EMOTIONS IN POPULIST SOCIAL MEDIA CAMPAIGNING

An Empirical Analysis of the Tweeting Behavior of the Alternative für Deutschland

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Abstract

Politicians, when trying to convince voters usually appeal to emotions (Brader, 2005). Especially populists often work with negative emotions in their campaigns to affect rational mechanisms of decision making to get electoral support (Hameleers et al., 2017). This thesis studies the effects of anger and fear in populist communication on sharing behavior on social media. Based on the theory of Affective Intelligence the author proposes that tweets by political accounts that contain anger will result in more retweets than those containing fear. The empirical analysis was done through the collection of a data set of 1461 tweets taken from 17 official Twitter accounts by the Alternative für Deutschland (AfD) and their party members during the period of July 17 until August 9, 2018. By applying sentiment analysis techniques the author found evidence for the intensified use of both anger and fear in the tweets and its positive impact on retweet quantity. Evidence for a higher impact of anger than fear on sharing behavior could, however, not be confirmed. Furthermore, an additional content analysis was done to categorize the topics of the tweets and the external sources of information being shared. The results confirm the assumptions that populist parties predominantly criticize elites and out-groups, and often refer to information from right-leaning media platforms. These findings help to explain the recent success of populist parties.

Glossary

Term	Explanation
AIT	Affective Intelligence Theory
AfD	Alternative für Deutschland (Alternative for Germany)
API	Application Programming Interface. A standardized programming interface for accessing data or algorithms from a website
Bundestag	German federal parliament
CDU	Christlich Demokratische Union (Christian Democratic Union of Germany)
CSU	Christlich Soziale Union in Bayern (Christian Social Union in Bavaria)
FDP	Freie Demokratische Partei (Free Democratic Party)
REST API	Representational State Transfer API. Standard set of operations to allow computers to exchange static information.
SPD	Sozialdemokratische Partei Deutschlands (Social Democratic Party of Germany)
The Greens	German: Bündnis 90/Die Grünen (Alliance 90/The Greens). A green Political Party in Germany.
The Left	German: Die Linke. A democratic socialist party in Germany
URL	Uniform Resource Location. The address of a website.

1. INTRODUCTION

Over the past decade populist parties have been making headlines all over the world, challenging liberal democracies and established party systems around the globe. In Europe, traditional parties, both conservative and social democratic, are increasingly losing support to political newcomers of former insignificant parties that stormed the stage in countries like Austria, Poland, Netherlands, Sweden, France and most recently – Germany. When the right-wing nationalist and populist party *Alternative für Deutschland* (AfD) got 12.6 percent of the votes in the federal state elections in 2017, not only did they secure a first-time presence in the parliament, they also received a relatively strong mandate in Europe's biggest economy.

Party systems throughout Europe have fragmented, and most have shifted towards the right (Galston, 2018). As Mudde already predicted in 2004, it seems that populism has become "the mainstream politics of Western democracies" (542). Its uprising has long been linked to fundamental socio-economic changes and the economic distress that followed the recession after the financial crisis in 2008. As voters seek for alternatives to traditional political parties, populists often gain electoral support by offering simple solutions for complex problems (Salmela & von Scheve, 2017, 567).

But even now when Europe has slowly recovered from the crisis, the surge of populist parties has continued and the German AfD, the Freedom Party of Austria (FPÖ) and the Five Star Movement in Italy (Cinque Stelle) successfully mobilize voters (Galston, 2018). Scientific research has found one important explanation for their triumph in their specific mode of campaign communication (e.g. Hameleers et al., 2017; Block & Negrine, 2017; Engesser et al., 2017). A commonly addressed campaign characteristic is their style of using *emotions* (Wirz, 2018, 114). Studies often argue that populists focus on *emotion eliciting appeals* instead of rational arguments through the use of certain topics (as for example immigration) (e.g. Matthes & Marquart, 2013).

Populist often spread messages containing negative emotions, particularly those that elicit *anger* and *fear* (Wirz, 2018, 1128). However, negative emotions distinguish themselves in the affect they have on the audience: The pioneering work of Marcus and MacKuen (1993) and their theory of Affective Intelligence introduced a new angle on the impacts of emotional appeals in politics. By examining the degree to which distinct emotions influence the interest in learning about an issue, and how these emotions can affect one's political evaluations and judgments, they found that anxiety increases one's interest in learning about political topics, while anger lets people become close-minded and less eager to seek information (Brader, 2005).

Since Marcus and MacKuen (1993) published their emotional theories on political learning in the early nineties, the campaigning landscape has been shaken up by the emergence of new digital technologies that brought social networks like Twitter and Facebook. Social media has changed the way politicians communicate. It has become a powerful tool for populists to mobilize voters in addition to traditional channels and media (Kriesi, 2014, 367). In particular, social media has eased the process of information sharing in social networks. However, so far, little research has focused on emotions as a driver of information diffusion within those networks (exemptions are Stieglitz and Dang Xuan, 2013; Kušen et al., 2017). Studies analyzing emotions and political topics have mainly examined the sentiment towards certain politicians (e.g. Kušen and Strembeck, 2018), negative news on social media and political learning (e.g. Sup Park, 2015), public mood (Bollen et al., 2011b) or online sentiment surrounding specific events (such as the refugee crisis, Pope and Griffith, 2016).

When it comes to social media adoption of populist parties, several studies have analyzed the distinct characteristics of their communication style: among them Engesser et al. (2017) with their research on how five European populist parties use Twitter and Facebook for spreading their ideology, Ernst et al. (2017) who compared populist communication strategies across six Western democracies and Jacobs and Spierings (2018) who did a six-year study of populist engagement behavior in the Netherlands. What makes the user base of social networks surrounding populist parties special is the exposure to like-minded people (especially those associated with the adoption of "extreme" positions) (Mutz & Martin, 2001, 110). Here, the so-called "echo-chamber effect" based on homophily – the tendency of people to communicate with those that share their political views – dominates information cascades and might affect public debates on social relevant issues (Del Valle & Bravo, 2018, 1716).

1.1 Problem Statement Formulation

Despite the growing importance of populist communication, up to this point, no research has analyzed the impact of the two distinct emotions anger and fear on information diffusion and in the context of social media. Therefore, the purpose of the thesis will be to fill this gap by examining three things: Firstly, it probes whether and how populist accounts use the two distinct emotions anger and fear on Twitter by taking the case of the Alternative für Deutschland's (AfD) social media communication as an example. The thesis uses Twitter because of its popularity and unique features as a powerful instrument for news acquisition and exchange (Park, 2015, 343). Secondly, drawing on the above reasoning, the author aims to find empirical proof for the reinforcing impact of anger on sharing behavior among the Twitter user base. Thirdly, the research will be augmented by analyzing and

structuring the political context surrounding the AfD. The focus will lie on media articles and content use of the party. This will give more insight into the patterns of populist rhetoric and their use of external sources of information on Twitter. Analyzing the relationship between news media and the strategic use of anger and fear can help to better understand how the persuasiveness of populist communication works and what message characteristics affect attitudes of the populist audience. The five research questions that this work is guided by read as follows:

- **RQ 1** *How do populist parties use anger and fear on Twitter?*
- **RQ 2** *What sources of information do populist parties share along with their Tweets?*
- **RQ 3** *What topics do populist parties address in their tweets?*
- **RQ 4** *Which of the emotional appeals anger and fear are predominately used by populist parties when attacking elites and out-groups?*
- **RQ 5** *What impact do anger and fear have on the sharing behavior of tweets published by populist parties?*

The case of the German AfD is seen as suitable because of the current fierce debate about how Germany — and the rest of Europe — should deal with asylum-seekers at its border. In view of the forthcoming Bavarian state elections in October 2018, a shift in rhetoric among the majority of German parties to a more radical, populist style has been observed.[1] Political discourse has been dominated by parties reacting to threat from the far-right, anti-migrant AfD trying to attract voters by adapting their linguistic style.

To this end, this thesis is related to three rich research fields that are brought together in the following chapters: emotions, populist political communication and the literature on user behavior in social media (Figure 1). The author reviews findings relevant for the present research questions and discusses expectations for the case. The aim is to show that the approaches from theories of emotions can fruitfully be applied to better understand the mechanisms of user sharing behavior, communication style and information diffusion surrounding populist parties on social media.

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[1] E.g. Bavarian prime minister Söder (CSU) used the expression "asylum tourism" : FAZ (2018, July 7). Bayern-SPD droht Söder mit Verfassungsklage, *FAZ Online*. Retrieved on July 8, 2018, from: http://www.faz.net/aktuell/politik/inland/bayerische-spd-droht-soeder-mit-verfassungsklage-15675988.html

Figure 1: The three research fields the thesis draws on
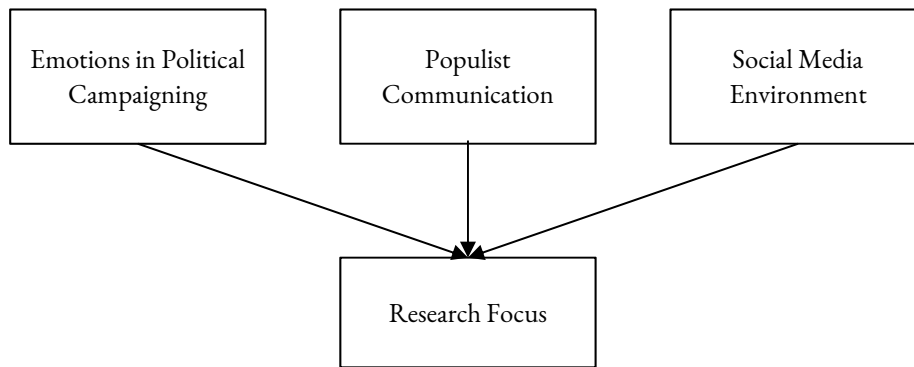
Source: Own illustration[2]

For the analytical part of the thesis a primary data sample of 1461 German tweets were analyzed that were taken from 17 official accounts of members and official party profiles of the AfD. The tweets were gathered during a time-period of 23 days from July 17 until August 9. After a number of pre-processing techniques, the corpus was then passed to a sentiment analysis tool (LIWC), analyzed for content and external sources of media and statistically processed for the final analysis and discussion.

1.3 Structure

The structure of this thesis is as follows (see Figure 2): in the second chapter (II) theories of political behavior will be presented, starting by the classical theory of the rational citizen and then continuing with newer approaches that take the influence of emotions on political decision making into the account. The following subchapters present the theories on populist campaigning and the role that social media plays for political propaganda. The last part of the chapter gives an overview over current approaches of sentiment analysis in social media and ends with the hypothesis formulation, theoretical framework and the introduction to the case. The third section (III) of this thesis presents the research methodology while the fourth one (IV) presents the results. In the final chapter (V) the results will discussed, concluded and recommendations for future research is given.

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[2] Unless otherwise stated all figures and tables are the author's own creations.

Figure 2: Structure of the thesis

Introduction
Introduction to the background, research area and research questions of the study

Theoretical Foundation
Literature review on existing research in the field of emotions, political behavior, social media and populism

Hypothesis & Political Framework
Development of five hypotheses, presentation of the theoretical framework and introduction to the case study of the Alternative für Deutschland.

Methodology
Presentation of the methodological considerations and research design

Analysis
Results and analysis of the quantitative analysis of tweets published by the AfD with a focus on anger & fear appeals, blame attributions, content and external news media.

Discussion
Discussion and thematic classification of the findings within the field of research

Conclusion
Final summary, conclusion, limitation and further research

II. LITERATURE REVIEW

The purpose of this chapter is to introduce relevant theories, concepts and findings from previous research that lay the foundation for the study design of this work. The chapter is broadly divided into a range of five topics (see Figure 3). First, the classical theory of voting behavior based on Down's rational citizen model is introduced briefly. Based on this, newer works of theories that take emotions as an influential factor in political decision making into account are presented in the second part. The third part focuses the attention to contemporary political campaigning on social media followed by the introduction of populist campaigning strategies and rhetorical characteristics. The chapter ends with the presentation of scientific approaches for the analysis of emotions in social networks as a fundamental prerequisite for the hypothesis formulation.

Figure 3: Topical structure of the literature review.
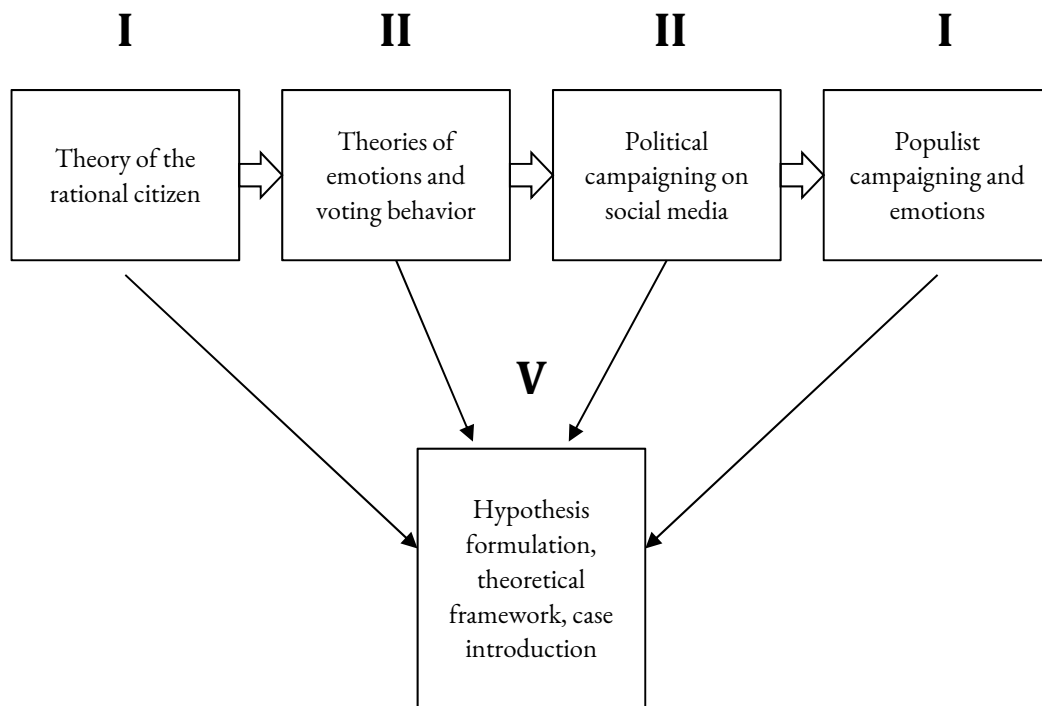
Theoretical Foundation

2.1 The theory of the "Rational Citizen"

Political participation and the question of how people vote has long been a discussed topic of interest of political science. Classical perspectives on electoral decision making describe the voter as a **rational citizen**, one who is carefully weighing up each candidate's pros and cons on different policies before every election. The so called

rational-choice approach postulates that a voter participates in an election, if their individual well-being is affected which results in them voting for the candidate that promises the largest economic advantage (Schoellhammer, 2015). One of the most influential works of the public choice movement is Anthony Downs' (1957) "An Economic Theory of Democracy". According to Downs and other conventional interpreters of economic voting models political behavior has a purpose and is done for specific reasons (Lowi et al. 2008, 11). Every action a voter takes or decides against is based on choices with forethought, reflection and calculation which is commonly referred to as voter sophistication (Yates, 2016, 5). The voting process is ultimately a result of a deliberative process of the benefits, risks and the costs of the decision that has to be made (Lowi et al 2008, 11–12). What Downs and others state, is that democratical political behavior is based on *rational choice*.

The rational choice approach changed the view on voting behavior, opening new discussions and influencing new ideas of why people vote (Franklin, Eijk, Evans, 2006, 2). The theory's explanation for an individual's political choices are entirely based on utility maximization (Downs, 1957, 138). It assumes that the electorate is *attentive* and *thoughtful*, making explicit comparisons while taking into account, through the analysis of the party's past performance, probable change of the candidates' behavior. The theory has been used as a descriptive model, not only in the analysis of politics but also in consumer behavior, and has been defended on the grounds that human beings are generally effective in attaining one's goals, assuming that the maxims underlying the theory are extremely compelling (Quattrone and Tversky 1988, 719). The theory was later extended to a more realistic theory of bounded rationality (Jones, 2003).

Rational choice (and later bounded rationality) draws the uncontested conclusion that the electorate should have clear and stable policy preferences, be informed about the political system, the political environment and candidates (Marcus 2013, 21). The reality in fact more often than not proves to be quite different. Voters still go to the polls and choose a candidate even though they seem to be clearly aware the costs outweigh the benefits (Jung, 2017, 26).

2.2 Emotions and their influence on political behavior

As recent election outcomes all over Europe and the United States have shown, the populace does not simply seem to give their vote after evaluating information based on factors such as their personal financial and macroeconomic trends that will most probably lead to their most ideal outcome. The poster child Donald Trump vs. Hillary Clinton presidential race in 2016 or the European Membership referendum Brexit a few months prior, shows the

electorate overlooks rational factors and votes for parties and leaders, that appear to act more like autocrats than government leaders of Western representative democracies. If not by rational arguments, how do politicians convince the voters nonetheless?

The reason is, that voting and politics is emotional. In recent years, a growing body of evidence has shown that our political behavior is governed more by emotions and less by rationality (Marcus, 2003). If voting was only about the election outcome, a rational voter would have simply stayed at home on election day, being fully aware of the fact that his single vote does not have any impact on the final result. Emotions are a durable feature of political campaigns and it is hard to deny that feelings are important elements in elections and voting choice (ibid.).

Emotions can be defined as the "underlying responses to the perceived relevance of external stimuli" (Brader, 2005, 390). Throughout the last decades, political campaigning strategies have begun utilizing tools to appeal specifically to voters' emotions. Those so-called **emotional appeals** are designed to evoke particular feelings or emotions in the audience, such as happiness, pride, patriotism, anger or hope (Kaid & Johnston, 1991, 56) or as Roselli et al. (1995, 165) define it "emotional appeals can be thought of as attempts to elicit, or make salient, object-related emotions". Tools making use of emotional appeals are often shown through the display of democratic symbols (such as the American flag), symbolic imagery, staged speeches in front of mass audiences or music. In today's politics, emotions play a fundamental role in connecting voters to parties, topics and candidates (Yates, 2016, 4).

2.3 The theory of Affective Intelligence

Among the first researchers who emphasized the critical role of emotion in political behavior were Marcus and colleagues (2000). With their theory of **Affective Intelligence** (AIT) they put the important role of the adaptive function of emotions in political decision making in focus. Drawing on foundations of social psychology, the contemporary comprehension of emotions now opens up to a less irrational, more complex and reasonable element in voting behavior (Yates, 2016, 7). Whereas rational choice theory assumes the individual to make their decisions only based on careful considerations, feelings and emotions are now presented as politically valid and part of the voter's judgment process when confronted with a vast amount of information about candidates, campaigns and party platforms.

21st century political campaigning has been transformed into a narrative, where modern media, opinion news broadcasts and editorial publications display emotions and affective cues to influence the candidate's personality

and campaign issues. The strategic use of social media reinforces the effect of cueing emotional appraisals of political information and choices. With the help of new media, in recent decades, it has become increasingly common in the political environment to set the focus on low information campaigns, targeting the uninformed voter, appealing more heavily to emotions instead of deliberation (Yates, 2016, 7).

The Affective Intelligence Theory (AIT) "is a theory about how emotion and reason interact to produce a thoughtful and attentive citizenry" (Marcus et al., 2000, 1). AIT offers a theoretical link between thinking and feeling and their impact on political judgement of voters (Yates, 2016, 10). The theory focuses on the identification of preconscious appraisal systems, their interaction and their role in guiding both habitual and deliberative action (Marcus, 2013, 24). In other words, AIT analyzes the processing timeframe of milliseconds between when a sensory stream reaches the brain (visual, auditory, touch, taste or smell) and the appearance in conscious awareness (ibid., 23). Out of their findings Marcus and his colleagues (2000) conclude that emotions become a source for political information for the individual voter when evaluating candidates.

The deliberations of Marcus et al. (2000) are based on works of neurophysiological research (particularly Gray, 1984; Gray, 1987, Gray, 1990). Marcus, Neuman and MacKuen describe two emotional systems, the **disposition** and the **surveillance system,** that govern our behavior and are strongly connected to civic engagement. A human brain learns through experience and cues that trigger emotions previously learned by associating certain objects to preferable, unpreferable or even hazardous outcomes. These connections are then stored in the brain and are automatically updated when new experiences occur. Subconsciously the two systems constantly compare what the brain's memory has recorded. When encountering a familiar situation past association help interpreting newly received information into cues that then trigger emotions (Brader 2005, 390).

2.3.1 The Disposition System

According to Marcus and colleagues (2000), these forms of learned behavior are part of the so-called **"disposition system"** which is accountable for an individual's habitual actions. Due to its limited capacity, the brain develops habits to keep the human consciousness clear for more demanding tasks. Located in the limbic region of the brain, the disposition system is concerned with the procedural memory and sensory systems, and is essential for the acquisition of new behavioral routines and their execution (Markus et al., 2000, 46). In order to be useful and successful the subsystem provides emotional cues to the brain to inform whether it is doing well. In that case, the

disposition system, through the nervous system, rewards us with a mild degree of enthusiasm, whereas the absence of it discourages us (Plutzer, 2002, 456; Marcus et al., 2000, 46). Habitual behavior is confirmed by the brain when a performance is executed in a normal fashion through the releasing of the usual level of *enthusiasm* (Marcus et al., 2000, 51).

In extending their theory to politics, Marcus et al. (2000) reason that individuals develop the same habits in voting behavior. Human beings acquire deeply entrenched values early in life that later define how they will behave and encounter in the antagonistic climate characteristic of politics. Habits prevail, and contemporary circumstances and rational deliberations of alternatives are neglected. A voter's habits can defy change and inhibit deliberative interest in contemporary political issues, contradicting those democratic theories of rational choice (Markus et al., 2000, 52).

