The London School of Economics and Political Science

'Sharing' the Digital Public Sphere? Facebook and the Politics of Immigration

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Declaration

I certify that the thesis I have presented for examination for the MPhil/PhD degree of the London School of Economics and Political Science is solely my own work other than where I have clearly indicated that it is the work of others (in which case the extent of any work carried out jointly by me and any other person is clearly identified in it).

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Abstract

This project critically examines 'Sharing' on Facebook, that which is central to the operation of the site and has been celebrated as a democratic panacea. By exploring the spatial, deliberative and informational features of sharing I attempt to locate the effective operation of a heralded Digital Public Sphere.

Drawing upon data gathered on the Facebook Pages of three major British political parties between January 2015 and May 2016, I examine the space, speech and news manifested by an assemblage of actors sharing immigration, a particularly contentious topic dominating recent British politics. Mapping the relations between platform, users, parties and media actors intertwined across the substance and form of the issue, I reveal how tension between the ideological and economic demands of the platform interacts with user desire and a wider political climate to directly scupper the progressive, deliberative ideals celebrated in the branding of sharing. Through formal and substantive analysis of the 'articulation' of immigration, I show how the platform becomes fertile ground for the growth of right-wing populism.

However, by taking a relational approach I problematise the portrayal of social media as a Deus ex Machina that conveniently explains unforeseen political events. I argue that narratives rooted in technological determinism neglect the sociotechnical qualities of contemporary life, where human and non-human agency are entangled in the production of consequences that blur the online/offline divide. Taking up agonistic critiques of 'post-democracy', I draw from the data a context that reflects a crisis in democratic representation - one not determined by technological change but in constant creative and productive engagement with it. Bridging empirical data with social and political theory reveals why practice emerges in ways that challenge the idealised branding of connected publics, yet at the same time unsettle attempts to reductively assign responsibility for their perceived failures.

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1. Introduction: 'Sharing' the 'Digital Public Sphere'

Numerous mechanical devices threaten to make good the prediction that 'what is whispered in the closet shall be proclaimed from the house-tops'.

Warren & Brandeis, 1890

On the 10th of April 2018, Facebook CEO Mark Zuckerberg was called to testify in front of the US congress. He was charged with explaining how exactly a small social-networking application devised in a dorm-room 14 years prior might have radically changed the process of democratic politics. This was to be a torrid drama involving a new president at war with the media, a foreign power alleged to have manipulated the minds of voters and a generation of digital natives apparently unable to tell fact from fiction. What exactly did he have to say about the role of his platform in the stream of unanticipated and unnerving political events across the globe, and what perverse abuses had he inflicted on the cherished notion of privacy? Not alone in their demand for some form of explanation the US Congress was joined in its outrage by the British Parliament. Zuckerberg was to be held potentially accountable for the result of a Brexit referendum that had sliced the United Kingdom from a European community that had nurtured peace between states for more than 50 years. As a truly global platform, entangled intimately with the daily lives of billions, Facebook are now being taken to task for a range of 'unanticipated' global political consequences; pilloried by the media and harangued by politicians across the ideological spectrum, Messrs Zuckerberg and co. increasingly find themselves 'persona non-grata'.

It was not supposed to be this way.

Early ideals espoused by Facebook as it exploded in growth celebrated the potential for 'sharing' to usher in a progressive era of 'connectedness', networking people around the globe in the pursuit of peace and prosperity, rationally dispelling age-old divides and repairing a democratic order scarred by ignorance, inequality and terror. In this work I offer insight into the digital scepticism that has arisen from the debris of Facebook's progressive mission, by examining the kinds of 'sharing' that actually take place with and through contentious political issues that flow across the site. Drawing upon data gathered on the Facebook homes of the three major British political parties between 2015 and 2016, I examine the shared space,

speech and news manifested by an assemblage of actors 'sharing' immigration, a particularly contentious issue dominating recent British politics. By charting the relations established across the assemblage, I detail the politics that emerge from the digital practice studied, how they reflect the failure of a heralded 'digital public sphere', and how they engage with the rise of right-wing populism that has fuelled liberal anxiety across Europe and the United States - Facebook's major user bases.

However, by taking this relational approach, I show how recent attempts to identify technology as a Deus ex Machina that conveniently explains unforeseen political events ultimately neglects the sociotechnical qualities of contemporary life, where human and non-human agency are entangled in the production of consequences that blur the online/offline divide. Taking up agonistic critiques of 'post-democracy', I draw from the data a wider context that reflects a crisis in democratic representation - one not determined by technological change but in constant creative and productive engagement with it. Bridging empirical data with social and political theory reveals why consequences emerge in ways that problematise the idealised dreams of connected publics - those thought capable of intellectually and rationally overcoming antagonistic partisan borders through ever-more 'sharing'.

'Digital' Politics

This project began in 2014, some time before the series of surprising political events outlined above. I sought to investigate the ways digital technology and social media were interacting with contentious political issues, for there was uncertainty in the literature about the kinds of consequences that everyday use of various platforms might have for the democratic program. In proposing a study into 'Digital' Politics I entered a field marked by researchers from a variety of disciplines. Below I briefly outline wider research in the field that offered hope for progressive politics, and at the same time raised caution about how digital practice was changing society. I detail the inspiration for my research, the choice of Facebook as platform and the selection of a particular issue. Together, these allowed me to build an investigation into a hypothesised Digital Public Sphere and its relation to the kinds of 'sharing' desired - and increasingly demanded - in contemporary life.

Indeed, the 'internet' has become a constant fixture in the professional and personal lives of billions of users. Digital modes of communication have been domesticated through their presence in the home (Silverstone & Haddon, 1996) accompanied by ever faster broadband

technologies. They have been made mobile through their connection to the worn and cherished items of everyday organisation, information and entertainment, and absorbed - often in less than transparent ways - through the digitization of household appliances, urban planning and commercial apparati. This internet of 'things' has led to new conceptualisations of digital connectivity and networking, and the growing popularity of digital platforms for an increasing range of social activities has stimulated literature on their political dimensions. As Dahlgren (2005, p.148) notes:

> the theme of the Internet and the public sphere has a permanent place on research agendas and in intellectual inquiry for the foreseeable future. It is now entering the mainstream of concern for the study of political communication and taking its place alongside the established research on the traditional mass media.

Various scholars have suggested the characteristics of digital 'space' and the negotiations that take place at what's been labelled the 'IRL/URL border' (Keiles, 2015), highlighting how the digital might radically decentralize and revitalize politics. This optimistic stance reflects what Slater (2002) notes as the 'cyberlibertarianism' associated with earlier hopes for a revolutionary new 'social'. Specific political visions accompanied the rise of the 'hyperlinked' internet, described under the umbrella term 'Web 1.0'. The hopes of developing a technological utopia for counter-culture and political activism were marked by the emergence of small, subversive communities of geeks, gamers, hackers and celebrated 'nerds' on bulletin boards, Usenet lists and across the networks of Internet Relay Chat. Wired pronounced the rise of the 'Zippies' in 1994 – those who "balanced their hemispheres to achieve a fusion of the technological and the spiritual" ("Zippies!", 1994). Early designers of the ARPANET that gave rise to the World Wide Web as we know it hoped to enlarge the horizons of digital networks - from the protection of national security amidst growing fears of 'cyber warfare' to a scholarly, peaceful resource. This was to be a tool through which scientists and researchers could collaborate and share knowledge, across a 'human-computer symbiosis', that replaced a 'centrality' paradigm with that of a 'distributed network' (Hafner & Lyon, 1998). The early messaging systems that followed empowered diverse forms of work, play and politicking amongst the largely academic communities that populated them.

Although the suggestion of a 'Web 1.0' may trigger memories of browsing a range of static 'sites' linked across various genres and topics in a more 'passive' spectator guise, the early networking of users through chat-rooms and independent application programs nevertheless allowed nascent forms of interactive digital 'sharing' – whether of news, opinion or software

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applications. These practices pre-dated the mainstreaming of platforms encouraging 'user-generated content', as well as the development of interactive informal and commercial sites built largely on user-contributions, reviews and dialogue. They provided an early example of a path away from a representation of internet use as simply 'passive' spectatorship, hinting at the potential for a future categorisation of the user as 'first-class object' (Cormode and Krishnamurthy, 2008). The explosion in the technological capabilities offered to those users wishing to network in such ways, socially and politically, fostered changing visions of what the internet could and should be. Barbrook and Cameron (1995) describe the growing optimism about the potential of digital networks as the ascendance of 'The Californian Ideology', a "new faith" building on:

> fusion of the cultural bohemianism of San Francisco with the hi-tech industries of Silicon Valley. Promoted in magazines, books, tv programmes, Web sites, newsgroups and Net conferences, the Californian Ideology promiscuously combines the free-wheeling spirit of the hippies and the entrepreneurial zeal of the yuppies. This amalgamation of opposites has been achieved through a profound faith in the emancipatory potential of the new information technologies. In the digital utopia, everybody will be both hip and rich.

Representation of the socio-political potential of the early internet emphasised its manifestation of a radical new medium for political speech, where "influenced by the theories of Marshall McLuhan, these technophiliacs thought that the convergence of media, computing and telecommunications would inevitably create the *electronic agora* - a virtual place where everyone would be able to express their opinions without fear of censorship" (ibid.). As Thompson (2005, p.38) describes, "Ever since the advent of print, political rulers have found it impossible to control completely the new kind of visibility made possible by the media and to shape it entirely to their liking; now, with the rise of the Internet and other digital technologies, it is more difficult than ever". Dahlgren (2005) emphasises the potential of the user 'interaction' foregrounded in what would be increasingly described as 'Web 2.0' systems, amidst this era of 'new visibility', as a central pillar of an extra-parliamentarian new politics, one that destabilizes older forms of political communication and censorship. For Coleman and Blumler (2009) too, this shifting terrain is the perfect environment to cure widespread disenchantment said to characterize liberal democracy. Within states, construction of an interactive political space is said to offer "a roadmap or a blueprint for an emerging digital environment whose defining characteristics are openness, persistence, engagement, partnerships, access and public benefit" (Ageh, 2013, p.6), and where "turnout campaigns and

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third sector groups reverse the trend of political disenfranchisement through the use of social media" (Bartlett et al, 2015, p.3). Such is the promise offered by the changing relationship between technology and politics that even "less interested citizens can be better mobilized by reading political comments" online (Kruikemeier et al, 2014, p.915), and the new wealth of user-generated content can challenge the aloof status of political journalists as public/political intermediaries, for "a blurring is taking place between the traditionally stable categories of 'producer' and 'user'. This could lead to a more diverse public domain that reflects 'the voices of the many'" (Witscghe, 2011) and loosens the grasp of elites on political discourse.

Attention has focused on the internet's role in contemporary political activism, as users not only schedule or coordinate offline action, but construct a movement that is both material and virtual, online and off, as they traverse barriers and checkpoints (physical and digital) during political upheaval or periods of social protest in the form of a 'socio-digital' coup (Cardullo, 2015). Protestors across the globe can utilise digital means to negotiate various forms of censorship and social control, through a variety of technologically infused resistance modes incorporating hacking, culture-jamming and the humorous re-signification of sacred elite symbols (Jiang, 2016, p.34). This fusing of physical and technological practice troubles the divide between real and virtual space and is said to have "facilitated the diffusion of global justice movements and enhanced their scale of operation by allowing activists to more effectively communicate and coordinate across geographic spaces without the need for vertical hierarchies" (Mukhopadhyay, 2016, p.4). The textual, visual and physical manifestation through the shared affective 'artefacts' of a political movement might boost its momentum, and ultimately reify its legitimate 'presence' in the eyes of participants, audiences and opposition (Schofield Clark, 2016).

A 'Digital Public Sphere'?

The potential impact of the digital environment on politics clearly excited analysts looking for novel means and novel spaces by and through which citizens may intervene directly in the service of democracy, and many of these more optimistic approaches have incorporated entrenched concepts of 'community' and 'network' rooted in idealistic notions of the 'public sphere' harking back to the work of Habermas (Postill, 2008, p.417). The image of a dialogical realm for a 'critical public' fostering debate above and beyond the excesses of the state has for Van Dijck and Poell (2016, p.227) "been the main conceptual framework through which the relations among popular contestation, mediated communication, and power have been

examined". Indeed, the kinds of normative ideals drawn out from the work above echo Habermas' (1962) original depiction of a rational-critical sphere in which private individuals might debate and resist political domination. Habermas' account of the bourgeois public sphere saw an educated public engage in dialogical combat, with intellectual approaches duelling across literary and political journals. The rise of public meeting spaces were said to have drawn individuals out from private contemplation to discuss the issues of the day, in salons, coffee-shops and at various meetings and clubs. The 'critique' established through these forms of cultural commentary could then be taken up as foil to the domination of elite state institutions, empowered by a parliament that began to recognize the input of a public represented directly through effective and honourable political journalists. In combination, the space, speech and traffic of critical 'news' is said to have led to the replacement of a sphere "in which the ruler's power was merely represented before the people with a sphere in which state authority was publicly monitored through informed and critical discourse by the people" (Habermas, 1962, p.xi).

This romantic ideal of a critical dialogical public proved tenacious and has been enlivened by the emergent productive social capacities of the digital realm. As Rensmann (2014, p.2) describes the potential of a Polis 2.0:

> There can be no question: the Internet matters politically as it *reshapes the public sphere*. The specific patterns of social media and Internet use have an influence on political attitudes (the study of which is only in its nascent stage), the departmentalization of information flows, even the way we've come to understand political engagement and practice itself [emphasis mine].

I wanted to empirically examine the outcomes of the technological social experiments manifested by the emergence of social media platforms where they come into contact with particularly controversial and divisive issues, and craft an evaluative construct through which the claims wrapped up within the brand of 'sharing' Facebook promote would be interrogated. As detailed over the following chapters, Facebook's corporate rhetoric became more explicit over time with regards the sort of 'space' they sought to provide, and one can locate within the politicisation of their branding the tenacity of the sorts of ideals put forward by the Habermasian public sphere model. In 2017 Zuckerberg explained the development of the platform over the preceding years by making plain his plans to build 'global community' as part of the "journey to connect the world" (Zuckerberg, 2017b). He likens Facebook's constructive

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efforts to the building of 'social infrastructures' like media and governments, and details how early aims of connecting family and friends had morphed into a mission foregrounding civic engagement built atop "informed communities" strengthened by "new ideas" where "every person has a voice". He cites the decline in the infrastructure available to local groups where people might meet and pass the time in progressive, pro-social ways, and the need for an online replacement of these informed, engaged and "very meaningful" spaces for more than simply "passive consumption".

Zuckerberg details how the circulation of "diverse content" across the Facebook network trumps the civic capacity of "traditional media", and increases the chances that people might emerge from an encounter with the wider spectrum of news to form more "balanced nuanced opinions". In combination, Facebook's provision of space, empowerment of interpersonal contact and the sharing of new ideas, and encouragement of the dissemination of varied news seeks to present infrastructure that ultimately "encourages engagement in existing political processes" and revitalises democracy. In 2015, following the birth of their first child, Zuckerberg and his wife pledged to donate 99pc of their Facebook shares to charitable and philanthropic efforts aimed at "improving this world for the next generation" anchored in the belief that connecting and building strong communities is fundamental to spreading 'understanding' across nations (Trotman, 2015). The ideals and rhetoric may appear grandiose, but given the power, wealth and ubiquity of the platform, as well as the surveillant, data-processing practices increasingly aimed at the commodification of users, they are ones that demand attention by those concerned with the uncertain role of the digital in contemporary political life. In its manifestation of a site for digital practice, traceable across the relations established by a wide set of actors, and in the political rhetoric it espouses that clearly echoes earlier 'public sphere' tenets, it serves as a field in which to conduct an empirical investigation that serves as an evaluative interrogation of the progressive ideals espoused.

Indeed, an 'interrogation' was warranted for an overview of the literature suggested I heed warnings about the consequences of political engagement 'online', as sceptical voices have taken aim not only at the original flattering portrayal Habermas offered, but also the likelihood of its manifestation in digital contexts. Following the translation of Habermas into English a variety of authors took up the question of a critical, independently mediated public, as the structure of media organizations changed rapidly towards the end of the 20th Century and political parties established specific media strategies. Writers interrogated the historical accuracy of the public sphere in Habermas' account, focusing on the validity of a critical sphere that specifically excluded minority voices, or failed to acknowledge ongoing patterns of

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domination and inequality that might skewer flattering portrayals (Fraser, 1990). In attempting to locate the realisation of Public Sphere ideals online in the contemporary digital age, several researchers have similarly struck a somewhat cautious tone.

Certain observers remain deeply skeptical about a brave new digital world for progressives and liberals. Assessing the rise of violent political extremism in Europe, UK think-tank Demos claim "The rise of populism in Europe can be traced through online behaviour" (Bartlett, Birdwell and Littler, 2011), alongside the emergence of what has been termed 'Anti-social media' (Bartlett et al, 2014) empowering the expression of hatred - particularly racial hatred. Indeed, Back (2002, p.629) notes 'arborescent' neo-fascism "seized upon the Internet as a political tool and an alternative media that was unregulated and relatively cheap". Sunstein (2009) takes a similarly pessimistic view, arguing that group-polarisation in the 'echo chambers' that develop in online spaces not only separates ideological communities in ways that negate dialogue and deliberation, but fosters 'extreme' versions of previous opinion, and scuppers the chance to utilize a new medium to rationally dissolve simplistic binaries. Other research has followed the same course, suggesting that despite access to ever more sources: "selective exposure behavior is particularly pronounced" as "people pursue attitudinally congruent information" (Flanagin and Metzger, 2014, p.7). If people move online to vent political concerns in a way that strategically avoids contestation and rather serves to shore up partisan borders in more and more extreme flavours, then the vision of a reflexive and rationally critical public begins to fade.

Indeed, for other cautious voices the ongoing embeddedness of digital technology with daily life marks less the realisation of a progressive, deliberative sociotechnical utopia and more the rise of 'technocapitalism' (Kellner, 1999), wherein growing commodification, consumerism (Fuchs, 2014) - and perhaps more disturbingly - surveillance (Bauman and Lyon, 2012) become the norm. The portrayal of a potentially novel 'digital' sphere already colonised by private interest casts a shadow over the hopes of early grassroots communities, and those intent on a radical space wherein political aspiration might flower, disempowered communities might blossom, and elites would be forced to reckon with growing unison demands to wrest power back. For Morozov (2009), the potential activism celebrated in earlier accounts of internet politics becomes in the contemporary corporate world of digital sociality simply 'Slacktivism', the banal clicks of an apathetic multitude happy to visibly support a good cause but less likely to invest any physical action beyond attention to their own mediated self-presentation. Together, these critics outline the neoliberal logic implicit in the very design of platforms and their parameters of action, as the temptation to 'brand' the fragmented, individualistic self

punctures hopes for a committed 'authentic' community of networked, progressive, anti-corporate activists.

'Social Media' in particular has been associated with grassroots political organization, and in its literal reproduction of 'groups' and 'rooms' populated by chattering users evokes the image of the salons and meeting rooms that served as pillars of the idealised public sphere of the past. Yet as Van Dijck and Poell (2016, p.227) argue in line with accounts above, "although the connection between social media and activism seems natural, these media are not designed to facilitate activism. In fact, the technological architectures and user policies of social media are primarily informed by commercial considerations". Here, attention is focused on the value of user 'data' as product, and how commodification takes place in less than transparent ways, produced unconsciously by users led to conceive of their interaction as social, rather than professional. On social media platforms large-scale data-mining and algorithmic prediction is put to work, on behalf of advertising companies and for the ultimate benefit of the platform owners who rely on their commercial engagement. Although the increasing presence of advertising in spaces inferred to users as 'free-time' places of leisure has not gone unnoticed, efforts to design 'adblocking' programs now face potential legislation by states who wish to ensure easy corporate access to the precious data resulting from 'consumer' interaction (Martinson, 2016).

For critical analysts, the strategies adopted by platform owners reflect the rise of a 'datafication' industry built on 'predictive analytics', processing how a user's digital practice might be of interest to both commercial and governmental bodies in ways that raise serious ethical questions about consumer privacy, thought-crimes and even predictive policing (Mayer-Schonberger & Cukier, 2013). At the heart of datafication are the widespread manipulation and commodification of the users drawn to social media platforms (Couldry & Van Dijck, 2015). Rather than simply consume digital offerings, drawing on Toffler's (1980) depiction of a 'Third Wave civilization' users are conceptualized as 'prosumers' in a digitally-fuelled "age of the prosumer" (Ritzer, Dean & Jurgenson, 2012), whose labour can be identified as earning value for a growing industry (Fuchs, 2010). At the same time, they are alienated from this labour and forced to ''buy' it back to access digital services, with the erosion of privacy as their own currency. Data here is 'compromised'; as Langlois, Redden and Elmer (2015, p.1) argue, "it has never been easier to share information, and yet access to information about the social – particularly social data - is often denied, as such data is privately owned, incomprehensible to the nonspecialist, silenced, or eliminated".

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Privacy and 'Sharing Subjects'

The more critical takes on the structural reality of these novel discursive arenas mimic the pessimism that ultimately emerged at the end of Habermas' older account of the public sphere and its transformation, particularly where they focus on the perceived power of corporate media and the creeping digital commodification of the personal. Indeed, the tension between easy access and already dominant digital entities suggests for Karatzogianni et al (2016) a *digital* 'transformation of the public sphere', in which technology both offers liberation from authoritarian control, and at the same time a vehicle for novel forms of oppression involving surveillance. Habermas' lament on the fate of the public sphere he portrayed centred on the danger of invasions of privacy, for he saw privacy as essential to the formation of reflective individual consciousness that must pre-exist the public coming together of critical citizens. As such, if the more pessimistic accounts above reflect the reality of digital life, in ways Habermas saw as mutually incompatible with the manifestation of a valid public sphere, then perhaps proposals for its 'digital' location were doomed from the start.

