate them with some typical examples.

### ***The Poor***

The category labeled "poor" includes tweets dealing with people living on the margins of the society, such as the poor, the old, immigrants, the disabled, the ill, victims of human trafficking, and those fleeing war and hunger. In all cases, the positive populist rhetoric of Pope Francis is empathetic, caring, and warm toward these minority groups or marginalized people and asks for the same attitude from his followers:

Poverty is not an accident. It has causes that must be recognized and removed for the good of so many of our brothers and sisters.

Let us work together to find concrete solutions to help the poor, refugees, victims of modern forms of slavery, in order to promote peace.

These examples show again the characteristic feature of positive populism that encourages direct actions, and not just attracts attention to some serious problems. Thus, positive populism is a rhetoric of responsibility and action.

### ***Peace and Community***

This quadrant includes tweets that aim to build peace and/or community. Among the individual categories, this was obviously the most frequent (21%), but was also found in combinations such as peace&community and religion (28%), poor and peace&community and religion (6%), and poor and peace&community (6%). More than 63% of the Pope's messages in the corpus deal directly or indirectly with the theme of community and peace. The tweets emphasize the very important role of peace and community in people's lives and especially in the life of Christians:

We begin building peace in our homes, streets, and workplaces: wherever we craft communion and community.

None of us is an island, autonomous and independent from others. We can only build the future by standing together, including everyone.

The rhetoric of Pope Francis's communication regarding peace and community is obvious: He says that no one can be excluded from the community of humans, independent of their merits or even religion. As opposed to classical populism, the positive populism of Pope Francis definitely misses the concept of the enemy; on the contrary, it urges people to seek a friend in every human being.

### ***Environment***

The famous *Laudato si*, in which the Pope addresses the topic of global warming, pollution, and other environmental issues directly, makes him a very important global influencer whose messages on this topic are appreciated by not just his Christian followers, but also by other professionals and environmental politicians. It is not a surprise then that his Twitter wall frequently contains messages of different environmental subjects:

We are stewards, not masters of our earth. Each of us has a personal responsibility to care for the precious gift of God's creation.

Among the poor being treated worst is our planet. We cannot pretend all is fine in the face of the great environmental crisis.

But it is important to note that the Pope almost always connects environmental issues to social issues or religious messages. He emphasizes our personal role in the future of the Earth and urges immediate action. Moreover, referring to our responsibility toward future generations, he implements a "vertical connection" among people. Just as in the case of his urge for "horizontal connections" among different cultures, social classes, and age groups, his desire for vertical connections calls for responsibility for those who have not been born yet. Thus, for his positive populism, the unceasing pacifist rhetoric is characteristic in both space and time.

### ***Religion***

Finally, because Pope Francis is, first of all, a religious leader, his Twitter messages contain religious content to a great extent (19%). However, in most cases, religious messages are connected to social issues such as peace&community (29%) or the poor (6%). Thus, for Pope Francis, religious or ideological issues are always connected to direct social action:

Be one with Christ when you pray, take care of your most vulnerable brothers and sisters, and work for peace.

Faith becomes tangible when it finds its expression in love and, especially, in the service of our brothers and sisters in difficulty.

As can be seen from his tweets, most of Pope Francis's religious messages connect the Christian faith to more general social issues such as helping those in need. They show that positive populism considers ideological issues mainly as sources of direct actions for a more equal and just society, and not as vague theories of self-interest.

### ***Addressing Our Research Questions***

The first question investigated which communication style Pope Francis uses on Twitter and which features characterize this style. The messages of the Pope are, almost without exception, emotionally positive given the frequent use of emotionally positive nouns. The fact that, besides the theme-determining positive nouns, the Pope uses mainly positive verbs and adjectives indicates that his positive populist style includes emotionally positive rhetoric on emotionally positive issues. We also found that, as opposed to classical populist influencers who use the rhetoric of blaming and division quite frequently, the Pope's rhetoric is based on peacemaking and integration. However, he also publishes antagonistic messages, and war terminology appears in his tweets, but he deliberately avoids the direct blaming of palpable groups of people: The picture of the enemy remains abstract and should be morally understood.

Our second research question asked about the relationship between the adoption of a populist communication style and the presence of positive messages. We found that the positive characteristic of Pope Francis's communication style entails communication in an imperative mood and is directed to his followers by a call for positive actions. His most frequent messages are undoubtedly those that provide guidance for his followers. Other types of positive messages include tweets in which the Pope asks for building peace and community and helping members of marginalized groups. Of course, he posts religious messages, which are frequently connected to social issues. In our sample, we did not find any instances of those "negative" features of populism such vulgarism, enmity, and hate speech. On the contrary, the positive populist style of the Pope involves peace-making, eloquence, and reconciliation.