However, if voters were only guided by political habits, based on inculcated partisanship, ideology or interest-group identity the outcome of elections would be entirely depending on how much a party is capable of generating enthusiasm among the electorate (Markus et al., 2000, 52). Vote tallies would be fairly predictable and campaigning strategies would work entirely on preserving an adequate amount of excitement in the traditional voting base, while producing apathy among the opponent's supporters (Zoonen, 2004, 65).

2.3.2 The Surveillance System

The human species would have become extinct a long time ago if the brain depended only on habitual routines as their survival would have depended entirely on their ability to stay within familiar environments. As the world we live in is not static humans need to adapt and change their behavioral patterns permanently. As soon as a new (potentially threatening) situation occurs the brain needs to interrupt current mechanisms, asses the environment and seek alternative strategies to react accordingly (in our example find a way to escape or fight the threat) (Marcus, 2013, 27). This is where the second preconscious appraisal system intervenes: **the surveillance system**. When facing a potential threat, it interrupts the brain's reliance on habit and encourages greater attentiveness and elaborates possible choices (Brader, 2006, 60). The surveillance operates as a fast-cycling "subconscious emotional process" (Marcus et al., 2000, 53), assessing whether the incoming sensory stream of information is a depiction of the environment the brain classifies as "familiar" (Marcus, 2013, 28). When attention is shifted to novel stimuli and reliance on habit is uncoupled, the system arouses greater thoughtfulness and motivation for learning, leading to

the brain's increased reliance on "higher cognitive function" (Marcus et al., 2000, 56). When increased discrepancy between expectations and circumstances occur, the system changes its level of **anxiety,** or **fear**[3], as a primeval reaction to threat, as a method of signaling that the moment has to come to look for alternative solutions (from relaxation/calm to anxiety/unease) (ibid, 57).

Furthermore, AIT can be connected to the citizens participation in politics. As Downs' (1957) already asserted, the chances that a single citizen has influence over matters of policy are infinitesimally small, if not even zero and learning about public affairs and taking action takes time and effort. Yet, most people follow public affairs and politics and establish a frequent attentiveness as habitual behavior (Marcus et al., 2000, 81). Marcus and colleagues (2000) found that those people who are more stimulated by their emotions are also more likely to become engaged in political discussions (86). However, when looking at policy-related information, the surveillance system controls the mere *engagement* and *motivation* pushing people to learn more about politics. When citizens are anxious, *media attention increases*, they are more likely to call to mind arguments for liking or disliking nominees and their standing on political issues (Brader 2006, 60). In Marcus et al.'s (2000) panel study during the Carter vs. Reagan election 1980, those who were worried about one of the candidates (and therefore receiving more urgent signals from the system) paid increased attention to political news. Their conclusion is that *enthusiasm is connected to involvement whereas anxiety is linked to attentiveness and learning* (94).

A second approach that concentrates on feelings as a key component in political judgement and thereby building the theoretical link to electoral results and voters' emotions is the **affect transfer hypothesis**. The theory focuses on the the inner process that voters undergo when they attribute their feelings toward a party or politician to their appraisals of campaign issues or, in other words: how voters rely on their feelings when they make political judgements (Yates, 2016, 9). Another theory of emotions and political behavior is based on the research of *discrete emotions* (a small number of core emotions). Taking subjective interpretation into account the so-called **appraisal theory** describes how emotions are experienced through an individual's perception, which is also described as "appraisal tendency" or "appraisal pattern". Hence, different emotions elicit different appraisal patterns which at the same time influence how information is being processed (Lerner & Keltner, 2001, 146; Hameleers, Bos, de Vreese, 2017, 876).

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[3] Regarding the conceptualization of anxiety and fear: this thesis uses both terms interchangeably such as psychologists as Brader (2006), Marcus et al. (2000) and Valentino (2008) did before. By definition both are quite similar to each other and the only tangible difference between them according to Erisen (2018, 56) is that fear is an emotion and anxiety relates more to an emotional state.

2.4 The impacts of anger and anxiety on the voter

MacKuen et al. (2010) incorporated *anger* (aversion) as a new emotional strategy into the empirical literature of AIT, challenging the presumption that negative emotions elicit similar emotional responses. Within a day-to-day environment, individuals can be confronted with aversive stimuli (individuals, groups, causes, slogans or symbols), causing discomfort or bitterness through feelings of anger, disgust or contempt. In contrast to anxiety, when confronted with **aversion**, people rely on previously learned habits, just as they do in rewarding cases. MacKuen and others (2010) assert that rather than a "homogenous negativity", people experience two contrasting kinds of "negative" situations – those of *uncertain risk* and conditions of *known threat* and therefore use different strategies accordingly. In a political context, an anticipated victory of a party elicits enthusiasm (positive action) whereas familiar disliked political parties, groups, issues leaders and candidates lead to aversion. In both situations humans response within already learned habits (442).

AIT postulates, that an angry voter, when getting emotional about politics, will *cling to their political position, making it entrenched resolute and steadfas***t** (MacKuen et al., 2010, 442). As anger is embedded within the disposition system, the voter will protect their views, become close-minded and seek less information, reducing the willingness to accept compromise. When information is seeked, then only those is searched for that bolsters the own stance, whereas uncomfortable one is ignored (Ryan, 2012, 1140). On the other hand, when the surveillance system is activated (through anxiety) it inspires people to pay closer attention to policy issues (read more) by *encouraging considerations of different alternatives***,** and, following AIT, transforming habitual, detached voters into better-informed interest-maximizers (MacKuen et al., 2010, 452, Marcus et al., 2000). Figure 4 summarizes the findings of Affective Intelligence Theory.

Figure 4: Affective Intelligence Theory
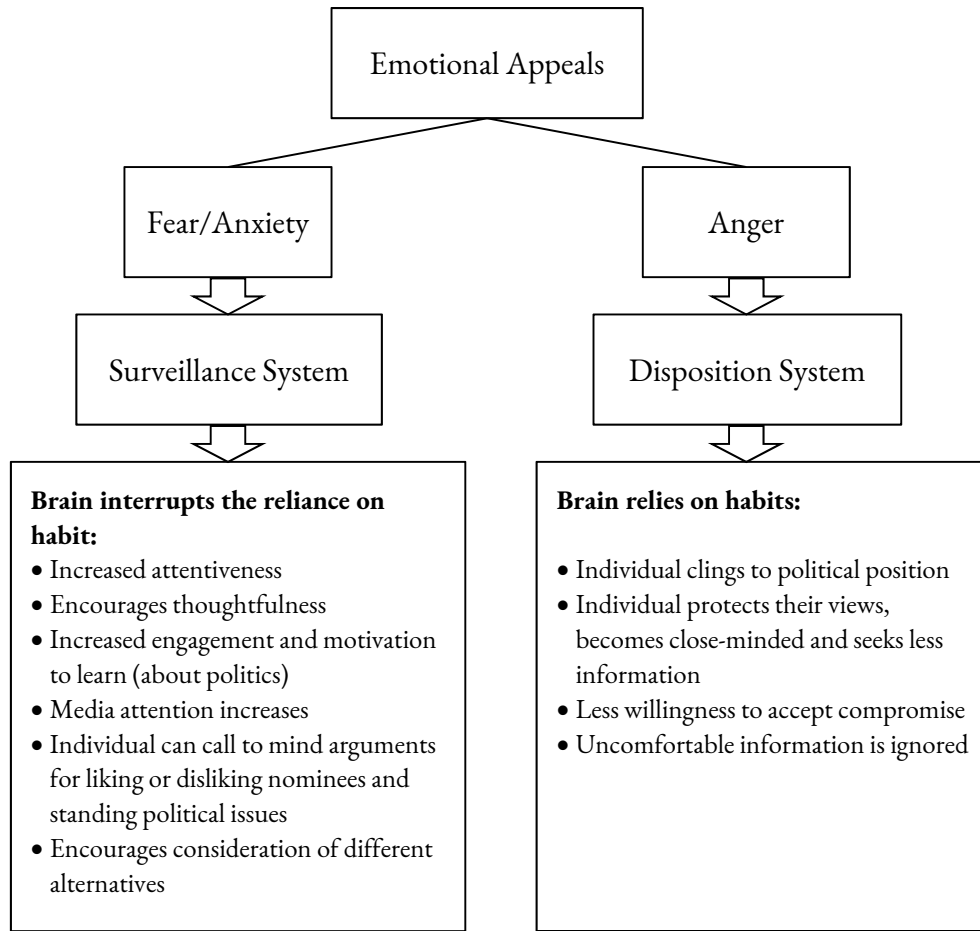
Source: Own illustration based on Marcus (2000) and MacKuen et al. (2010)

The work of Valentino et al. (2008) departs from the assertions of AIT. They find that anger might distract people during complex tasks, which results suppressed information seeking. Although people are interested in a topic, they might be less able to concentrate on the task and cannot gather information. Bodenhausen et al. (1994) found, that individuals that feel angry are more inclined in stereotyping than those who feel anxious and are also more prone to superficial aspects of persuasive political speech.

Gadarian (2010) found in her research, that after the 9/11 attacks the American public being charged with negative emotions were especially supportive to hawkish policy when exposed to emotional news coverage. She concluded the likelihood that an individual accepts the threatening message increases when negative emotions are being used in mass media coverage and parties therefore have the opportunity to support their views when using appeals like fear or anger, especially when addressing topics such as crime or immigration.

3. Political communication, social media and populism in the 21st century

After the theoretical introduction of emotions and their role in political decision making, especially the influence of anger and fear on the voter's political learning process, the third chapter will now give insights into theories of political campaigning on social media. With a focus on populist parties, particularly the example of the AfD in Germany and the distinctiveness of their voter base in the second part, the chapter ends with the development of the hypothesis based on the findings from AI theory, social media campaigning and (alt-right) populist communication.

3.1 Political campaigning on social media

Social Media and its user base has experienced an enormous growth over the past decade and so has its meaning for public discourse and communication in society (Stieglitz and Dang-Xuan, 2013, 218). As in April 2018, 2,234 Billion members worldwide were signed up on Facebook, 813 Million on Instagram and 330 Million on Twitter (Statista, 2018). The widespread use of those platforms has broken down barriers of communication within societies which also changed the way political campaigning works. There is a broad and noticeable trend showing that traditional campaigning media such as television and newspapers becomes increasingly insignificant as political parties invest more and more social media campaigns to defeat their opponents (Stier et al., 2018, 50). Donald Trump's 2016 digital campaign, with all its controversy, is the recent most standing out example of how effective a social media campaign can work (or in this case, might probably even help a candidate win the election). Social media platforms enable candidates to directly reach out to their voter base, without being critically assessed by public press, and are utilized as pervasive communication channels to mobilize supporters and change public agenda. With social media, not only the way of communication changes, but also the political audience (ibid). As McQuail (2010, 140) describes it, the audience is "not longer part of a mass, but is either member of a self-chosen network or special public or an individual" which allows political actors to directly be exposed to users with specific political interests or demographic characteristics (Stier et al., 2018, 51; Diaz et al., 2016). Furthermore, the demographic compositions of the target audience on social media differs significantly from a representative sample of citizens which allows campaigning strategies to tailor messages specifically designed for certain groups (ibid.).

3.2 Twitter as an element of political discourse

Since its launch in 2006, Twitter has become undoubtedly the main medium for dynamic political discourse and a broadly accepted and frequently used communication channel for institutions (i.e. politicians and parties) (Stieglitz and Dang-Xuan 2013, 219). More and more officeholders and policy-makers are engaged in social media and

spread private and professional content. The fast and compact way of communicating makes Twitter the number two social network for political propaganda after Facebook in Germany. One week after the Bundestagswahl in October 2017, two thirds of the members in the German Parliament (19. term) held a Twitter account (452 out of 702) (Fuchs, 2017). Principally, the members of smaller fractions (such as Bündnis 90/The Greens and the Left) tend to use Twitter more than bigger parties (Handelsblatt, 2017). Here a smaller amount of particularly active members proficiently use communication synergies to foster the interchange and dialogue with an interested community (Thimm, Einspänner, Dang-Anh, 2012, 269).

Twitter itself is a microblogging service, where users share information of all kinds, i.e. text messages and/or multimedia content on the platform (Thimm, Einspänner, Dang-Anh, 2012, 296). Posts (*tweets*) of users can contain up to 280 characters, can be subscribed to and are from that moment on visible on a user's personal timeline. Other than Facebook, most Twitter profiles are open to public. The subscribers to an account are called *followers* and together build community: a *twittersphere* or *twitteruniverse*. Plain texts in the posts can be added with *hashtags* (#), mentions (@) and external links (URLs). According to a German online study of ARD/ZDF about social media activity in 2017, only 1,8 millionen German Twitter users (3%) post weekly and only 0,6 million daily (1%) (ARD/ZDF Onlinestudie, 2017, 8). According to a statement of Twitter in 2016, 12 million users visit the platform in Germany every month.[4]

Thimm, Einspänner and Dang-Anh (2012, 298) analyzed political propaganda in Twitter posts and found that a tweet can have different functions. Next to status-updates or retweets (RT) of other information in simple text form, Twitter allows to establish complex narrative structures. When enriched with image and video material those structures can serve argumentative purposes and tweets are often part of a thematic discourse between different participants within the twittersphere. Through the use of four specific communication operators (@, #, RT, http://) the users and their published content are connected through a highly complex system of references. The inclusion of the @-sign in combination with a Twitter account name builds a link that either addresses or mentions another account and allows to directly or indirectly address a user. Furthermore, mentions can be initiators of discussions. In connection with prefixed RT (*Retweet*) an @-sign indicates the re-directing of a tweet of a second user (RT+@+account name). Through retweets the technical range of the original tweet and therefore the influence of the original sender increases. The function of a hashtag (*hashtagging*) sets the tweet into a thematic

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[4] This number is composed of signed in users and those users who look at tweets without being logged in. How those numbers are divided between both groups was not published by the company (Zeit Online, 2016).

context (e.g. #btw2017) and becomes traceable. Often hashtags are set by the users themselves and are quickly adopted by the community. The last and most complex communication operator is the hyperlink (http://) that contributes to a discussion system on the platform. Generally, a hyperlink within a tweet refers to a body of knowledge in the web to either inform the twittersphere or to support own opinions and arguments with evidence. Other important factors include the integration of images, videos and audio elements in the tweets via hyperlinks which allows to convey, emotionalize and illustrate content and points even more forcefully (ibid., 299).

3.3 Polarized politics: Social Media and confirmation bias inflamed in echo chambers

Social media creates a direct path between producers of news content and their consumers and on the surface. In theory, social media has the potential to connect people who share different ideas around the globe. In practice, the emergent spreading of so-called fake news in networks has proven to become a threat to liberal democracies. Scientists have been investigating the determinants behind misinformation, their diffusion and influence on political learning. Del Vicario et al. (2016) analyzed the causes for the spreading of news on Facebook by focusing on how users consume news with regards to stories containing scientific or conspiracy information. Their findings showed, that around both conspiracy-like and scientific subject matters, two well-shaped, highly segregated and for the most part non-interacting network communities occur online. Users tend to seek for, interpret, and recall those kinds of information that confirms their existing beliefs. This phenomenon is known as *confirmation bias* and is seen as one of the main motifs for sharing content, whereby a specific narrative dominates (i.e. threat of islamic influence on western cultures) and other content is ignored (558).

Del Vicario and colleagues (2016) show that the primary driver of content diffusion is *social homogeneity*, defined as the degree to which the preferences of individuals and society tend to be alike (Gehrlein, 1987, 219) which results in the formation of "polarized clusters" within friendship networks. So, if a user posts a link to inform and challenge their network, chances are high that the content shared is already commonly accepted and agreed upon within their social group. The same pattern also applies to the unchecked circulation of misinformation (Del Vicario, 2016, 558).

The phenomena when beliefs and views are augmented or reinforced by communication and repetition within a system (on social media) is known as "*echo chambers*" (Barberá et al., 2015, 1531). In other words, information about certain events (i.e. terrorist attacks) is primarily exchanged among individuals with similar ideologies. In

political context, this can increase social polarization and extremism particularly with regards to conspiracy allegations that are disseminated within echo chambers of users that carry a critical attitude towards "mainstream media" and show a higher support alternative sources of information. (Del Vicario et al, 2016, 558). Platforms like Facebook and Twitter play a hard part in contributing to the emergence of echo chambers through content algorithms running in the background, that influence what is shown in the feed based on pages liked and followed and their user activity. Both, technology and users' confirmation bias has led to the occurrence of small and big echo chambers within the social media circles. As groups share information only supporting their own notions without being exposed to different positions and opinions, the distance between those echo chambers online widens (Fakhreddin, 2017).

Even though the internet theoretically provides access to countless amount of data and information, research has shown that the distribution of news within networks follows power-law distribution (also referred to as pareto distribution): 20% of the content accounts for 80% of the exposure (Himelboim, 2010, 384). Technology itself has created a new area where consumers self-select their exposure to media depending on their partisan preferences. Users, although they have control over the media that they consume, often experience an increase in opinion-reinforcing news and which also applies to partisanship: conservative media "create a self-protective enclave hospitable to conservative beliefs" that 'protects [the audience] from counter persuasion" (Jamieson & Cappella, 2010, 75).

3.4 Twitter, emotions and their influence on information sharing

Cognitive processes in the brain and arousal related effects that are caused by emotion in written communication have an influence on sharing behavior and emotional contagion (Stieglitz and Dang-Xuan, 2013, 223). Besides a high the level of cognitive involvement, which describes to what extent the content is being reflected, paid attention to, recognized and elaborated by the reader, certain kinds of emotion (among them anger and anxiety) have the ability to trigger physiological arousal. Studies have proven that physiological arousal is a driver for information sharing on social networks (e.g. Berger, 2011; Berger and Milkman, 2012). Content evoking high-arousal, or activating emotions that are positive (awe) and negative (anger and anxiety) are more viral. The opposite effect is caused by low-arousal, deactivating emotions (e.g. sadness) (Stieglitz and Dang-Xuan, 2013, 223).[5]

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[5] Research such as the study of Anthony (1973) proofed those assumptions in their analysis of the travelling speed of rumors in high and low anxiety groups. In times of conflict, crisis and catastrophe (mostly characterized by negative emotions) rumors travel faster than in times less turbulent.

Moreover, when transferring emotionally charged content in computer mediated communication the effect the message has on the receiver can differ significantly compared to content that is neutrally expressed (Roxin & Royzman, 2001, 296). Huffaker (2010) proved that people in online discussion forums give more feedbacks to those entries that contain affective language both to positive and negative emotions. These observations were confirmed by Dang-Xuan and Stieglitz (2012): by analyzing more than 17,000 entries from political blogs in Germany they found that those ones that either expressed more positive or more negative overall sentiment tend to receive significantly more comments compared to sentiment-neutral or mixed sentiment entries. Furthermore, when negative affect is used in messages online the result in feedback often leads to hostile and insulting language Kraut (2006, 723).

On Twitter, affective dimensions in tweets do not only influence the sharing behavior, but also the quantity of retweets: the more the message is emotionally charged, the more likely it is to be disseminated among followers (Stieglitz and Dang-Xuan, 2013). Tweets that contain strong positive or negative emotions are proven to be faster and more often spread within the network. Consequently, emotions in political campaigning are a vital characteristic to consider not only in terms of the effect they have on the voter but also as a driver for information diffusion in the digital environment.

3.5 Populist campaigning, social media and their use of emotions

Before further specifically looking at the case example of the thesis of the populist party Alternative für Deutschland the view will be shifted to the specific campaigning style of populists. First of all, it is important to define, what makes a party populist. The contemporary conception of populism is for the most part based on the new-right wave, starting in the 1970s, mobilizing against traditional "self-centered" politics, that supposedly ignores the wishes of the people. Issues focused on immigration, taxes, crime and nationalism is thereby the crucial element in right-wing propaganda (Jagers & Walgrave, 2007, 3).

As populism itself is depending on contextual conditions it can take many forms and facets and universal definitions have been vague and is often described as a "set of ideas" (Engesser et al., 2017, 1111; Hawkins, 2009, 1045; Priester, 2012, 1). Based on the previous work of Mudde (2004, 543), Albertazzi and McDonnell (2008, 3) introduced populism defining it as an "ideology which pits a virtuous and homogeneous people against a set of

elites and dangerous 'others' who are together depicted as depriving (or attempting to deprive) the sovereign people of their rights, values, prosperity, identity and voice."

Populism, whether it is right-wing or left-wing oriented, maintains a complex relationship with democracy, rejecting crucial aspects such as "checks and balances" (Kriesi, 2014, 363). Of a particular note is that populism follows a so-called "thin" ideology, like nationalism (less elaborate), as opposed to "full" (more substantive) ideology (such socialism, conservatism, liberalism). The "thin" ideology separates society into two homogenous and antagonistic groups: the "good people" and the "bad elite", centering around a set of core concepts, too restricted to provide answers to a broad range of political questions and problems within societies (Stanley, 2008, 99). In practice, thin ideologies have been often combined with their more established full-ideology counterparts (i.e. cohabiting nationalism and conservatism) (ibid.). Denying the existence of divisions and interests of opinions by rejecting the legitimacy of political opponents, populist parties present themselves as the voice of the people (vox populi), standing up against the corrupt elite (Wirth et al., 2016, 11). The people are seen as a "monolithic group", a corporate body, capable of having common interests and a common will (volonté générale) (Kriesi, 2014, 362).

Through responding to ordinary people's hopes and fears populist parties at the same time seem to offer simple solutions to societal problems such as immigration or national security. The political establishment is often blamed in an emotionalized way and the effectiveness of the message reinforced by appeals to the national identity (Hameleers, Bos, de Vreese, 2017, 876). Campaigning strategies are repeatedly based on the allegation that national elites (such as the national government or the EU) are working against the people, are only in politics to enrich themselves or and are acting in the interests of certain groups. Those groups can differ from country to country (it might be the Muslims in Western societies or people who are not Muslim in Turkey), but what populist parties offer is that they are the ones truly speaking for the people. Emotional appeals play a major role in populist rhetorical strategy. By filling their message with a sense of threat to the people they often play with negative emotions of *fear* and *anger*. Fear is utilized to convince the uncertain electorate that the established government is threatening the future of the heartland through their failing politics. Anger on the other hand is often connected to the culprit elites that are blocking the goals of the people (ibid.).