However, as digital social practice increases, the relation between public and private long held as fundamental to theorizing about the social is in flux - both in terms of legislation and in terms of public understanding. Indeed, 'privacy' is not what it used to be; the ancient divide between 'private' and 'public' that older societies considered vital in establishing intellectual and political excellence - the alleged facilitation of mankind's highest calling - is rapidly dissolving. By allowing the separation of matters considered private - those of the household, and those worthy of public scrutiny - those founding political life, the classical world from which contemporary Western politics emerged believed human beings were able to exist simultaneously in two guises, each complementing the other and allowing thoughtful contemplation on life that was critical and dialogical (Arendt, 1958; Habermas, 1962). Yet these strictly divided but deeply entrenched contexts have 'collapsed' amidst rapid sociotechnical change (boyd and Heer, 2006). Rather than simply reproduce a lament over the 'end of privacy', proponents of ever more 'sharing' in the name of the public democratic good have instead argued that as a social norm it is 'evolving' (Corbin, 2010).

Indeed, as a result of technological change and the popularity of various platforms, conversations between contemporary digital actors are no longer 'private' by default, but

potentially exhibited, recorded and traceable across multiple digital realms. Yet the notion of public *concern* over such change is troubled where we inhabit a 'confessional society', wherein people's desire for exhibition overcomes privacy concerns even when the post-panoptic flow of surveillance is made transparent (Baumann & Lyon, 2012). Changing attitudes toward candid expression are indicative of ways social media use has subsidized the 'personalization of politics' Bennett (2012, p.22) traces through late modernity, in which opinion is increasingly validated not simply by external 'facts' and 'expertise' but alongside personal anecdotes and emotion. Technological empowerment is said to foster expressive and attentive 'story-telling publics', curating political performances that amplify and extend 'new modalities' of affective engagement with society (Papacharissi, 2014).

Regardless of the risks pointed out by critics, people willingly confess the most personal details upon platforms where an imperative to 'share' witnesses the evolution of the word's meaning: from 'user-to-user' sharing, to sharing with the 'world' (Van Dijck, 2013, p.65). Individual and group visibility has become more intensive, more extensive, less controllable, yet ever demanded for existence as "the struggle to be seen and heard, and the struggle to make others see and hear, has become an inseparable part of the social and political conflicts of our time" (Thompson, 2005, p.49). 'Sharing' oneself with the world at large is the dominant paradigm espoused by platforms themselves – the demand for an endless supply of 'sharing subjects' – people subject to their own desire for attention and the needs of business that together manifest what Gerlitz and Helmond (2013) term the 'Like Economy'. 'Sharing' is aggressively normalized by the most popular social media platform of all - Facebook - who admit how: "We decided that these would be the social norms now, and we just went for it" (Corbin, 2010). These are norms said to open-up the promise of 'World Peace' no less (Matyszczyk, 2016), and make possible the rational exchange of ideas even in the face of violent extremism (Stewart, 2016). Such optimism relies on the notion that the explosion in the range of actors offered a 'voice' audible on the world stage will necessarily lead to a more democratic flow of opinion. Indeed, so convincing has this ethos of digital sharing, openness and exchange become that states have begun to pursue the crafting of competent 'digital citizens' required to make rights-claims in new online spaces as part of a 'Digital Inclusion Strategy' (Isin & Ruppert, 2014, p.82), where 'sharing' is demanded if one simply wishes to be counted.

So compelling is this urge to share that we enter for John (2017) a veritable 'age of sharing', in which increasing 'sharing' practice – of individual emotions, aspirations, forms of capital – is nevertheless "supportive and subversive of hegemonic (digital) culture" (2017, p.2), and both

contributes to the wealth of technological providers as well as threatens the commodification of shared goods where these are freely distributed from the bottom-up. In explanation of the motives behind user-sharing John points to a wide body of literary, philosophical and psychological thought emphasising the 'purported naturalness' of sharing (2017, p.12). What's particularly useful about John's account of the polysemic homonymity of the term is the fact that it acknowledges the economic dimensions that encourage sharing practice amongst users and how it became the 'sine qua non' of corporate media strategies (2017, p.16), yet also highlights the normative shaping of 'sharing' more generally that predates computer-mediated communication and is associated with 'the value of making our inner selves public' (2017, p.17); this marks the dominant form of communication in what John describes as contemporary 'therapy culture' (2017, p.98). As digital communication increased, this popular conceptualization of 'sharing as telling' began to include the sharing of various kinds of personal - candid or even offensive - information that takes on a similarly therapeutic, 'honest' and 'intimate' role (2017, p.34) and ultimately becomes constitutive of 'social' media. Such analysis of the tenacious normative ethos behind the communicative and distributive functions of sharing helps explain not only the branding strategies adopted by platform owners that reflect the ideals Habermas celebrated, but also why users continue to share, despite their potential awareness of their role in the constitution of profitable social media enterprises triggered by an endless stream of 'terms and conditions' tick-boxes. Indeed, as Valtysson (2102) argues, despite fears of a 'colonisation' of this potential digital public sphere, users prefer to view their experience as an emancipatory one in terms of organisation and productive peer-relations.

Despite the criticism launched at Habermasian ideals, they continue to echo in the branding of social media spaces as connective, liberating spheres for an interactive and empowered 'us'. They linger in corporate accounts of sharing through platforms that attract astonishing numbers of users, and in the more optimistic accounts of the potential for networked political activism. Yet they can also be identified in more critical takes as an overarching measurement for the potential of digital community. Given the preponderance of the determined sharing subjects detailed above and the various internal and external motivations guiding their habits, I formulated a set of research questions that would allow me to determine 'what' exactly they might be sharing in terms of political debate, and how such practice spoke back to literature emphasizing both the positive and negative outcomes that might emerge. These would allow me to interrogate the aggressive and idealistic rhetoric of a social media platform through acknowledgment of critical literature, and at the same time empirically evaluate the more

pessimistic claims emerging. Below I set-out in further detail my choice of field-site and issue, present the questions that guide the thesis and describe the conceptual formation, structure and the argument that builds throughout.

Platform: Facebook as Site

Headquartered in California, Facebook was launched in 2004 by 20-year-old Harvard University undergraduate Mark Zuckerberg. From its humble beginnings as a social network for university students, the site exploded in popularity throughout the 'noughties', capturing 1.5 billion users worldwide, hiring 12,000 employees and gaining 83.6 % of its users outside Canada and North America ("Our History", 2018). Indeed, in the UK more than half the country are users, with 31 million people regularly logging in (Sweney, 2016). Women are said to be more frequent users than men, a trend apparently common across social networking sites (Anderson, 2015). Claiming that a 'hacker culture' lies beneath the operating design, Zuckerberg noted as aim a desire to "strengthen how people relate to each other", "rewire the way people spread and consume information" and "make the world more open and connected" ("Mark Zuckerberg's Letter…", 2012).

A relationship with the political process has been a key strategy in the attempted achievement of these goals, in the United States and indeed further afield. Facebook official Elizabeth Linder noted the use of the site as a place for debate around the European Referendum, arguing that:

> Everyone was discussing this topic and what is fascinating is that we saw an incredible use of Facebook from the part of the campaigns to connect to people. So while the major televised debates were played out on TV, people were sitting on their couches or around the corner of their pubs or on their phone, scrolling down their laptops reacting to what they are hearing on TV sharing with their friends and learning what their friends are thinking of the debate and the campaigns used that opportunity to answer people's questions in real time (Cassar & Xuereb, 2016).

Indeed, Facebook has also become a primary news source, particularly amongst millennials who are said to have turned away from traditional media sources and towards a social, mobile form of information delivery ("How Millennials Get News", 2015); as Vice President of 'Search' Tom Stocky argued, "What we really tried to do was make Facebook a place where you could tap into the global conversation of what was happening in the world" (Frier, 2016).

As a 'nonymous' environment "where the default is social" (Shiels, 2010) and 'sharing' an imperative (Van Dijck, 2013, p.45), Facebook offers users and researchers access to both historical and 'real-time' posts and comments. As noted above, the demographic make-up of digital 'civic communities' on Facebook challenges assumptions that social media politicization is primarily a youthful pursuit, as the charge of 'everybody' (Shirky, 2008) renders it a more popular context for social networking amongst a wider population than the 'digital-natives' typically associated with Twitter. The 'banal' (Billig, 1995) activity involved in practices of everyday political 'micro-activism' (Marichal, 2013) across a network of 'weak ties' (Granovetter, 1973) makes it a prime sight for research into the embedded nature of 'socializing' technology. Access is open wherever Facebook Groups and Pages are categorized as 'public', and not reliant on the utilisation of prohibitively expensive Big Data services. Data can be extracted and compiled in basic form using free software, and this serves as a useful assistant to the manual observation and collection of information. Indeed, although much of the recent academic work on social media has utilised Twitter as a research field, long-term collection of live data from within the platform requires significant computing resources and costs. Access to historical Twitter data is also subject to high purchase pricing, and accessible only through official commercial platform partners. Large research projects can gain special access to the complete Tweet 'firehose', yet these are nevertheless unable to share data findings with other researchers due to the terms and conditions associated with access grants. By design, contributions on Twitter were also limited to 140 characters, reflecting the term 'micro-blogging'.[1]

On 'Pages', in contrast, Facebook users contribute lengthy anecdotes, directives and impassioned pleas, and weave together stories that frequently utilise image, song or video material, both from original user-generated sources or networked in externally via links. The 'link' is a hyperlink, the structure of the internet that has stimulated research into 'Hyperlink Network Analysis' and 'Webometrics' (Park and Thelwall, 2003). A 'Hyperlink' can be defined as "an electronic link providing direct access from one distinctively marked place in a hypertext or hypermedia document to another in the same or a different document" ("Hyperlink", 2018). Through links, user, message and issue are reproduced across networks co-constituted by intentions, creations and responses, and the black-boxed mechanisms of platform algorithms. Warnick (2007) utilizes Kristeva's focus on the multivocal properties of any 'text', and Bakhtin's

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[1] Despite these hurdles, I believe Twitter remains an important site for political analysis for those in a position to carry it out. The virality of various hashtags, including #refugeeswelcome for example, suggest it as somewhere a similarly themed project to this one might prove worthwhile.

decentering of the speaker as a mere linguistic 'representative' (2007, p.96), in highlighting the 'networked authorship' that blends voices across these "cacophonous environments, sites of Burke's 'unending conversation'" (2007, p.97).

Within the platform are tens of thousands of Groups and Pages associated with various political parties in the UK and wider afield, offering a space for them to interact with and direct news to voters, bypassing traditional media go-betweens. Major parties argued that attention must be paid to social media as a space of politicization and the potential capture of voters. The Conservatives spent up to £100,000 a month on Facebook campaigning pre-election in 2015 (Hawkins, 2015), and UKIP leader Nigel Farage pointed out the vital role of a digital presence, especially where young voters are sought, suggesting "it's now under 30s that are beginning to vote for UKIP in significant numbers" (Joseph, 2015). Labour Leader Jeremy Corbyn similarly focuses on the changing nature of politics as a result of technological change, where "the way of communication, it is not just through broadsheet newspapers or tabloids, it's social media that really is the point of communication of the future. We have got to get that" (Corbyn, 2015). Yet at the same time, parties remain nervous about the role of social media more generally in destabilizing party coherence and control over individual MPs. Labour have drawn up a 'code of conduct' (Mason, 2015). UKIP have been forced to discipline or expel members after various race-related gaffes (Boffey, 2014) and the Conservatives – despite their prolific spending – suggested caution concerning an increase in political debate on major social media platforms, for "Britain and Twitter are not the same thing. The British people are decent, sensible, reasonable" (Cameron, 2015).

Political Pages: from Fringe to Centre

Former Conservative leader David Cameron warns against the obsessives that insist on "arguing at the extremes" (Cameron, 2015), and these might indeed be characterised across a diverse range of political Groups and Pages on Facebook. Many of these are 'closed', requiring admin approval to join. In terms of activity and sheer user numbers however, they pale beside the official 'Pages' of major political parties. Research has pursued political discourse on various 'extremist' Pages and Groups within the platform (Bartlett & Krosdomski-Jones, 2015; Siapera & Viejo, 2015; Awan, 2016), but also those hosting a variety of activist networks (Costanza-Chock, 2012; Harlow, 2011; Breuer, 2012). A focus on the latter has highlighted the potential of technologically empowered networking to enact radical political change and moved optimistic theorists to sing its praises as noted above. Less attention, however, has

been paid to political parties' *official* digital headquarters; perhaps these mainstream sites are of less interest to those looking for 'extremes'.

Nevertheless, I believed that particularly for a study of controversial issues, the less palatable themes within topics that command public attention should not be conveniently excused as alien or 'fringe', nor should the banal everyday politicking of individuals more willing to 'like' a mainstream party page than associate with a particular grassroots movement be ignored. Indeed, given the amount of traffic criss-crossing the major party Pages, I believed that the sharing that perhaps less politically-motivated users engage with was likely to manifest a highly productive portion of a potential digital political sphere. I thought it useful therefore to look at the centre-ground dominated by the three parties that would score highest in the 2015 UK General Election: The Conservatives, Labour and UKIP. Each of these Pages is public, hugely trafficked, and regularly updated. By following actors onto the largest and most populous political Pages, I aimed to empower an investigation that sought the everyday practice of the multitude, in order ultimately to evaluate claims about the political consequences of their 'digitisation'.

As noted above, towards the frenzied period of political campaigning covered by the project, all three of the parties studied emphasised the importance of social media and the likely consequences of its use for British politics. As of March 2016, on Facebook the Conservatives had amassed 551,511 likes with UKIP running a close second at 538, 190 and Labour on 429, 521. Yet rather than suggest a simple metric popularity contest, these interactions mark what Lanham (2006) describes as the 'economics of attention' ushered in by digital practice, for the registering of individual user likes ensures that each of these people are provided with time-line snapshots of the Page every time an official post is made. Although users *can* visit 'unliked' Pages, and share party posts across their own user networks - or indeed to the public at large depending on their privacy settings – where they opt-in to these virtual mailing-lists parties are given a direct connection to the everyday horizon of millions, those whose 'banal' social activity now includes spending large percentages of their time refreshing the platform, both at home and on the move. Not only are party 'posts' highlighted when a party appears on one's personal timeline, but the subsequent user 'comments' Facebook have noted as algorithmically 'top' are displayed immediately below. Users are thus drawn into a horizontal encounter with the political activism of other regular contributors, whether they choose to engage in debate or not. Given that users not only contribute in textual from, but also post links, images and various media sources from within and outside the platform, this is a

significant symbolic moment of political engagement, and Pages are not therefore simply 'vertical' spaces of transmission and consumption.

With these mainstream party Pages selected as my specific field sites within the platform, I chose one issue to investigate how users were 'sharing' across digital space. Based on an analysis of British polls over 2014 and 2015, and considering the gaps in the literature on social media, I chose to focus on debate around Immigration. Below I outline the context of the issue, and why it served as a useful case-study.

The Issue: Immigration

As Zuckerberg (2017b) notes in the 'Global Community' letter outlined above, "the greatest opportunity is helping people stay engaged with the issues that matter to them every day, not just every few years at the ballot box". Immigration dominated public polls in the UK between 2015-2016 and significant political policy changes have accompanied its ascent as topical issue no.1. Changes to Immigration rules in the UK starting in 2012 saw the Coalition government take a stricter approach to the movement and settlement of migrants, including the abolishment of Tier 1's Post Study Work visa, a new minimum income requirement of £18,600 for British nationals wishing to sponsor migrant partners or children, and a re-evaluation of educational institutions able to provide Tier 4 student visas (Immigration Rules Round-up, 2012). These reflected a longer public campaign to reduce immigration started in 2010, where Cameron argued that "We would like to see net immigration in the tens of thousands rather than the hundreds of thousands. I don't think that's unrealistic" (Prince, 2010). Despite the move to clamp down on free movement, critics on the right pointed at the role of the EU as an obstacle to any realistic achievement of this goal (Dodds, 2015), and as debate over a proposed 2016 EU referendum increased, further changes to immigration policy saw the 2014 Immigration Bill reduce the potential number of appeals to immigration decisions, the forced expulsion of potentially 'harmful' individuals before any appeals are heard, an increased focus on 'sham' marriages, the introduction of a required financial contribution by migrants to the NHS, and the introduction of the 'right to rent' scheme ("Immigration Bill becomes Law", 2014). The latter pushed the responsibility for the monitoring of migrant housing into the hands of landlords, with Right to Rent checks requiring those letting private property in the UK to ensure tenants possess the requisite legal status to reside in the UK or face penalties. Significant changes were also made to the UKBA in 2012 following sustained criticism with 'Border Force' emerging as a new section of the home office focusing on the protection of

entry points to the UK, whilst ICE (Immigration Compliance and Enforcement) Teams were established across the country to emphasise 'compliance'.

The increasingly 'hostile climate' manifested by the above has led research to draw on the concept of a 'Crimmigration' landscape, marked by an increase in "immigration policing activities performed *within* the territorial boundaries of the state" (Wilson & Hernandez, 2015), strengthening links between immigration agencies, local police and local councils to ensure an increase in 'live' monitoring of individual immigration status. Beyond the UK, Parkin (2013) charts a wider European shift towards the criminalisation of migration, constituted across bureaucratic and penal realms, but notes also the *discursive* factors at play. As a key part of the discursive assault, the 'securitization' of migration sees an intensification of the public presence of 'risk and security' experts – "an industry that parallels the domestic crime control agency" (Bowling, 2013, p.293). This rise of an entire sector profiting from the criminalization of mobility would appear to mesh with the continued conflation of refugees, asylum and terror in political rhetoric amongst resurgent right-wing populists across the continent, as talk of 'fifth columns' (Mason, 2015) stokes public anxiety whilst the continued violent spectacle of ISIS and their attacks by 'homegrown radicals' on various European cities drive states to demand pledges of value 'allegiance' from new arrivals ("Belgium wants…", 2016). Where migrants and refugees fail to navigate the increasingly complex web of constantly changing legislation, they risk becoming 'illegal' in literal and rhetorical terms that increasingly trigger affective responses anchored in discourses around terrorism (Bhatia, 2015).

Given the ways politicians utilize 'public opinion' in the justification of the policy changes outlined above, the discursive work involved in how people 'talk' about immigration has long interested academics. Much of this has centred on the role of dominant media organisations who remain in large part the assumed providers of relevant political 'information' and who are able to wield affective and sensational racialized representations that do not simply 'depict' reality but come to constitute it (Hall, 1997). In more recent work, both Wright (2014) and Dora-Olivia & Allen (2014) cite the ways media accounts have sought to differentiate migrants, and what emerges as backbone for analysis are the ways particular tropes are used to stereotype and criminalise asylum-seekers and refugees rendering them as 'illegitimately' mobile. Narratives of a continent under threat from 'unwanted invaders' (Parker, 2015) stimulate a 'crisis mentality' (Esses et al, 2013), and mesh with a 'fortress' metaphor Carr (2012) draws out from ethnographic investigation into the political borderlands of Europe; alleged 'trespassers' are dehumanized politically *and* discursively via the championing of

'legitimate' removal agencies as Europe seeks to strengthen its physical and cultural perimeters at the same time as it dissolves internal barriers. At the same time, popular tabloid depictions of migrants as diseased 'cockroaches' draw condemnation from supranational political bodies (Jones, 2015), yet resonate with sympathetic audiences who see 'political correctness' and a corrupt cabal of transnational elites stifling realistic concern. Whilst they flex the significant editorial muscle of their respective media organisations, anti-migration commentators paradoxically claim the role of plucky underdog bravely representing the 'truly suffering' minority of native patriots, stigmatised by 'reverse racism' and liberals hell-bent on the destruction of the nation-state. Where sanctioned by industry regulators, they retreat onto social media to proclaim victimhood and marshal a grassroots army of amateur pundits determined to authenticate their own personal opinions digitally.

Indeed, much of the debate around the topic has been about the alleged public demand for 'uncensored' conversation revealed by recent polls and surveys aiming to capture the pulse of contemporary anti-migration populism (Ashcroft, 2012; Goodhart, 2013; Mckinstry, 2014). As such, I wanted to understand how immigration politics unfold in a hypothesized sphere that might encourage the candid and critical expression of opinion, and equip users with the ability to mediate issues via alternative paths beyond the editorial scope of a few powerful, politically partisan actors, or in the absence of 'politically correct' meddling. Precisely because it is such a contentious and controversial issue driving partisan politics, I believed that immigration would serve as a particularly fruitful test-case with which to examine the potential and actual use of Social Media, and thus assess how it may or may not empower the critical and reflexive dissolution of divides and the potential encouragement of dialogical interaction along progressive, democratic lines.

Given this new platform for political interaction, the sharing of opinion and the circulation of news, the topic of immigration and its contested philosophical and material dynamics presented a way to use an issue of pressing concern for an investigation that did not rely chiefly on a genealogical or historical understanding. Instead, it sought to establish the ways in which the issue unfolds across political and social life increasingly marked by 'digital' ways of knowing. This is a controversial subject that would appear to beckon users to an arena whose architecture may support candour across diverse locales (Stromer-Galley, 2002), and present "opportunities to participate for many people who otherwise find that there are too many taboos and too much discomfiture in talking about politics in their own face-to-face environments" (Dahlgren, 2005, p.156).