Finally, our third research question asked whether the Pope's communication style could be conceived as positive populism. As a result of our mixed-methods analysis, we summarize the main features of his rhetoric in terms of populist features as follows. First, positive populism concentrates mostly on

emotionally positive issues and uses positive terms. This feature of being positive relates to the effective characteristic of communication: Positive populism is, as opposed to classical populism, positive in its tone of rhetoric. The second feature is that his rhetoric almost always calls for action and does not just describe or assess different phenomena. It is positive in the sense of revealing what to do, instead of blaming others, as quite frequently happens in classical populist rhetoric. The third characteristic feature is that his rhetoric includes some level of a unifying, integrative nature, and his division remains on an abstract level (ruling elite vs. the people, hierarchy vs. the people) as opposed to classical populism, which has a definite divisive character against concrete individuals or groups of people. This consolidating quality includes horizontal and vertical integration. Whereas the former refers to the integration of different social, cultural, or religious groups of people, the latter pertains to the integration of different generations, including future and past groups of human beings.

As a consequence of the above-delineated features of the Pope's communication, we conclude that Pope Francis's tweets have most parameters of the positive aspect of populism as it has been earlier defined by positive psychologists. He expresses responsibility toward not just people in need such as the poor, refugees, and other disadvantaged social groups, but he calls for responsibility toward the environment and the planet as well. Nurturance is also a very important feature of the Pope's rhetoric: Most of his messages evoke positive emotions such as love, compassion, and altruism. His tweets are moderated, avoid hate speech, and show respect for even ideologically distant social groups such as criminals, prisoners, or followers of different religions. Thus, the high tolerance level of Pope Francis's messages cannot be denied.

### ***Limitations***

Although we tried to make a case for a coherent conceptualization of Pope Francis's communication style as positive populism, there are at least two different arguments that could oppose our understanding. The first relates to the fact that, indeed, our concept of positive populism contradicts the minimal definition of populism (see Mudde, 2004, for instance) by which populist ideologies, both leftist and rightist ones, have to entail divisive logic. Consequently, one could say that populism without division is an oxymoron, and populism without the us/them binary is not populism at all. Although we absolutely understand that our conceptualization might be inconsistent with most classical definitions of populism at the first sight, we should recall that the Pope uses oppositions and he has divisive rhetoric, but he does not apply it to people; instead, he applies it to ideas, behaviors, and social patterns on a more abstract level. As Zúquete (2008) also observes,

The related emphasis on antagonistic discourse and antisystem dynamics has the consequence of overstressing the negative attributes of populist movements (what they stand against, their grievances) while often viewing their positive attributes (what they stand for, their world views) as secondary to the emergence and development of a populist discourse. (p. 94)

In stating that Pope Francis's communication style is populist but not divisive in the narrower sense that divisions are not applied to people, but rather to ideas and behaviors, we challenge the idea that populism should be some inherent evil that causes enmity by necessity.



The second limitation of our conceptualization is that it is empirically tested by the social media communication of a religious leader who has a definite ideological and cultural background with a thousand-year-long tradition behind it. Thus, one could rightly ask why we did not use a framework associated with religious contents such as, in our case, mystical populism or the Argentinian theology of liberation. Indeed, Pope Francis's tweets are not his alone; he is the leading edge of an ancient tradition and acknowledging this tradition contextualizes his tweets. Pope Francis's ideology is directly tied to his style. This point could return us to Augustine's conception of rhetoric that is, in general, a neutral tool. Accordingly, Twitter could be used for good or ill, but genuinely good rhetoric that aspires to turn hearts to God can only be true, beautiful, and good. Any other tactic self-defeats because Pope Francis's God is truth and love. Using artful rhetorical lies (heresies) like division cannot turn people to God because He is relation (Trinitarian unity), not separation.

Consequently, one could rightfully suppose that the Pope's communication might be investigated in the context of his tradition. However, although we appreciate the *raison d'être* of this argument, we also have to point out that we wanted to contribute to the literature of populist communication style in the broadest sense and tried to give a fruitful conceptual tool, namely, positive populism for communication analyses. With this, unfortunately, we lost some deepness in analysis in terms of the Christian tradition of public speech and teaching, which is a limitation of the study.