When the party's aim is to incite people's attitudes *without* blaming the political establishment, appealing to anger is a more effective method. Hameleers et al. (2017) suggest that populists use emotional appeals strategically by

tailoring their communication to the social identity attachment of the target group. Setting their findings in relation to strategic communication of European populists such as Geert Wilders and in the Netherlands and Marine Le Pen in France, their success in campaigns can be partly explained through appealing to negative emotions of the "ordinary citizen".

Bobba (2018) found that emotionalized-style messages of the Italian populist radical-right party *Lega Nord* affected the likeability of Facebook posts. If the message in the post was emotionalized they received three times more "Likes" than those with neutral sentiment. When examining the published posts for the emphasis of fear and anger he found that anger appeals are much more often used than fear-appeals. Content wise, those messages containing anger but also hatred and disgust were expressed together with blame attribution to the Italian government, the state, Europe, immigrants, Islamic people and terrorists.

In the new media environment, populist parties have stepped up in professionalizing their communication strategies by taking advantage of the benefits that social networks bring through direct communication and interactivity (Bobba, 2018, 10). Ernst et al. (2017, 1357) theorized that populist communication on social media becomes highly compatible through four characteristics: politicians get direct access without journalistic interference, the connection to voters becomes closer, it allows more personalized content and it is an efficient tool to target specific groups. By bypassing journalistic filters, extreme parties get their political message out that would be otherwise less visible in traditional media. Following Schweitzer's (2008) innovation hypothesis, by using the internet, especially smaller parties are able to circumvent the disadvantage of having lower campaign funding by being able to communicate their propaganda to a large user base and connect with potential voters.

4. How to analyze sentiment and emotions in texts

Before the case of the Alternative für Deutschland is introduced, the last part of the literature review takes a look at the scientific methods on how to identify and analyze emotion in texts. Through introducing two concepts of sentiment analysis, the work of emotion detection in the field of computer-mediated communication will be discussed. The findings lay the theoretical foundation for the methodological approach in chapter III where sentiment analysis is part of the empirical study of the twitter communication of the AfD.

4.1 Scientific sentiment analysis tools

Sentiment analysis or "opinion mining" has been topic in computer science and other scientific disciplines over the past two decades. Defined as "the process of determining a predefined sentiment from text written in natural language with respect to a specific subject" (Fawaz et al., 2004, 417), sentiment analysis tools allow the processing of texts in comments, blogs or reviews. The outcome allows the extraction of a general opinion about certain topics among unstructured data available on the internet. Sentiment analysis programs conduct a fine-grained examination that aims to give an overall orientation (positive to negative) and intensity (weak to strong) of the sentiments expressed by a text. This technique enables researchers to solve numerous problems, such as a forecasting or prediction of outcomes for a variety of purposes such as disaster response, politics, journalism and economics. But also users' feelings expressed on social media towards corporations and industries can be measured. Sentiment analysis thereby provides beneficial indicators of services and products and when applied correctly its algorithms help categorizing and transforming raw data from social media platforms into valuable knowledge (Pope & Griffith, 2016, 300).

Various examples in research can be found from Tumasjan et al. (2010), predicting German political elections with greater precision than traditional surveys and opinion polls or Asur et al. (2010), succeeding by forecasting box office revenues for upcoming movie releases better than conventional market predictors. The relation between online sentiment on Twitter and changes in the weather was examined by Li et al. (2014) who found that during increased snow depth feelings of depression were heightened. Anger on the other hand correlated with heat: the higher the temperatures in the area the more anger was found in the tweets. A focus on political communication and sentiment and the relation to information diffusion was carried out by Stieglitz and Dang-Xuan (2013). When analyzing a corpus of 165.000 tweets, their findings implied that emotionally charged Twitter messages tend to be retweeted more often and much faster than neutral ones. Together with Twitter, Facebook has been the preferred platform for sentiment analysis. As an example, can be named Kramer (2010) who used sentiment analysis for the gross national happiness of Facebook users.

Methods for sentiment analysis can be generally divided into two main concepts: The Lexical Approach and the Machine Learning Approach (Pope & Griffith, 2016, 300):

The **lexical approach** examines the semantic orientation of words and phrases in a text and determines an overall sentiment polarity. The method draws on a pre-defined dictionary that incorporates words or phrases that have

been labeled into a collection of sentiment categories. In other words, it can be described as a technique where data is segmented or partitioned into groups that can or cannot be disjoined (Unnisa et al., 2016, 13). The lexical approach is also referred to as unsupervised learning, as it does not require prior training in order to classify the data. The challenge within unsupervised learning lies within the dependency on accurately defined dictionaries as a lack of words can lead to a lack in performance. Another difficulty poses the context dependency of words, as for example the different polarity classification of "funny movie" (positive) and "funny taste" (negative) (Vohra & Teraya, 2013, 314-16). The same can be the case for the detection of sarcasm (Wolfgruber, 2015, 45). More advanced lexical analysis tools nowadays do not only allow the detection of positive or negative polarity but also a number of sentiment categories such as anger and fear (Pope & Griffith, 2016, 299).

The **machine learning approach** on the other hand uses a labelled set of training data which is based on a random sample of data produced by human evaluators that assign each text unit into desired sentiment categories (i.e. positive, negative, neutral). The so-produced training data functions as a robust sentiment classifier for supervised classification algorithms to produce a model. Machine learning approaches are part of supervised learning technique, meaning that tasks such as training and testing are part of the process. The most commonly used algorithms are Naive Bayes and Support Vector Machines which then produce sentiment results with the remaining data in the corpus (Pope & Griffith, 2016, 300). The drawbacks of supervised learning approaches is the high dependency on the domain of the training data and therefore lacks generality. Also, it can be very costly and time consuming as all the classes need to be manually pre-defined (Li & Liu, 2012, 130).

Notwithstanding of lexical or machine-learning approaches, the popularity of sentiment analysis is constantly growing, also due to the increase of accessible data (Giachanou & Crestani, 2016). However, the available evaluation datasets vary widely in quantity and quality (Haselmayer & Jenny, 2017, 2625). While English dictionaries are widely common, German ones are still lagging behind in amount of words and quality (Wolfgruber, 2015, 133). Inferior wordbooks often hold the risk of not detecting sarcasm, irony or spelling mistakes within the text. Elaborated programs are able to take grammar, the order of the words, different polarities of words and reinforcing words such as "very", "really" or "totally", however, due to the complexity and variability of the language a certain amount of misinterpretation always has to be taken into account (ibid., 34). The study of this work will make use of the lexical approach and draws on a German sentiment dictionary provided by LIWC.

5. Hypothesis and Framework

5.1 Hypothesis Formulation

The aim of this work is to investigate to what extent the Alternative für Deutschland uses emotional appeals in form of anger and fear in their social media posts on Twitter. Moreover, the sources of information the party shares in their network and the content in the tweets will be examined.

Several scholars have pointed out that emotions are a commonly used element in populist campaigning (Bobba, 2018, 2). Particularly with regards to populist' blame attribution, the discrete emotions **anger** and **fear** serve as utile tools in communication styles to convey that "the people" are threatened by "elites" or by "others" (Fieschi & Heywood, 2004). Designed to elicit specific feelings within the audience, the use of emotional appeals in form of fear (e.g. Marmor-Lavie & Weimann, 2006) and anger (Nabi, 2003) has been proven to be a common strategy in campaigns. Moreover, when the campaign content's information is emotionally charged, research has indicated that citizens' opinions are differently affected than by the absence of emotions (Gadarian, 2010).

Based on these findings it can be assumed that populist parties use emotional appeals to arouse certain feelings within the electorate on social media. More specifically, this paper argues that the two negative emotions anger and fear on social networks are dominantly expressed. However, it is argued that anger is the dominant emotional appeal of the both when a populist party is targeting their conservative right-wing voter base. This assumption is based on the following reasons:

From the perspective of AIT fear is an unlikely basis for appealing to the conservative right-leaning voter. When the surveillance system is activated through fear the deliberative state that follows weakens previous habits, lets the voter become better informed and seek out alternatives. Consequently, when populists spread content that uses events of the day by appealing to anxiety the audience should be expected to strive after more information about the topic. This could on the one side mean that the voter informs themselves only about the topic through sources of information that have the same subjective point of view on the issue (i.e. right-populist propaganda websites). But, if we follow the assumptions of Marcus (2017), the citizen increasingly resembles the hypothetical rational voter that Downs (1957) originally described, but with an open-mindedness that turns away from long-standing dispositions such as partisanship and ideology (in that case right-leaning conservatism). Ergo it can be assumed that *the anxious audience is likely to educate themselves through using more objective sources of information.*

According to AIT, populists are therefore far more likely to use *anger* appeals in populist communication. This is especially important when connecting emotional appeals to the popularity of more authoritarian policy proposals among the target audience in populist campaigning. Vasilopoulos et al. (2018) found that after the Charlie Hebdo attacks in Paris, anger fuels the support for conservative policies whereas anxiety undermines it. Voters that tend to identify themselves with more conservative, right wing ideologies, through the influence of *anxiety* were *not* more open to the acceptance of "authoritarian" policy preferences. *Anger*, however, had the opposite impact: for conservative right-wing voters, the bonds to authoritarian policies were strengthened when they felt angry. The results of their study are illustrated in Figure 5. The main conclusions that can be drawn from the literature are therefore the following: *if the populist party's conservative right-leaning voter base is targeted, the use of anger should be the emotional tool to strengthen the bond between party and electorate.*

Figure 5: Influence of anger and fear appeals on the voter
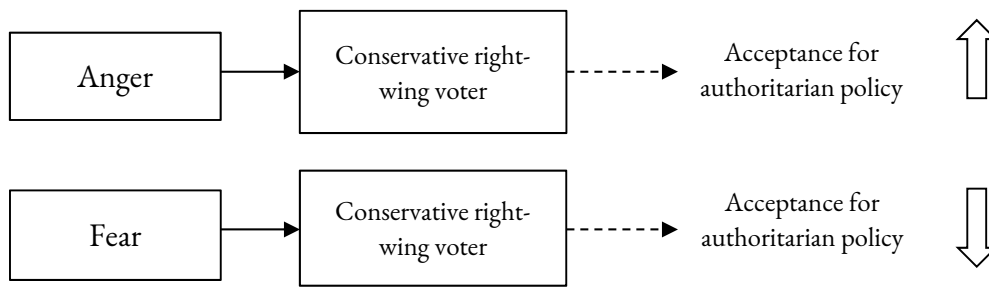
Source: Own illustration based on Vasilopoulos et al. (2018)

When connecting the findings from above to the campaigning environment of social media, in which the target audience of populist parties can be directly addressed, the assumption can be made that the majority of the follower base is most likely in line with the (conservative/right-wing) views of the populist party. [6] Bringing the conclusions together, this thesis' first hypothesis thus states:

H1: Populist parties express more anger than fear in their posts on Twitter when appealing to their voter base.

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[6] A 2017 analysis of the political Twittersphere proved those assumptions by visualizing how the AfD accounts stood apart from the rest of the parties being only connected among each other (Blood and Maier-Borst, 2017).

This hypothesis alone does not tell us anything about the type of content populist parties share within their tweets as part of their campaigning strategies. Studies show, that the AfD tends to spread those links preferably on Twitter that is traditionally more in the center right leaning spectrum of the German news media landscape (Reuter, 2017). The fundamental criticism of the "mainstream media" is a dominant feature of populist parties. With regards to subject and content matter research proved, that the AfD-sphere is closed off the rest of the network. As Brunner and Ebitsch (2017) show, those Facebook fans that surround the AfD do not inform themselves via established news media such as *Tagesschau*, *Spiegel Online*, *Süddeutsche Zeitung* or *Huffington Post* Deutschland. Instead, the fans predominantly read *Junge Freiheit*, the *Epoch Times*, *Russia Today Deutsch* or *Compact* – old and new media, that often publish news with right-wing or anti-liberal spin. If this thesis' research sticks to the previous studies on URL-sharing of right wing parties on social media, the next hypothesis can be exposed as follows:

H2: When sharing external sources of information on Twitter, populist right-wing parties will post more opinionated content of right-leaning media than of established news media.

When looking at the content that is spread by populist parties, research has shown that the subject of communication often refers to the people as a homogenous in-group and "the others (the elite or out-groups) who are blamed or excluded from the people (Wirz, 2018, 1115). The next hypothesis therefore reads as follows:

H3: The content populist right-wing parties share on Twitter predominantly addresses problems attached to elites and out-groups.

Furthermore, this thesis takes a look at the relationship between anger, fear and blame attribution in the tweets. The arousal of anger presumes that the current status quo is perceived as unfair and unjust, not often rooted in an inner frustration (Rico, Guinjoan, Anduiza, 2017, 448). Those who are perceived as being in control of the current situation ("the elite") are the primary driver for anger. Anger entails harm or offense that is perceived as unfair while it at the same time comes with a certainty of whom to blame. It motivates people to take action against the person responsible. The next hypothesis therefore states:

H4: When attacking "the elite" in tweets political parties are more likely to use anger than fear.

As this thesis not only investigates populist' campaigning behavior but also the effects their tweets have on the audience, it is also important to take a closer look on the response within the network. Content being shared on Twitter that evokes high arousal (such as anger and fear) has been proven to have a positive impact on the number of shares (Stieglitz and Dang-Xuan, 2013, 223). When it comes to the diffusion of tweets, those containing anger are more prone to be retweeted than those expressing fear (Kanavos et al., 2014, 108). As a simple and powerful way of information diffusion, retweeting is the key mechanism to spreading content within the social network (Suh et al., 2010, 177) and is therefore expected be the main objective of a populist party's social media strategy. By concentrating on the role of discrete emotions on virality, the last hypothesis of this thesis states:

H5: Those tweets shared by populist parties that are emotionally charged with anger in their messages are more often retweeted than those containing fear.

5.2 Theoretical Framework

This section presents a framework that integrates all theoretical considerations of the previous chapters and covers the effects that are of interest to this study. It also incorporates the hypotheses and the research questions of the thesis.

The research is divided into two topic fields. On the one side the focus is put on emotional appeals within the populist party tweets and their impact on the diffusion of tweets within the Twitter network. Looking at the affects of emotions based on the theory of Affective Intelligence the general use of anger and fear and its influence on sharing behavior is investigated (H1 & H5 resp. RQ1 & RQ5).

On the other side the focus lies on the content and the sources of information the party and their representatives implement in their tweets (RQ2 and RQ3). By analyzing the blame attribution of elites and out-groups (H3) and the reference to news media platforms attached to the tweets (H2), the thesis aims to give insights into the characteristics of populist communication strategies on social media. By then connecting the two research fields, the relationship between emotional appeals and populist blame attribution in the tweets is done through H4 and RQ4. Presented below in Figure 6 is the graphical illustration of the framework.

Figure 6: Theoretical framework of the thesis
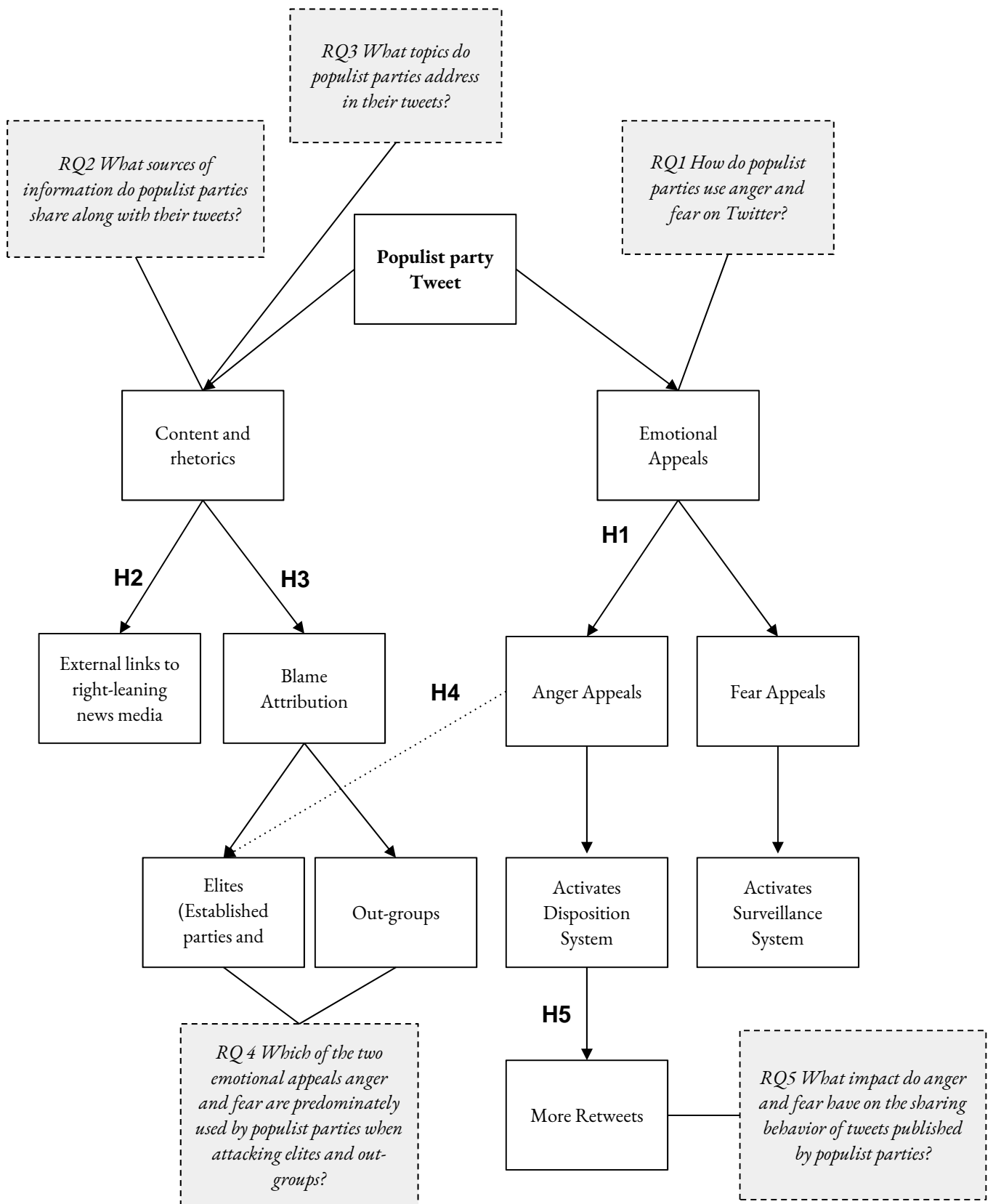
6. Case Study: The right-wing populist party AfD in Germany

6.1 The Alternative für Deutschland (AfD)

In the following chapter the focus will now be shifted to the specific case chosen for this thesis. After reviewing the relevant literature and theories, it became apparent that the research field between emotions, populist campaigning and social media has yet to be explored. Thus, based on five research questions, the method of a single case study will be employed. As identified by Yin (2014, 16), a case study is described as an empirical inquiry that examines a contemporary phenomenon in depth within its real-world context to identify and analyze the knowledge gaps that are unexplored, with no clear evidence.

For this thesis, the example of Germany and the populist nationalistic-right party Alternative für Deutschland (AfD) was chosen. It was seen as particularly well-suited because the AfD, as a fairly new party, just entered the German parliament in 2017. Originally the AfD was founded in 2013 as a Euro-critic party by Bernd Lucke. After the refugee crisis in 2015, the party split into a nationalistic-right wing led by Frauke Petry and Jörg Meuthen and an economic-liberal wing led by Lucke. The latter left the party in 2015 and founded his own party ALFA. From 2014 to 2017, the AfD entered into 14 state parliaments and the national parliament (Bundestag). Until then, Germany has not had a party in the Bundestag right from traditional conservative parties (CDU/CSU, Christian Democratic Union/Christian Social Union) since the end of World War II and has thereby long been the European exemption. Other than south European countries such as Italy or Greece, where populist parties quickly won elections in the aftermath of the financial crisis 2008, Germany recovered quickly and managed to keep extreme parties out of the parliament. Up to this day, Germany builds the fourth largest economy in the world with an unemployment rate of less than 4% (Eurostat, 2018). Nevertheless, the AfD gained 12.6% of the votes in the 2017 elections, building the minority leader in the parliament today. In the following section the country-specific situation in Germany will be explained to give a holistic view of the political party landscape the AfD and their voters are part of. This helps later to understand why the AfD uses certain rhetorical strategies and addresses certain problems and topics in their tweets.

6.2 The voter base of the Alternative für Deutschland

First and foremost, in order to comprehend the success of the AfD it is important to take a look at the characteristics of their voter base to then get a deeper insight into the question why they voted for the AfD. A 2017 study of the trade union-linked Hans Böckler Foundation (Hilmer et al., 2017) searched for the drivers that led to

populist voting within the German population. The fundamental reason that influenced AfD voters in their decision was the "dissatisfaction with the own life situation" (ibid., 26) which was not based on objective facts but more on grounds of the individual's subjective perception. The latter is often shaped by the feeling of being personally disregarded: regardless of their actual income, AfD sympathizers often believe to live in a lower social status and asses themselves more often than average socially declined compared to their parents. As a matter of fact, the majority of the voters can be found in the lower middle class. Notwithstanding, the crucial factor for voting alt-right is in their case not the suffering of unemployment, but more the fear of not finding a job in case of losing the current one. As a basic principle, the study attested that voters prone to the AfD often feel a "loss of control" (ibid., 6) which affects them on a personal, political and national level. Next to anxiety about the future, AfD voters often sees politicians as "out of touch with reality" and do not feel themselves and the population adequately protected by the state.