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Through choice of platform and issue I was able therefore to conduct a critical investigation into the attempted provision of a functioning 'digital' public sphere, and as a result, provide insight into Facebook's troubled contemporary status. In so doing, I illuminate *why* and *how* a series of apparently unintended consequences emerged from its widespread use. Across the chapters that follow I detail three empirical aspects of 'sharing', involving the 'politics of the artefact' (Chapter 3), the deliberative interaction between users (Chapter 4), and the practices of news and information circulation (Chapter 5). Joining the different forms of what I detail as the 'articulation' of immigration, building on critical approaches to theories of ideology and hegemony, I argue that the sharing that takes place directly contradicts the aims expressed in Facebook's determined branding - those that echo older Habermasian ideals. However, rather than isolate either the platform, user or issue as the primary cause of the political phenomena observed, I consider the relations between each as part of a sociotechnical 'assemblage'. Below I briefly outline why this assemblage concept is useful in explanation of the political consequences that emerge from Facebook use.

Digital Actors and the Assemblage

In the formulation of the methodological approach outlined in Chapter 2, I draw on work in Science and Technology studies wherein researchers *follow* user practice to consider how and why certain political issues are engaged, and how particular discursive communities produce, multiply and modify them. These 'cartographic' approaches delineate the respective factors within the life-course of an issue's adoption by particular 'issue-publics', and examine how these processes unfold across a variety of topological features - the "centers and peripheries, reliefs and valleys, frontiers and passes" (Venturini, 2010). Crucially, these include diverse technological platforms and networks within and through which the issue lives and breathes, as users engage it as part of everyday digital practice. Rather than exist as passive objects for use, particular landscape features within each issue actively contribute back to the manifestation and life-span of its controversy through actorial 'exchange' (Latour, 1994, p.35). Indeed, as Marres (2017) argues, any study of such medium-specific activity must incorporate analysis not only *using* the digital, but *about* the digital, thus acknowledging the particular productivity of platforms within today's 'wider media ecology' (Horst & Miller, 2012, p.16).

From this perspective, digital arenas populating an issue landscape are thus entangled with discourse and practice. In the case of social media, they encourage certain modes and formats of communication, provide 'like' facilities inferring consensus, empower the connection of

'weak ties' and highlight related issues and actors networked interpersonally and epistemologically. Driving the acting force of digital platforms are algorithms that also perform, 'staging' information rather than simply presenting it objectively (Gillespie, 2012), and as Couldry (2014, p.620) warns, "we must be very careful of taking what goes on such platforms as direct evidence of wider political or social processes, without considering how such activity is precisely constituted by such platforms". Indeed, as Kitchin (2017, p.18) argues, "algorithms are created for purposes that are often far from neutral: to create value and capital; to nudge behaviour and structure preferences in a certain way; and to identify, sort and classify people". Designed with particular economic, social and political ends in mind by platform owners and technicians – those "sociologist engineers" (Callon, 1987) - algorithms take up the product of sharing users and do their own work on the data that is fed to them, yet in return, are open to user-input changing their primary functions. These processes then work dialectically as continued user-action and algorithmic intention interact to produce dynamic "calculated publics" (Birkback & Carlsen, 2016).

Indeed, as users are urged towards platform capabilities that demand the crafting and curation of their digital performative selves, they may also reflect upon and *negotiate* platform 'defaults' in sharing practice. This ability illustrates for Isin & Ruppert (2014) the way users might 'resignify' conventions, manifesting the digital 'openings' that inherently accompany the 'closings' resulting from the limitations of particular design features. As Bucher (2016, p.13) points out, "While algorithms certainly do things to people, people also do things to algorithms. The social power of algorithms – particularly, in the context of machine learning – stems from the recursive 'force-relations' between people and algorithms". A cursory search across political groupings online in their myriad manifestations suggested they attract both supporters and dissenters, and forums, blogs, newspaper comments and social media groups are often the site of heated debate. Although the most popular platforms might increasingly tailor the information users encounter along predictive analytic lines rooted in prior selection, some people appeared to search out the 'Other' in order to vociferously defend and define themselves. Not only do they respond to a 'lack' of information resulting from algorithmic personalization tendencies, they also knowingly subvert the programming built into systems. Just as early web-designers learned to 'game' search engine results by incorporating meta-tags reflecting the most searched for keywords, social media users take-up the potentials of algorithmic systems in ways designers may not anticipate.

The vital concept drawn out from the work detailed above on platform design, algorithms and user-negotiation is that political debate around issues that one might locate in social media

cannot be divorced from the properties and capacities of the arena in and through which they operate, however nor should the consequences of sociotechnical change be theorized deterministically. To assess the role social media might play in fostering a critical, dialogical realm reminiscent of an ideal 'public sphere', my empirical investigation needed to acknowledge how the platforms upon which it builds may 'suggest' particular kinds of sharing, popularisation and remediation, but also how these are 'taken up' by the diverse set of 'users' on which they rely. These are key factors that nurture an understanding of the dynamic life of these new social 'spaces' and the issue concerned, in a way that avoids deterministic accounts or predictions.

The concept of an 'assemblage' drove me towards an inclusive focus on the relations between the array of actors cultivating the politics studied, that may otherwise have been bracketed off from platforms or plucked out of the digital realm as if unattached. Philosophically, the concept is perhaps most commonly associated with the work of Deleuze and Guattari (1983), in which the assemblage (from the French 'agencements') is proposed as a new way of conceptualizing philosophy and history that problematizes the epistemological Western reliance on origins, binaries and wholes. It envisages the social as a rhizomic, decentering throng of heterogenous connections that emphasizes between-ness, growth and movement. Delanda (2006) takes up such literature and utilizes the concept to attack organic models of society that assume the functional roles of separate parts and their static, essential properties within a totalistic whole. He draws out instead the interactive material and expressive capacities of 'components' that enable links, exchange and reciprocity within 'relations of exteriority'. Work in Science and Technology Studies has also taken a similar approach. Although Deleuze is relegated to a few footnotes in Latour's (2005) popular work on 'Reassembling the Social', the 'assemblage' is taken up to conceptualize the relations between 'actors' and 'networks' that eclipse the fundamental properties of either. The very notion of 'actor' is extended to incorporate non-human agents, utilising the philosophical emphasis on relationality over substance to emphasise 'material-discursive' intersections within human practice manifesting 'socio-technical systems'. This is to make absurd the idea of any situation "where the existence of two coherent and homogeneous aggregates, for instance technology 'and' society, could make any sense" (2005, p.76). Law (2007) makes the roots of this 'Actor-Network Theory' somewhat more explicit, noting Latour's fondness for rhizomic metaphors and suggesting his work as "an empirical version of Gilles Deleuze's nomadic philosophy" (2007, p.6).

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A key point across its various theoretical manifestations is that it replaces a static conception of discrete social entities in neat opposition, with a philosophical and metaphorical interpretation of reality as composed of overlapping, interacting flows and networks. What emerges in place of the reification of categorized, sedentary antagonists is a need to focus on relations, intersections and the trajectories of circulation. However, as Puar (2012, p.57) notes, instead of trying to cleanly define a purposively slippery term one might ask: "What does assemblage as a conceptual frame do, and what does their theoretical deployment as such do?". For Puar, "assemblages are interesting because they de-privilege the human body as a discrete organic thing" (ibid.). This de-privileging of the human body and mind as discrete object is increasingly important when the circulation and exchange of what comes to constitute news, information or knowledge around a political topic is technologically accelerated and made vast over a range that trounces entrenched social, political and normative borders. By engaging the concept of the assemblage in this way, practice on social media around the cultivation and circulation of epistemological artefacts thus becomes 'distributed authorship' (Biggs and Travlou, 2011), wherein creative networks of users form an ensemble with technical systems constituted themselves by a range of desiring designers and *capable* machines.

What made this concept useful for this study, therefore, is the way it demanded attention to the multiple human and non-human 'agents' at work in the dynamic formation and evolution of particular political issues as sociotechnical phenomena, without assuming an a priori stance rooted in particular theories about historically situated human actors or by leaning towards technological determinism. It empowered an understanding of how "The exercise of agency, through its intended and unintended consequences, partially constitutes the set of conditions under which the future exercise of agency is carried out. In this emergent process, machine and human agency can be found inextricably intertwined: a "dance of agency" (Pickering, 1995, p.21). Within 'sharing' practices that manifest the assemblage are relations marked by cultivation, exchange and circulation. The self and other, subject and object, human and machine all coexist; the fluid concept of sharing exemplifies the blurring of real and virtual, online and offline, each constitutive element within what emerge as 'issues' driving politics. Sharing practices thus have transformative effects, as assembled human actors across political parties, media organisations and myriad Facebook-users merge with active and reactive technological systems in processes of becoming, transforming data into 'information'. Avoiding deterministic accounts of technological change, media agendas, party rhetoric or 'rational' human practice encourages this emphasis on heterogeneity, contingency, multiplicity and

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relationality. With this in mind, I chose a three-pronged inclusive empirical analysis, incorporating shared space, shared speech and shared news within one overarching research question:

- Do 'sharing' practices around immigration on Facebook denote the effective operation of a Digital Public Sphere?

> -What kind of space has been designed for this sharing and how do parties and users negotiate the parameters of action?
>
> -What are the deliberative properties of this sharing illustrated by the form and substance of user comments and discussions?
>
> -What sources of 'knowledge' around immigration are shared through hyperlink-networks?

Each of these shared aspects reflect the pillars of the Habermasian ideal, constituted by the salons and chambers for debate, rational-critical public dialogue and the circulation of independent literary 'critique'; each conjoins actors in the production of relation that co-constitute public issues. As noted above, each of these areas also allows the empirical analysis of the claims wrapped up in the branding of Facebook's pro-social politically influential infrastructure. As Zuckerberg notes (2017b) "As we've made our great leaps from tribes to cities to nations, we have always had to build social infrastructure like communities, media and governments for us to thrive and reach the next level". Building my evaluation through investigation into the space provided for communities, governmental figures and media actors to meet, and the deliberative and informational exchange engaged, allows the project to draw a set of conclusions bridged via each empirical chapter. In so doing, I explain why a recognisable Digital Public Sphere ultimately fails to emerge, and why this failure - rather than make Facebook politically impotent in its use - in fact directly contradicts the aims celebrated in what is its particularly effective and affective operation.

Assemblages and 'Articulation'

Pointing out the failure of Facebook to manifest the kind of digital public sphere their ethos invokes via this relational methodological framework, allowed not only a more balanced

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approach to the portrayal of contemporary digital politics - that demands a diverse range of actors are acknowledged - but empowered conceptual work that helped account for theoretical critiques of 'assemblage' and its empirical application. Methodologically, the notion of assemblage allowed a fruitful investigation of the relations established between the multiple actors co-constituting the issue and helped ensure the 'social' thus conceived incorporated, rather than excluded, the 'technical'. Yet as critics complain, a focus on dynamism and relationality resulting in an ontological 'flattening' "closes off many important questions" (Couldry and Hepp 2017, p.62), and may neglect acknowledgment of the ways relations traced underpin power formations that lead to imbalances and inequalities in the social world they engender. Such an approach may have consequences where it fails to attend theoretically to the way "representations are more than links in a reified assemblage out of which new spaces of action are built" (Couldry, 2013, p.13). As illustrated in the chapters that follow, by moving forward to conceptualise the political practice drawn out from the data as the 'articulation' of immigration, I was able to map particularly forceful narratives inscribed across the networks co-produced by actors, that reflected not only the nudging tendencies of design but illuminated the particular political context in which the deliberative, progressive goals of Facebook were ultimately inverted.

Indeed, twinning the concept of assemblage with that of 'articulation' allowed me to draw upon the strengths of prior theoretical contributions whilst overcoming their empirical limitations for a new era in which diverse actors contest 'meaning making'. As Laclau and Mouffe argue in their seminal 1985 work on Hegemony, 'articulation' "consists in the construction of nodal points which partially fix meaning; and the partial character of this fixation proceeds from the openness of the social" (1985, p.113). This focus on 'openness' acknowledges the constant *struggle* in its attempted determination along specific lines of meaning, and thus how "in one of its key dimensions, the specificity of a hegemonic articulatory practice is given by its confrontation with other articulatory practices of an antagonistic character" (1985, p.114). As Hall (1985, p.113) argues in a similar vein:

> By the term 'articulation', I mean a connection or link which is not necessarily given in all cases, as a law or a fact of life, but which requires particular conditions of existence to appear at all, which has to be positively sustained by specific processes, which is not 'eternal' but has to be constantly renewed, which can under some circumstances disappear or be overthrown, leading to the old linkages being dissolved and new connections—re-articulations—being forged.

This struggle to chain symbolic elements together in a coherent political narrative is a deeply affective practice constructing and situating the self, and as Deluca (1999, p.334) argues, "In a world without foundations, without a transcendental signified, without given meanings, the concept of articulation is a means to understanding the struggle to fix meaning and define reality temporarily".

Bridging concepts of assemblage and articulation in the evaluation of how this contestation flows across relations with and through Facebook, as an actorial participant, contributes a more vivid portrayal than one that might ignore space itself as a communicative participant. As Featherstone (2011, p.139) argues, Hall's work on articulation "doesn't explicitly reflect on the spatial practices through which articulation is constructed", thus "assemblage thinking can productively inform a processual, relational reworking of articulation". As he continues: "The usage of articulation as a concept to think through solidarities and alliances, in this regard, contributes a directly political edge that usages of assemblage generally lack" (2011, p.141). Whilst some of the theoretical work drawn from post-structuralist theory may not be typically associated with empirical investigation, I ground it in this project via a data-led exploration. In so doing, I situate myself alongside Wallis (2013, p.15), who suggests gently that "my purpose in viewing technology as articulation and assemblage is not to get lost in theoretical abstraction. Rather, in the spirit of Deleuze and Guattari and echoing the words of Elizabeth Grosz, I take articulation and assemblage as *tools* to be utilized, shaped, developed, and experimented with".

Buoyed by the same spirit of experimentation and adaption, I was thus able to draw from my initial grounded exploration a suitable methodological framework and establish a set of tangible research questions responding to relevant literature. From the data gathered and analysed I could then categorise the empirical evidence in ways that provided coherent answers to the queries raised. Through theoretical and conceptual interrogation of these answers I could finally detail not only the formative and substantive articulation of immigration, but the political context in which it operates that emerges as 'post-democratic', a concept elaborated across each section in discussion of chapter findings, and in empirical conversation with what have typically been theoretical accounts. Below I briefly map my journey through the data and the structure of the argument, as it builds across the chapters to come.

Thesis Structure

First, I outline my data-gathering and its relation to a growing field of 'Digital Sociology' in Chapter 2. I note conceptualisations of 'Big Data' and the opportunities offered to researchers, as well as the difficulties in crafting a pragmatic research project without a multi-disciplinary team. I describe the tools utilised through grounded experimentation and how data was gathered, coded and conceptualised. I also point to ongoing ethical issues facing social media research, and how I approached challenges of reproduction and anonymisation. I then begin the empirical elaboration as I focus in Chapter 3 on what Winner (1980) describes as 'The Politics of the Artifact'. In terms of the space designed as the digital 'salon' for the idealised sphere of political exchange, Facebook sought to accommodate the widest possible variety of users, transcending the limitations associated with Habermas' focus on the public sphere as a bourgeoisie construction. Facebook's goal was to *level* communicative political potential, by connecting users and political parties in an intimate sphere of 'friend networks'. Yet as detailed, design changes driven by an increasing focus on usability sought to emphasise the 'friendly' nature of the site by attempting to bracket off the chance of unlikeable encounters, algorithmically analysing user-behaviours and nudging them towards more of the same. Through analysis of Party and user interaction across Pages I explore negotiation of the parameters of action and the algorithmic nudge by Party and user alike. Drawing out the relative habits of liking, sharing and commenting, I engage critical work on 'slacktivism' to describe what I term the banal 'obedience' Party strategy promotes. I reveal how across Pages, Parties utilise their branded homes to 'connect' with potential voters in largely promotional ways that both respond to the demands of a 'like economy' and deeper anxiety over the prospect of revitalising more direct forms of 'digital door-stepping'. Bridging analysis of Party posts in formal and substantive terms with user responses and user 'travel', I map the spatial characteristics of the platform. I draw out how exactly it becomes an arena for the articulation of immigration taking place within the speech and hyperlink practices analysed across the subsequent chapters, indicating digital 'labour' on, with and for both party and platform. At the same time, I mark the first signs reflecting a wider climate recognised as 'post-democratic', by evaluating the party *apathy* for issue-discussion and inclusive deliberation, the critical user response through spatial negotiation, and the subsequent platformed success of a populist challenger to the 'establishment'.

One of the primary goals within Page design was to connect voter and representative in novel and productive ways. Yet as argued, Parties appear reluctant to engage dialogically with users, despite the heralded potential of 'Web 2.0' interactivity paradigms. In Chapter 4 I explore the prevalence of both 'vertical' and 'horizontal' communication through comment directionality,

and evaluate the presence of 'rational, critical dialogue' and its relation to the consensus cherished in public sphere ideals. Along with the provision of suitable space for debate the deliberative modes of exchange were a central tenet of the public sphere. The belief that progress can be achieved via intellectual battle has driven political ideals, with Zuckerberg himself arguing that rational debate can overcome even violent extremism rooted in religious difference and open up the real possibility of world peace. Drawn out from data gathered, the top-ranked user comments evoke a particular rhetorical style, suggesting the primary problem, cause and solution to immigration as public 'crisis' in ways that avoid easy categorisation as 'hateful' or 'extreme' speech. Nevertheless, users target hostility at those held accountable, identify both domestic and international conspirators and thematically build narratives that outline the root causes of their anxiety as they respond to the awkward avoidance of the issue by establishment parties.

Drawing on contemporary literature that focuses on the revitalisation of populist parties across the globe, I identify mechanisms of Othering visible in comments and the forms of partisan discursive work engaged in such pursuits, shaped in part by the structural characteristics of the space outlined in Chapter 3, and in part by prevailing user-attitudes traced through the history of the issue. Substantive themes appear entangled with the core concerns highlighted in political soundbites and anti-migrant rhetoric, and with the dominant framing of the issue by established media bodies. In Chapter 4, I begin to unpack what I conceive of as the 'articulation' empowered by the platform space, revealing the determined connection of elements within a narrative framing immigration in terms of risk, loss and political failure, outlining further a perceived crisis in democratic representation. This articulation connects soundbites, persistent historical themes and personal anecdotes as it constructs 'objective' facts about the issue through a problem, blame and solution framework that manifests textual expressions of an algorithmically empowered 'collective will', one that purposely obscures disjoints and discontinuities in pursuit of a response to the spectre of 'mobility' enflaming the issue's affective status. Yet it also suggests a 'double antagonism', as revealed through a closer look at the hyperlinks circulated in Chapter 5.

Indeed, literature has explored the potential challenge to legacy media by 'social' media practice, particularly in terms of an end to established practices of journalistic gatekeeping and agenda setting. Critical analyses of media framing and agenda-setting in the late 20th Century tackled overly optimistic notions of the media as objective independent foil to the domain of political elites, raising questions about the legitimacy of Habermasian visions that have nevertheless proved tenacious. With the rise of the digital however, and the excitement

generated about potential radical *intervention* by users, the media landscape is said to have changed with publics and audiences prone for 'reconceptualization'. Yet as I argue in Chapter 5, the media practice emerging through empirical study unsettles visions of a user-led journalistic revolution. Users do indeed exhibit creative modes of intervention, first and foremost by negotiating parameters of action and using 'text boxes' to link *external* material. They network in an array of digital sources curated as evidence or objective 'news'. Yet they do so in different ways for different themes *within* immigration, that expose how particular platform strategies are taken up in negotiation with the parameters of action outlined in Chapter 3 and the thematic articulation in Chapter 4. The evidence presented suggests that there is indeed a need to think differently about 'audiences', but the status of legacy media organisations long considered Gatekeepers provides novel insight into digital news practice in ways that problematise accounts of their demise. Through both modal and thematic analysis of hyperlinks I show how users engage affectively through the viral circulation of *multimodal* content, as older themes are drawn up through novel means. In so doing, I chart how in contrast to the more 'respectable' forms of speech shown in Chapter 4, viral ideological circulation allows the forwarding of material that in spoken terms would be more easily associated with older forms of identifiable 'racist' and prejudiced practice. Hyperlinks thus become a way of bridging disparate sources through practice that is persistent in its reliance on 'Old Media', yet *supplemented* with novel modes of User-Generated Content for specific ideological ends.

Through the sharing of space, speech and links empirically and theoretically charted across Chapters 3, 4 and 5, we see ultimately how 'algorithmic articulation' emerges via the sociotechnical assemblage, that reveals not only the absence of an identifiable Digital Public Sphere, but how it leaves room for a particular kind of right-leaning populist response to a specific political context. In Chapter 6, I bridge the conceptual interrogation of findings from the three previous empirical chapters and return to the research questions outlined above. I conclude the argument built throughout the project in concert with the theoretical appraisal of contemporary liberal democracy presented, in order to emphasise the importance of relational analysis in avoiding reductive deterministic explanations for unanticipated political events. I review the ways engagement with agonistic critiques and the concepts of articulation and hegemony illuminates the data throughout, and how neoliberal consensus and the neutering of antagonisms considered too soaked in passion for debate empowers a connective counter-hegemonic assault by right-leaning groups, whose digital practice exhibits domination of the issue across the political centre. As a result, platforms certainly prove effective conduits for

politicisation, but it is the negotiation by a range of actors and the interplay with an environment and context that shapes the outcomes ultimately at odds with the kind of Digital Public Sphere held aloft by urgent demands for the world to 'Share' ever more. As such, this project fosters an understanding of why exactly the ideals celebrated by Facebook's founders have led instead to the troubled situation outlined at the start. In closing, I explore a range of alternate sites for the potential location of an effective and revitalised digital democratic public and suggest areas for further research beyond the scope of this work.