### **Conclusion**

Populism, as a rhetorical style that appeals to the emotions of the audience, is an inherent part of professional communication. Populist content should be interesting, readable, and easy to understand, and it always aims to reach an extensive audience. What is more, populist communication is not simply informative; rather, it provokes action. In recent literature on the topic, populism is usually considered as deviation, as a travesty of political communication, but more and more researchers argue that populism, as it is represented by typical global influencers such as Donald Trump, has become the norm in contemporary Western society. In this article, we have argued that populism, as a rhetorical tool, can be considered a communication style by which social agents easily reach an extensive audience and make them act in a predetermined way. What is more, we have constructed different value-based conceptions of populism, in which, in the case of positive populism, the agent of the communication aims to broadcast the positive messages of integration, peace, community, tolerance, responsibility, nurturance, and even altruism. We found that the Pope's Twitter communication could be considered populist based on its easy-to-understand language and its appeal to emotions, but division was found only on an abstract level. As opposed to the classical or negative populism maintained by populist leaders such as Donald Trump, the positive populist rhetoric of Pope Francis can be considered a peace-making, pacificatory communication style that aims to integrate people both horizontally and vertically, and its antagonistic character is confined to the distinction of good and evil as moral and abstract categories, and his antielitist critic of capitalism also remains on an abstract level.

Our recent analysis contributes to the existing literature on populism in a twofold way. First, to the best of our knowledge, this is the first attempt to systematically analyze the social media communication of the religious leader of the Roman Catholic Church in terms of populism. We found that Pope Francis is commensurable with the most popular social media influencers in terms of the number of his followers and his social media activity. This intensive form of religious communication shows that a religious leader such

as the Pope can be a crucial influencer in social media whose opinion might act on the thinking of his large body of followers. Second, this article contributes to the literature of populism in general, given that it proposes the concept of positive populism that entails positive features of classical populism such as being simple and easy to understand and being emotionally saturated and people-centric, but it goes without the negative aspects such as enmity, vulgarism, racism, radicalism, and exclusion. What is more, positive populism not just neglects the above-mentioned features, but replaces them with their positive counterparts such as peacefulness, eloquence, integration, tolerance, altruism, evenness, and inclusion. This characterization of positive populism also shows that populism could and even should be conceived as a natural rhetorical tool that can be used in either negative or positive ways.

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## Appendix

**Table A1. Coding Protocol for Populist Categories.**

Category	Protocol
Simplicity	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>expresses simple statement, simple proposition</li> <li>is extremely easy to understand</li> <li>includes generalizations</li> </ul>
Antagonism	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>shows opposing groups, ideas, or values</li> <li>refers to struggle between oppositions</li> <li>has the rhetoric of “two paths”</li> </ul>
Emotionalization	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>tries to affect emotional response</li> <li>has emotional context</li> <li>words express emotions</li> <li>has emotional argumentation as opposed to rational persuasion</li> <li>appeals to conscience in a moral sense</li> </ul>
Taboo	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>mentions social taboos or extremely risky themes</li> <li>uses “skating on thin ice” metaphor</li> <li>mentions taboos in the context of religion</li> </ul>
Vulgarism	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>has vulgar expressions</li> <li>has vulgar content</li> </ul>
Blame&enemy&anger	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>pictures an enemy</li> <li>calls for fight against something</li> <li>calls somebody to account for something</li> </ul>

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Zeitgeist	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• accuses something or somebody</li> <li>• states that we live in a special time</li> <li>• refers to a twist of fate</li> </ul>
Utopia	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• refers to the end of time</li> <li>• pictures an almost unimaginable positive future</li> <li>• promises a perfect future</li> </ul>
Antiliberal values	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• has normative command regarding the way the world should be</li> <li>• expresses ideas that disagree with neoliberal ideology</li> <li>• objects to consumption</li> <li>• criticizes consumer society</li> <li>• criticizes individualism</li> <li>• promotes classical (traditional) family models</li> <li>• promotes antiscientism</li> <li>• promotes antiseccularism</li> </ul>
Irrationality	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• refers to faith instead of reason</li> <li>• uses religious arguments alone</li> </ul>

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**Table A2. Intercoder Reliability Measures for Populist Categories.**

Category	Agreement (%)	Cohen's $\kappa$	Krippendorff $\alpha$ (nominal)
Simplicity	89.8	.650	.651
Antagonism	93.4	.840	.841
Emotionalization	88.6	.745	.746
Taboo	94.0	.655	.655
Vulgarism	98.2	.000	-.006
Blame&enemy&anger	92.2	.678	.679
Zeitgeist	94.6	.611	.612
Utopia	88.0	.739	.740
Antiliberal values	89.8	.737	.736
Irrationality	86.1	.722	.720