The demographic analysis of the September 2017 elections in Germany show significant differences between the regions of former East and West Germany (Franz et al., 2018) (see also Appendix 1): sparsely inhabited areas with problems of superannuation of the population attract more AfD voters in the East, whereas in the West many industrial workers with a low income voted for them. A higher unemployment rate, however, had no significant influence on the approval of the AfD. Nationwide the party received 12.6% of the total votes, whereas the popularity among the male population (16.3%) was much higher than among the female (9.3%). More than twice as many percent of the population in the East (21.9%) voted for the AfD compared to in the West (11.1%) (ibid., 137).

The populist parties in Europe not only draw strength from lack of prospects and structurally weakened regions but also from the public opposition to mass immigration and cultural liberalization, and the sovereignty to distant and unresponsive international bodies (Galston, 2018). The reality, however, shows that the AfD enjoys the highest popularity in those parts of the country with the lowest percentage of immigrants (Franz et al., 2018, 143). When the conservative Union of CDU (Christlich Demokratische Union) allowed to open the borders during the refugee crisis in 2015, many conservative voters disagreed, which resulted in a loss of trust in the 2017 parliamentary elections: 1.1 million former CDU (and CSU) voters gave their vote to the AfD (see Appendix 2). Often these voters expressed fears about increase of criminality and violence, and with the influx of "strangers" a stronger influence of the Islam on their "christian characterized culture" (Göll, 2017). Shifting away from conservative

positions, Angela Merkel may have helped the AfD becoming third biggest party given the party's focus on such issues throughout the campaign (Blickle et al., 2017).

In principle, conservative voters are characterized by a desire to return to traditional values and preserve that which is proven, by also being open to novel but not adapting every novelty without question. Conservatism (from latin conservare, conserving the status quo) stays in contrast to the progressive favoring of change and a reactionary preference to return to the past (Mudde, 2007, 27). It combines a set of different ideas, varying depending on the countries and over time. The literature often defined conservatism on the basis of four features: authoritarianism, traditionalism, religiosity and nationalism. The boundaries between conservative and populist radical-right parties such as the AfD are often difficult to establish. Radical-right populist parties are part of the nationalist movement, however, what distinguishes them from center-right parties (such as Christian Democrats or liberal FDP in Germany) or the neo-conservatism of the 1980s, is the liability to acknowledge *nativism* and as part of their core ideological features, and the lack of an elaborated socioeconomic agenda (ibid., 28).

As head of the traditionally rather conservative party CSU, chancellor Angela Merkel's political shift to the center ("Mitte") of the political landscape over the past decade allowed plenty of space on the right side for an alternative option on the ballot. By moving away from conservatism as one fundamental essence of the party's ideals, many voters cannot identify themselves anymore with the CDU leaving an emerging need for politicians representing these values, which resulted in the surge of the AfD (Dunz, 2018).

III. METHODOLOGY

7. Methodological Considerations

Before the conducted research is outlined in more detail, the methodological foundation for the thesis will be explained. By elaborating on the means of data collection and analysis, it serves as a credibility and validity of the research. To determine the methodological choices, this thesis uses the research process onion by Saunders, Lewis, & Thornhill (2016, 124; see Appendix 3). The onion provides a clear framework as it endorses suitable methods and strategies to answer the research question, providing an effective progression and establishing a good quality-research, ensuring validity, reliability and trustworthiness.

Philosophy of Methodology

To ensure consistency throughout the study, it is important to establish the philosophy of science. The research philosophy refers to "a system of beliefs and assumptions about the development of knowledge" (Saunders et al., 2016, 124), in other words, it provides the justification for the research methodology. The methodology should be informed by the nature of the phenomena being observed. It should provide assumptions about human knowledge (epistemological assumptions), the realities the researcher encounters during the study (ontological assumptions) and the extent of how much the researcher's personal values influence the research process (axiological assumptions) (ibid.).

For the **first layer** of the research onion, Saunders et al. (2016) describe five different philosophy of science paradigms of which the two main ones are *Positivism* and *Interpretivism* (Saunders et al., 2016, 135). *Positivism* assumes that reality exists independently of the thing being studied, other than *interpretivism,* which states that human beings and physical phenomena cannot be studied in the same way and therefore their research needs to be different (ibid., 137, 140). This thesis is based on the positivist philosophy because of the following reasons:

The *ontological perspective* of positivism assumes that the researcher is external, objective and independent of social actors (Saunders et al., 2016, 127). Ontology is a system of belief that reflects an interpretation by an individual about what constitutes a fact. It is associated with the central question of whether social entities should be perceived as objective (and not subjective as in Interpretivism) (ibid.). In this thesis' research the role of the researcher is limited to data collection and interpretation based on predefined methods that are not influenced by the researchers own interpretation and are therefore solely objective.

From an *epistemological perspective*, which refers to the way we interpret knowledge and which knowledge is considered relevant for a study, positivism assumes that the research is based on scientific numbers and observable and measurable facts that build causal explanations (ibid.). In the case of this thesis the data is sourced through Twitter and then analyzed using a sentiment analysis program which makes the data measurable and quantifiable and builds the foundation for statistical analysis.

With regards to the researcher's own perspective (*axiology*) positivist research requires neutrality and personal detachment from the data to avoid influencing the findings (Saunders et al., 2016, 137). The researcher has to undertake the research, as far as it allows them, in a value-free way. In the present case, the analysis of political content might always bare the risk that the interpreter is biased in a certain way, however, as the analysis is not based on subjective interpretation but on quantitative data that jeopardy can be avoided to a certain extend.

Research Approach

The **second layer** of the research onion addresses the need for a research strategy, which is "a plan of how a researcher will go about answering her or his research question" (Saunders et al., 2016, 177). The research strategy is therefore chosen based on the research questions and the objectives of the research. This study is primarily based on the *deductive approach* which comprises the development of a theory based on academic literature that leads to the design of a research strategy to test it (ibid., 146). This approach was executed through deducing four main hypotheses from the literature, expressing them in operational terms, testing the hypothem (through quantitative analysis techniques), examining the specific outcome, and (if required) modifying the theory based on the findings. With this approach, the method brings the advantage of explaining the causal relationships between variables, and utilizing controls to allow the testing of the hypotheses quantitatively. This makes it possible to later generalize the findings (ibid.).

Methodological Choice

The **third layer** of the research onion deals with the methodological choice of the research in which the decision has to be made on whether the study should be done based on quantitative or qualitative data or a combination of both. In the case of this thesis, a quantitative mono-method approach, where a single set of data is generated through the Twitter data base. Quantitative research examines the relationship between variables and can be used to investigate a wide range of social phenomena, including feelings and subjective viewpoints (Saunders et al., 2016, 406).

Research Strategy & Time Horizon

For the **fourth layer** of the research onion – the research strategy – the plan of action to receive a goal (Saunders et al, 2016, 178) – a combination of archival research and the specific case of a political party is chosen. Archival research describes documents that are "durable repository for textual, visual and audio representations" (Lee, 2012, 391), which in this thesis describe the communication between individuals within groups such as social media and blog posts. However, as the research deals with a topic surrounding the specific situation of a political party and the influence of their communication strategies on the network surrounding them, also the premises for a case study are fulfilled. A case study is defined as an in-depth inquiry into a topic or phenomenon within its real-life setting (Yin, 2014, 16). Regarding the time horizon (**fifth layer**), a period of 23 days was picked. The data was aggregated together and chosen as one "snapshot", independent of its development over time. Therefore, a cross-sectional horizon was taken (Saunders et al., 2016, 148).

Research Techniques & Procedures

The last and **sixth layer** of the research onion (techniques and procedure) deals with the data collection and analysis (Saunders et al., 2016, 316). The research of this thesis was based on primary data taken from Twitter. Primary data describes data that is specifically collected for the research project being undertaken (Saunders, 2016, 724). The data was generated through the internet-based observation of Twitter timelines (so called tweets accessed through the Twitter API). Twitter's global reach, large user base, and data openness make it the preferred platform for large-scale studies of human behavior (Steinert-Threlkeld, 2018, 2). It has been increasingly used in political context as a communication channel for political institutions (Stieglitz and Dang-Xuan, 2013, 219). The content of the investigated tweets was then used to generate statistical measures with the help of word counts and regression techniques.

Reliability, Validity & Generalizability of the data

As quantitative research examines the relationship between variables by measuring numerically and through statistical techniques, it is important to ensure the reliability, validity and generalizability of the data (Saunders et al., 2016, 166). *Reliability* is defined as the extent to which different measurements are in agreement with one another (Carmines and Zeller, 1979) whereas *validity* concerns whether the data collected can yield a valid measure of a theoretical construct that is suitable to the research question (Cheliotis, 2015, 586). Quantitative research often uses probability measurement methods to ensure *generalizability* (Saunders et al., 2016, 166).

Social media and in particular Twitter with its open access has proven to be a trove of information for research on collective as well as individual behavior that emerges from the interactions of many (Cheliotis, 2015, 586). However, with regards to validity, research has to identify an appropriate way to collect the data according to the research question which might bring potential biases in the level of representativeness of the work (Bruns & Weller, 2014). Using data taken from social networks represents only the views of some members of the community and can bring the risk of being unreliable because "observing" the views or of other members may produce the data with different emphasis (Saunders et al., 2016, 376). Therefore, the validity of the outcome has to account for the adoption rate of Twitter in different communities, age groups or, as in the example of this thesis, countries and cultures. Taking specific party accounts for the examination and leaving out others can result in further biases the researcher needs to be aware of. The same can be said for the restrictions in the data collection through own software querying the public REST API of Twitter. According to Bruns & Weller (2014) Twitter may prevent the collection of the "ideal" data set. Previous studies by González-Bailón et al. (2014) showed that the REST API (accesses historical data – used in this thesis) yields a smaller dataset than the Stream API (accesses live data), which can result in over- or underestimation of various metrics. It is therefore not assumed that this thesis' data collected from social media is free of measurement error that also plagues other methods of data collection, e.g. survey instruments commonly employed in the social sciences (Cheliotis et al., 2015, 586).

Table 1: Methodological research process for this thesis based on the research onion

Layer	Stages in Research Process	Chosen Method
1	Philosophy	Positivism
2	Approach to theory development	Deductive
3	Methodological Choice	Mono-method/Quantitative
4	Research Strategy	Archival/Case
5	Time Horizon	Cross sectional study
6	Techniques and Procedures	Primary Data through internet-mediated observation

Source: Own illustration based on Saunders et al., (2016, 124)

Nonetheless, by querying data over a time span of 23 days from 17 different accounts the measurement errors were tried to be reduced to a minimum. Moreover, to ensure reliability and generalizability this research uses similar techniques previously tested in other studies (e.g. Stieglitz and Dang-Xuan, 2013). An overview of the different levels of research processes within this thesis can be seen in Table 1.

8. Research Design, Data and Sample

8.1 The Case: The Alternative für Deutschland

The empirical focus is on the the German right-wing populist party Alternative für Deutschland (AfD) that in 2017's national parliament elections reached the 5-percent-hurdle necessary to make it into the parliament and it is therefore first time since 1945 that a populist party enters the Reichstag again. With 12,5% they became third largest party in the 19th Bundestag, after the Christian Democratic Union/Christian Social Union (CDU/CSU) with chancellor Angela Merkel (33,0%) and the Social Democratic Party (SPD) and their leading candidate Martin Schulz, which received the worst result since the Second World War with just 20,5% of the vote.

8.2 Approach Synopsis

The analysis of the data followed in four phases (see Figure 7). In particular we examined the tweeting behavior of 17 political accounts and analyzed how their use of emotional appeals influenced the user response in form of retweet behavior. Furthermore, we studied the use of media content of the selected accounts. Starting in Phase 1 by accessing the data of the selected accounts through the Twitter API, the data is pre-processed by the removal of double entries, English tweets and direct @Replies. The external links that were included in the tweets were converted from shortened "http://t.co"[7] links to its original URL format (Phase 2). The remaining data is then analyzed through a sentiment analysis program (LIWC), regression techniques (Eviews and Stata) and manually allocated according through topic fields (Phase 3). The result analysis is conducted in Phase 4.

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[7] https://help.twitter.com/en/using-twitter/url-shortener

Figure 7: Approach overview of AfD Twitter Analysis
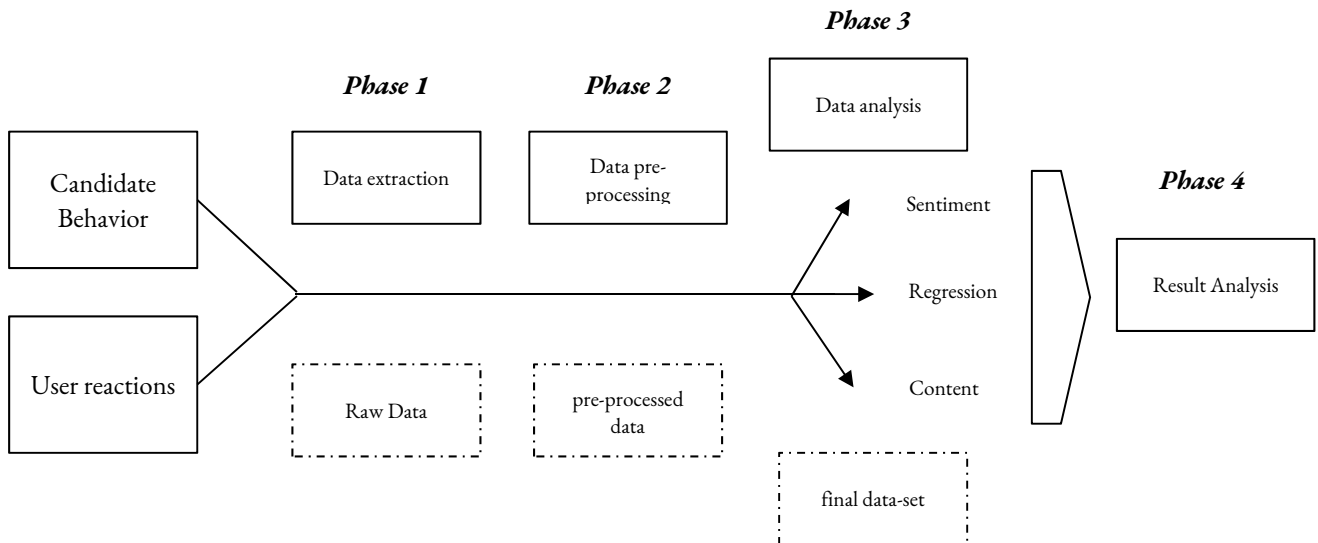
8.3 Phase 1 & 2: Data extraction and pre-processing

For the empirical analysis two datasets of tweets relevant to the AfD that were published on Twitter's public messages board were employed. Both dataset cover a period of 24 days spanning from July 17 to August 9, 2018, the campaigning period three months prior to the Landtag (state parliament) elections in the German state Bavaria and Hesse. The period was marked by a heated debate between the German parties about integration of muslims in Germany following the resignation of the German Turkish football player Mezut Özil. He attacked the country's football federation (DFB), its president, fans and media for what he saw as double standards in treating people with Turkish roots. The media and politicians quickly expanded the discussion to a societal discussion about tension surrounding national and personal identities which was also reflected on social media exchange. In general, the data was chosen in the pre-election phase since those campaign stages are characterized by a high level of user participation in the political communication and discourse on Twitter (Stieglitz and Dang-Xuan, 2013, 225).

One dataset contained tweets published by eight official Twitter accounts of the AfD from federal, state and local level that were higher than average active (at least one tweet a day over the past few months) as well as their official membership magazine (AfD Kompakt) (see Table 2):

Table 2: Official AfD Twitter Accounts (August 2018).

AfD Account	Twitter Name	Level	Tweets	Followers
Alternative für Deutschland (AfD)	@AfD	Official Account	16,400	124,000
AfD Bayern	@AfDBayern	State Level (Bavaria)	9,521	14,600
AfD Essen	@afdessen	City Level (Essen)	5,552	1,902
AfD Fraction Brandenburg	@AfD_FraktionBB	State Parliament (Landtag Brandenburg)	4,899	3,713
AfD Fraction Parliament Berlin	@AfDFraktionAGH	State Level (Berlin Abgeordnetenhaus)	3,835	5,434
AfD Berlin	@AfDBerlin	State Level (Land association) Member announcement account	19,600	14,600
AfD Fraction Bundestag	@AfDimBundestag	Federal (National Parliament)	4,097	21,100
AfD North Rhine Westphalia	@AlternativeNRW	State Level (Landtag NRW)	19,200	9,163
AfD Kompakt	@AfDKompakt	Official Membership Magazine AfD	5,355	16,500

Note: Data from 07.08.2018. Tweets are all tweets since sign-up of the account.

Different levels from different parts of the country were chosen to cover the entire federal landscape. Additionally, eight prominent AfD politicians were chosen that were characterized by a high frequency of tweets:

Table 3: Party Member Twitter Accounts. (August 2018).

Politician	Twitter Name	Role	Tweets	Followers
Alice Weidel	@Alice_Weidel	AfD Co-Leader (Fraktionsvorsitzende)	1,886	56,700
Beatrix von Storch	@Beatrix_vStorch	AfD Deputy Leader	8,108	39,000
Frank Pasemann	@Frank_Pasemann	Member of the Bundestag (constituency Magdeburg) chairman of the AfD executive board as deputy treasurer	12,200	7330
Georg Pazderski	@Georg_Pazderski	Regional chairman of the AFD Berlin, chairman AfD in Berlin House of Representatives, first deputy speaker	1,100	12,800
Guido Reil	@GuidoReil	Member of the AfD Federal Board	11,500	11,500
Malte Kaufmann	@MalteKaufmann	Spokesman AfD Heidelberg	3,429	16,700
Ronny Kumpf	@RonnyKumpf	Chairman AfD Magdeburg	1,183	2,179
Jörg Meuthen	@Joerg_Meuthen	AfD Federal Sportsman, Member of the European Parliament	1,906	32,900

Note: Data from 07.08.2018. Tweets are all tweets since sign-up of the account.

The data was gathered through a Java-based software tool that uses the "Rest API" provided by Twitter and the sample was restricted to German language tweets. Twitter's Rest API only allows to gather a restricted amount of data (only 100 tweets per query) that were created not longer than six days prior to the query. The data therefore had to be drawn multiple times during the observed time frame. After generating the raw data, they were converted from .CSV to .XLSX files and a data cleaning procedure was applied to identify and remove double entries and @Replies from the data-set. After the cleaning procedure 1461 tweets remained.[8]

8.4 Phase 3: Data Analysis

8.4.1 Sentiment Analysis

To extract the sentiment within the tweets Linguistic Inquiry and Word Count (LIWC) dictionary was used that is available for academic use (Pennebaker et al., 2015). By calculating the degree to which a text contains words belonging to empirically defined structural and psychological categories, it determines the rate at which certain cognitions and emotions (e.g sadness or enthusiasm) are present in the text. For each psychological dimension a relative frequency is calculated with which words related to that dimension occur in a given text sample (e.g., the words "furious" "disgusting" or "unbelievable" are counted as representatives of the construct "anger"). LIWC has been used widely in psychology and linguistics but also for topics related to political science such as senatorial speeches or political ads (Tumasjan et al. 2010, 407).

The program uses a lexical approach to perform sentiment analysis and incorporates a number of international dictionaries for different categories developed by computer scientists and psychologists. LIWC was chosen as the internal German dictionary (German_LIWC2001) contained the sentiment categorizations affect, positive emotions, negative emotions but more importantly anger and fear. A lexical approach was preferred over the machine learning approach as the latter requires the input on training data which has to be evaluated by professionally trained human evaluators which would go beyond the scope of this thesis. The sentiment categories selected within this thesis go along with words and word stems of the following two classifications:

- Anger (e.g. words and word stems such as hate, kill, brutal, rude, rape, aggressive)
- Anxiety (e.g. words and word stems such as worried, fear, nervous, anxious, afraid).

---

[8] Data available in separate file "AfD Retweet Data final.xls".

When recognizing words from one of the categories above, LIWC generates a numerical score for each tweet (a positive number greater than 0 based on the total number of words presented in the Tweet that match words, and word stems within one of the sentiment categories). To get a feel for tweets featuring emotions the following example are provided:

anger:

> *Somalische Piraten attackieren einen deutschen Frachter mit Raketenwerfern und Kalaschnikows. Nach Absitzen der lächerlichen Haftstrafen leben diese Kriminellen nun mitten unter uns und beziehen Sozialleistungen. Ein einziger Skandal... #nurdieAfD https://t.co/M5unchY81k*
>
> (LIWC anger score: 6.1)
>
> (*English: Somali pirates are attacking a German freighter with rocket launchers and Kalashnikovs. After serving ridiculous prison sentences, these criminals now live among us and receive social benefits. What a scandal ... #OnlytheAfD*)

anxiety:

> *++ Der Rechtsstaat muss endlich wieder Zähne zeigen! ++ Tötungsdelikte, Raub, Nötigung, Diebstahl einer 100 kg schweren Goldmünze aus einem Museum, Hehlerei, Prostitution und Drogenhandel - die Liste der Vergehen des Clans aus Berlin ist lang. #AfD*
>
> (English: *++ The rule of law must finally show teeth! ++ Killing offenses, robbery, coercion, theft of a 100 kg gold coin from a museum, stolen goods, prostitution and drug trafficking - the list of transgressions of the clan of Berlin is long. #AfD*)
>
> (LIWC anxiety score: 11.43)

8.4.2 Content and Media analysis

For the third hypothesis (H3), which postulates that populist parties predominantly address issues referring to "the others" (political elites) and out-groups (minorities), three categories were predefined to classify the content in the tweets:

- A – elites
- B – out-groups
- C – other topics

To get a more deeper understanding of the precise topics the AfD posts about on their timelines twenty different topic fields were determined. These topic fields where then assigned to one of the above defined categories A/B/C.

Table 4: Categorization of AfD tweets according to content and field.