In each of the chapters that follow I engage the relevant literature relating to the empirical aspect studied, and how I respond to the uncertainty identified above. I describe how the practice observed directly contributes to the political consequences emerging, that ultimately scupper progressive hopes for a digital democratic 'renewal'. By utilising immigration as a case-study for the critical capacity of Facebook to provide the kind of prosocial sphere they claim to pursue, I contribute to an understanding of the impact of everyday social media platforms on political issues of upmost public concern. By taking up calls for a 'digital sociology' I also contribute to a methodological intervention, and provide a map for future research looking to tackle the messy nature of sociotechnical relations in a feasible and pragmatic way that nevertheless upholds ethical guide-lines established throughout the history of the discipline. In so doing, I note the limitations facing the project, and how I navigate the contested terrain to elucidate a firm answer to the research question set out above.

Indeed, to begin a project on 'digital traces', I had first to locate and gather them. In the following chapter I describe the method used, and the ways it illuminates the sociotechnical practice of contemporary life.

2. Practicing 'Digital' Sociology

<u>Introduction</u>

There are particular difficulties facing any researcher attempting to grapple with the relatively novel challenge of 'Big Data'. Part of the reason for the uncertainty surrounding the design of such a project is a result of the slippery nature of the 'digital' as any sort of descriptive or analytical term. Questions might be asked concerning the wisdom of attempting to define a 'new subfield' worthy of a prefix, when Sociology has in the past utilised computation in quantitative research and academics in Sociology departments have produced work that has taken up the 'internet' as field. Furthermore, if one observes and participates in the 'digital space' of social media, in the absence of any direct physical interaction with data-producers – perhaps informants in an older parlance - is this to be an 'ethnography'? How, in addition, might a sole researcher capably and coherently conduct a project inspired by contemporary work that is frequently carried by a large team of experienced, multi-disciplinary academics, wielding a vast amount of processing power and holding influential relationships with private data companies?

In this chapter I detail my methodological approach to the project in order to tackle these questions, and how my strategy towards the novel realm of social media contributes a response to recent demands for a 'Digital Sociology', one that works both 'on' and 'through' the digital rather than treating it as a discrete 'object' of study. Partially auto-ethnographic, I outline the ways in which grounded, experimental exploration of the field led to theoretical and empirical strategies that differed from the initial stance adopted, and emphasized the need for a theoretical bedrock inclusive of non-human agents where one had not been presumed. I highlight the ways in which multimodal digital practice unsettles older sociological analyses yet requires not an abandonment but 'extension' of methods to allow complementary forms of content analysis. The digital toolset is explained, and its selection references emerging ethical issues facing social media research. By charting the ways in which a larger dataset was analysed, and then filtered down into smaller selections - in concert with a dynamic theoretical approach - I illuminate both the challenges and opportunities facing researchers seeking to tackle the wealth of new sociologically relevant information made available by online sociality, and justify the three empirical studies of 'sharing' that follow in subsequent chapters. These allowed me to balance a contribution to a digital intervention within the discipline with the provision of an answer to my research question as a response to

gaps in sociological research on social media, immigration and the constitution and distribution of controversial issues.

'Digital' Sociology

The methodological literature on research into 'digital' social interaction spans several disciplines and ideological approaches. Referring to the unsettled nature of what has come to encompass the 'digital humanities', Bianco (2012, p.98) asks "what sort of bastards or stepchildren have we become under this nomos?". Yet, for Baym and Markham (2010, p.xiv), "this absence of disciplinary boundaries keeps internet studies both desirable and frustrating". The career goals of novice academics generally include the building of a resume littered with various publications and public appearances, and these rely largely on specialist disciplinary publications, conferences and associations. Given the difficulties in crafting a thesis that demanded knowledge drawn from multiple disciplines, this project was designed to overcome obstacles presented by tradition that favour separate specialist 'schools'; I adopt a methodological approach that pursues the melding of quantitative and qualitative, computational and humanistic approaches in achieving my research goals. However, in so doing I remain wary of making "spurious claims of novelty" about digital methods (Boellstorff et al, 2012, p.13).

As Rogers (2013, p.19) suggests, analysis of the digital in fact often pursues the 'flipping' of methodological approaches, to "ground claims about societal or cultural change in web data" as 'online-groundedness'. This is not therefore the establishment of an utterly novel mode of research. Rather, this is 'emergent' (Hine, 2008) or 'extended' practice, for as Burdick et al (2012, p.16) suggest, "Digital Humanities is an extension of traditional knowledge skills and methods, not a replacement for them. Its distinctive contributions do not obliterate the insights of the past, but add and supplement". Yet this extension of qualitative research skills into an arena formerly associated with 'hard' science and its quantitative dogma is fraught with difficulties. A career of qualitative research does not equip one to handle programming languages, write software, deconstruct algorithmic protocols and create, maintain and process vast data archives. Lauding the interdisciplinary is easier said than done.

Indeed, a decade ago Savage and Burrows (2007, p.887) warned of a 'coming crisis in empirical Sociology', based on the discipline's inability to appreciate, or access, huge swathes of data manifested for example by the "the digital by-product of the routine operations of a large

capitalist institution". Within an era of a 'knowing capitalism' (Thrift, 2005), the tools and methods of sociology were being outshone by commercial approaches in the private sphere that not only trumped social scientists in the accumulation of sociologically relevant 'Big Data' but went on to analyse it through the appropriation of academic language and descriptive terms. Sociologists, and their array of dated methodological tools, were looking increasingly irrelevant against the growing influence of private research institutions as well as the in-house analytical teams within huge corporations. Yet rather than simply retreat from quantitative measures entirely, perhaps finding any link to empirical positivism distasteful, they warned those so inclined that "The socio-technical changes […] also have implications for those in the profession committed to more qualitative styles of empirical research" (Savage and Burrows, 2007, p.893).

Big Data is not simply an accumulation of figures and calculations, but what might be described as qualitative data on a quantitative scale. Are researchers unfamiliar with the quantitative skills necessary for its appreciation simply to ignore the unprecedented availability of data describing social interaction of the sort long cherished by the discipline? The divide between qualitative and quantitative experts is marked, and interlopers risk not only the confused reception of their work but open themselves up to attacks from each of the sequestered corners from which they borrow. As Murthy (2015, p.81) notes of contemporary Sociological conferences that manifest an inattention to the early warnings above, one witnesses "hyper-empirical readings of social media just doors down from macro-theoretical discussions of social media. This camp mentality puts sociology behind, rather than ahead of the curve".

Several accounts of digital life have stressed a commitment to the ethnographic method associated with traditional sociological and anthropological methods. Early work by Slater & Miller (2000) pursued an approach focused on the situated use of the Internet, and the ways in which assumed separations between virtual and real neglect how the interplay between the two marks user practice and the social consequences of digital sociality in a specific place subject to particular historical contexts. Rather than the notion that digital practice radically changes local custom, the internet is seen to be 'taken up' by users in ways that *extend* traditional practice. This finding is connected to the authors' commitment to an ethnography that demands localized observation of users and their interaction with technology. This emphasis on locality and situated use resulted in the formation of anthropology-centric 'digital ethnography' schools and departments that did not step-away from longstanding ideas about participant-observation. Alternatively, Kozinet's (2002) approach to 'Netnography' saw an opportunity to negotiate the obtrusive, time-intensive nature of classical participant

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observation by taking up the remarkable access to data produced without the intervention of a researcher, data that is ever-present in digital public forums, chatrooms and discussion groups. Re-situating the analytical focus through 'professional lurking', Kozinets (2002, p.64) described this path to public data as "perfectly suited to the approach of G. H. Mead (1938) in which the ultimate unit of analysis is not the person, but the behavior or the act", and where despite uncertainty surrounding particular identities "every aspect of the "game" (the act, type and content of the posting, the medium, and so on) is relevant observational data in itself, capable of being trustworthy".

As Hine (1994, p.15) notes in an early treatise on 'Virtual Ethnography', dealing with the data produced by digital interaction problematises any methodological commitment to a human/machine binary when it has become more difficult to delineate "what is a human effect and what is a machine text". She concludes that a "more interesting form of social research is produced by embracing and reflecting on these apparent impacts of technology where they occur, as an intrinsic part of the research process". A focus on the space of practice and acts in place of a user-centric analysis empowers this approach, and remains within a more flexible conceptualisation of 'ethnography' if "we can delineate 'ethnography in the digital era' as the study of cultural patterns and formations brought into view as we ask particular questions about the intersection of technology and people in the postinternet age" (Markham, 2017, p.654).

Nevertheless, the 'taming' of Big Data demanded by the collection of the digital 'traces' (Latour, 2007) left by online practice is no easy task. The '3 Vs' describing the volume, velocity and variety of data sets and sources can be overwhelming (Stapleton, 2011). In order to begin, Tinati et al (2014) urged researchers to transcend disciplinary limitations and grapple with the practical challenges signalled by the location of heterogeneous massive digital datasets that flag "currently emblematic sociological concerns for networks, mobilities and flows" (2014, p.665). One particular strategy to tackle the depth and dynamism of the networked content emerging from the digital involves the use of computational methods that navigate the large archives exposed. As Murthy (2016, p.84) argues, "data intensive, computational approaches often help facilitate a grounded theory (Glaser & Strauss, 2009) approach by providing some initial context". Yet as Ruppert et al (2015, p.1) warn, the 'social lives' of data include the "*sociotechnical practices* through which data is generated", and "the normative, political and technical imperatives and choices and the actors and institutions that come to shape Big Data at various moments in their social lives" (2015, p.2). Whilst computational and quantitative methods provide a way into data, they alone cannot vividly describe interaction involving

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machine and human and cannot be the end-point or sole method for those seeking to illuminate the reality of 'sociotechnical' practice.

As a result, with this project I followed the call of Savage and Burrows and situated myself in the growing sphere of a 'Digital Sociology', one that favours a methodological approach enriched by novel quantitative tools as well as the history of qualitative research including ethnography, modes of content analysis and critical structural approaches. For Lupton (2014), whilst work in other disciplines has frequently traversed digital ground in various ways, Sociology has been slow to mark a path of its own; the term 'Digital Sociology' itself barely leaves a trace upon the literature. Yet if it is to claim the right to research and to speak about the digital - against the overwhelming authority of private interest or the methodological dogma of other disciplines - Sociology must acknowledge the challenges it faces and the means by which these might be overcome. Alongside the work of Lupton, Orton-Johnson and Prior's (2013) critical perspectives on a 'digital sociology' argue that embracing these challenges should involve a 'disciplinary pause for thought', "reflecting upon the ways in which the core concerns and contours of sociology are being explored, challenged, shaped and reformed in diverse and imaginative ways" (2013, p.2). Similarly, making her own case for a 'Digital Sociology', Marres (2017) argues that we should first seek to transcend the division between the digital as 'object' and as 'tool' for social investigation, and instead address digital ways of knowing society that incorporate social phenomena occurring *with* the digital. Marres urges researchers to pursue a "device-aware sociology" (2017, p.30), in which "the digital no longer features as either object or method of social enquiry, but refers to the setting, or field, from which social enquiry operates" (2017, p.29). As a consequence, "Digital sociology is first and foremost committed to testing the partly unknown methodological capacities of digital infrastructures, devices and practices to inform and advance social research" (2017, p.83).

A common thread that persists through various accounts one might gather under the digital prefix is the use of particular tools to engage this 'testing' process, and to access, catalogue and process the big data made available through digital practice. For this project I found the online availability of open-source software vital, developed at digital hubs like the University of Amsterdam, University of Southampton and King's College London, and in the work of webometric pioneers like Mike Thelwall. These tools provide a variety of resources for establishing the sort of mixed-methods framework required for investigating social practice in a digital realm. The sheer variety of programs encourages experimentation, and whilst I was able to explore the efficiency of each for my project, I was then able to focus in on one particular program as the most suitable for the kinds of questions my research was asking.

Below, I sketch out my strategic methodological evolution as I built the project, and how and why I settled on a particular set of periods to study immigration debate, and a particular set of structural and practical analyses to evaluate the emergence of a 'digital public sphere'.

Navigating Big Data: a Grounded approach

Although the concepts of 'assemblage' and sociotechnical 'sharing' detailed in Chapter 1 came to frame my methodological approach, the project in fact began rather differently, with the simple search for a populous digital environment in which several political communities might gather. The initial goals were to extract 'discourses' generated by users of a social media platform around a particular issue: immigration. Following a period of preliminary data-gathering, I intended to build a theoretical framework based on the data that emerged from observation, mould a suitable corpus, and sharpen a particular set of research questions. This was an 'emergent' approach from a 'grounded' perspective on empirically-driven theorizing (Glaser & Strauss, 1967; Strauss & Corbin, 1990). Yet it was also an emergent approach to methodology, as following my preliminary data collection period I was moved to redesign my methodological analysis and re-evaluate the ways in which I combined qualitative and quantitative methods and interrogate my initial theoretical framework.

Indeed, as a result of my initial findings into the mode and form of communication within my field sites, I was pushed to re-conceptualise both the space and the users under investigation in a way I had not anticipated. Early exploration of my data revealed not only a set of spoken 'texts' that were ripe for discursive analysis, but also a wide variety of 'links': external sites shared by users in a variety of ways, including for example, as direction (in the case of petition sites), as rhetorical evidence (in the case of blogs, traditional media or statistical data) or as emotive spectacle (in the case of viral videos, images or sounds). These links suggested that people were doing more than just debate through text, and importantly, were negotiating the particular affordances and constraints of the built-environment they inhabited. My hopes of extracting raw data ripe for analysis was also confounded by the ways in which the data appeared to be 'already structured', and in particular, how that structure promoted particular kinds of visibility – both to me and to other Facebook users. I became aware of a (re)active participant lurking underneath the millions of 'nonymous' allegedly 'real name' crowds gathered, that ate up and spat out 'liked' and 'unliked' content and thus contributed directly to the form and substance of information flows. By refocusing my analysis on the unexpected components of 'sharing' resulting from interaction with particular platform features, it

recalibrated the research lens from 'users' - that I had assumed might be easily defined as a coherent 'community' and bracketed off from the social media platform - to the conceptualization of the 'space' itself and the apparently inseparable relations between user and space that constituted practice around the issue whose content I sought to unpack.

In so doing, it led me back to the literature, and to the notion of a sociotechnical 'assemblage' as a productive and critical way of imagining the digital communication I had found. I was then able to sketch out a more theoretically coherent strategy that *explicitly* acknowledged the role of the platform design and its evolving feature-set, in order to vividly portray the spaces studied and the relations manifested by the heterogenous ensemble of human and non-human actors across media organisations, political parties and Facebook's platform and regular user-body. I was challenged by my initial empirical work to acknowledge the ways those who populate the spaces studied did not only exchange opinion through written text, but shared it via multimodal curation, involving text, images, videos and hyperlinks to a range of other 'texts', themselves often composed of multiple elements and further links, and the ways this exchange was influenced and underpinned by the obscured exchange occurring with the platform itself. Thus, my analytical focus switched to the interplay of these coterminous info-networks, and the kinds of political performances they enable through user *relations* with the platform space around the particular issue of immigration.

Although inspired by the philosophical bedrock of grounded theory, the nature of my study into big data demanded I maintained a flexible approach to the ways in which I took up some of its 'prescriptions' – oriented towards more traditional qualitative research methods like interviews and focus-groups. As Berente and Seidel (2014, p.3) argue in their exposition of a computational grounded theory method (GTM) - "A move toward stringent application of GTM as a method, however positive for the discourse concerning that particular approach, may in some ways undermine the spirit of creativity that led to the method in the first place". Given the massive volume of data that I first gathered, I needed a way to navigate. Choosing a grounded approach to the exploration of trace-data that did not shy away from experimental adaptation allowed the empirical data to lead me to theoretical literature in a way that put both on equal footing, as I responded to the environment. It also allowed me to build on similar methodological approaches found in the literature but retain my original research goals.

Having sought to investigate the potential of the internet and social media to manifest a new Habermasian public sphere in the digital world, I realised that it was not enough to analyse

'texts' in the form of user comments bracketed off from a 'salon' I had presumed would be of little interest itself. As a result, my empirical focus was split into three connected areas, encompassing the platform itself (and its relative affordances and limitations), the kinds of rhetorical debate I had originally sought to interrogate and their relation to Habermasian ideals, as well as the circulation of multimodal information and news representing user negotiation of the kinds of features made available. It was the relations between the assembled human and non-human actors that came to manifest the 'sharing' I sought to examine, and through which I could coherently evaluate the potential of a new Digital Public Sphere. This focus on relations was to be central in the formation of an argument that encouraged a balanced look at the consequences of interplay between human and non-human actors.

The Digital Toolset

As noted, empowering the approach outlined above was a diverse and flexible digital toolkit that enabled me to map out my sites and extract an empirical corpus. Although the algorithmic tendencies of platforms bear down on researchers as upon users, they too might 're-appropriate' platforms and the initial diagnostics garnered through analysis (Rogers, 2013). Through the utilization of freeware tools, critical 'metric' analysis that bypasses the initial presentation of information considered 'relevant' by the platform allows its own statistical investigation of the wealth of data 'prodused'. For this project my primary tool was 'Netvizz', a program from the Digital Methods Initiative at the University of Amsterdam. Netvizz allows users to collect and extract data from public Facebook groups and pages and export it into standard file formats for further processing – "groups, and pages can thus be analyzed quantitatively and qualitatively" (Rieder, 2013, p.1). What the software enables is not only the ability to collect relevant text for analysis, but also engage platform analytics through statistical overview of the operational dynamics impacting its production. As such it rejects a focus on purely 'text' and encourages consideration of the multiple agents at work in co-production.

I had in fact discovered several other tools that carry out similar extraction processes during the software-testing process. Some large-scale collaborative projects around Facebook have in the past worked in unison with the corporation's in-house research facility (eg. Kramer et al, 2014). Yet for those researchers lacking such an arrangement, familiarity with programming languages might nevertheless allow the personal coding of a script that might scrape exactly

the required data from an external position. However, in facing my own initial limitations as a student raised in social theory I decided to pursue a pre-existing set of tools. Initially, I found a tool called Facepager[2] designed to extract the entirety of various Facebook Group and Page data, including posts, comments, user details and personal friend-networks. The dataset promised not only suggested a vast amount of content ripe for analytical purchase, but in providing names offered more close-reading of demographic details should one follow-up the identities of various posters.

However, in consultation with the emerging field of digital ethics I decided that the ethical implications of such a process were troubling, despite the lack of a coherent legal framework establishing the rights and wrongs and the risk of prosecution involved in the extraction of such personal information. I felt that my project could prove fruitful in its analysis of semantic networks and the technical parameters of discussion in the absence of *identifying* information. Whilst this would inherently preclude certain kinds of questions asked of the data, I believed the more balanced focus inclusive of an *acting* space that the project had moved towards was not dependent on such information. The field of digital ethics is by no means established or settled, and the initial process of my research design forced me to grapple with the haze surrounding the ethical implications of Social Media research, and I discuss these in more detail below. However, my choice of Netvizz was very much a reflexive process in dialogue not only with the somewhat limited literature detailed below, but also with a variety of academics familiar with online work that I approached across multiple departments.

Indeed, Netvizz is not only a well-established application from a university with a long history of quality research, but one used previously in recent studies of social interaction online (Rieder et al, 2015). It is also an application *within* Facebook itself. This was a key consideration in my ethical approach, for as a result of its *internal* operation, the designer has taken steps to modify it several times during Facebook's ongoing internal application review process. Data is collected only from public groups and pages and is anonymised at all steps. Despite this careful moderation of its capabilities, it nevertheless offers a wealth of empirical material when tailored to particular design goals.

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[2] See - https://github.com/strohne/Facepager
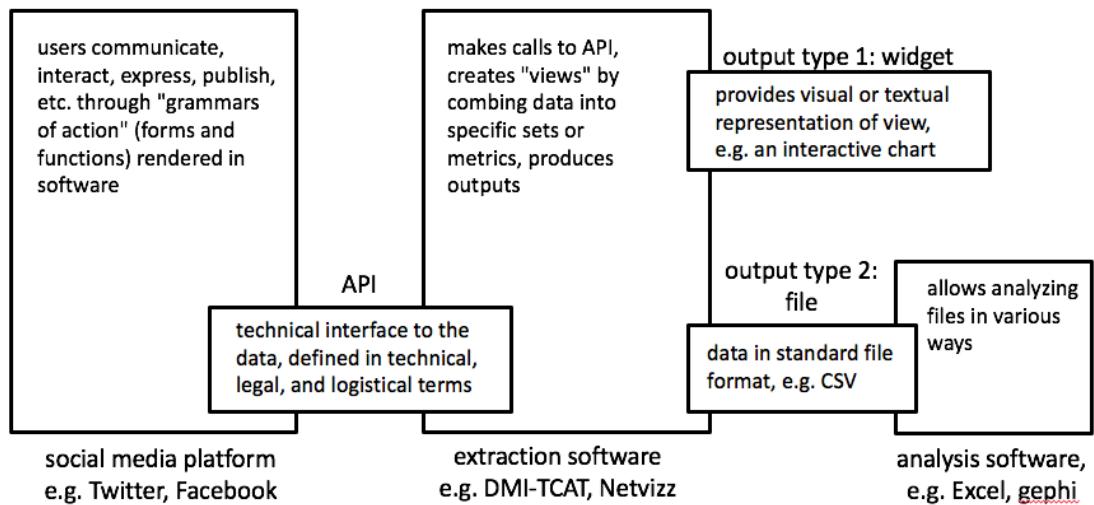
Figure 2.1 Netvizz Workflow - Source: Rieder, 2015

Illustrated above is an outline of how the application works, as Netvizz extracts data resulting from platform use via the platform API (Application Programming Interface). Where a particular Page is chosen, the files extracted and then exported from Netvizz contain posts and comments from the Page and period specified as illustrated below in a tabulated CSV (Comma-Separated Values) file.
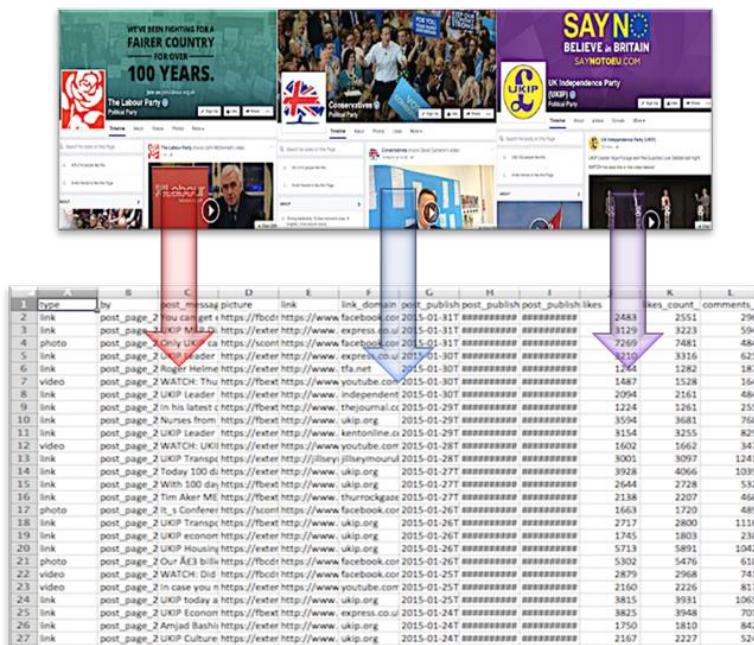
Figure 2.2 Netvizz Example

This data can then be stored, cleaned, resampled and filtered in secondary applications suitably equipped to handle the size and volume of the database. Collection of data in this way allows a range of empirical observations for researchers with diverse goals in mind: by judging the size and permanence of the user group, and by noting how like and reply functions operate in relation to particular topics, one can assess the utilization and efficacy of platform specifics by content 'produsers' (Bruns, 2008), the potential role of 'lurkers' (Orgad, 2009, p.43), and the ways in which platform 'popularity' markers might be drawn upon in construction of 'consensus'. Awareness of visual and textual components informs consideration of platform features and affordances impact upon rhetorical strategies, whilst evidence of original vs. remediated contributions illuminates how external information and discursive sources are 'shared' or networked. Calculating the length of commentary on posts also reveals the affective resonance of particular topics and themes. Together, these empirical filters provide insight into the technical mode by which opinion is expressed in ways that make transparent acknowledgement of platform 'competence' through an overview of the space. By providing a metric overview of the field-sites studied, Netvizz allowed me to not only paint a portrait of the general-use statistics characterizing both party and user take-up of the platform, but also to hone in on particular sections of the data that were of interest and spread the workload across a range of mixed-method approaches.

Data-Gathering

Whilst the increasing range of digital tools are rightly celebrated, they do not simply absorb the burden of work but demand careful, ongoing management. The methodological approach adopted ultimately involved a continuous trial-and-error approach to dealing with a massive amount of quantitative data without an equal amount of computing power. It also required laborious qualitative analysis, demanding the close-reading of several thousand party posts, hundreds of thousands of user-comments and discussions and several thousand links, all of which needed to be individually visited, scanned, re-read and then categorised. Interest in automated sentiment-analysis and machine-learning is growing, and fuels hope for a future reduction of the sheer amount of time necessary for qualitative work on big data. However, given the foetal state of such endeavours I chose to retain older, more established modes of analysis in tackling the substance of the content gathered despite the temporal consequences. Below I detail the variety of technical problems that arose amidst construction of the project,

and the ways I responded in search of a logical and tangible solution to the pitfalls facing Big Data work.

Despite the ease of access provided by Netvizz, there were various complications. The first extraction of data covering 2015 took place between October and November of the same year. However, an overview of activity suggested that new comments for some posts that were months old were *still* being made, as a result of ongoing debates between certain users. Furthermore, as a result of the time taken to correctly extract data, material from different pages was extracted more than a week apart. Given these findings, a second round of extraction was carried out at the end of November, with all pages completed within a week. This was a step taken in order to minimize missed activity between periods of extraction, and thus ensure any comparison between pages was as robust as feasibly possible. For the same reason, data was only extracted from January 2015 up to and including September 2015, to ensure a minimum of 4 weeks between the last post and its extraction date – enough to allow sufficient user interaction for analysis.

A second extraction was then arranged for June 2016, from October 2015 up to and including May 2016. Inevitably, based on my findings from the first extraction, Party posts made early in the year had more time to accrue activity than posts made closer to the extraction date. I was curious therefore how much of an issue this might prove to be in comparative analysis. I decided to conduct temporal analysis on the post-comment relation and found that despite the apparent spread in post publication and comment publication dates, the window of user-activity per post calculated across the year suggested a fairly small temporal range of activity. As indicated below, the average period between post published (pp) and comment published (cp) for each party drawn from the first extraction saw UKIP and Labour on 0.59 and 0.58 days, and the Conservatives on 1.3 days. The rise on the Conservative Page followed their victory in the General Election, and as noted in Chapter 3, reflects the way the ruling party of the time were more typical hosts for critical 'travelling' users.
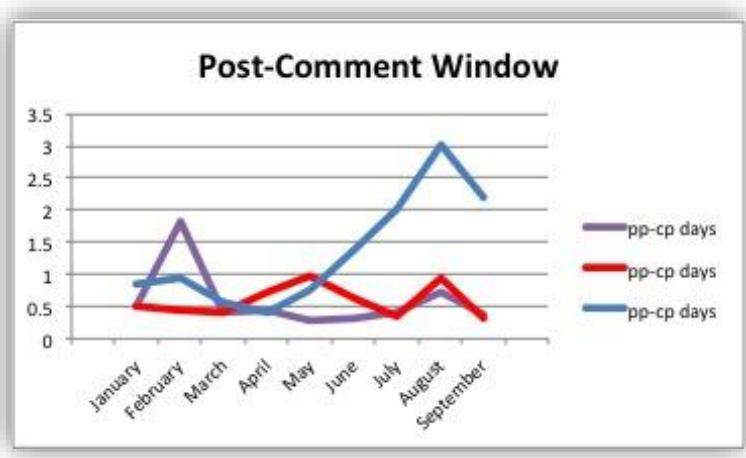
Figure 2.3 Post-Comment Window in days - 2015

Given the small window, I decided that incorporating at least a week's gap between post and extraction should allow a satisfactory amount of time for data generation. By carrying out data gathering of the three Pages in the smallest time possible, and allowing a period between post and data collection, I took as pragmatic an approach as possible to data validity.

Based on the first set of data extracted from grounded exploration, several further sampling options emerged via which I could construct a smaller corpus to address more specific questions that arose from the initial overview. On a basic level, a decision had to be made between a 'post' or 'comment'-driven selection. Utilising quantitative textual analysis, I could select comments straight from the database - based on keyword mentions - and thus a set of comments based on the frequency of immigration references could be drawn out and might be analysed for form and substance. However, sampling in this way only draws out comments that explicitly refer to a particular word and misses the surrounding context. Users may comment in reply to posts or other users without directly referencing immigration or a related term or may simply post a link in reply – practice in which this project became particularly interested. Instead, textual analysis of the entire database could be used not to simply highlight separated comments explicitly referencing the issue, but rather to point to particular posts where *discussion* emerges around the topic. Posts themselves could then be taken in a more holistic way, rather than comments grasped in absentia. This allowed both select comments explicitly featuring immigration to be extracted, alongside the various discussions pulled and analysed, thus revealing the kinds of characteristics associated with both *horizontal* and *vertical* party/user and user/user interaction as detailed in Chapter 3 and Chapter 4.

Yet a post-centric sampling approach still contained various options. A first strategy might be considered as 'interaction' driven, following Rieder et al. (2015). Sampling might consider posts with the most immigration mentions and most likes (and thus algorithmically engineered visibility) recorded across the entire year. The socio-political context around the time of posts might then be considered in order to evaluate the relationship between events and online debate. The second option was to assume an events-driven focus more directly. Posts about particular events connected to wider immigration debate might be taken from select periods and the commentary within deconstructed; as an example, sampling might focus on the 2015 election. Analysis could then unpack the way immigration is linked to other topics and the wider context, and the themes that arise within and across event-related posts.

There appeared to be strengths and weaknesses to each approach. If the Top 50 posts that trigger immigration comments all occur across a brief time period, and these are selected as corpus, then it would seem the longitudinal potential within the project is neglected. If an event-based sampling strategy is taken, then more insight might be gained about discussion dynamics over time, but one might miss the content of everyday attitudes and opinions not specifically related to a particular socio-political event. To interrogate the relative merits of each option, I began with several questions relating to the post/comment relationship. One might simply filter the most-commented posts explicitly referencing immigration. But this is a tricky proposal, because many infer the topic, suggest it implicitly or trigger a related issue; e.g. Refugees, the EU, or Asylum. Furthermore, parties took different approaches to the issue, with UKIP the most explicitly vocal, whilst Labour and the Conservatives appeared far less interested in triggering debate. Thus, I was moved to focus on content-based searches of the commentary itself that lay *beneath*, in order to draw out posts of particular interest. First, which posts across the year had the highest immigration-comment frequency, and what were the characteristics of these posts? Second, which of these explicitly mentioned the topic ('triggered' emergence), and which saw discussion despite a lack of immigration focus ('organic' emergence)? Third, amongst the posts categorized under organic emergence, which other topics appeared to draw out immigration debate?

Based on the frequency of immigration-related comments charted from the first extraction, the life-cycle of the issue began to emerge. With immigration riding high in opinion polls during the Easter period pre-election 2015, online commentary appeared to reflect the public desire for debate with a spike in prevalence of issue discussion *regardless* of whether parties raised the issue or not. Summer 2015 however saw significant downtime in party and user activity overall, yet immigration discussion intensified suddenly, echoing the increased media

coverage of the European 'migrant crisis'. Indeed, it was useful at this point to consider the apparently organic periodic life of this issue from a higher vantage point. Utilising Google Trends, the frequency of Google searches for immigration across 2015 made in the UK suggest somewhat similar periodic interest to the discussion frequency on Facebook, with three spikes in Easter and a prolonged period of activity in Summer.
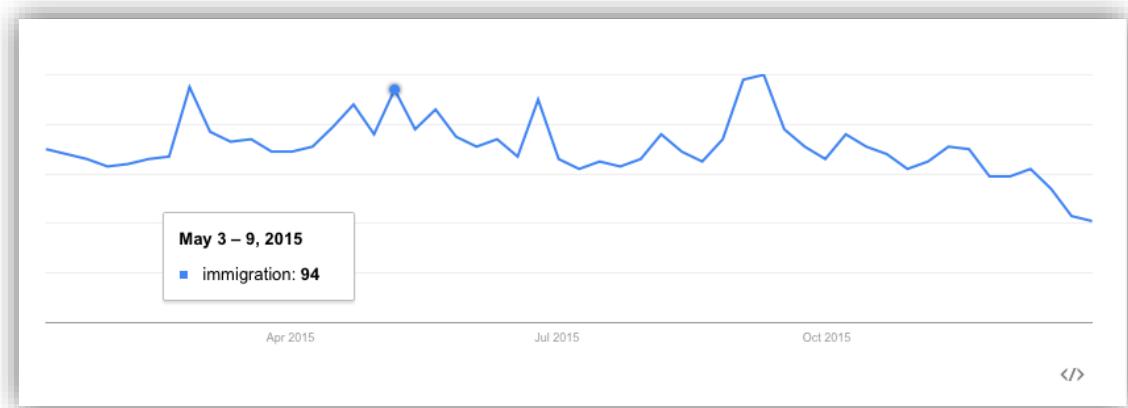
Figure 2.4 Google Trends Immigration Searches over Time

Utilising Nexis[3], I also conducted a topic search for immigration in headlines across all UK National News publications over the period January-September 2015 and charted the most relevant 1000 results. As seen below, there are again spikes around Easter, before a drop until late Summer when coverage picks up once more.
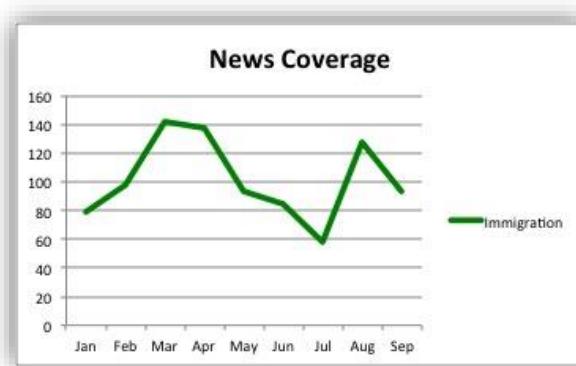
Figure 2.5 No. of Immigration Headlines over Time 2015

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[3] See – Nexis.com

Finally, collating data from the Economist / IpsosMori 'Issues facing Britain' polls ("Ipsos Mori Research Archive", 2018), I reviewed the ebb and flow of immigration as a topic dominating public opinion over the same period. As illustrated below, concern rises steadily across the year, with peaks again showing around Easter and then growing steadily across the Summer.
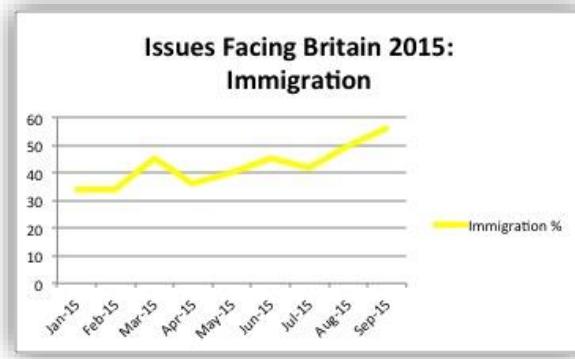
Figure 2.6 Percentage of people citing Immigration as Primary Issue

In combination, first-extraction analysis drawn from a metric overview of the empirical landscape, activity highlights, user practice and thematic variation over time led me to a final conclusion. Rather than simply take the posts with the highest immigration 'frequency' and limit myself to a small time-frame, I would supplement my analysis of the entire database with a smaller collection of the top 'scoring' posts from each page across three periods between January 2015 and May 2016. Two of these reflected an increase in the topic life both within and beyond the Facebook pages studied as noted above – March/April and August/September 2015. The third was chosen at the start of 2016 on a hypothetical basis, following the announcement that the European Referendum was to be held in June 2016. Given the rapid increase in discussion of immigration during the month prior to the last General election, during which the EU stoked considerable political debate, discussion was expected to spike in April/May 2016. Each of these periods would allow not only evaluation of a relative increase in immigration discussion across the three pages but encourage acknowledgment of the intersections between various events that shape particularly lively socio-political contexts. In line with the conceptual outlook articulated in the previous chapter, this empowers evaluation of the topic of 'immigration' as an assemblage that blurs the online/offline binary.

Once the second extraction took place in June 2016 based on the strategy outlined above, I was able to construct an overall corpus charting activity over the entire period studied, and then extract a smaller selection comprising three specific periods relating to spikes in the life-

cycle of the issue. This provided a selection of Top-ranked comments, a group of longer discussions, and a body of text ripe for hyperlink extraction. With this data gathered I began to incorporate more qualitative approaches alongside the initial quantitative methods, as I closed in on the particular kinds of practice I wished to highlight in order to answer my primary research questions.

Empirical Analysis

Based on my initial grounded exploration, and subsequent reconceptualization of the project, I had moved a long way from simply extracting and analysing user-comments around immigration in some form of 'discourse study' that would somehow illuminate internet politics. There was clearly more to the 'sharing' taking place than isolated thematic analysis of user-comments would reveal. Having incorporated the platform itself as an actor involved in such exchange – albeit as revealed in Chapter 3, one purposely cloaked – focus was re-established on the design and ethos behind what might typically be considered an inanimate piece of technology. With a wider lens now on the 'sociotechnical assemblage' thus conceived and its relation to the manifestation of a 'Digital Public Sphere', I expanded my empirical studies along three lines, reflecting both the ideals of the original public sphere model and the optimistic rhetoric branded in Facebook's 'sharing'.

As noted, in each of the empirical chapters described I build upon older grounded approaches to both find and categorise data reflexively, noting that "Data Collection and Analysis are Interrelated Processes" (Strauss and Corbin, 1990, p.6). Taking up quantitative and qualitative methods, and assisted by novel computation techniques, I was able to explore and navigate the vast swathes of Big Data available through utilisation of the tools outlined. Through exploration and data-gathering, construction of a database for each section allowed qualitative processes of analysis, first utilising open-coding of concepts and themes shared by actors through posts, comments and links, with thematic categories initially drawn out inductively, moved by the observation that "Each concept earns its way into the theory by *repeatedly* being present" (1990, p.7). Indeed, as Herring (2010) notes of alternative approaches to older forms of Content Analysis, "Emergent phenomena require basic description, and phenomena of interest cannot always be identified in advance of establishing a coding scheme—the intermingling of channels of communication on websites may especially require novel coding categories" (2010, p.236). Over time, categories established were compared and related in order to provide "explanatory power" (Strauss & Corbin, 1990, p.8). Once established and

refined through constant-comparison, thematic categories were open to theoretical evaluation, in concert with pre-existing frameworks and ideas drawn from the relevant literature. Across levels, from open-coding to category refinement, identification of thematic repetition, comparison, evaluation and subsequent theory development, data in each chapter was interrogated in order to provide answers to the research questions that had solidified following the initial exploratory methodological procedure. Building on a grounded approach to tackle digital data moves one away from more traditional content analysis, but as Herring suggests "web content analysis may be following somewhat different norms from those traditionally prescribed for the analysis of communication content by researchers such as Krippendorff and McMillan, or even evolving new norms", and "it seems desirable to be able to integrate different methods into the analysis of the content of a multimodal website, rather than stopping the analysis where traditional content analysis methods leave off" (2010, p.237).

As illustrated through the examples included in the chapters to follow, the topic of immigration was identified and quantified across party posts, comments and multimodal links in relation to user-engagement and the participatory negotiation of platform affordances. In chapters 4 and 5, issue sub-themes were drawn out, and this empowered recognition of user-attitudes towards both party and issue, and complemented a move from inductive to deductive assisted by the utilisation of external frameworks to evaluate the 'stock issues' constituting narrative frames present, as well as the deliberative aspects of longer discussions. It also beckoned further modal comparison, to identify modal/thematic intersections in the deployment of media sources through hyperlink practice. As displayed graphically in later chapters, and documented in the Appendices, multiple thematic categories were drawn out from the issue and treated with some respect, and substantial category-collapse was avoided. Whilst fewer, more inclusive categories may have been conceptualised (Schreier, 2012, p.79), this was a particular methodological choice taken in order to allow connection between specific themes, platforms and modes during investigation, and thus encourage theoretical interrogation of the relationship between changing media technologies and the contemporary sociotechnical constitution of the issue.

Although the project lacked the "multiple, trained coders" (Herring, 2010, p.239) suggested as optimal in the evaluation of data, as Lacy et al (2015, p.10) note, "The question of what constitutes acceptable minimum levels of reliability has no definitive answer" . In my coding strategy I pursued *intra*-coder reliability, through a long-term process of constant-comparison over time (van den Hoonaard, 2008, p.445). The unusually long time-frame awarded by PhD research allowed the slow refinement and re-evaluation of thematic categories, as thousands

of Party posts, User-Comments and the diverse array of news articles, videos and petitions were systematically re-read, re-watched and re-coded at the end of both the second and third years of the project. The data studied was drawn from three different Pages, and following periods of gathering, analysis and dynamic coding, the patterns emerging could be compared both within and across them at various times. Despite ongoing review, the apparent tenacity of particularly dominant themes described in later Chapters was evident, yet somewhat substantiated through critical engagement with the existing literature reviewed, as well as polling data across time.

Ultimately, the exploration, collection, cleaning and analysis of such large amounts of data was laborious and time-consuming and would no-doubt have benefited from the service of a wider project team, but as Murthy argues, "Though many Big Data methods, such as that used by Kwak et al (2010), will not be accessible to individual sociologists, it is important for us to engage with, and experiment with, big data so that we can maintain critical, reflexive perspectives of social forces and their impact on policy and society" (2015, p.84). Although various research logs and 'fieldwork' notes were kept as a 'memoing' strategy (Birks, Chapman & Frances 2008) in order to provide a reminder of theoretical thoughts, computational technical issues and error corrections, the constant maintenance of enormous databases involving thousands of posts and links amidst millions of comments was particularly taxing, requiring substantial computational and cognitive resources. Given the somewhat 'developing' nature of sentiment analysis however as noted elsewhere, for now it appears necessary to allow for significant time during the coding process where it relates to Big Data, and for access to considerable processor speed and RAM allocation.