Topic Field		Category
1	Euro, European Central Bank, policy on interest rates	A
2	Europe, debt crisis, Italy, Spain, etc.	A
3	Islam, integration, "multiculturalism"	B
4	Police, inner security	A/B
5	Child benefit abroad	B
6	Bundeswehr (German armed force), compulsory military service	A
7	The Greens (Bündnis 90/Die Grünen), The Left (Die Linke), Free Democrats (FDP)	A
8	Exclusion of the AfD	A
9	Refugees, Asylum, Migration, family reunion, Ceuta, Sami A.	B
10	Social Party (SPD)	A
11	#Metwo, Özil	B
12	Crime of foreigners and immigrants	B
13	Merkel, Christian Democratic Party (CDU), Christian Social Union (CSU)	B
14	Bavaria, Landtagswahlen (state parliament elections 2018), Söder (governor of Bavaria)	A
15	Climate change	C
16	Opinion polls	C
17	Media, GEZ (fee collection center of public-law broadcasting institutions)	A
18	Left-wing extremism	C
19	Taxes, social state, caring,	A
20	Others (Trump, USA, football, Russia) etc.	C

The elites (A) were not only seen on the established parties, which are the smaller parties (7), the Social Democrats (10) and the CDU/CSU (13) but also the media, which are often seen as an enemy of the people by populist parties.

Each single tweet was manually assigned. A tweet could belong to one or more topic fields and categories depending on the content, shown in the following example:

Fri Jul 27 22:06:14 CEST 2018 by Joerg_Meuthen:

Die Oberbürgermeister der Städte Köln, Bonn und Düsseldorf haben nun der Kanzlerdarstellerin einen Brief geschickt, in welchem sie um die Zuweisung weiterer illegaler Einwanderer bitten. Zeit, die Bürger zu befragen. Zeit für die #AfD! ➡ *https://t.co/ocrJBWe5Vb https://t.co/sc2OVhy1b1*

(English: The mayors of the cities of Cologne, Bonn and Dusseldorf have now sent a letter to the chancellor impersonator, in which they ask for the allocation of other illegal immigrants. Time to ask the citizens. Time for the #AfD).

In the tweet by Jörg Meuthen, not only is Angela Merkel (CDU) and the mayors of the cities (SPD) criticized but also immigrants, that might be allocated to the cities. According to Meuthen, the people should therefore not vote for the established currently ruling parties but for the AfD. The tweet is therefore categorized according to the following:

Content Classification: A & B (elite and out-groups)

Topic field: 9 (Refugees), 10 (SPD), 13 (Merkel).

A second example is illustrated by a tweet published by Alice Weidel:

Sun Aug 05 16:06:07 CEST 2018 by Alice Weidel:

++ *Ja zur #Wehrpflicht! ++ Die Aussetzung war ein grober Fehler. Sie muss aufgehoben und die #Bundeswehr wieder zu einem attraktiven Arbeitgeber werden, der seine originäre Aufgabe, nämlich die Landesverteidigung, wieder bewältigen kann. #AfD*

(English: ++ Yes to #draftservice! ++ The suspension was a gross error. It must be repealed and the #Bundeswehr again become an attractive employer, who can master its original task, and that is the national defense. #AfD)

Here, neither the elite or any specific group is addressed. The categorization therefore is as follows:

Content Classification: C (other)

Topic field: 6 (German armed force and compulsory military service).

Generally, the classification required a foundation of knowledge about the current political landscape and day-to-day politics as some tweets indirectly addressed certain political actors. For instance, the pedophile scandal in the 1980s that happened within the Green party was found in some tweets as an indirect synonym for the party which might not be recognized by a layperson.

For H3, those tweets were selected, that contained a link to an external news media site. Links that led to either another tweet, Youtube or Facebook were excluded. As Twitter posts are restricted to 280 characters and tweets often led to Facebook accounts of the user, which allows a larger amount of words. If Twitter users shared more than one URL in their tweet, only the first URL was analyzed, which lead to 533 URLs. Next, the URL classification that was carried out manually based on Neudert et al. (2017), Reuter (2017) and Busch-Janser (2017). The grounded typology of news platforms and content types that was used was as follows:

- **Professional News Content**

  These platforms display the qualities of professional journalism, with fact checking and credible standards of production. Through providing clear information about the real authors, editors, publishers and owners their articles are produced by an organization with a history of professional journalism (Neudert et al. 2017, 3). The platforms were in the second step categorized from left to right on the political landscape (Reuter, 2017; Busch Janser, 2017):

  - Mainly conservative, right-leaning news media platforms (e.g. Focus)
  - Mainly political center news media platforms (e.g. Deutschlandfunk)
  - Mainly left-leaning news media platforms (e.g. Tageszeitung)

- **Less professional/less established news platforms**

  These platforms to a certain extend contain content that includes various forms of ideologically extreme propaganda or conspiracy information and deliberately produced through false reporting. It aims to persuade the audience of moral virtues or failings of organizations, causes or people and presents commentary as a news product. The organizations producing the content that do not employ professional journalist that use techniques such as emotionally charged words and pictures, unsafe generalizations, ad hominem attacks, and other logical fallacies (Neudert et al., 2017, 3). They were politically categorized according to the following:

- Right-wing nationalist platforms (e.g. Junge Freiheit)
- Left-wing nationalist platforms (e.g. Indymedia)

8.4.3 Regression Analysis

8.4.3.1 Variables

To test H5, which postulates a positive relationship between anger in tweets and retweet behavior in terms of the amount of times a tweet of one of the observed AfD accounts has been retweeted, the following variables for each tweet were constructed for the regression:

Dependent variable:

- the number of times the tweet has been retweeted: RETWEET_COUNT

The regression was based on a sample of 1461 data.[9]

The explanatory variables:

- anger score determined by LIWC: ANGER
- anxiety score determined by LIWC: ANX
- number of followers of the original author: FOLLOWER_COUNT

The number of followers was included in the regression to test H5, because the followers of a twitter account user represent the degree of homophily (users that have similar interests) which consequently increases the likelihood that the users retweet the content (Stieglitz and Dang-Xuan, 2013, 228). In other words, the larger the audience of the tweeting person, the more likely the tweet gets retweeted.

Previous studies have shown that also other factors can have an influence on retweet behavior. Suh et al. (2010, 183) found, that external URLs within a tweet positively correlate with retweetability. The detailed analysis of the message in the tweets also showed, that the Twitter account users try to announce important information by marking the text with a "+++" to arouse attention by the reader. Therefore, in an alternative regression (H 4b), two more influential independent variables were added as dummy (binary) variables:

- dummy variable when external sources such as news platforms were referred to (inclusion of external URL in the tweet): DUMMY_EXT_SOURCE
- dummy variable when tweet contains a "+++": DUMMY_PLUS

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[9] 18 of the total number of 1461 tweets had no retweet. An alternative regression without these 18 observations did not lead to other qualitative results.

The descriptive statistics of the all used variables for the regression analysis are presented in Table 5.[10]

Table 5: Summary Statistics of Variables used in the Regression Analysis

	Mean	Median	Maximum	Minimum	Standard Deviation
Dependent variable					
RETWEET_COUNT	135.75	66	1509	1	168.5
Explanatory variables					
ANX	0.50	0	22.22	0	1.57
ANGER	0.86	0	13.16	0	1.80
FOLLOWER_COUNT	14425.6	7313	252854	75	21692.59

Note: Number of Observations: 1461

8.4.3.2 Estimation Method

In order to test H5 regression analysis is used. As regression technique, a count data model was chosen due to the fact that the dependent variable RETWEET_COUNT represents true-event count data (i.e. nonnegative and integer based data). After decided to use a count data model, it was necessary to choose a concrete count data regression model. Here, a negative binomial regression model was chosen (Stieglitz and Dang-Xuan, 2013, 228; Kušen and Strembeck, 2018, 43) due to the fact, that the standard deviation (and hence the variance) of the endogenous variable is larger than its mean which implies overdispersion of the data. [11] The applied negative binomial regression model assumes that the dependent variable follows the negative binomial distribution.[12]

The used regression model has two following alternative forms:[13]

(H5a) E (RETWEET_COUNT) =

$c(0) + c(1) * \text{ANGER} + c(2) * \text{ANXIETY} + c(3) * \log(\text{FOLLOWER\_COUNT}) + \varepsilon$

The enlarged form (H5 b) includes the use of external sources (DUMMIE_EXT_SOURCE) and the "+++"-Signs (DUMMIE_PLUS) as two additional exogenous dummy variables:

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[10] Data available as a separate file under "AfD data for regression.xlsx".

[11] A specification test for overdispersion led to the result that a Poisson estimation is not the correct approach, because the residuals of the Poisson estimation showed overdispersion. This regression test is based on Cameron and Trivedi (1990). See also the chapter "Count Models" in the user's guide of Eviews (2018).

[12] Stieglitz and Dang-Xuan (2013, 228).

[13] Kušen and Strembeck (2018, 43) use also a negative binomial regression model.

(H5b) E (RETWEET_COUNT) = c(0) + c(1) *ANGER + c(2) *ANXIETY +

c(3) *log(FOLLOWER_COUNT) + c(4) * DUMMIE_EXT_SOURCE

+ c(5)*DUMMIE_PLUS + ε

In the regression models above E(RETWEET-COUNT) is the expectation of RETWEET-COUNT depending on the set of the explanatory variables on the right-hand side of the equation. The c(...)-variables are the regression parameters. C(0) represents the estimated constant, whereas c(i=1..5) are the coefficients of the exogenous variables. ε is the error term which represents the discrepancy in the approximation.[14] The results of the regression and test of H5 are presented in chapter 9.5.

8.5 Methodological Limitations

The methodology used in this thesis brought several challenges that should be tackled:

- **The casual Twitter language and noise**

    The linguistic style of the tweets is usually informal, with multiple abbreviations, idioms and the use of jargon is very common. Also, punctuation and spelling errors might occur (Hasan et al., 2014). However, as the accounts examined within this thesis are official accounts by political actors and have a representative function for the entire party, it is assumed that the author of the tweets avoids the occurrence of mistakes to a certain degree. Nevertheless, the possibility cannot be excluded. The greater challenge for lexicon based approach presents the use words that it has not saved in its dictionary. Examples are words such as "Gesinnungstaliban" (attitude taliban), "Moralpolizei" (moral police) or "Migratengewalt" (migrant violence). The dictionary was therefore complemented by a selection of content specific words connected to political context that it would in its original form not be able to recognize. However, regarding the number of tweets that were analyzed not all of those words could be added. Also, as the maximum length of a tweet is restricted to a length of 280 characters, the users refer to the same concept with a large variety of irregular or short forms (data sparsity). Also, this phenomenon presents a challenge for sentiment-analysis programs (Martínez-Cámara et al., 2014, 7).

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[14] The regressions calculations were made with the econometric software package Eviews Student version 10.

- **Emojis in tweets**

  Some tweets contained so called "emojis"[15]. Emojis are pictographs with a designated textual description that are which are part of the Unicode 8 format incorporated by Apple in 2011 (Fernández et al., 2018, 74). They are used to express feelings or emotions in absence of other elements such as words, facial expressions or voice cues and are therefore an important element when categorizing tweets according to emotions. However, as LIWC was developed in 2001 and emojis were not introduced before 2010 into the official Unicode 6.0 it does not recognize them yet, which might influence the results.

- **Twitter API limitations**

  Beyond the methodological issues that appeared with the sentiment analysis, pragmatic issues arose from competing regimes of data access, usage and control by Twitter. The company is effectively asserting monopoly rights on their data through various technical and legal means (Bruns & Burgess, 2012, 168). This effects the free access to web-based support of Twitter archives. As in August 2018 Twitter revoked a key piece of access that developers currently have to the service, replacing it with a new access system that limits what they can do (Twitter Blog, 2018). This also effected the Java based app used for this thesis that accessed the data through the free Rest API which was denied after August 16, 2018. The originally planned follower and retweet analysis for the analysis of an echo chamber network therefore could not be conducted and had to be left out. Other problems that occurred were the limited timespan and amount of tweets that the Rest API provided. Data was only available six days backwards from the current data and a maximum of 100 tweets could be extracted with one query.

- **Occurence of genuine @Replies**

  The Java-based software for gathering data was originally developed to only retrieve original tweets of the analyzed accounts. However, for some users also so-called genuine @Replies were erroneously among the tweets. Genuine @Replies are those tweets that which contain an @ in the beginning of the tweet but are not retweets (Bruns & Burgess, 2012, 13). They were then removed manually. As sometimes the distinction between genuine @Replies and original tweets starting with a @Username was not completely obvious, a probability for their occurrence between the data can not completely be excluded.

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[15] https://getemoji.com/

IV. RESULTS

9.1 The AfD and their use of anger and fear on Twitter

After the data cleaning procedure, a total of 1461 tweets were taken for the analysis. As shown in Table 6, every fifth (293) of the analyzed tweets contained anger but only every eighth contained fear (186). Five percent of all tweets contained both anger and fear. These results are in line with previous research that two emotional appeal strategies can be observed that make use of anger and fear. The results confirm the assumption that the AfD seeks to mobilize people emotionally by giving them a certain image that plays with anger and fear. When looking at the author of the tweets the AfD disseminates, it can be seen that most of the tweets (that are emotionally charged) are retweets and not originally written by the account. Using retweets offers a way to quickly share information while attributing the original source, which allows the party accounts to generate a high frequency of content distribution on their timeline without being too involved into the maintenance of the account.

Table 6: AfD tweets charged with anger and anxiety

1461	All Tweets	%	Original Tweets	%
Anger > 0	293	**20.01%**	62	4.23%
Anxiety > 0	186	**12.70%**	77	5.26%
Anger & Anxiety	84	5.74%	34	2.32%

Note: all tweets = original tweets and retweets

Around 13% of the analyzed tweets contained anxiety. When looking at the rhetorical style of those three tweets from the sample that contained the most anxiety (shown in Table 7), the result shows that Guido Reil, Malte Kaufmann and the official AfD account all communicate very straightforward by using anxiety evoking words in form of hashtags such as abuse, blackmail, ISIS, knife attackers or rapists. Through a careful selected choice of words that elicit images in the head of the reader associated to crime and violence – all terms are closely connected to anxiety. The results confirm the findings of (Brader 2005, 390) that politicians use a variety of mechanisms to trigger emotional cues through images, words and sounds that tap personal experience or deeply rooted symbols of danger and failure to evoke the emotional response among the audience.

Table 7: Top 3 AfD tweets charged with anxiety.

Account	Tweet	RT	Anx Score
Guido Reil, AfD	@MDRINFO Warum so mutlos, Mr. Marx? https://t.co/BSss6BLaOa #KardinalMarx #Kirche #Verrat #Missbrauch #Erpressung #Erpressbarkeit #Islam #IS *(English: Why so discouraged, Mr Marx? https://t.co/BSss6BLaOa #KardinalMarx #Church #Treason #Abuse #Blackmail #Blackmailing #Islam #ISIS)*	151	**22,22**
Dr. Malte Kaufmann	Verbrecher aller Länder - kommt nach #Deutschland! Unsere #Willkommenskultur gilt selbstverständlich auch für #Terroristen, #Islamisten, #Vergewaltiger, #Messerstecher, #Piraten und sonstige hilfsbedürftige #Asylanten. ?????? https://t.co/bg3R7Zps6W 😡 *(English: Criminals of all countries – come to #Germany. Our #Welcomeculture is of course also valid for #Terrorists, #Islamists, #Rapists, #Knife attackers #Pirates and other needy #asylees. https://t.co/bg3R7Zps6W)*	342	**16,00**
Alternative für Deutschland	++ Der Rechtsstaat muss endlich wieder Zähne zeigen! ++ Tötungsdelikte, Raub, Nötigung, Diebstahl einer 100 kg schweren Goldmünze aus einem Museum, Hehlerei, Prostitution und Drogenhandel - die Liste der Vergehen des Clans aus Berlin ist lang. #AfD https://t.co/LLlx5zGI06 *(English: +++ State of law has to show its teeth again! ++ Homocide, robbery, coercion, theft, of a 100 kg gold coin from a museum, prostitution and drug dealing – the list of offenses of the clans in Berlin is long. #AfD https://t.co/LLlx5zGI06)*	157	**11,43**

Table 8 shows the tweets that had the highest anger score among the corpus. With a total of 20% of the tweets containing anger, the authors contend that anger, not fear, is the key emotional tool within the populism rhetorical strategy can be confirmed. All three messages contain emotionally charged terms associated with anger such as 'unbelievable', 'shame', 'betrayal', 'hate' or 'hunt'. What is striking about the tweet of Guido Reil is that it appeared in both the top scores for anger (11,1) and fear (22,22). Through both using words that refer a potential rape scandal of the cardinal Marx (appealing to fear) and the treason of the church by potentially covering it up (anger appeal). Arguably, fear and anger are the emotions most frequently connected to the spread of populism and are therefore occasionally used together. The use of emotions is connected to the context of the addressed topics: Anger is amoral emotion; it is heightened by the perception that an event is unfair or illegitimate (the unjust situation of the church using their power to cover up a potential sex abuse scandal) whereas fear the emotion is caused by a highly uncertain threat (the fact that the "trusted church" is an unsafe place).

Table 8: Top 3 AfD tweets charged with anger.

| Account	Tweet	RT	Ang Score
Dr. Malte Kaufmann	UNFASSBAR. #Hass & #Hetze gg. Mitte der Gesellschaft &gewählte Abgeordnete des dt. #Bundestages. Gespickt mit #FakeNews über #AfD. Kommentar von @georgrestle ist einzige Schande &belegt einmal mehr: #ARD & Co. sind perfide Lügen-Staats-Propaganda-Sender!?? https://t.co/kI5mQ268GS *(English: UNBELIEVABLE: #Hate and #Hunt against the center of the society & elected delegates of the German #Bundestag. Spiked with #FakeNews about the #AfD. Commentary of @georgrestle is a shame & proves that #ARD and the rest are perfidious Lie-State-Propaganda stations?!? https://t.co/kI5mQ268GS)*	315	**13,2**
Guido Reil, AfD	@MDRINFO Warum so mutlos, Mr. Marx? https://t.co/BSss6BLaOa #KardinalMarx #Kirche #Verrat #Missbrauch #Erpressung #Erpressbarkeit #Islam #IS *(English: Why so discouraged, Mr Marx? https://t.co/BSss6BLaOa #KardinalMarx #Church #Treason #Abuse #Blackmail #Blackmailing #Islam #IS)*	151	**11,1**
Beatrix von Storch	#Erdogan und seine faschistoide #AKP steuern also die Hass-und Hetzkampagne #WeAreWithÖzil . Wenig überraschend. #WeAreNotWithÖzil #WeAreWithGermany https://t.co/uOm979RdlA *(English: #Erdogan and his faschistoid #AKP are leading a #Hate and #Hunt campaign #WeAreWithÖzil #WeAreWithGermany https://t.co/uOm979RdlA)*	335	**10,0**

All in all the findings are in line with Bobba (2018) that in populist' social media communication, anger appeals are much more often used than fear-appeals. Although evidence for both emotions is shown, with the resulting 20% anger and 12% fear the assumptions of the first hypothesis can be confirmed.

9.2 The AfD and their distribution of news media

After discussing the findings, the emotional analysis revealed, the second part of the analysis focuses on the content specific aspects and the sources of news media the AfD is sharing. This is done by investigating the guiding research question and hypotheses which read as follows:

- *RQ2: What external sources of information does the AfD share in their Tweets?*
- *H2: When sharing external sources of information on Twitter, populist right-wing parties will post more opinionated content of right-leaning media than of established news media.*

Starting with a general analysis of how many of the investigated tweets contained an external link, the results in Table 9 shows that around 36.5% of the tweets contain an external URL leading to a news platform. Links to other social networking sites were excluded (Youtube and Facebook). From the URLs being shared around two thirds are part of a retweet whereas one third was part of an original tweet posted by one of the observed accounts.

Table 9: AfD tweeting activity classified according to Original, Retweets and URLs.

	Original Tweets	**Retweets**	**Total**
All	628	836	1461
% of all tweets	42.9%	57.1%	
Contained external URL	**187**	**346**	**533**
% of URLs	35.1%	64.9%	36.5%

To gain deeper insight into the use of media in the party's Twitter communication, particularly regarding the orientation of the political news media content, the focus lies on the 30 political news media sites the accounts shared most articles from. Altogether, 533 links to external media sites were shared from which about two thirds (410) belonged to 30 different media websites (for a total list of all URLs shared see Appendix 4). As seen in Figure 8, with 84 articles, the media website most shared is *Welt*, a bourgeois-conservative national newspaper belonging to the Axel Springer Publishing House. Next to *Welt*, *Bild* (42) and *Junge Freiheit* (41) are the most referred to external websites followed by *Focus* (32), *Tagesspiegel* (22) and *Spiegel* (18).