In combining "human knowledge and hermeneutic skills with the processing power and pattern recognition of computers" (Nelson, 2017, p.1) in the ways set out above, and by mixing qualitative and quantitative, inductive and deductive methodological approaches, I thus reflect in part Nelson's own encouragement of a 'Computational Grounded Theory'. I share her belief that "By staying grounded in an interpretive relationship with the data, my proposed method also mitigates the shortcomings of purely computational methods, namely, the output from computational methods is often difficult to interpret in meaningful ways" (2017, p.3). As Nelson warns however, "A general lack of standardized guidelines and training around computer-assisted text analysis in sociology is producing a risky situation" (2017, p.2), and as noted earlier, the experimental nature of Big Data research and relative youthful stature of 'Digital Sociology' suggests researchers must decide on their own particular methodological strategies depending on the aims of their respective projects.

The subjective choices and 'judgement calls' made here suit my particular research plan and provide the forms of "Computationally Guided Deep Reading" I pursue (2017, p.23), but individuals will need to decide on the appropriate utilisation of a specific digital tool or set of methods dependent on their particular goals. Through careful selection and experimentation with a mixed set of tools and methods, researchers can move from observations of macro trends to micro-level understandings (Murthy, 2015, p.87). The methodology adopted here incorporating structural and thematic analysis of the multimodal textual and visual relations manifested across the sociotechnical properties of social media practice thus similarly pursues Herring's (2010) call to "expand the methodological paradigm" (p.242) concerning the analysis of web 'content', incorporating as it does:

> various types of information "contained" in new media documents, including themes, features, links, and exchanges, all of which can communicate meaning. Along with this broader definition comes a broadening of the methodological paradigm; theme and feature analysis methods need to be supplemented with other techniques, in order to capture the contributions of different semiotic systems to the meaning of multimodal, multifunctional web content (p.245).
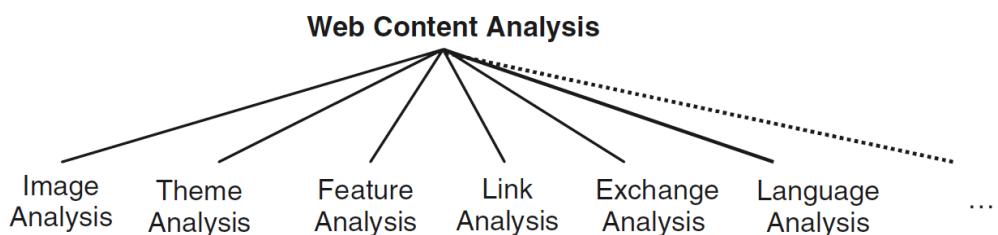
Figure 2.7 Herring's (2010) 'Web Content Analysis'

i) Sharing Space – Party Pages and the Politics of the Artefact

First, I focused on the nature of the shared 'Space' that was to 'platform' this potential public sphere and its relation to a characterisation of general-use by both parties and individual users. Taking advantage of the time period covered by the entire database, I assessed the 'general' use of pages both quantitatively and then qualitatively to draw out what kind of practical strategies characterized party and user take-up, and related this to the history of Facebook and the ideals and economic needs that lay beneath the dynamic development of particular features and platform affordances. What were these 'Pages' that became the

respective 'homes' of political parties, how were they designed and how were they used by parties and users alike? What kind of effects were these digital 'salons' having on the practice within? As discussed in greater detail in Chapter 3, the Pages and Groups Facebook provide - for the rational and competitive debate they highlight as central to democratic progress - are not *neutral* arenas. Rather, they are designed with both specific ideological goals, and a changing set of economic needs in mind. As a result, the features offered that guide - rather than determine - communication were deemed worthy of investigation, alongside a historical overview of the ethos celebrated explicitly by platform owners.

In order to study *how* the platform itself becomes an active participant in the co-production of debate around the issue utilised as case-study, I analysed platform take-up characterized by all activity occurring on the political pages selected between January 2015 and May 2016. A statistical overview of the number of posts and comments revealed temporal variances in communication, suggested how vertical interaction between party and user does and *doesn't* occur, and began to illuminate how parties themselves see the Page as a democratic tool in ways that speak problematically to the goals of the platform itself. Noting how likes and shares are accrued – indeed, demanded - opened up discussion of the algorithmic functioning of Facebook, and how its development reveals tension between the economic and ideological goals of the site that are reflected in the kinds of use exhibited by all users over time. The structure of the database provided by Netvizz was re-sampled in order to draw out the resonance of particular styles of post, and the multimodal nature of party use was hierarchically weighed. Posts were then analysed qualitatively to discern the kinds of topics discussed, and the relative attention given to immigration.

Figure 2.8 Pages and the Artefact

The frequency of immigration as issue emerging across the entire period was also calculated through quantitative text analysis, and examined in order to discern its relation to other topics covered by party posts, and to interrogate the ways the algorithmic regime of visibility leads to particular discursive strategies and promotional party habits. Statistical analysis of comment frequency was conducted to assess which kinds of party posts attracted particular attention, and when user activity peaked and dipped across the period. This was then contrasted with the size of the respective 'commentariats' interacting with each page, in order to discern minority and majority impacts on the ascendancy of particular issues. This commentariat database was then examined to note 'user travel'; although Netvizz anonymises all identifying user data, it is possible to track particular lines of code in order to calculate which users interact with one, two or all three of the pages studied. In this way, quantitative analysis evaluated the vision of party pages as 'digital homes' and beckoned research on a more qualitative scale carried out in subsequent chapters to ascertain 'critical linking' and commenting habits evoking ideas of 'digital graffiti' likely to impact a party's digital strategy and their attitude towards direct interaction on the site.

Whilst this approach provided an overview of how parties take up Facebook, and how users appear to respond, in ways that spoke to the ideology and design of the platform with regards 'vertical' interaction, it also illuminated the need for closer, more nuanced qualitative work on the specific substance of user-contributions and the horizontal peer-to-peer interaction taking place. It suggested ways in which the politics and political economy of social media more generally impacts the presentation of particular kinds of features designed to produce particular kinds of effects amongst users. Yet at the same time, it revealed how the unexpected effects of a dynamic acting platform present significant obstacles to the owners and designers responsible, when interacting with pre-existing 'offline' cultures of use.

Ultimately, I was able to illustrate what kind of 'salon' was provided for the realization of Facebook's public sphere goals, and describe the obstacles presented by the unintended consequences of the assembled relations. In doing so, I reveal the space set up for what I began to conceive as the determined 'articulation' of immigration, and an arena in and through which antagonism to the status of liberal democracy itself would emerge.

ii) Sharing Speech – Digital Speech and Democratic Deliberation

Second, I looked more closely at the 'comments' gathered beneath posts to elicit the kinds of formative and substantive patterns emerging in user speech across the particular periods selected. We are said to witness the era of 'rhetorical governments', "in which there has been a revival of rhetoric and renewed significance of rhetoric in politics" (O'Shaughnessy, 2014, p.18) resulting from changes in political journalism, the field of public relations, 'spin' and the wider media ecology. Given the increasing presence of the digital as an actor within political communication, a focus on understanding 'digital rhetoric' as a novel phenomenon has captured the attention of various scholars, and as Eyman (2015, p.18) argues, "while rhetoric provides the primary theory and methods for the field of digital rhetoric, the objects of study must be digital (electronic) compositions rather than speeches or print texts". Indeed, for Losh (2009), any tracking of the digital traces produced by sociotechnical practice must incorporate the rhetorical 'relics' produced, those "that may elevate the creator/sender of the message, endorse particular forms of social association or cultural organization, and even promulgate particular ideologies, sometimes through references or allusions with explicit or implicit political or social import" (2009, p.52). If, as a consequence, we begin to "speak of the network user of the 21st century as the new 'Rhetorician'" (Berlanga et al, 2013, p.127), there is a need to draw out the kinds of strategies users invoke on digital platforms and relate them to both the wider sociohistorical context and the active properties of their novel platforms. The kinds of speech an effective Public Sphere would demand are clearly related to specific ideas about rational and critical communication. Thus a study of the kinds of speech emerging on Facebook pages around this contested issue needed to be measured and evaluated against a suitable framework.

As I note at the start of Chapter 4, anxiety about the potential anti-democratic properties of the kinds of sociotechnical rhetoric emerging around contentious political issues has marked much of the literature on digital speech, and would appear to challenge the belief of platform owners that ever more sharing on digital social networks will inevitably connect the world in more positive ways than at present. As such, the empirical focus here aimed to interrogate such practice and illuminate how users actually talk about immigration, and suggest whether the discursive capacities presented by the platform realistically empower the goals celebrated in its ethos when they interact with user habits. Based on my research question and the ideals inferred in 'sharing', as well as the kinds of form and substance grounded exploration of user comments revealed, I moved between quantitative and qualitative analyses, single comments and longer user-discussions. For single comment analysis, I built a smaller dataset from the most-liked, and thus most visible 100 comments explicitly mentioning immigration for all three

pages across the entire period studied. For discussion analysis, I extracted 18 discussions 'following' the most-liked comments referencing the topic from each of the 3 key periods emerging from a study of the issue's 'life-cycle': the 2015 General Election, the so-called 'migrant-crisis' in the summer of 2015 and the European Referendum in Easter 2016.

I first analysed the 'direction' of user-comments made in response to Party posts or other users, to ascertain what kind of interactive environment was imagined by users themselves. This determined the prevalence of vertical or horizontal stances and referenced the attitudes of parties to engage directly with users of their page, and the consequences exhibited by subsequent user practice. I then explored single comments iteratively and, based on initial thematic analysis, utilized older forms of rhetorical analysis associated with classical political debate: this method of 'Stock Issue' analysis (Jasinko, 2001; Hollihan and Baaske, 2005) draws out the 'problem', 'blame' and 'cure' proposed in narratives flowing around topical issues. I then refocused the lens to consider the longer discussions provoked by popular comments, and adopted a framework developed by a digital researcher at the University of Washington (Freelon, 2010). This allowed me to evaluate 'conversations' made up of multiple comments and do so in line with Habermas' notions of rational-critical thought – those considered central to dialogue in a critical public sphere. In combination, study of both single comments and longer debates suggested how immigration as topical issue emerged both formatively and substantively, with respect to the common user practices of both monological and dialogical contribution. It drew out the constitutive elements framing its controversy, the disputed identification of causal factors and the discursive narratives weaved around ideas of political representation and responsibility. These findings were then compared and contrasted both within and across each Page studied in order to discern any relevant thematic convergence and divergence.
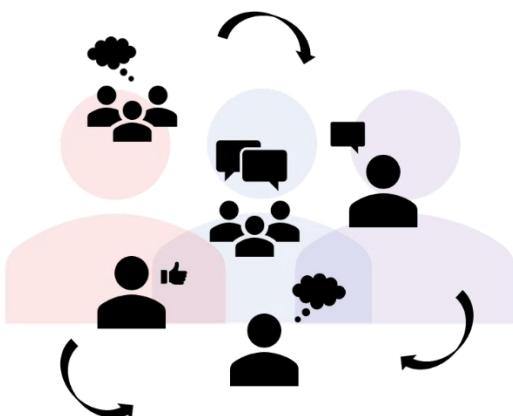
Figure 2.9 Speech and Deliberation

As noted, the data discovered was 'already structured' based on the way in which Facebook charts sharing across the platform. How the design of the platform encourages particular kinds of content in this way based on popularity metrics has not escaped criticism, and indeed Chapter 3 provides more substance on such debates. Whilst analysis of the 'least visible' and apparently ignored comments would no doubt provide fruitful coverage of the sorts of material lacking the resonance needed to incorporate it into the 'trending' cycle around which the site operates, analysing the most liked and visible comments allowed me to determine the kinds of contribution users were most likely to encounter when visiting the page, and thus the most likely to gather more interaction. Diving deeper into the discussions that emerged in response then empowered evaluation of dialogical interaction taking place, and the presence or relative absence of 'rational-critical' exchange. Ultimately, this breakdown of the kinds of shared 'speech' emerging could then be placed alongside analysis of the shared 'space' in which it took place, in order to build a more coherent picture of the 'sharing' landscape. In doing so, it allowed me to ultimately evaluate what kinds of 'consensus' shared speech would manifest, or indeed how and why a façade of consensus could appear. Built atop an understanding of the spatial characteristic of Facebook, this analysis of user speech in comments and discussions illuminated the textual components of the kinds of 'articulatory' practices conceived and how these shaped narratives hostile to the democratic status quo and inclined to shore up the status of a populist post-democratic challenger. In concert with theory drawn from work on hegemony, discourse and the construction of 'collective will', data analysis sheds light on how specific use of the kind of space offered interacts with discursive habits in the constitution and distribution of immigration narratives and their relative success within and across Pages in terms of frequency and virality.

iii) Sharing News – Issue-Networks and Aesthetics

Finally, responding to the grounded, exploratory investigation of the first extraction data, I included analysis of 'hyperlink-networks' shared within issue debate and manifesting the sharing of 'news' about immigration. The presence of these links indicated the ways sharing practice not only involved pre-existing communicative conventions built into the platform itself, but signified a negotiation of its features as users embedded html code into a box originally designed for simple textual contributions. In so doing, they carried external media sources 'over' the structural boundaries of the 'walled garden' Facebook erect. The circulation of 'external' epistemological sources thus appeared alongside 'internal' user speech – the

anecdotes or expressions of personal belief about the topic. Given the increasing concern expressed about 'fake news' and the power of viral media on the part of politicians, publics and eventually platform owners themselves, I wished to acknowledge what kinds of sources were used in debate, and what kinds of platforms they represented. What sort of sentiment did these links express about both the issue, and the party on whose page they appeared? Were these critical or promotional linking practices, and did they reflect the rise in 'User Generated Content' typically associated with the 'democratisation' of news media and the rise of 'participatory journalism'? How prevalent were legacy media in the hyperlinked 'curation' of immigration amongst page contributors, and how do linking practices speak to the 'gatekeeping' of immigration news? These questions were then utilized to consider how Habermas' fears of a public sphere colonised by select purveyors of news might be realized or dissolved in the kinds of digital social worlds platforms seek to (co)construct.

Although a focus on textual debate through speech suggests how users might 'do things with words', as noted, Isin and Ruppert (2014, p.13) argue that the utilization and negotiation of digital platform features suggests users can also 'do words with things': "*digital acts* involve conventions that include not only words but also images and sounds and various actions such as liking, coding, clicking, downloading, sorting, blocking, and querying". By considering hyperlinking practices within 'sharing', attention can spread to the wider, digital info-networks that are drawn upon to empower or challenge particular forms of speech and rhetoric within 'networked narratives' (McNeill, 2012, p.73). They indicate the way users may interact with the 'glocal' status of political topics and move in and out of local, national and international discourse flows, challenging both ideological and territorial borders.

Since the development and popularization of hyperlinks within personal computing, attention has been focused on the ways they force an entire reconceptualization of texts, readers and authors. As Landow (1997, p.2) notes in earlier work, "over the past several decades literary theory and computer hypertext, apparently unconnected areas of inquiry, have increasingly converged", stressing the need to "abandon conceptual systems founded upon ideas of center, margin, hierarchy, and linearity and replace them with ones of multilinearity, nodes, links, and networks". Hypertext as linked (multimodal) hypermedia denotes the 'information medium' arising through computation, and "Changing the ease with which one can orient oneself within such a context and pursue individual references radically changes both the experience of reading and ultimately the nature of that which is read" (1997, p.4). Both tool and medium, hypertext systems demand both readers and authors take up the rhizomic potential of 'text' as assemblage, for it "has the capacity to emphasise intertextuality in a way that page-bound text

in books cannot" (1997, p.35). For Warnick (2007) too, it is 'intertextuality' that is most vividly illuminated by hyperlinking practice, and the rhetorical function served by collages of textual and visual media whose allusive properties are supported by embedded links. For Landow, importantly "hypertext does not permit a tyrannical, univocal voice. Rather the voice is always that distilled from the combined experience of the momentary focus, the lexia one presently reads, and the continually forming narrative of one's reading path" (1997, p.36). I was curious how the prevalence of linking activity within Facebook discussion reflected the theory argued above, and thus what it suggested of digital political practice and the sharing of discourses that breathe life into particular issues. I sought the role of links within the curation of particular arguments, narratives and multimodal ensembles that relate to immigration as debate and its relation to the manifestation of a critical public disseminating 'honourable' and 'independent' facts about the politics of the day.

Figure 2.10 Issue-Networks and Aesthetics

To locate media circulated around immigration, I took a 3-step approach. First, I located the 100 most-liked and thus most visible comments from each page across the entire period studied that *explicitly* mentioned immigration *and* featured a link. However, during exploration of the data at the start of the project, immigration-related links were observed in comments that did *not* make explicit reference to the topic – dropped in reply to other users or left as standalone contributions without any textual context. To incorporate these into my analysis, I again sought to negotiate the 'already structured' data provided by the Facebook encounter and looked past the algorithmic presentation of the most 'relevant' comments. In doing so I turned to the 10 party posts from each page with the largest number of immigration-related

comments – popular or not - across the entire period studied. I then searched for links in the comments attached to these. As a final step, I turned to the 3 key periods identified previously as significant sources of heightened immigration discourse, offline and on. I then searched for comments with links in the 5 posts from each of these periods with the most mentions of immigration, and these were added to the dataset where not already extracted during the second step. These periods included Mar-April 2015 - the build-up to the General Elections; August-September 2015 – the rise of media coverage of the so-called 'migrant crisis' during the Summer and the publication of the 'Aylan Kurdi' image; April-May 2016 - the run-up to the European Referendum. As a result of this three-step approach I was able to construct a large body of comments featuring links for each Page from across the entire period.

After extracting several thousand links, I qualitatively categorized link-comments according to theme, platform and mode and charted the relations between them. In this way I could discover what particular subthemes within the topic trigger the provision of external media, and the prevalence of textual or visual sources curated. I also assessed the nature of these links in terms of a critical or promotional contribution to the party in charge of the respective pages. Together this allowed me to consider what kinds of external sources were utilized as worthy 'news' about immigration during periods of intense discussion. Findings were then interrogated with respect to literature on the role of legacy media in the construction of dominant thematic narratives, the rise of user-generated content, and the relationship between political and media 'logic'. This evaluation of information and news circulation was the last empirical piece of the sharing practice thus conceived, and in combination with data on the kinds of space inhabited and speech exchanged widened the analytical scope to flesh out the sharing of immigration within the Pages selected for study. Incorporating spatial, textual and multimodal features, sociotechnical articulation practices are drawn out from within sharing as they attempt to curate a dominant view on the issue and situate it in a wider political context.

Using the larger database gathered, and then selecting a more focused corpus reflecting the life of the issue empowered evaluation of the bridge from *macro* to *micro*, and the ways in which immigration debate emerges relative to everyday banal patterns of use. Detailing the kind of shared space provided by Facebook Pages, and the frequency, form and substance of both speech and shared news illuminated what kind of 'sharing' actually takes place on the platform, and its relation to the professed ethos of platform owners. As a result of my methodological stance, I was able to map the assemblage envisioned, and start to theorise how the 'sharing subjects' I had conceived engage particular kinds of epistemological

'encounters' within and across the issue landscape, and the way these might ultimately reflect a functioning 'digital' public sphere.

In the following chapters, I break down the kind of digital space inhabited, the activity of both parties and users, detail the socio-political context, and interrogate the findings theoretically. To finish, however, I face an issue of increasing importance: the ethical stance that has driven the project across its conceptualization and evolution.

Format and Ethics

Prior to the discussion of ethics, it is worth noting a brief formative quandary that emerged from the establishment of a chapter focused on hyperlinks: the relationship that would exist between the written thesis and the reader. Sprinkled across this work, but featured heavily in Chapter 5, these hyperlinks are designed - as noted - to join multiple texts and serve both reader and writer in navigation. Yet if, according to tradition, this thesis is to be delivered as an analogue, 'hard copy' piece of material, how will the reader dip in and out and across various modes and medias?

The 'SAGE Handbook of Digital Dissertations and Theses' explores this quandary, with Stansbie (2012, p.395) noting how "the user experience of such computerised collections is therefore quite distinct from reading a narrative", "allowing a reader to navigate away from the writing and view/read other online associated works and references, bringing the external internet into theses as a form of citation". As she continues, "This interactivity asks a reader to contemplate the theses on a different level transforming the reader into active participant" (2012, p.397). Whilst multimodal submission formats may be more typical in Art or Visual Media departments, the print-based demands for submission that continue to characterise PhD requirements in the Social Sciences across higher education institutions in the UK appear less flexible. As such, I have included links as footnotes and references, yet sought to illustrate samples with embedded imagery and textual description. I hope a coherent idea of their content has been offered.