Figure 8: Top 30 most tweeted external media websites by selected AfD accounts on Twitter
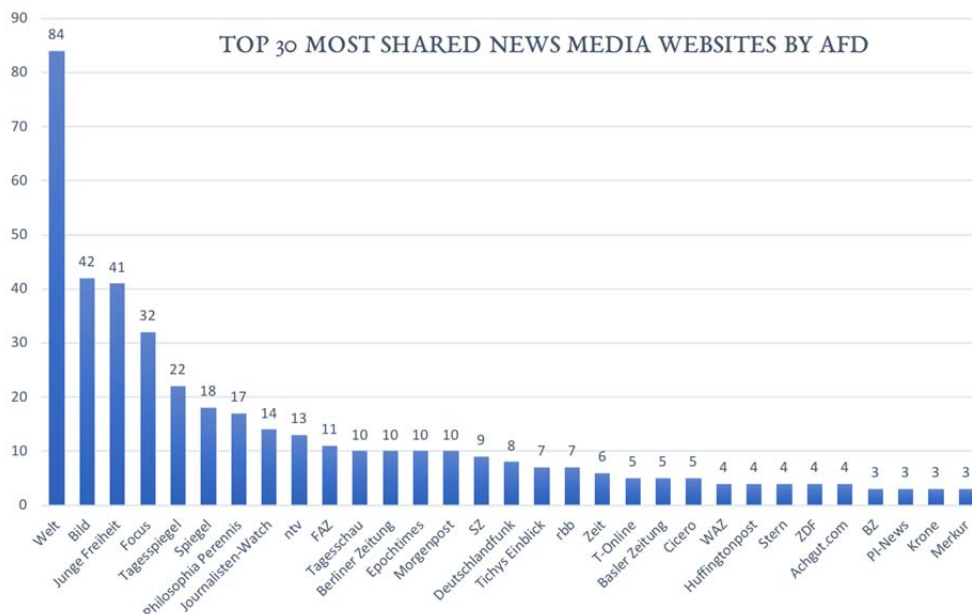
Note: Total sum 410 links

In order to investigate the second hypothesis, which postulates that populist right-wing parties share more opinionated content of right-leaning news media on Twitter than of established (center) news media, the 30 most referred to websites were categorized according to two media landscape maps based on the classifications of Neudert et al. (2017), Reuter (2017) and Busch-Janser (2017). As seen in Table 10, 25% of the shared content belonged to websites that predominantly represent a right-wing nationalistic journalistic point of view: Leading the pack *Junge Freiheit*, *Philosophia Perennis* and *Journalistenwatch*. *Junge Freiheit* was periodically under observation by the German intelligence service, as there were indications for the suspicion of a right-wing extremist effort, has established itself as a voice for the radical nationalist opposition to the established political system (Botsch, 2017). The newsblog *Philosophia Perennis* belongs to the right-wing populist Roman-Catholic theologist and author David Berger, known for often addressing topics and contents about islamization, mainstream media critic and migration (Bednarz, 2018).

Table 10: 50 Most shared media sites by AfD Twitter accounts

Less professional/ established news platforms		Professional News Platforms					
Right-wing nationalistic		**Conservative/ Right-leaning**		**Center**		**Rather left-leaning**	
Junge Freiheit	**41**	**Die Welt**	**84**	**Spiegel**	**18**	**Tagesspiegel**	**22**
Philosophia Perennis	**17**	**Bild**	**42**	**N-TV**	**13**	SZ	10
Journalistenwatch	**14**	**Focus**	**32**	Berliner Zeitung	10		
Epochtimes	10	FAZ	11	Deutschlandfunk	8		
Tichys Einblick	7	Morgenpost	10	Zeit	7		
Cicero	5	Basler Zeitung	5	RBB	7		
Achgut	4	Huffington Post	4	T-Online	5		
PI-News	3	Krone	3	Stern	4		
		Merkur	3	ZDF	4		
		bz-berlin	3	WAZ	4		
Sum	**101**		**197**		**80**	**32**	**SUM**
Percent (of Top 30)	25%		48%		20%	8%	410

Next to right-leaning media, about half of the tweets contained news articles by professional German media sites, among them *Die Welt*, *Bild* and *Focus* (48% of the Top 30). The paper *Die Welt* takes a self-described "liberal cosmopolitan" position in editing, but is generally considered to be conservative (Pointner, 2010, 153). Together

with *Bild* both papers are part of the Axel Springer publishing house. The tabloid *Bild,* generally follows conservative ideological discourses but has been often criticized in the past for its controversial statements and agitation with "smear campaigns" against public persons, politicians and foreigners.[16] The political paper *Focus* is also known for its conservative orientation (Bussemer, 2004, 264).

With only 20% of the shared news media coming from established center news media platforms (such as *Der Spiegel* – a paper with more social-liberal focus, ibid.) and 8% coming from rather left-leaning news media (e.g. *Der Tagesspiegel*) the assumptions of Hypothesis 2 can therefore be confirmed: the AfD does indeed post more opinionated content of right-leaning media than of established news media.

9.3 The content of AfD tweets

After exploring the news media the AfD adds to their tweets, the next step is to study the actual content in the messages to draw a complete picture of the patterns in the communication style of the party. As Kirchgessner et al. (2016, 1111) state, "populist communication manifests itself by emphasizing the sovereignty to the people, advocating for the people, attacking elites, ostracizing others, and invoking the heartland." As a starting point serve the third research question and hypothesis which state the following:

RQ3: What topics do populist parties address in their tweets?

H3: The content populist right-wing parties share on Twitter predominantly addresses problems attached to elites and out-groups.

To test the hypothesis, the tweets were categorized into 20 content topic fields and then assigned to the category "attacking elites (incl. liberal media)" or/and "out-groups" (minorities) and "Others". Table 11 shows the quantitative results of the message analysis. The three most found topics in the tweets were:

1. **Refugees, asylum, migration** (Topic field 9), accounts for 28.9 %.
2. **Islam, integration, multiculturalism** (Topic 3), accounts for 12.4%.
3. **Non-Government parties in the parliament** (Green Party, Liberals "FDP" and Left Wing Party "Linke"). (Topic 7), accounts for 12.4. %.

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[16] Zudeik, P. (2018, July 16). Der Krawallmodus wird ihr nicht helfen. *Deutschlandfunk Kultur*. Retrieved on September 3, 2018, from:
https://www.deutschlandfunkkultur.de/kommentar-zur-bild-zeitung-der-krawallmodus-wird-ihr-nicht.1005.de.html?dram:article_id=422831

Table 11: Analysis of AfD tweets according to text content

Topic Field	Category	Number of tweets	Percentage of all tweets
1	Euro, European Central Bank, policy on interest rates	10	0.7%
2	Europe, debt crisis, Italy, Spain, etc.	81	5.5%
3	**Islam, integration, "multiculturalism"**	**181**	**12.4%**
4	Police, inner security	61	4.2%
5	Child benefit abroad	3	0.2%
6	Bundeswehr (German armed force), compulsory military service	27	1.8%
7	**The Greens (Bündnis 90/Die Grünen), The Left (Die Linke), Free Democrats (FDP)**	**181**	**12.4%**
8	Exclusion of the AfD (from political debates)	90	6.2%
9	**Refugees, Asylum, Migration, family reunion, Ceuta, Sami A.**	**422**	**28.9%**
10	**Social Democratic Party (SPD)**	**141**	**9.6%**
11	#Metwo, Özil	66	4.5%
12	Crime of foreigners and immigrants	148	10.1%
13	**Merkel, Christian Democratic Party (CDU), Christian Social Union (CSU)**	**172**	**11.8%**
14	Bavaria, Landtagswahlen (state parliament elections 2018), Söder (governor of Bavaria)	46	3.1%
15	Climate change	27	1.8%
16	Election and opinion polls	26	1.8%
17	**Media, GEZ (fee collection center of public-law broadcasting institutions)**	**107**	**7.3%**
18	Left-wing extremism	32	2.2%
19	Taxes, social state, caring,	77	5.3%
20	Others (e.g. Trump, USA, football, Russia) etc.	331	22.6%

Next to the three most mentioned topics also the two other German parties CDU/CSU and SPD were addressed with 11.8% resp. 9.6% of the tweets.

Assigning the 20 content topic fields to the three categories A, B and C [17] leads to Table 12.

1. Category A represents 43.1 % of the messages which attack the elites and (liberal) media. The populists of the AfD attack, accuse, or blame the elite (especially the governing and rival parties and politicians) for the malfunctions and grievances of democracy. Many tweets portray Merkel and the government as selling out the people's principles and values, by cheating the people out of their sovereignty. Patterns that were often seen is the use of derogatory terms such as "*filthy left green*" (*linksgrünversifft*), "*migrant chancellor*" (*Migrantenkanzlerin*), "*multi culti*" (*multikulti*). "*ideology deluded*" (*idelogieverblendet*), "*good-doers*" (*Gutmenschen*) – all metaphors for parties that represent "left wing ideas" with regards to the refugee crisis. The media was often referred to as the "*state broadcaster*" (*Staatsfunk*), "*left green propaganda*" (*links grüne Propaganda*), "*establishment worshipping*" (*establishment heiligend*), "*force-funded*" (*zwangsfinanziert*) or *government mouthpiece* (*Regierungssprachrohr*).

2. Category B represents 46.1 % of the messages. The content in the tweets attacks especially out-groups of refugees and asylum seekers or deals with related themes like Islam and or integration. Metaphors that elicit feelings of insecurity around immigration – for instance the assertion that the country has been "invaded" by immigrants or the country is our home and immigrants are unwanted guests. Terms that were used included *Nafris* (devaluating term for *North Africans*), *Moslem-Clans* (*Muslim clans*), *Asyl-Irrsinn*, (*asylum lunacy*) *Europa wird überrannt* (*Europe is being run over*), *Merkel's Gäste* (*Merkel's guests*), *Multikulti* (*multiculti*), *Absurdistan*, *Massenmigration* (*mass migration*), *Kriminelle* (*criminals*) or *Islamisten* (*islamists)*. Hinting at controversial stereotypes and extremist statements the twitter accounts engage in rhetorics about immigration and minority rights such as the gender debate (e.g. through terms like *Genderwahn – gender mania*).

Table 12: AfD tweet's messages classified to attacked groups

	Category A Attacking elites and mainstream media	Category B Attacking out-groups	Category C Other topics	Total
Number	632	674	437	1461
% of all tweets	43.1 %	46.1 %	29.9 %	

Note: Sum of % of all tweets greater than 100% as some tweets contained more than one category.

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[17] See Table 4 in Chapter 8.4.2.

Generally, it can be said that the findings for the AfD back up the previous work of Rico et al. (2017, 448) that blame attribution is used by populist parties as a rhetorical strategy. With the results that anger is being used as the most dominant emotion when attacking the elites, H4 therefore can be confirmed.

Lastly, the focus of the analysis was shifted to the specific hashtags used in the AfD tweets. Hashtags are used to set the tweet into a thematic context and make it traceable. Table 13 shows the 20 most used ones of the study. When two different hashtags were used the same number of times (e.g. *#asyl* and *#wehrpflicht*) they were summarized in one column.

Table 13: Most used hashtags in the tweets (Rank 1-20)

Rank	Hashtag	Count	Translation
1	afd	704	AfD
2	afdwirkt	60	AfD acts
3	merkel/bundestag	46	Merkel/ German Bundestag
4	özil OR oezil	43	Özil (German football player)
5	ltwby OR ltwbayern	39	state legislature election Bavaria
6	csu	36	Christian Social Union
7	spd/brandenburg	35	Social Democratic Party/ Brandenburg
8	grüne OR grünen	34	The Greens
9	cdu	29	Christian Democratic Party
10	medikamentenskandal	25	medication scandal
11	deutschland/europainvasion/berlin	23	Germany/ Invasion of Europe/ Berlin
12	rundfunkbeitrag/bundeswehr/r2g/golze	22	Radio and TV license fee/German armed forces/red red gree/Golze
13	erdogan	18	Erdogan
14	ceuta/eu/islam/afdimbundestag	17	Ceuta/EU/Islam/AfD in the Bundestag
15	europa	16	Europe
16	flüchtlinge/ltbb	15	Refugees/state legislature Brandenburg
17	metwo/seehofer/samia	14	Metwo/Seehofer/Sami A.
18	asyl/wehrpflicht	13	Asylum/Conscription
19	festungeuropa/fdp/nrw/bayern/ltwhessen	12	Fortress Europe/FDP (Free Democratic Party) /North Rhine Westphalia (NRW)/ Bavaria/ state legislature election Hesse
20	gez/kaufbeuren/gauland/cottbus/lunafarm	11	TV license/Gauland/Cottbus/Lunafarm

Note: when separated by "/" hashtags were used the same amount of times

As might be expected, a long way ahead of the rest the hashtag #afd was used in almost 50% of the tweets (704 times), followed by the party's unofficial slogan #afdwirkt (60 times). Also in the hashtags analysis, the typical patterns for a thin-ideological populist communication style was found: on the one side the political parties (e.g. *#merkel, #CDU, #SPD*) and the media (*#rundfunkbeitrag, #GEZ*) were addressed on the other hand the immigration and integration problems in Germany (*#islam, #refugees*). Here the most used hashtag was #Özil (respectively *#metwo*), referring to the wider debate about identity and integration in Germany following the resignation of the ethnic Turkish soccer star Mezut Özil. Hashtags outside of the patterns that were found were addressing the discussion of the reintroduction of the German military service (*#concription*), the medication scandal in Brandenburg and the upcoming elections (*#ltwby*). A word cloud visualization gives a summarizing overview of the 100 most used hashtags in the corpus of tweets.

Figure 9: Word cloud visualization of top 100 most used hashtags in tweets

Note: size of words according to frequency

The results support the third hypothesis that populist parties dominantly refer to elites and out-groups in their tweets. The concept of attributing causal responsibility for negative outcomes by emphasizing blame attributions

to the government, the "biased" media ("anti-establishment populism", Jagers & Walgrave, 2007) has been found as an evident pattern among the tweets. Moreover, blame attributions in form of "the good German people" versus the morally opposed "evil societal out-groups", represented by Muslims and immigrants which pose an economic and cultural threat, can be significantly confirmed ("excluding populism", Jagers & Walgrave, 2007).

9.4 Anger, fear and blame attribution in populist tweets

For the fourth hypothesis, the findings for emotional appeals from Chapter 9.1 in tweets were brought together with the findings of Chapter 9.3. The particular research question and hypothesis the analysis was guided by are stated as follows:

RQ 4 Which of the emotional appeals anger and fear are predominately used by populist parties when attacking elites and out-groups?

H4: When attacking "the elite" in tweets political parties are more likely to use anger than fear

Table 14: AfD tweet's messages classified to "attacked" groups linked with emotions

	Category A Attacking elites and (mainstream) media	Category B Attacking out-groups	Category C Other topics
ANXIETY	62	129	33
ANGER	153	186	75
SUM	215	315	108
% ANXIETY	29%	**41%**	31%
%ANGER	**71%**	**59%**	69%

When connecting the findings of the emotional analysis in Chapter 9.1 to the results of the content categorization, Table 14 indicates that with 71% feelings of anger are predominantly used in category A (elites and mainstream media). The findings confirm the previous assumptions of (Rico, Guinjoan, Anduiza, 2017) who stated that those who are perceived as being in control of the current situation ("the elite") are the primary driver for anger. Especially the outrage about Angela Merkel was evident. This goes along with the ongoing narrative of the AfD, where Merkel has been often referred to as a "betrayer of the people" acting not in the interest of the "Germans"

but is a "chancellor for the refugees"[18] where Germans are called to "get their country back" ("holen wir uns unser Land zurück").[19]

A second observation that was made is that not only was anger the dominant emotion expressed in tweets about elites (Group A) but also in those attacking out-groups (here especially migrants and asylum seekers). The results for Category B show that 59% of the tweets contained anger and 41% contained fear. This outcome can be due to the fact that political parties and the threat of immigration is often connected to each other in the tweets and therefore the emotional appeal anger is visible in both categories. That anger is also used to attack out-groups such as Muslims and refugees can be explained by the findings of Marcus (2017). Applying AIT to the potential societal problems that refugees bring along, he postulates that conservative right-wing voters are not as much *afraid* of foreigners (xenophobic) as they are *angry* at them (xenocholeric). He argues that anger rises when the individual faces challenges to important norms that they find to be foundational to the social order (Marcus, 2017). Furthermore, when anger is heightened among right-wing conservatives, their convictions are strengthened (ibid.). In that case, the immigration of a lot of people from another cultural environment to Germany can be seen as the factor that challenges the status quo. Therefore, when the AfD appeals to anger, suspicion and prejudice towards foreigners, legal and illegal migrants and asylum seekers tightens which might be seen as a preferable outcome for the party.

Moreover, the AfD not only used anger but also fear when attacking out groups (41%). When looking at the overall narrative of the AfD, as already mentioned above, evidence can be seen that they appeal to public anger *and* fear by consistently bringing up the issues of Merkel's "open-door" refugee policy.[20] Merkel and her party ("the elite" – anger appeal) is constantly blamed as the responsible for the "Islamization of the Christian West"[21] (Muslim out-group – fear appeal).

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[18] Zeit Online (2016, December 20). "Die Flüchtlingskanzlerin und die Angst vor dem Bösen". *Zeit Online*. Retrieved on July 14, 2018, from: https://www.zeit.de/news/2016-12/20/kriminalitaet-die-fluechtlingskanzlerin-und-die-angst-vor-dem-boesen-20172809

[19] Mayer (2017, July 26). Beatrix von Storch: „Wir holen uns unser Land zurück!". *Hamburger Abendblatt.* Retrieved on July 14, 2018, from: https://www.abendblatt.de/hamburg/article211377153/Wir-holen-uns-unser-Land-zurueck.html

[20] Which has led to the more than 1.5 million, mostly muslim, immigrants entering the country since 2015.

[21] Heuer, H. (2015, September 9). Pegida mit 18.000 Menschen in Dresden auf der Straße: Kanzlerin Merkel wird neues Feindbild. *Dresdner Neueste Nachrichten*. Retrieved on July, 14, 2018, from: http://www.dnn.de/Dresden/Lokales/Pegida-mit-18.000-Menschen-in-Dresden-auf-der-Strasse-Kanzlerin-Merkel-wird-neues-Feindbild

The findings from the connection of anger and fear appeals to thin-ideological elements of "the elite" and "out-groups" within the AfD tweets confirm the fourth hypothesis: even though anger is used in both categories, it dominates those tweets were the establishment is being criticized. Anxiety appeals on the other hand are more connected to the topics that concern "out-groups".

9.5 The AfD and the influence of anger and fear on sharing behavior

The last hypothesis deals with the emotional content of the tweets by measuring the amount of anger and fear (anxiety) the text contains as a result of the sentiment score based on the calculations of LIWC. The research question and hypothesis posit the following:

RQ5: *What impact do anger and fear have on the sharing behavior of tweets published by populist parties?*
H5: *Those tweets shared by populist parties that are emotionally charged with anger in their messages are more often retweeted than those containing fear.*

Before starting with the results of the regression analysis, a look will be taken on the temporal characteristics of the amount of anger and anxiety in the tweets of the AfD. Figure 10 shows the daily timelines of the independent variables anxiety and anger during the sample period from July 17 until August 9, 2018.

Figure 10: Daily Timelines of independent variables Anger and Anxiety

a) Independent variable Anxiety (ANX)

b) Independent Variable Anger (ANGER)

ANGER

You can see from the bar charts that there are significant fluctuations of the activities between the single days. Both activities together have a maximum of 180 (Wednesday, 24th of July) and reach the lowest amount of 26 on Sunday 22nd of July; resp. Saturday, 28th of July. When taking a closer look at the content of the tweets on the 24th of July (peak of anger and fear) the tweets show that especially *The Greens* and their party members Claudia Roth and Renate Künast are under attack which co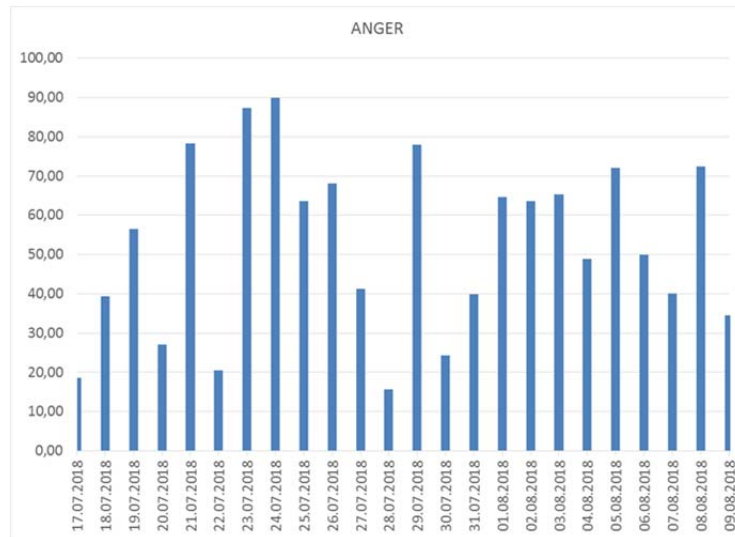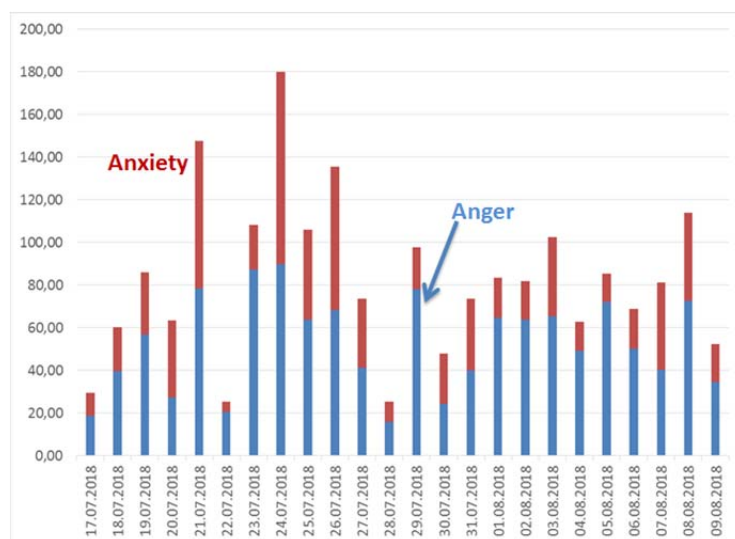nfirms the results from Chapter 9.4 that anger is often used in connection to blaming the establishment. Moreover, the immigration debate about Özil and #metwo were addressed on that day multiple times. A pattern for a repetitive weekday were the amount of anger and fear are

b) Independent Variable Anger (ANGER)

c) Sum of independent Variables Anger and Anxiety

You can see from the bar charts that there are significant fluctuations of the activities between the single days. Both activities together have a maximum of 180 (Wednesday, 24th of July) and reach the lowest amount of 26 on Sunday 22nd of July; resp. Saturday, 28th of July. When taking a closer look at the content of the tweets on the 24th of July (peak of anger and fear) the tweets show that especially *The Greens* and their party members Claudia Roth and Renate Künast are under attack which confirms the results from Chapter 9.4 that anger is often used in connection to blaming the establishment. Moreover, the immigration debate about Özil and #metwo were addressed on that day multiple times. A pattern for a repetitive weekday were the amount of anger and fear are

especially high or low could however not be found (which might also be due to the fact that the observed period was less than a month and therefore not long enough to see routine tweeting behavior).
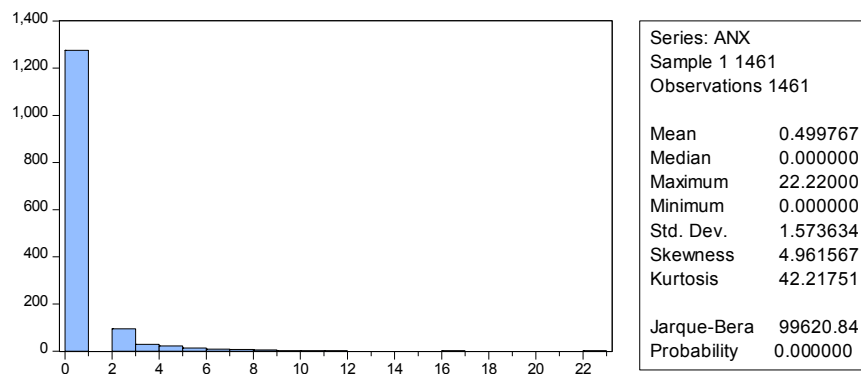
Figure 11 (a - d) shows the histograms of the dependent variable (count of retweets) and the explanatory (= independent) variables. All variables are non-negative, the count variables are integer.

Figure 11: Histograms of dependent variable and explanatory variables

a) Dependent variable RETWEET_COUNT

Series: RETWEET_COUNT	
Sample 1 1461	
Observations 1461	
Mean	135.7515
Median	63.00000
Maximum	1509.000
Minimum	0.000000
Std. Dev.	168.5012
Skewness	2.197583
Kurtosis	9.972362
Jarque-Bera	4135.319
Probability	0.000000

b) Independent Variable Anxiety (ANX)

Series: ANX	
Sample 1 1461	
Observations 1461	
Mean	0.499767
Median	0.000000
Maximum	22.22000
Minimum	0.000000
Std. Dev.	1.573634
Skewness	4.961567
Kurtosis	42.21751
Jarque-Bera	99620.84
Probability	0.000000

c) Independent Variable Anger (ANGER)

Series: ANGER	
Sample 1 1461	
Observations 1461	
Mean	0.862396
Median	0.000000
Maximum	13.16000
Minimum	0.000000
Std. Dev.	1.798228
Skewness	2.450454
Kurtosis	9.817294
Jarque-Bera	4291.347
Probability	0.000000

d) Independent Variable Follower of the Original Tweet User (FOLLOWER_COUNT)

Series: FOLLOWER_COUNT	
Sample 1 1461	
Observations 1461	
Mean	14425.63
Median	7313.000
Maximum	252854.0
Minimum	75.00000
Std. Dev.	21692.59
Skewness	5.785393
Kurtosis	55.42667
Jarque-Bera	175468.4
Probability	0.000000
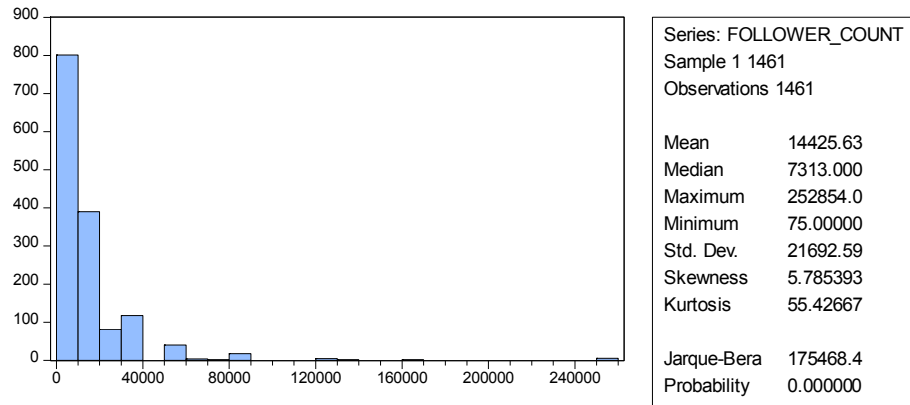
On average, a tweet of the sample is retweeted 135.75 times. Compared to other studies this represents a rather high value which can be explained by the examined group of prominent politicians in the study. The means of the amounts of anxiety resp. anger are 0.50 resp. 0.86 and have maxima of 22.22 resp. 13.16. The tweeting user has on average 14,426 followers within a range from 75 up to 252,854.

Table 15: Correlation Matrix of Independent Variables used in the Regression Analyses

|	ANXIETY	ANGER	FOLLOWER _COUNT	DUMMIE_EXTERNAL _SOURCE	DUMMIE_ PLUS
Independent variables					
ANXIETY	1				
ANGER	0.226***	1			
FOLLOWER_COUNT	-0.013	0.011	1		
DUMMIE_EXT_SOURCE	0.015	0.010	0.011	1	
DUMMIE_PLUS	0.035	0.032	0.148***	-0.169***	1
Number of Observations: 1461					

Notes: * / **/*** Significance at the 10/5/1 percent level.

The correlation matrix of the independent variables for the sample of 1461 observations is shown in Table 15. The coefficients suggest that multicollinearity is not a problem in the data. The highest correlation was found between anger and anxiety (+ 0.226). This indicates that only a few tweeting users try to appeal to emotions of both kinds simultaneously.

A first step to analyze the influence of anger and anxiety on the number of retweets is done by visualizing the graphical relationship through a scatter diagram (Fig 12).

Figure 12: Scatter diagrams Retweet Count vs. Anger resp. Anxiety

a) Retweet Count vs. Anger   (b) Retweet count vs. Anxiety

RETWEET_COUNT=126.5+10.77*ANGER   RETWEET_COUNT=131.4+8.712*ANX
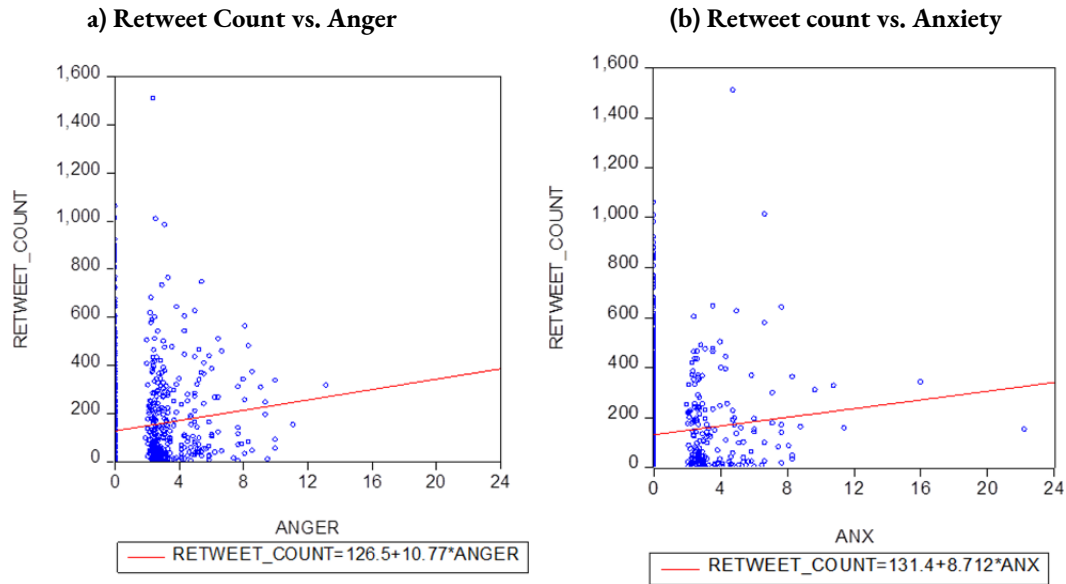
The bivariate OLS-regression results give a first hint towards a positive influence of the emotions anger and anxiety on the retweet number. However, to test H5 it is necessary to analyze the relationship through a multivariate regression approach. The results of the negative binomial regression testing H5 are presented in Table 16.

Table 16: Negative Binomial Regression Results

Independent variables	Coefficient	Dependent variable: RETWEET COUNT	
		H5 a	H5 b
ANX	c(1)	**0.044** (0.020)	**0.045** (0.020)
ANGER	c(2)	**0.075*** (0.017)	**0.074*** (0.017)
FOLLOWER_COUNT (Log)	c(3)	0.455*** (0.019)	0.445*** (0.019)
DUMMIE_EXT_SOURCE	c(4)	---	0.24*** (0.059)
DUMMIE_PLUS	c(5)	---	0.23** (0.102)
Constant	c(0)	0.606*** (0.17)	0.57** (0.17)
Adjusted R²		**0.26**	**0.26**
Number of Observations		1461	1461

Notes: Estimated standard errors are in parenthesis. * / **/*** Significance at the 10/5/1 percent level.

All other control variables are found to be significantly positive correlated with the dependent variable (p < 0.01 resp. p<0.05 for the DUMMY_PLUS variable). This implies that tweets with citations from external sources and media (e.g. newspapers), containing "++" or "+++" at the beginning of the message, or those originated on Sundays, are positively related to the quantity of retweets. Moreover, the regression confirms the results of Stieglitz and Dang-Xuan (2013, 240) that the number of followers of a Twitter message's originator is positively correlated with the retweet numbers and highly significant. Both estimations show a level of adjusted R2 of 0.26.

H5 predicts that those tweets shared by populist parties that are emotionally charged with anger in their messages are more often retweeted than those containing fear. The results show that the coefficients for anxiety and anger have both the expected positive sign and are statistically significant for both regressions. The coefficient $c(1)$ is in the extended estimation version 0.045 with p=0.02<0.05; $c(2)$ is 0.074 with p <0.01.[22]

The magnitude of the effects of the explanatory variables on the dependent variables can be inferred from the estimated coefficients and are in line with other studies. E.g., Stieglitz and Dang-Xuan (2013) estimated a coefficient of 0.06 for negative sentiment and of 0.48 for the (log) of follower count.[23] . The coefficient of *anger* of 0.074 means that a one-unit increase in the total score of anger in the text messages, holding all other explanatory variables constant, expected to trigger exp(0.074)=1.076 times more retweets.[24]

Moreover, the coefficient for anger is larger than for anxiety (0.074 versus 0.045). This indicates that tweets using anger appeals seem to be retweeted more often than messages with fear-appeals. But to be sure about this interpretation a coefficient diagnostic test is made via the Wald-test procedure. The null-hypothesis states that both coefficients for anger and fear have the same value, i.e. $c(1)=c(2)$.

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[22] The estimation statistics including p-values were again calculated by Eviews Student 10.

[23] Kušen and Strembeck (2018) estimated a similar magnitude of the coefficient for intensity of emotions.

[24] Stieglitz and Dang-Xuan (2013, 235).

Table 17: Wald Test Results for Coefficients of Anger and Anxiety

Wald Test:
Equation: EQ02

Test Statistic	Value	df	Probability
t-statistic	-1.045173	1454	0.2961
F-statistic	1.092387	(1, 1454)	0.2961
Chi-square	1.092387	1	0.2959

Null Hypothesis: C(1)=C(2)
Null Hypothesis Summary:

Normalized Restriction (= 0)	Value	Std. Err.
C(1) - C(2)	-0.028972	0.027720

Restrictions are linear in coefficients.

The results of the Wald-test are presented in Table 17 for the extended estimation approach (H5 b). Eviews computes an F-statistic which is used to test the restriction hypothesis c(1)=c(2). Based on the probability-value of the F-statistic, the null-hypothesis cannot be rejected (p=0.27; i.e. p>0.1). That means although the estimation output shows a higher coefficient for anger (0.074) compared with the anxiety coefficient (0.045), from a statistical point of review it is also possible that the coefficient for anxiety is larger than the one for anger. Another Wald-Test for the shorter estimation approach H5a confirms this diagnostic test.

This is a central result and implicates that H 5 *cannot* completely be verified. Both coefficients have a high probability to be positive. Evidence for the probability for a stronger impact of the anger variable is found, but tweets containing fear can also have a stronger effect on retweet counts. The findings of Stieglitz and Dang-Xuan (2013) can be confirmed that content that evokes high-arousal activated through negative emotions is more viral. In sum, it can be argued that cognitive processes caused by anger and fear in written communication on social media are determinants of sharing behavior: evidence for the stronger impact of anger (as supposed to anxiety) on the number of retweets could, however, not be statistically verified.

Lastly, the five most retweeted tweets for shown from the corpus in connection (Table 18). Anger fear was only visible in two out of the three most shared tweets. The most retweeted tweet by Alice Weidel contained both emotions which goes along with the findings above. Interestingly, as seen in the tweet of Beatrix von Storch and

Frank Pasemann neither anger nor fear could be found in the tweets. This can be explained by the content of the tweets which is in Storch's example very short (but has a video attached to it which shows the problems about Muslim immigration in France). Frank Pasemann's tweet on the other side was sarcastically addressing Renate Künast (the Greens) and her suggestion to ban "Ferrero Nutella" advertising which might explain the absence of both sentiments.

Table 18: Top Most retweeted tweets in corpus.

Name	Text	Date	RT	ANX	ANG
Alice Weidel (@Alice_Weidel)	*Unfassbar: Ein Kameruner (25), der im vergangenen Dezember eine Rentnerin (73) brutal angriff, sie schwer verletzte, während er mit Wucht auf ihren Kopf und Halsbereich sprang, soll „schuldunfähig" sein! #AfD https://t.co/I1BWGQobkF* (English: Unbelievable: A Cameroonian (25) who brutally attacked a retiree (73) last December, severely injured her while jumping on her head and neck, was said to be "incapacitated" #AfD)	Mon Jul 30 2018 16:42	1509	**4,76**	**2,38**
Beatrix von Storch (@Beatrix_vStorch) RT gab.ai/Ronald Gläser @ronaldglaeser	Wie ruiniere ich in nur zwei Generationen ein Land? https://t.co/jEErv0KsJj *(English: How do I ruin my country in two generations?)*	Sun Jul 22 2018 09:24 (Original Sat 21 Jul 2018 21:02)	1060	0,00	0,00
Alice Weidel (@Alice_Weidel)	++ *~600 afrikanische Migranten überrennen Grenze in Exklave #Ceuta! ++ Dabei verwendeten sie selbstgebaute #Flammenwerfer und Branntkalk - mehr als ein Dutzend Sicherheitskräfte wurden verletzt. #AfD #FestungEuropa https://t.co/1KXa6erR0j* (English: ++ ~ 600 African migrants overrun Border in Exclave #Ceuta! ++ Using home-made #flamethrowers and burnt lime - more than a dozen security forces were injured. #AfD #FortressEurope)	Thu Jul 26 2018 16:22:55 CEST 2018	1012	**6,67**	0,00
AfD Essen (@afd_essen) RT Felix Krautkrämer (@krk979)	*24. Juli: AfD fragt Bundesregierung, wie viele kriminelle Großclans es in Deutschland gibt. 30. Juli: Innenministerium antwortet: Haben wir keine Erkenntnisse. 5. August: BILD thematisiert Araber-Clans. Und Wunder: Plötzlich haben BMI und BKA Erkenntnisse. https://t.co/SV9Z2u3xpq* (English: July 24: AfD asks federal government how many big criminal clans there are in Germany. July 30: Home Office replies: We don't have any findings. 5 August: BILD thematizes Arab clans. And miracle: Suddenly BMI and BKA have insights.)	Mon Aug 06 15:11 (Original Mon Aug 06 14:52)	1008	0,00	**3,12**
Frank Pasemann, MdB (@Frank_Pasemann) RT Birgit_Kelle (@Birgit_Kelle)	*Grüne Doppelmoral at its best: Werbung für Nutella verbieten, weil es Kindern schadet. Werbung für Abtreibung aber erlauben, obwohl es Kinder tötet. Ja, genau mein Humor Frau @RenateKuenast https://t.co/ojsY5qSRHm* (English: Green double moral at its best: ban advertising for Nutella, because it harms children. But wanting to allow advertising for abortion, though it kills children. Yes, exactly my humor Mrs. @RenateKuenast)	Sat Jul 28 2018 21:56 (Original 18 Jul 18 17:16)	983	0,00	0,00

The summary of the results of all hypotheses is shown in Table 19.

Table 19: Summary of tests of the hypotheses

Hypothesis	Support?
H1: Populist parties express more anger than fear in their posts on Twitter when appealing to their voter base.	Yes
H2: When sharing external sources of information on Twitter, populist right-wing parties will post more opinionated content of right-leaning media than of established news media.	Yes
H3: The content populist right-wing parties share on Twitter predominantly addresses problems attached to elites and out-groups.	Yes
H4: When attacking "the elite" in tweets political parties are more likely to use anger than fear.	Yes
H5: Those tweets shared by populist parties that are emotionally charged with anger in their messages are more often retweeted than those containing fear.	Partial

V. DISCUSSION & CONCLUSION

The last chapter discusses and concludes the research findings, reflects upon the limitations of the thesis, and highlights the academic contribution of the study for future research.

10.1 Discussion

The aim of this research was to improve the understanding on *how populist parties use emotional appeals in their social media campaigns* and *how it influences the sharing behavior of their posts.* Furthermore, the rhetorical blaming strategy in form of referring to *"elites"* and *"out-groups"* was examined. Also, the question was answered of *which of the emotional appeals anger and fear are predominately used when either of the two groups was attacked.* Moreover, a closer look was taken on *external news media populist parties share.*

This was done by specifically examining anger and fear expressed in the tweets of the populist right-wing party AfD. Then the tweets were distinguished between elements that contained statements reflecting a thin-centered ideology. Moreover, the external news media referred to in the tweets was categorized according to their political alignment and their credibility. In line with the author's expectations, evidence was found for anger and fear as dominant appeals in their tweets and its positive effect on their diffusion. When blaming "the elites" and "out-groups", anger was more expressed in the tweet. Also, it was found that the AfD shared many links to news media sites but those coming from established professional news media platforms outnumbered those to less-professional right-leaning by one to four.

As the results of this study show, democratic politics is, undoubtedly, an emotional business. Considering the social relevance of the research field, a stronger focus on distinct emotions and their role in different stages of political campaigning seems to be an important factor when trying to understand a range of tactics and rhetorics of populist parties. Negative emotions are part of their communication style and they do share patterns of how they try to dismantle the current status quo of democracies.

Throughout the campaigning process social media can be an important weapon (Mounk, 2018, 169). As the case of the AfD has demonstrated, populist parties have proven to use appeals of anger and fear in their campaigning and can thereby cause changes in political choices (Brader, 2005; Marcus, 2000). When times are more turbulent and troubled (i.e. as in the 2015 refugee "crisis") minds are more easily led. Here, anxiety provoked by societal

change is a pattern seen all over Europe frequently adapted by populist parties (Rico, Guinjoan, Anduiza, 2017, 444). As this study shows, the narrative of the AfD is no exception.

By connecting the fields of emotions, populist rhetorical strategies and user behavior in social media this thesis contributes to the research area of political communication by shedding light on how right-wing parties employ emotional appeals and blame attribution to shape the public discourse and convince their voter base. On the one hand, the research of this thesis contributes to the current debate in the area of emotions and information diffusion in social networks by specifically concentrating on two distinct high-arousal emotions anger and fear. So far, previous research of Stieglitz and Dang-Xuan (2013) have focused on positive and negative emotions as a driver of sharing behavior during German state elections, whereas Kušen et al. (2017) particularly examined the situation in Austrian politics. By specifically concentrating on anger and fear and connecting it to the theory of Affective Intelligence in context of a populist party in Germany, the field of political communication was hereby extended.

Through building up on the findings of Wirz (2018) it was further demonstrated that populists assign blame to elites in an emotionalized way. Moreover, it could be illustrated that social media gives populist parties more freedom for the use of strong and direct claims that circumvent journalistic gatekeepers by uncontestedly articulating blame attribution and propagate their message. By building on research of how populists spread their ideology on social media, exemplary work of Engesser (2017), Hameleers et al (2017) and Jacobs and Spierings (2018) is expanded. Other previous research has examined the influence of social media on populist support (Groshek & Michalska, 2017), the similarities between right-wing populist movement *Pegida* social media strategy and the AfD (Stier et al., 2017) or Waisbord and Amado (2017) who analyzed the uses of Twitter by populist presidents in contemporary Latin America.

How generalizable and valid are the findings of this research? In the methodology part of this thesis it was already discussed that the German AfD case was seen as a suitable example for a young European populist party as they entered the Bundestag recently, campaigning with an anti-immigrant, anti-establishment narrative. By restricting the research to one country may rise issues of generalizability for other countries and populist parties. However, given that past research has shown that populist parties in different European countries have been proven to invest much of their resources in development of strategies of emotionally-charged style of communication (Mancosu, 2016, 18) the outcomes of this work can be expected to be generalizable. The same can be said for the usage of blame-shifting rhetoric (e.g. the United Kingdom Independence Party (UKIP) and Nigel Farage blaming the EU

and refugees). In that sense, this thesis proposes that, although the context of whom to blame and the usage of emotional appeals will differ slightly, the overall patterns found here are likely to occur elsewhere too. The same can be assumed for the validity and reliability of the empirical data used in this work: both resulting coefficients of negative sentiment (anger and anxiety between 0.044 and 0.075; resp. 0.45 for the log of follower count) were very similar to those of Stieglitz and Dang-Xuan (2013) and Kušen (2018). It is therefore assumed that suitable methods and strategies to answer the research questions were applied.