In terms of the ethical approach to the research conducted here, social media analysis invites careful consideration of the very concept of 'respondents' when researching spaces that blur a public/private distinction. Close reading of the 'Terms of service' of platforms is a useful first step. As Facebook notes:

Public information is any information you share with a public audience, as well as information in your Public Profile, or content you share on a Facebook Page or another public forum. Public information is available to anyone on or off our Services and can be seen or accessed through online search engines, APIs, and offline media, such as on TV ("Data Policy…", 2017)

Whilst corporate attitudes are worth acknowledging, it is however useful to turn to the official guidance suggested by the European Social Research Council. They advise that a full ethics review may be required where research involves:

Social media and participants recruited or identified through the internet, in particular when the understanding of privacy in these settings is contentious where sensitive issues are discussed - for example in 'closed' discussion groups where there is potential for quotes to be identifiable and including where visual images are used ("ESRC Framework for…", 2015)

This study does not intend to interrogate *closed* groups, preferring to focus more on what is publicly available without researcher intervention, distancing it somewhat from 'Netnography' (Kozinets, 2010), or online participant observation reliant on interpersonal relationships with informants. Indeed, the ESRC goes on to state that "Information provided in forums or spaces on the internet that are intentionally public would be considered 'in the public domain'" yet warns that "the public nature of any communication or information on the internet or through social media should always be critically examined, and the identity of individuals protected, wherever possible, unless it is critical to the research, such as in statements by public officials" ("ESRC Framework for…", 2015). They direct readers to the British Psychological Society, who believe "researchers should particularly consider the extent to which undisclosed observation may have potentially damaging effects for participants" (Hewson et al, 2017, p7), although they add that "It is important to note that analysis of online discussions or other activities is not precluded, but it should be carefully considered in light of the ethics concerns" (2017, p.8).

According to the 'Association Of Internet Researchers' (AOIR), "When making ethical decisions, researchers must balance the rights of subjects (as authors, as research participants, as people) with the social benefits of research and researchers' rights to conduct research" (Markham and Buchanan, 2012, p.4). Yet at the same time they "advocate guidelines rather than a code of practice so that ethical research can remain flexible, be responsive to diverse contexts, and be adaptable to continually changing technologies" (2012, p.5). In evaluation of how researchers might steer their work through potential legal and ethical minefields, they

promote a reflexive attitude that asks two particularly pertinent questions, including "How might removal of selected information from a dataset distort it such that it no longer represents what it was intended to represent?" (2012, p.9) and "Does one's method of analysis require exact quoting and if so, what might be the ethical consequence of this in the immediate or long term?" (2012, p.10).

I believe researchers gathering digital data online do indeed hold "a responsibility to offer appropriate explanations about the meaning and limitations of the conclusions, and the methods used in data analysis" (Anstead and O'Loughlin, 2012, p.2), and I was committed to making these clear in the work I carried out. Here I followed Trevisan and Reilly (2014, p.1131) who describe how:

> A 'medium-cloaked' strategy towards data anonymization was adopted for this study of the comments posted on the Facebook pages of UK disability rights groups. Key themes were typically conveyed without the disclosure of personally identifiable information.

This form of indirect reproduction encourages protection of social media participants and follows the principle of nonmaleficence. I believe the aims of my research are in accord with the notion that "the granularity provided by the use of verbatim text […] was not necessary in order to illustrate the collective response" (2014, p.1139), thus verbatim quotes were not literally reproduced. Where collective data illustrations are built through comment-merging ad key-words are reproduced based on frequency, anonymisation prohibits the recognition of individuals.

Taking an ethical stance on an issue in the absence of legislative guidelines is obviously problematic. User activity on social media is increasingly of interest to law enforcement and the advertising industry, typically incorporating the tracking of demographic user data alongside predictive analytic models. Although perhaps unusual within the discipline, this project nevertheless abandoned specific, identifiable user information in light of the concerns I had and the primary interests I developed. I was looking for the empirical and discursive material left by users with which I might make light of the tools used in its construction, and in doing so I perhaps adopted an 'archaeological' rather than ethnographic method. The initial stance taken during the conception of the project saw what now appears a naive attempt to identify particular partisan communities gathered on political party Pages, in a way that beckoned interest in the demographic makeup therein. As I moved towards analysis of space and practice however, these concerns were somewhat left behind, and whilst critiques may

immediately focus on their absence, I should make clear that I believe the consensual collection of personal data within a similarly shaped investigation would no doubt serve an interesting project; it is just not the sort that I conduct here. As such, I believe my theoretical and methodological choices were reflexive and ethically robust.

Conclusion

By explaining the research trajectory outlined above, I indicate the ways grounded exploration of this digital 'field' significantly impacted both my theoretical and methodological approach to Facebook sharing. Once the impact of an acting technological artefact was acknowledged, concern over the political and spatial characteristics of the platform promoted for deliberation led to the establishment of my first empirical focus. This was then used as a bedrock for the examination of my original concerns and the ways users exhibit particular articulation strategies in the textual framing of immigration as a controversial issue. As a final supplement, exploration of the hyperlink practice encountered reveals the way individual thoughts and opinions are networked via the importation of external news and information sources, each signalling particular affective registers related to issue subthemes. Once assembled, these three areas of empirical investigation allowed me to empirically re-construct the sharing that takes place beyond its corporate branding, and relate it to the potential of the largest and most popular social media platform to manifest the kinds of public sphere ideals identified as central to the deliberative philosophy the site evokes.

At each stage of this project's design, I was guided by a pragmatic attitude towards the kinds of research that might be feasibly conducted, and the ethical stance taken in reflection of both the history of Sociological research and the recommendations put forward by those reflexively exploring its wilder frontiers. As above, this is a methodology both *about* and *with* the digital field, and it relied on the utilization of computational tools and quantitative measurement as well as qualitative content analysis. In its experimental, grounded and mixed-methods form, I believe it reflected the goals of those seeking to establish 'Digital Sociology' as a recognizable and worthy (inter)disciplinary school, and hope that its elaboration may shed light on the chapters to follow. I also hope that it may be of use to other solitary researchers struggling to navigate the arrival of digitized, 'datafied' social practice.

3. Party Pages and the Politics of the Artefact

This is the struggle of our time. The forces of freedom, openness and global community against the forces of authoritarianism, isolationism and nationalism. Forces for the flow of knowledge, trade and immigration against those who would slow them down. This is not a battle of nations. It's a battle of ideas

Zuckerberg, 2017

What if the price of machines that think is people who don't?

Dyson, 2012, p.314

<u>Introduction</u>

Having outlined the research aims and detailed the methodological approach, this chapter begins the empirical elaboration of the project and investigates the shared space 'represented' in particular ways by platform designers and users, and practically 'produced' by relations between its active participants. It details the characteristics and feature take-up of three Facebook Pages - those sub-sites of Facebook adopted by Political Parties and branded as digital 'homes'. These are the built-environments in which voters are offered the chance to connect and share with politicians and other users. By analysing the general practice of parties and users over time as they take up the space offered by the platform, I highlight tension between the ideology and economics that shaped a user-preference platform design and patterns of use, and how these relate to contemporary political strategy and growing political scepticism. In so doing I reveal promotional 'Web 1.5' strategies on the part of establishment parties who neglect the interactive potential of the site, as well as substantive engagement with immigration as a controversial issue. I then illuminate the way interactive user-contact is avoided, whilst user-labour is nevertheless employed, in order to expand party-Page 'reach' as a result of algorithmic curation as well as related patterns of 'slacktivism'. I reveal ultimately the ways in which the political economy of 'personalised' social media and particular cultures of use combine to manifest distinct sociotechnical obstacles to the lofty connective political aims heralded by platform owners in the presentation of 'shared' democratic space. I show how Pages are not impotent however in their failure to establish a suitable salon for the Digital

Public Sphere, but instead become effective and affective arenas for the 'articulation' of immigration along partisan populist lines.

The Evolution of a Platform

As noted in Chapters 1 and 2, grounded research into Facebook as a site of political practice around immigration revealed the official 'Pages' of the three main political parties as the most trafficked and 'populated' sites relating to British politics. Although a range of unofficial, grassroots 'Groups' have been set up for political discussion, and that allow users to make their own 'posts', these are far less populous spaces in terms of activity than the official Pages taken up as the party 'homes'. On party Pages, users are able to 'like', 'share' and 'comment' on party posts. Yet the presence of both Groups and Pages as Facebook 'sub-sites', and the communal gathering of individuals who may not be linked through *friend* connections signifies a change in the operation and design of the platform in contrast to its early years. Data analysis of user and party trends interrogates the early ideals espoused by platform owners, and reveals the gulf between the consequences sought and those realised.

As of August 2017, Facebook is the third most popular site on the internet in global terms behind Google and YouTube. According to Alexa.com's 'Top Sites' list, it counts a staggering 2 billion users per month and beats its two major social media rivals on average 'time spent' on site (10+ minutes), as well as the number of external sites linking to it (7.6 million). The sheer volume of use marks incredible growth in a relatively short time and as Lanchester (2017) suggests is worthy of serious consideration:

> We should look again at that figure of two billion monthly active users. The total
> number of people who have any access to the internet – as broadly defined as
> possible, to include the slowest dial-up speeds and creakiest developing-world mobile
> service, as well as people who have access but don't use it – is three and a half billion.
> Of those, about 750 million are in China and Iran, which block Facebook. Russians,
> about a hundred million of whom are on the net, tend not to use Facebook because
> they prefer their native copycat site VKontakte. So put the potential audience for the
> site at 2.6 billion. In developed countries where Facebook has been present for years,
> use of the site peaks at about 75 per cent of the population (that's in the US). That
> would imply a total potential audience for Facebook of 1.95 billion. At two billion

monthly active users, Facebook has already gone past that number, and is *running out of connected humans* [emphasis mine].

[This image, 'Original Facebook Design', has been removed as the copyright is owned by another organisation or individual]

At the start of its life however Facebook was quite a different beast from the mega-corporation known today. It originally operated as a collection of individual 'profile' pages familiar to users of alternative platforms like My Space, beginning with university students at Harvard and gradually expanding to include universities across North America and Europe. The fundamental emphasis was on personal connections between *known* peers, school groups, friends and families, to provide a way for them to stay in touch and share various 'status updates' concerning personal activities and interests. As Zuckerbeg notes in an early 2004 interview: "you can browse around and see who people's friends are and just check out people's online identities and see how people portray themselves and just find some interesting information about people" (CNBC, 2004). Early interviews suggest '[thefacebook]' as it was first known was more of a curious technical challenge for its young coders to work through, with little attention paid to the potential ideological consequences of connecting vast amounts of people in novel social realms. There was also little interest in the commercial prospects of the site, as an interview with Mark Zuckerberg suggests in 2004 - ""I'm not going to sell anybody's email address," he said. "At one point I thought about making the website so that you could upload a resume too, and for a fee companies could search for Harvard job applicants. But I don't want to touch that. It would make everything more serious and less fun" (Tabak, 2004). This also painted the site in a different light to its early rival, the 'HarvardConnection' – a platform Zuckerberg initially worked on – which was built around a specific desire to *profit* from the promotion of club nights and events for students (Kirkpatrick 2010, p.83). The provision of a platform based entirely on the voluntary sharing by users of user-generated content, in the absence of serious advertising considerations, was also initially a way to avoid the previous copyright problems Zuckerberg had run into with earlier programs like 'Facemash', a previous foetal Harvard social network (2010, p.28). Yet as a concept, this 'sharing' would soon be taken-up and extolled as a civic virtue, both by Facebook and the corporate and political entities that would eventually be invited to populate the platform.

As the platform opened-up to general users beyond academia, and with waves of design changes during the first years of operation, a new focus emerged on the establishment of more recognisably 'public' spaces open to *all*, highlighting the potential for users to encounter

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individuals they did *not* know in 'real life' existing beyond local peer groups or family relations. As a result, the platform evolved from a space for personal profile performances to an audience of known friends, into a selection of specific *interest* and *issue* spaces characterised more recognisably as 'public' than 'personal' spheres, and in which the potential of sharing with 'the world' at large might be taken up. Zuckerberg noted in 2009 that "the concept of a 'friend' is definitely getting overloaded". He says that the word was useful to 'get people over a bunch of hurdles'" (2010, p.312) relating to entrenched notions of privacy. As noted in Chapter 1, privacy became seen by platform designers as less a fixed obstacle, and instead something malleable and open to change.

The emphasis on sharing with those beyond personal friend networks was exemplified by the introduction of Causes, Pages and Groups several years into the site's existence. As the company itself explains ("Pages, Groups and Causes", 2008), Causes began as "an application that enables users to organize themselves into communities of action that support specific issues, campaigns, or non-profit organizations", and was aimed chiefly at non-profit organisations that might wish to "spread awareness about their work, recruit new supporters, launch fundraising campaigns, and sponsor petitions". Somewhat similarly, Groups could be "created by any user and about any topic, as a space for users to share their opinions and interest in that subject". Groups were to be largely discursive spaces for deliberation and the sharing of opinion between peers and non-peers, and mimicked the grassroots sentiment reflecting the earlier design of Causes.

'Pages' however differed slightly, in that their introduction signalled a new commercial perspective, and allowed companies and brands a channel via which users could attach themselves by 'becoming a fan', and which "may only be created by an official representative of that entity" (ibid.). As an early Facebook note described ("Facebook Tips", 2009):

> In the same way that profiles on Facebook help you connect with friends, Facebook Pages allow you to interact with and stay up-to-date on your favorite public figures, organizations and businesses. *When you become a fan of a Page, you are connecting with that organization or public figure* and will begin seeing status updates, photos, videos and other posts from the Page. All of the posts from Pages will appear in your home page just as they would from your friends. You can get access to videos from your favorite band, chat live with your favorite celebrity, or even get a sneak peek of new

products being launched by your favorite brand [emphasis mine].

Along with a raft of commercial enterprises seeking to connect with legions of consumers, it was these 'brand homes' that *political* actors also began to take up as their official social network homes. The use of official Pages allowed a direct mode of connection and interaction with potential voters, giving parties the ability to deliver their message into the bedrooms, living rooms and onto the mobile devices of platform users, bypassing longstanding media organisations. Indeed, as Zuckerberg noted in 2008, "I think because politicians can - can communicate with (short pause) tens of thousands of people at the same time, it's pretty effective for them in campaigning" (60 Minutes, 2008). With the establishment of Pages, parties were offered a stage on which to continuously campaign beyond the usual times long considered periods of peak pre-electoral activity. Yet rather than monological performances, *dialogue* between users and Page owners is what Facebook sought to engineer. No longer simply a social tool for elite students, or friends, families and known peers, the platform became a sphere for novel political encounters, infused with democratic ideals, and integrating an exploding body of users across the globe.

Below I present data on the political practice that characterises these encounters, between 2015 and 2016, and that provides an understanding of the intended and unintended consequences emerging though the user 'sharing' taking place within.

Party Pages: UKIP, Labour and the Conservatives

Figure 3.1 Party Facebook Pages

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Whilst thousands of unofficial, user-generated Groups and Pages exist across Facebook, in terms of activity there are no political spaces focused on the UK that approach anywhere near the number of users interacting on the three official 'Pages' of UKIP, Labour and the Conservatives. With Pages marking the official digital 'homes' of respective parties, voters are connected to representatives in the absence of traditional media gatekeepers long tasked with operating in the middle-ground between state and public. As such, they manifest potential aspects of democratic philosophy more akin to older 'direct' forms of the political and serve as a potential site for the repoliticisation of apathetic publics. As Schwartz (2015, p.1) suggests:

> The decline of loyal voters creates an incentive for new political marketing strategies in order to reconnect with citizens and win over voters during election campaigns. Politicians must seek out citizens in spaces that are traditionally associated with the private sphere because the citizens are withdrawing from the political sphere. Facebook pages are obvious tools for political marketing directly to the citizen, but they could simultaneously provide citizens with a new space to reconnect with politics through critical public debate.

Whilst each Party appeared eager to take up the space offered by Facebook as territory for the realisation of the connective ideals within sharing, there are differences in how parties post, how much they post, and how users visiting and liking each page respond and interact. There are also differences in terms of 'what' parties post.

All 3,690 party posts made between January 2015 and May 2016 were extracted, individually examined and qualitatively categorised to draw out the patterns detailed below.
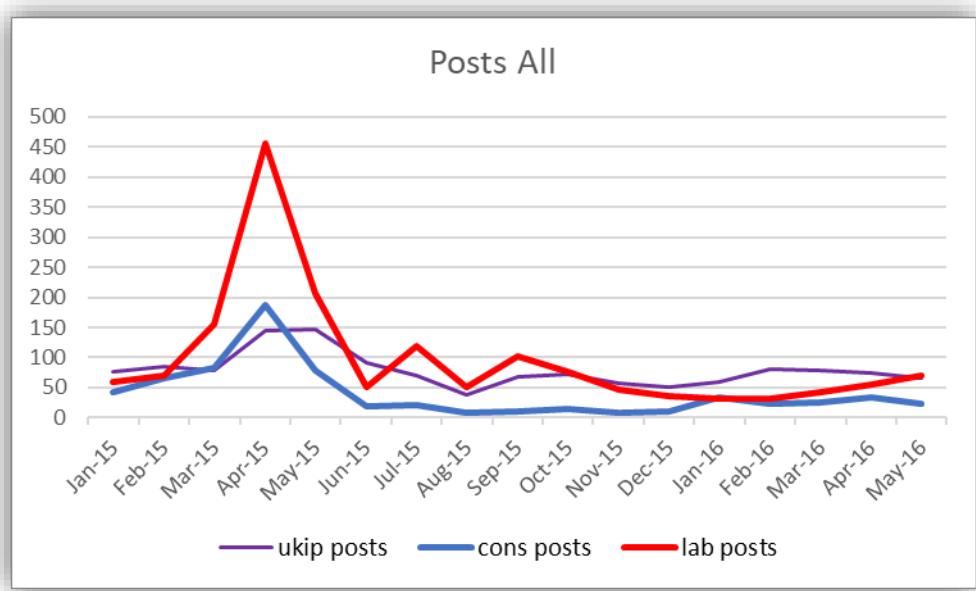
Figure 3.2 No. of Posts per Month

The three parties studied here post at fairly steady levels for most of the period, converging somewhat in output, save for a frenzied period of election campaigning in early 2015 where use increases dramatically. Indeed, Labour produced more than twice the output of the two other parties, clearly striving to engage this novel medium during the 'short' electoral campaign. A focus on the potential of the digital continued beyond Ed Miliband's term as leader and was made explicit as part of a 'Digital Democracy Manifesto' under Jeremy Corbyn, who extolled the virtues of 'Massive Multi-Person Online Deliberation' through which "We will create a 21st century networked democracy where everybody can be a political decision-maker"("Digital Democracy Manifesto", 2016). This passion for digital deliberation as progress echoed the ideology increasingly espoused by the platform itself. Labour also published an official 'Social Media Policy' that explained how the party might use digital technology to "to break down the wall that creates 'us' and 'them'", allow "debate and discussion to flourish on our channels" and "put the stories and experiences of the public first"("Social Media Policy", 2016). As data over the entire period suggests, Labour take-up the platform more actively than others in terms of post *frequency*, and also utilise the space to post more *voluminously*; analysis of the length of their posts below reveals a massive spike in post-length as they sought to make transparent internal party processes and spread word of their leadership election over the Summer of 2015.
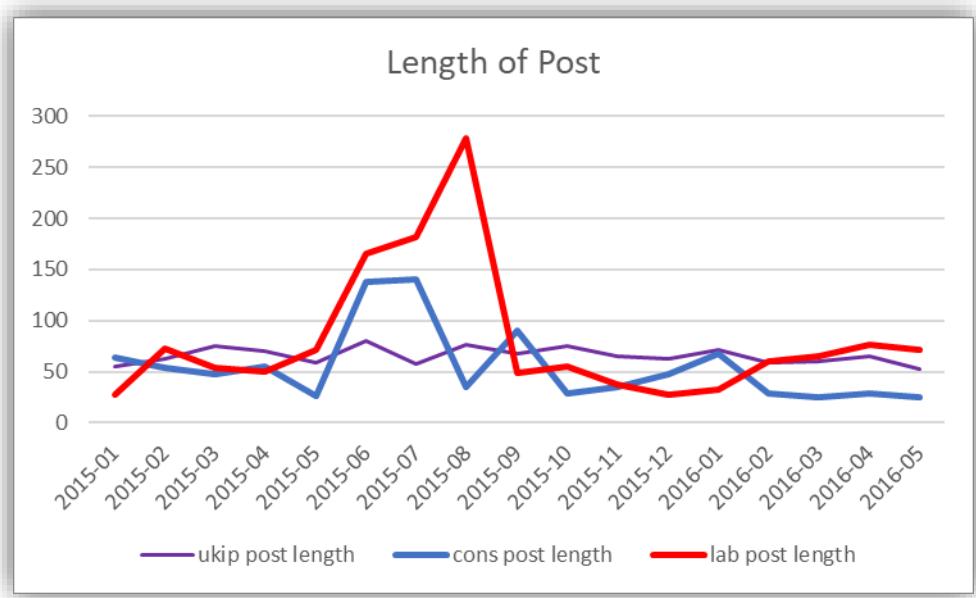
Figure 3.3 Post Length over Time in Words

The Conservatives have also focused on the internet as a key component of contemporary political life. The official Conservative Party Review of 2016 went some way to explaining such efforts, noting how "Over recent years we have seen a staggering number of people engaging with the Party through social media and other platforms. These people are not all Party Members, but they care enough to make a connection. If we want to thrive in future years, we must recognise this change and harness these new supporters" ("Conservative Party Review", 2016). Yet at the same time, scepticism about the democratic potential of digital politics lingered in 2015 election-victory speeches despite the party's offline success, as they mocked "All those who mistook a trend on social media as the settled will of the British people, who thought a retweeted hashtag was a democratic mandate" (Gove, 2015). This scepticism was evident in their Facebook output over time, as the party lagged far behind Labour and UKIP in terms of post frequency.