10.2 Conclusion

In this thesis, an emotional and a content analysis of Twitter behavior by official party representatives of the German right-wing populist party AfD (Alternative für Deutschland) was presented. The focus was set on 17 selected accounts during a time span of 23 days which resulted in 1461 tweets and retweets posted over that period. In line with previous expectations, the empirical analysis showed the following:

- The AfD uses emotional appeals in form of anger and anxiety in their tweets. The number of tweets that contained anger are more than one third higher than those containing fear resp. anxiety. The results therefore indicate that populist social media communication is dominated by feelings of anger. This goes in line with the findings of Marcus et al. (2017) and their theory of Affective Intelligence which suggests that when appealing to the conservative right-leaning voter an effective emotional communication strategy of a party should be dominated by anger.

- When sharing external news of information, the AfD predominantly shares URLs linking to a selected range of established conservative/right-leaning and less professional nationalistic-right-wing news platforms. Around one fourth of the shared news come from websites that have a history in spreading ideologically extreme, hyperpartisan, or conspiratorial political news and information. Those organizations do not employ professional journalists and seek to persuade failings of organizations, causes or people and present personal opinions in form of commentaries as news. The results of the study support the idea that AfD Twitter accounts use a limited number of sources when discussing political problems.

- The communication style of the AfD in the tweets confirms the "thin ideology" strategy and shows that the party sees itself as a direct and true representative and of "the people" which is threatened by "the elite". Opposed to "the good people" is a corrupt, incapable and political class, out of touch with the voter base, embodied by the established parties, particularly chancellor Angela Merkel and the liberal media (the "lying press"). Thus, the AfD sees "the people" (and themselves as their "voice") in a political and moral struggle against the system.

- Furthermore, the AfD communicates that "the people" are threatened by external enemies. These can take the form of minorities, such as immigrants, refugees, homosexuals (so-called "out-groups") but also foreign institutions or the European Union.

- The AfD uses anger as a dominant emotion expressed in the tweets when criticizing "the elites" but also "out-groups". Fear, on the other hand, is for the most part only used in tweets that appeal to "out-groups" and thus predominantly minorities of Muslims and immigrants.

- As a final note, the study affirms findings of prior research about the influence of emotional rhetoric style on the diffusion of tweets. Evidence has been found that those tweets the AfD posts in which either anger or fear are expressed are positively correlated with the quantity of retweets. However, the results do not confirm the assumption that anger has a stronger impact than fear on sharing behavior. A possible explanation might lie in the findings of Stieglitz and Dang-Xuan (2013) who did not find any support for the notion that negative emotions have more impact on the retweet quantity than positive ones. It is therefore assumed, that the main influencing factor on retweet count is the intensity of the arousal caused by the emotion (e.g. awe or anger), irrespective of the fact what kind of arousal-evoking emotion is used. The opposite effect is caused by low-arousal, deactivating emotions (e.g. sadness) (in line with Stieglitz and Dang-Xuan, 2013, 223). By implementing high-arousal emotions in their tweets, the findings show that the AfD seems to have successfully understood the influence of particular emotions on virality.

10.3 Limitations

The study is determined by methodological choices of exclusion and inclusion that make up the boundaries of the research. Several methodological issues therefore deserve careful attention. Generally, a limitation lies in the rather low sample size in terms of selected candidates and tweets. The presented research only focused on 15 accounts from different political positions. Not all sixteen states of Germany were included in the analysis, which might lead to an over-focus on specific addressed problems in the one state (e.g. the medication scandal that happened in the east German state Brandenburg) whereas problems in the northern state Schleswig-Holstein might be different. Also, politicians from EU-level were left out. A general problem with the analysis of the accounts is the imbalanced use of Twitter of different politicians. As some accounts tweet every day, others do not even operate an account at all and therefore cannot be included in the sample size. In Germany, Twitter still has not reached the popularity among politicians that Facebook has, however, the overall trend shows a positive sign up rate of politicians for the platform. This could help providing a more general picture of the social media political communication landscape in the future.

The third limitation is the short period of time the tweets were analyzed and the timeframe chosen for the study. Populist communication might be different during election campaigns, especially in the days before an election. As the selected period took place during the parliamentary summer recess, parliamentary work in the Bundestag was paused which could also influence the debate on Twitter to a limited field of themes. The discussion was widely concentrated on a few selected topics, such as the Immigration issue or the short term intensive discussion about the football player Mesut Özil and, which provided fertile ground for the AfD but left the range of alternative topics quite narrow.

Another limitation is the fact that only the actual text in the tweets was analyzed. Including the analysis of the external links (e.g. to Facebook posts), videos or image content in the tweet might give a more complete overview about the rhetorical style of the AfD. Furthermore, the categorization of the different topic fields was limited to 20 topics only. A narrower breakdown of the addressed subject matters in the tweets could have been done according to other core themes. By the way of example, the opposition parties FDP, The Left and the Greens have been summarized to one topic field. Also, problems concerning migration outside of Germany, e.g. happening in Spain or Italy, were summarized under one point together with domestic immigration issues. Categorizing them more specifically therefore could have resulted in a more holistic picture of the communication strategy of the AfD.

The biggest limitation within the thesis is, however, the accuracy of the German dictionary the sentiment analysis is based on. As it was developed in 2001 for different scientific linguistic fields, and therefore long before the emergence of social media, the text analysis might not be accurate enough for the requirements of the special language style of a tweet. Certain words and word combinations or even their change in context are a major drawback for an automated analysis of social media text. Also, does it not capture irony, sarcasm, or culture-specific context. Here a machine learning approach based on the evaluation of human interpreters might be a more reliable, but also more costly and elaborate solution.

10.4 Implications for future research

The study makes several research contributions. First of all, by examining the role of the two distinct emotions anger and fear on the dissemination of tweets in the social media setting, the existing literature is extended. So far, previous research has concentrated on the virality of positive and negative emotions and their influence on information diffusion in social media (e.g. Stieglitz and Dang-Xuan, 2013; Kušen et al. 2017). However, none of

these studies have considered the distinct role of the high-arousal emotions anger and fear on virality in the context of populist communication on social media. Further research could extend these findings by looking on the influence of anger and fear from the perspective of sharing networks. When incorporating the following base of political parties on Twitter, anger and fear might have different impact on the emergence of echo chambers resp. their density when information is being shared. Especially taking into account the theory of Affective Intelligence and its effect on public debates in polarized groups could be an insightful area of research.

Second, the study analyzed the use of anger and fear in tweets based on a sentiment analysis tool that employed a lexical approach through an emotional dictionary developed by Pennebaker et al. (2015). The current dictionary incorporates pre-defined words that have been semantically tagged into a number of different sentiment categories. A construction of word collections that are designed for the specific requirements of political rhetoric could extend the research field and should provide more precise analysis tools, especially with regards to divergent demands that cultural context and language of the content bring.[25]

Furthermore, by also incorporating the "thin ideology" as part of the key characteristics of populist' communication into the analysis, this study contributes to existing research by demonstrating that anger is the dominating affective tool when blame is shifted towards elites and out-groups on social media. Future studies could build on this by examining whether the findings of the study can be replicated in other cultural contexts such as the Eastern European democracies where populist parties are currently already forming the government. With the upcoming European Parliament elections, a comparative study between different countries over a longer period of time might identify differences in emotional rhetoric depending on the cultural context. This also goes for the investigation of the question whether opposing parties use different emotional strategies on social media within a country (e.g. The Greens and the Christian Democrats in Germany). The prerequisite for social media analysis of political parties, however, is that observed subjects operate a Twitter account and are actively engaging in political debates. For the German political landscape the observation was made that especially the two biggest parties (CDU/CSU and SPD) are often underrepresented on Twitter.

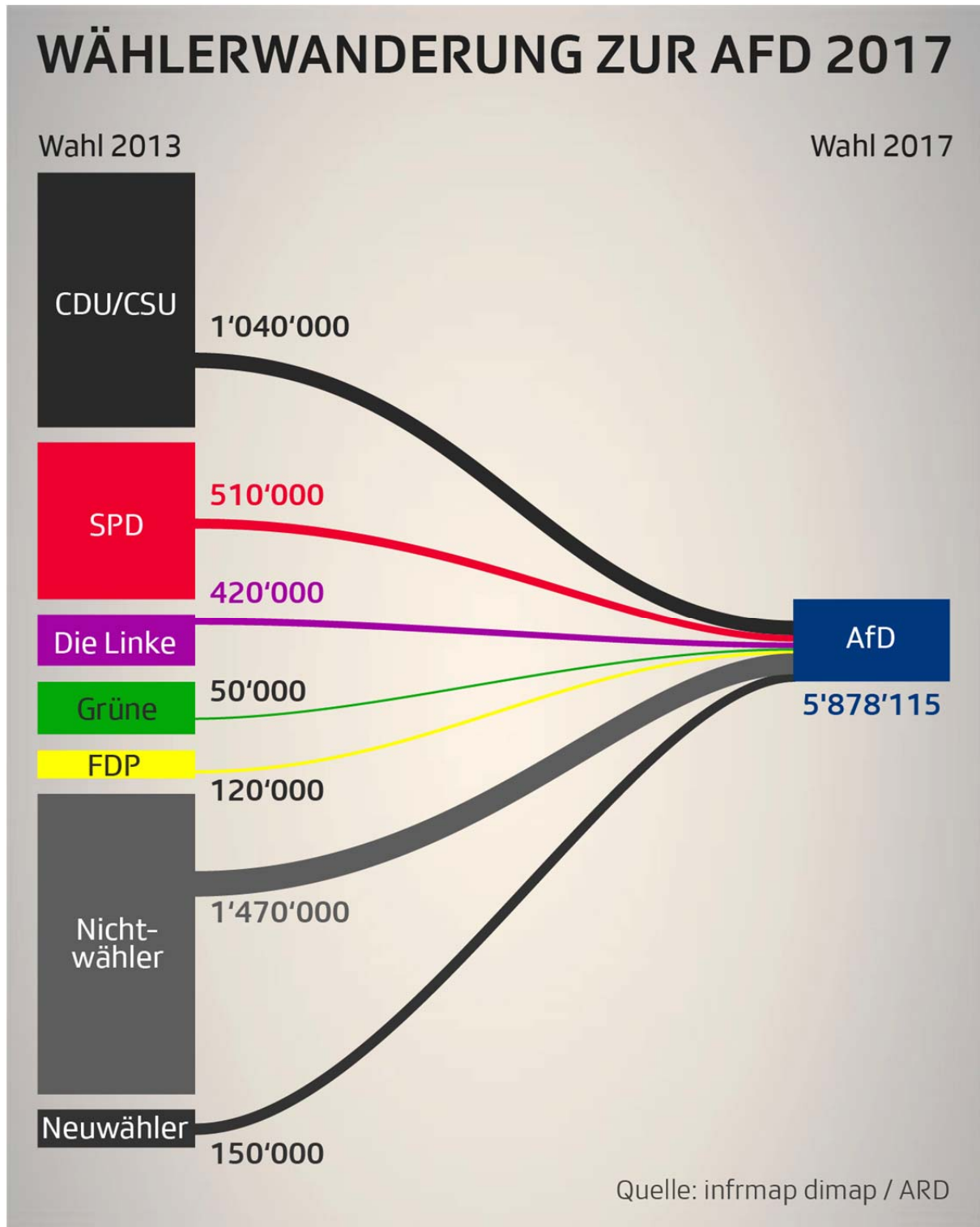[25] An exemption is the German Political Sentiment Dictionary developed by Haselmayer and Jenny (2017). https://homepage.univie.ac.at/martin.haselmayer/Data.html

11. Appendix

Appendix 1: Final result of the 2017 Bundestag election in Germany, second vote as a percentage of the AfD.
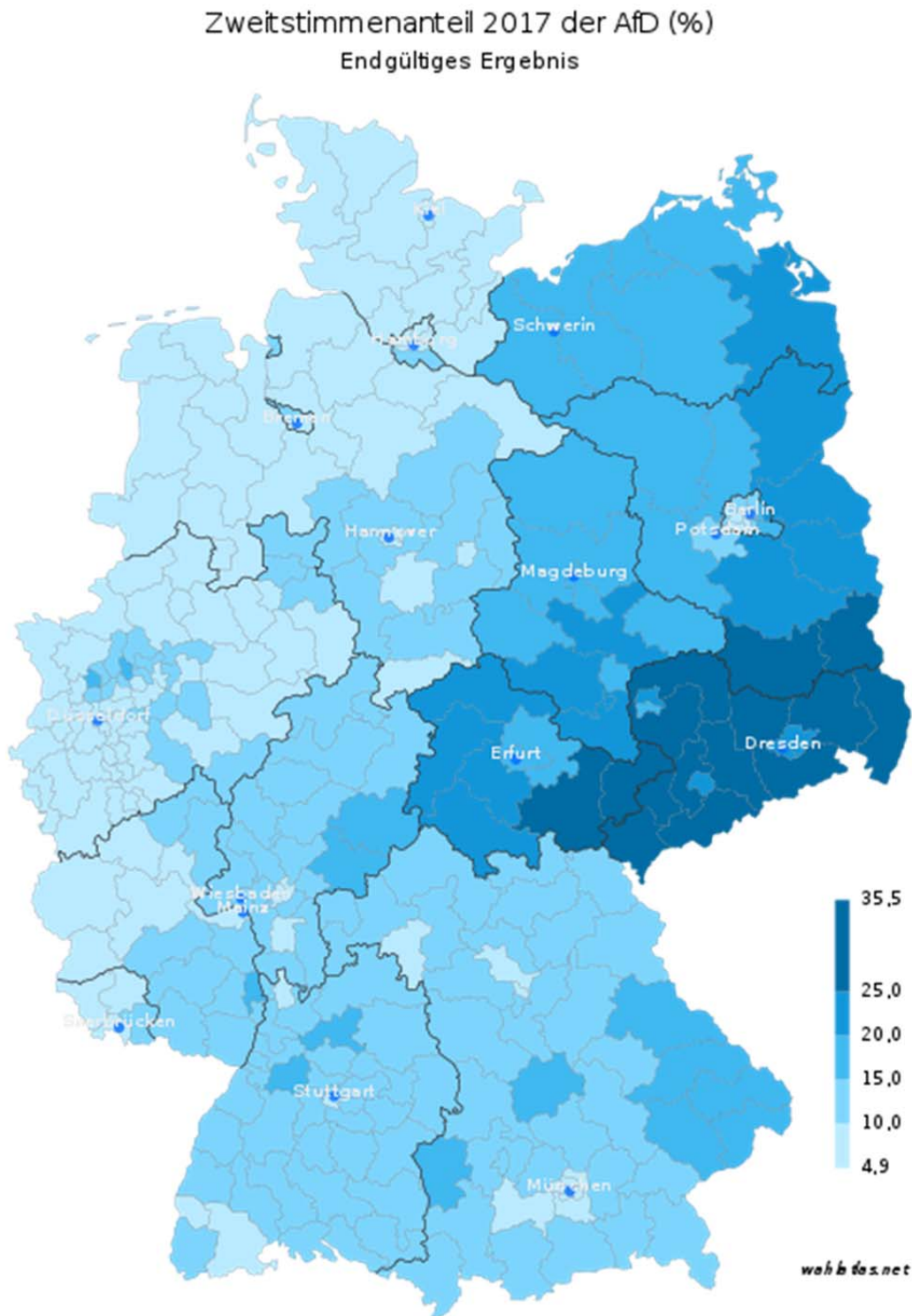
Source: Wahlatlas (2017). Retrieved on July 14, 2018, from: http://wahlatlas.net/btw/17/#!afd17z,default
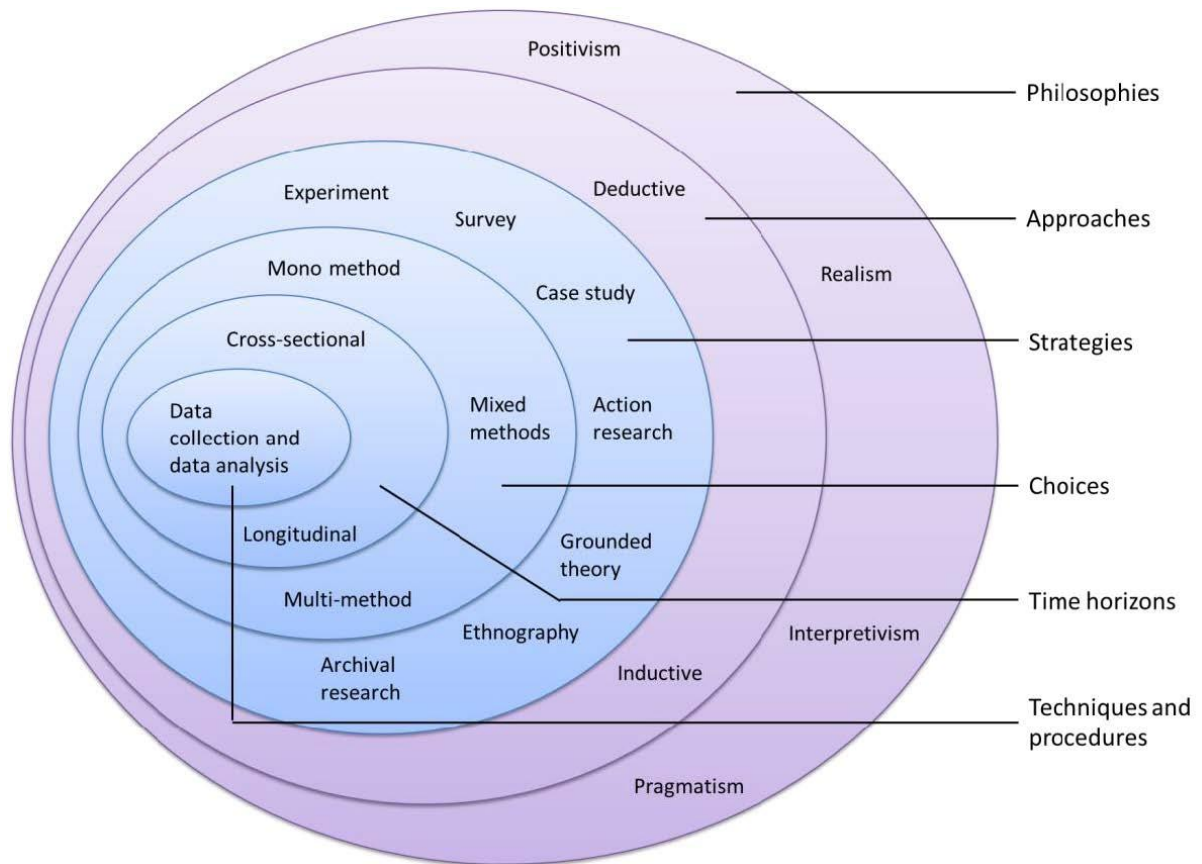
Appendix 2: Shift of votes in the Bundestagswahl from other parties to the AfD compared from 2013 to 2017.

Source: SRF (2017, September 26). Retrieved on July, 14, 2018, from:

https://www.srf.ch/news/international/waehlerwanderung-nach-rechts-so-kam-die-afd-auf-12-6-prozent-der-stimmen

Appendix 3: Research Onion

Source: Saunders et al. (2016, 124)

Appendix 4: External news media websites used in the corpus of the AfD tweets.

News Platform	Amount of Links
Welt	84
Bild	42
Junge Freiheit	41
Focus	32
Tagesspiegel	22
Spiegel	18
Philosophia Perennis	17
Journalisten-Watch	14
ntv	13
FAZ	11
afd kompakt	11
Berliner Zeitung	10
Epochtimes	10
Tagesschau	10
Morgenpost	10
SZ	9
Deutschlandfunk	8
rbb	7
Tichys Einblick	7
Zeit	6
T-Online	5
Basler Zeitung	5
Cicero	5
WAZ	4
Stern	4
Huffingtonpost	4
Achgut.com	4
ZDF	4
BZ	3
Merkur	3
Krone	3
PI-News	3
News Republic	2
afd.de	2
Web.de	2
Handelsblatt	2
Wahlrecht.de Welt	2
Idea	2
Newsrepublic	2
Augsburger Allgemeine	2

presseportal.de	2
Kölner Stadtanzeiger	2
Thüringer Allgemeine	2
MDR	2
Allgemeine Zeitung	2
Deutschland Kurier	2
Freie Welt	2
https://charismatismus.wordpress.com	1
Tag24.de	1
katholisch.de	1
Landtag Brandenburg	1
Thüringische Landeszeitung	1
Leverkusener Anzeiger	1
Saarbrücker Zeitung	1
Lübecker Nachrichten	1
Die freie Welt	1
Magdeburger News	1
Täglicher Anzeiger Holzminden	1
Mannheimer Morgen	1
unzensuriert.de	1
Märkische Allgemeine	1
RT-Deutsch	1
Contra-Magazin	1
Soundcloud	1
Fox-News	1
Sputnik	1
Mittelbayrische	1
Dora Gezwitscher	1
Mitteldeutsche Zeitung	1
Breitbart	1
mlmj.wordpress.com	1
The Guardian	1
Deutsch RT	1
TVM	1
HAZ	1
Volksstimme	1
Indymedia	1
WDR	1
jetzt-direkte-demokratie	1
Rundblick Unna	1
NNN	1
shz	1
Nordkurier	1
Spectator	1
NRW-direkt	1

Sportbild	1
Yougov UK	1
Steinhoefel.de	1
civilpetition.de	1
Stuttgarter Zeitung	1
Ostseezeitung	1
dushanwegner.com/	1
AfD-Bundestag	1
Tagespost	1
Express	1
Frankfurter Rundschau	1
Westfalenblatt	1
taz	1
http://www.friatider.se	1
Kaufbeuren	1
Daily Beast	1
Emma	1
Ran	1
TZ	1
CNN	1
Voice Europe	1
Reporter ohne Grenzen	1
wahlen.kaufbeuren.de	1
Reuters	1
Kreisbote	1
Rhein Neckar Zeitung	1
Ärzteblatt	1
RP	1
Wochenblick	1
Wikipedia	1
Politik und Zeitgeschehen Facebook	1
ARD	1
Potsdamer Neueste Nachrichten	1
NRZ Welt	1
Berliner Woche	1
Neue Züricher Zeitung	1
Total	**533**

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