Although more active than the Conservatives, UKIP were forced to balance a desire to take up novel digital opportunities with anxiety about the conduct of party representatives on social media. There appeared tension between a need to accommodate changing patterns of communication, and the fear of scandal that may accompany an unadvised focus on the people behind the party, particularly in relation to controversial issues like Immigration. Indeed, "UKIP members have been urged to stop using social media after a series of scandals

over inappropriate comments" ("Twitter ye Not", 2014), and the party was incensed by "a lot of journalistic effort into social media archaeology" when "it was beyond our means to vet 1400 Facebook and twitter accounts for idiotic posts" (Goodwin and Milazzo, 2015, p.47). Yet according to media coverage, UKIP have in recent times proven immensely successful at utilising a variety of digital platforms, resulting in "disproportionately high levels of social media engagement for the size of its membership" (Perraudin, 2014). Perhaps more remarkably, "UKIP is not just attracting young Facebook users, but is getting older users to engage. The Conservative and Labour parties see their main Facebook interactions among the 18- to 24-year-old age bracket, but UKIP are seeing most engagement from 25-34s and 45-54s" (ibid.). Indeed, UKIP acknowledged such success, noting ("UKIP Leader…", 2015):

> We're delighted that so many people are liking Nigel's online presence. Given that we as a party are offering new, behind the scenes insight into the campaign on Nigel's Facebook and Twitter profiles, we're keen to see more people engaged and sharing our content. And we're also determined to do our bit to drive up voter engagement – whether that's people voting for us or not. Facebook is a great way to do that.

UKIP's Page output fell in the middle-ground between the other two, as they favoured a more steady and consistent posting frequency. Yet as detailed later, this consistency was to yield significant results.

As part of the features offered to Page owners, parties were able to not only post textual updates, but share images, videos and links to other Facebook Pages, or even completely external websites. Indeed, in terms of the modal output illustrated below, parties appear to show some creative flair, taking up the multi-modal opportunities available in ways that reflect both older styles of political propaganda as well as novel approaches to viral marketing.
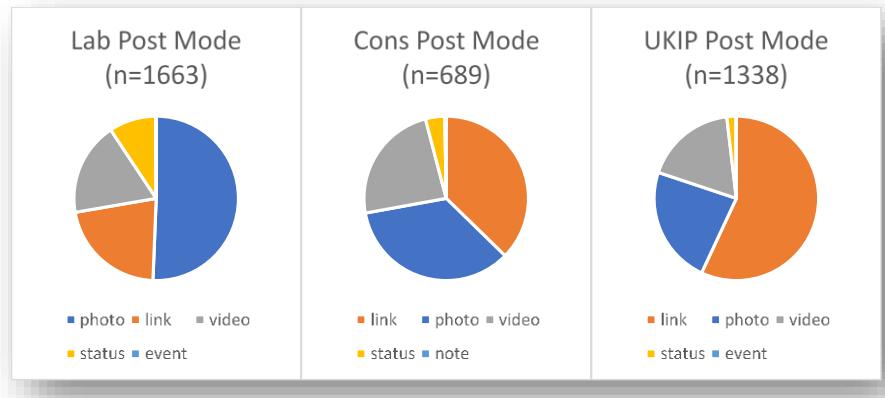
Figure 3.4 Post Modes

Over time, UKIP were to prove the most prevalent linkers, Labour the most prevalent photo posters and the Conservatives the most likely to favour video posts. Rather than stick to simple status updates in textual form, Parties frequently adopt a 'show and go' style of presentation, catching the eye of users and directing them to embedded messages.

Figure 3.5 Lab Post Image-Board

Indeed, whilst the post length analysis above indicates a willingness to occasionally engage lengthy messages, as shown through posts drawn from across the period, Parties also use images in mimetic fashion, using graphics to not only reflect the brand design of the party in digital space but to inform users and/or urge a specific response. This is particularly the case for Labour, whose post design echoes a 'placard and protest' aesthetic, featuring chunky text outlining slogans and demands for action. There's also significant repetition in apparent attempts to encourage 'virality'.

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In contrast to the 'sloganeering' protest aesthetic, the Conservatives utilise a more human display, featuring the faces of various party representatives and the Party Leader David Cameron. Yet there were also frequent depictions of Labour's Ed Miliband and Ed Balls, illustrated in a somewhat threatening and eerie fashion. The Conservative 'blue' brand is explicit, and several posts are also emblazoned across the Union Jack, highlighting a patriotic aesthetic that Labour appear to conspicuously avoid.

Figure 3.6 Cons Post Image-Board
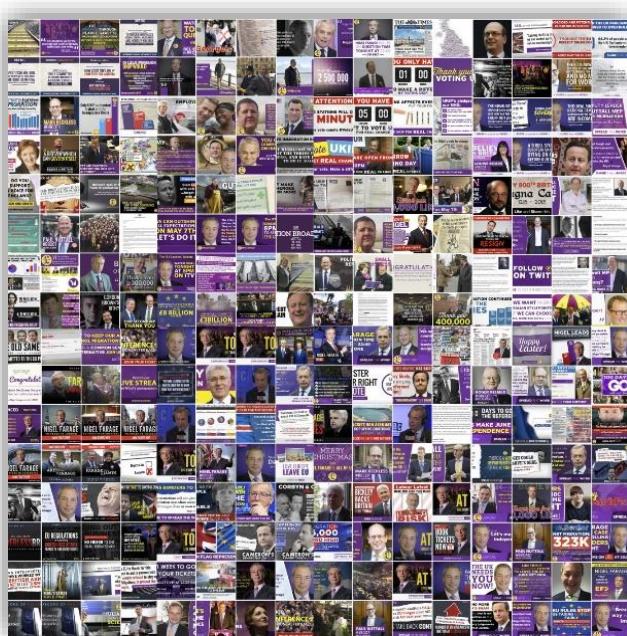
Figure 3.7 UKIP Post Image-Board

UKIP take an even more 'human' approach than the Conservatives, as a parade of faces feature the smiling visage of Nigel Farage alongside various party representatives, and they too depict their political rivals looking malevolent in some fashion. UKIP also appear slightly reluctant to drape their messages in the Union Jack, preferring bold gold lettering on their royal purple background. The multiple portraits of Nigel Farage and the promotion of a 'strong leader' brand are also echoed in the kinds of language that accompany the images posted, as indicated by the post word-clouds below.

Figure 3.8 Post WordClouds

Yet whilst Labour and UKIP emphasise their own party names, and UKIP's focus on leadership is clear, the Conservatives instead prefer to take a promotional stance aimed at employing user practice to spread the party message. The Conservatives here echo the demand for 'sharing' in line with platform ideals, emphasising the networked makeup of the digitally social and the need to let 'friends' know various political 'truths'.

The presence of 'http' in the maps above also reveals the strong emphasis on links in posts, as parties network in a variety of external sources as part of their posting strategy. Indeed, as noted in the modal chart above, links were a vital formative aspect of party posts, proving the favoured mode for UKIP across the entire period, whilst both Labour and the Conservatives gradually increased the their penchant for external bridges away from the Page itself.
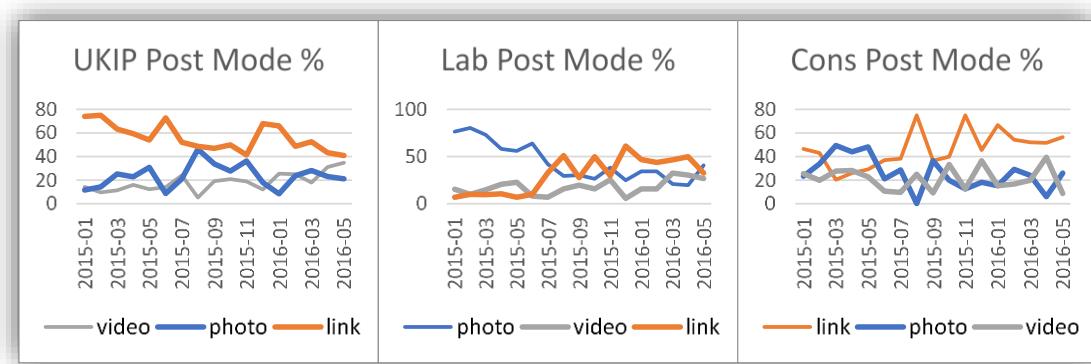
Figure 3.9 Post Mode Comparison Over Time

Linked sites often manifested *internal* associations, involving the Facebook Pages of various party politicians as well as the official party website. As the breakdown below reveals, links to the Party's official site were the most popular for UKIP and Labour, yet a select group of

external organisations were also consistently linked, as parties worked to remediate content that flattered their own stance on issues or attacked their political opponents. Of these, partisan legacy media were the most common.

The most 'liked' UKIP link post was to an Express article in May 2016 featuring 'Nigel Farage's EU diary ('Leave campaign MUST woo Labour voters to win referendum'), and the most popular link post on the Labour Page was to a Mirror article in September 2015 (Jeremy Corbyn reveals how Labour will renationalise railways if he becomes Prime Minister). As revealed in Chapter 5, the relationship between select media organisations and parties complicates the vision of Pages as a

Figure 3.10 UKIP Post Link Domains

connective space for strengthening more direct democratic pursuits in the absence of journalistic middlemen. 'Remediation' practices infused the habits of both parties and Page users, and as discussed later, reflect the complex media ecologies manifested by the growth of digital social platforms and user-generated content.

Indeed, on the UKIP and Labour Pages the most common linking domains beyond party sites were to media organisations with clear partisan identities – the Express and Breitbart for UKIP, and The Guardian and the Mirror for Labour.

Figure 3.11 Lab Post Link Domains

Alternatively, the most popular link post by the Conservatives was to the official Facebook Page of David Cameron and a status update in May 2015 ('One nation, one United Kingdom - that is how I hope to govern if I am fortunate enough to continue as Prime Minister'). The Top-3 linked domains on the Conservative Page were also all to associated Party sites, with their respective media alliance

to the Telegraph falling far behind. As the ruling party, the Conservatives perhaps struggled to find favour amongst a media landscape eager to critique those currently in charge, regardless of the issue at hand. As a result, they relied on networking in their own content rather than the remediation of favourable coverage elsewhere.

In terms of formative practice then, there is some *convergence* as parties follow generally similar paths; they post quite regularly - spiking around socio-political events of import - they experiment with various modes of posting, and they share friendly media agencies or allied party sites for users to peruse. However, in terms of issue focus and substantive practice, there is evidence of significant *divergence*. Indeed, the analytical use of immigration as study reveals contrasting strategic approaches. As argued below, this

Figure 3.12 Cons Post Link Domains

reveals the importance of the relationship between online and offline party needs, and the varied desires and fears relating to voter capture and user 'labour'.

Party Trends: Substance vs. Strategy
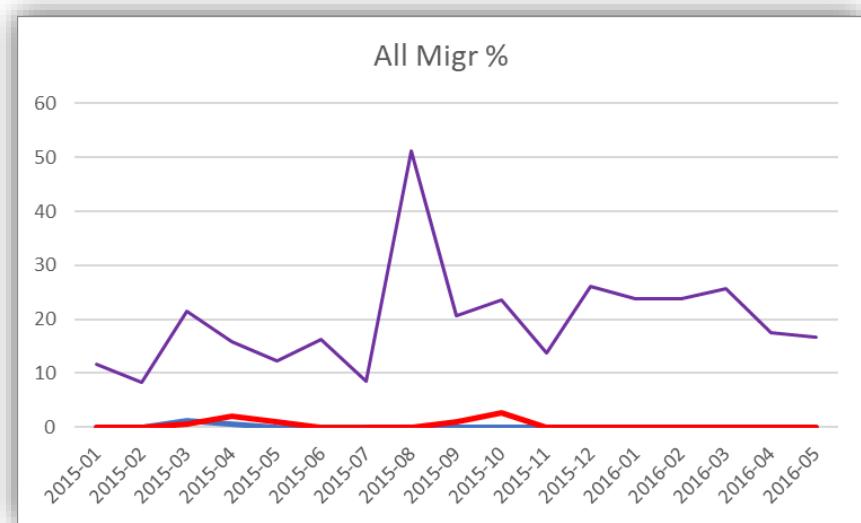
Figure 3.13 Percentage of Immigration Posts per Month

In terms of content, each of the parties' posts covered a range of political issues. Perhaps most striking however, is the relative *lack* of posts concerning immigration. As revealed above, immigration appeared as the subject of a tiny percentage of posts across the time studied on the Labour and Conservative Pages yet was a constant occurrence for UKIP. Indeed, during the so-called 'migrant crisis' in the Summer of 2015, over half of UKIP's posts covered the issue whilst the other two parties studiously *avoided* it. As noted below, this avoidance occurred despite immigration's domination of public polling across the period.

[This image, 'Ipsos Issues Index', has been removed as the copyright is owned by another organisation or individual]

That Labour and the Conservatives adopt completely different attitudes to UKIP in terms of addressing immigration is hardly news that only digital analysis could provide. Yet the ways in which offline and online strategy blend together illustrate how digital campaigns are both a result of each party's history concerning previous attempts to negotiate such a controversial subject, as well as the particular demands of digital platforms and the ways in which they accumulate, filter and present data detailed below.

As such it begins to reveal obstacles facing the glorification of social media as a novel way to empower radically democratic candid deliberation, connectedness and transparency. Aware of their own troubled history with the discussion of immigration, Labour and the Conservatives attempt to ignore or downplay the issue's relevancy and pursue an alternative strategy in their party posts. Yet in so doing, they leave the discursive ground open for those more willing to engage the subject, and ultimately more able to dominate the overall space of encounter based on its system of operation and participation.

[This image, 'Old Conservative Immigration Advert', has been removed as the copyright is owned by another organisation or individual]

As the image on the left indicates, earlier attempts by Conservatives to tackle the issue generated a particularly hostile response to their explicit engagement with issues of race, and what was considered a clumsy negotiation of the normative sanctions on its discussion. Leader Michael Howard's overtly right-leaning 'Are You Thinking What We're Thinking' campaign in 2005 that openly tackled the subject saw the party lose the subsequent election to Labour, marking its third election defeat in a row (Lee and Beech, 2009, p.29).

[This image, 'Net Migration Soars', has been removed as the copyright is owned by another organisation or individual]

More recently, the notorious failure of Cameron's 2010 'migration cap' continued to haunt the party as it approached the 2015 election. Various media infographics repeatedly exhumed its

corpse as in response a wave of new measures hurriedly struggled to regain some kind of issue-competence in the eyes of voters. Needing to ensure success with a traditionally right-leaning issue base, the Conservatives were significantly weakened by both entrenched normative resistance to the politicisation of race in 'explicit' terms, and by their own inability to control increasing migration resulting from the free movement policies tied into EU membership and neoliberal emphasis on free trade. This was made worse by the appearance of UKIP, a party able to avoid both obstacles by the capture of a demographic more sceptical about liberal norms around equality and more openly hostile to the EU in principle.

[This image, 'DuffyGate Episode', has been removed as the copyright is owned by another organisation or individual]

Labour too have been forced to grapple with the issue in ways that seek to accommodate floating 'middle' voters, and yet avoid alienating both supporters on the Left tied to the party traditionally, as well as growing ethnic-minority blocs constituted by various generations of migrants. There appeared little desire over 2015 and 2016 to substantively rehash the controversy that erupted after the earlier 'Duffy Gate' episode of 2010, wherein party leader Gordon Brown was thrust onto a chat show to awkwardly make amends for branding a concerned member of the public a bigot for raising the issue during an ill-advised 'walk and talk' session: "I apologise if I have said anything like that. What I think she was raising with me was an issue of immigration and saying that there were too many people from eastern Europe in the country. I do apologise if I have said anything that has been hurtful, and I will apologise to her personally" (Weaver, 2010).

In a similarly awkward, more recent turn of events, Labour launched their infamous 'controls on immigration' mug in early 2015, perhaps hoping it would make up for a general lack of engagement with the issue in discursive terms and vaguely paste over divisions within their own ranks and amongst their constituents. Yet as illustrated, the move drew fierce criticism even from within the party itself.

Given their experiences in attempting to negotiate what was repeatedly an issue the public demanded be tackled, one can understand why the two parties sought to *avoid* the issue in their own digital campaigns on Facebook. As a result however, they failed to take up this novel participatory environment, potentially empowering open and honest deliberation and the kinds of multi-person digital networking celebrated in party statements. This was a refusal of the chance to embrace the issues offline habits had avoided. In rejecting more engaged approaches to civic deliberation celebrated by the sharing ideal, they thus carried over the offline tendencies that had contributed to the rise of a less risk-averse, openly populist party flirting with illiberal themes.

Yet to understand why it was so important to avoid controversy online as well as 'off', there is also a need to acknowledge the internal socio-technical workings of the site. The agentic 'algorithmic' role of the platform itself has significant consequences for the character of party Pages and their relative success in terms of brand 'reach'. Indeed, whilst the failure to take-up democratic opportunities offered by the digital might be blamed on parties themselves, some responsibility must also be accorded to the platform. At the same time that Facebook were increasing their explicit claims about a democratic renewal through ever more 'sharing', they adopted design changes that would in fact empower the problematic transfer of offline political controversy avoidance to online, scuppering the chance to make a potentially novel political sphere fruitful in line with their professed ideals. A brief exposition is useful here in order to illuminate the data that follows.

Relevance and Personalisation: The Algorithm

As Facebook moved from a simple collection of school-friends and local peers to a more diverse group of individuals, companies and various political organisations, the wealth of data Facebook presented to users based on their liking and sharing habits became overwhelming. The question faced by the site's owners and designers was how to decide the most 'relevant' information that users might wish to encounter, given the impracticality of scrolling through every potential update and every piece of novel content produced by the millions of 'weak ties' that interactive platform features had established. Although the platform had succeeded in connecting users to as many people as possible, and in as many ways as possible, they were now forced to grapple with questions of what material users might be most likely to spend time 'attending to', so as not to drown out the most pressing interests with info-'noise'. In light

of the explosion in 'Big Data' emitted across networks of what became billions of users worldwide, Facebook sought "to find useful correlations within data sets not capable of analysis by ordinary human assessment" (Yeung, 2017, p.119), so that the material users would see would be that most likely to capture their attention, and increase the likelihood they would forward it to others within and beyond their personal networks. As an early patent explained (Birkback and Carlsen, 2016):

> members may be inundated with information that does not interest the members. Further, members may find themselves unable to find in a timely and efficient manner the information that does interest them, such as information about their friends and their community. There is therefore a need for systems and methods for generating dynamic relationship-based content personalized for members of a web-based social network.

The way they chose to do this was via sophistication of arguably the central pillar of the platform itself – its 'algorithm'.

In 2010, Facebook presented 'EdgeRank'. This was not the first attempt at tinkering with the flows of information users encounter, but the first detailed explanation of the way in which they decided exactly what *kinds* of information the platform puts front and centre.

[This image, 'Edgerank Description', has been removed as the copyright is owned by another organisation or individual]

'Edges' are the user 'interactions' with content that Facebook then ranks. This ranking depends on the *affinity* between the viewer and creator, or those interacting elsewhere with the content, whether the interaction is a like, share or comment, and the relative newness of the content or interaction. In other words, if people you appear close to interact in a meaningful fashion with a post or update, then you are likely to be told of this in a prime spot on your continuously refreshing feed (Kincaid, 2010). The aim here was to focus on relevancy and *personalisation*, and to provide a user-experience that analysed user-practice, responded to one's behaviour and then 'nudged' one towards more of the same. Rather than a top-down guidance system, this was an interactive and dynamic environment tailored to providing users with that which they were most likely to seek out. After several years of referencing EdgeRank, the company claimed that more complex 'machine learning' had made the algorithmic backbone of the platform even more sophisticated, and even more effective at filtering out

content in the name of mediating the *optimal experience* users desired. Affinity, Weight and Time would remain at the heart of its operation, but more nuanced calculations of trust - and particularly the provision of content with higher 'viral' qualities - would become increasingly important in order to empower continual 'sharing' rather than simple consumption (Kacholia, 2013). The goal of this dynamic design was an active, responsive 'networked' salon presented to users whenever they navigated to the site, or indeed happened to glance at the mobile Facebook application that might remain constantly open on a portable electronic device, and constantly delivering 'notifications' of 'relevant' activity to the home screen without any specific user-prompting.

This emphasis on personalisation and relevance was accompanied by the repeated communication of the platform's ethos and ideology about how best to empower 'sharing' and connection. During the early years of the site the small group of designers and engineers in charge had become increasingly convinced by the importance of the 'network effects' generated by the site (Kirkpatrick, 2010, p.143). At the heart of this mission would be a focus on recognising the importance of what Zuckerberg began to champion as the 'global knowledge economy' (Zuckerberg, 2013) - "It's not zero sum. If you know something, that doesn't stop me from knowing it too. In fact, the more things we all know, the better ideas, products and services we can all offer and the better all of our lives will be". In response to what he terms "a striking decline in the important social infrastructure of local communities over the past few decades" (ibid.), Zuckerberg aimed to fill a 'social gap' by gathering people together online in the kinds of communal spaces manifested by Groups and Pages and covering a variety of social interests and needs. These were lofty statesman-like ideals that Zuckerberg sought to place *above* economic needs. Indeed, as Shaun Parker – an early partner and finance advisor explains of the young CEO, "He was not thinking, 'Let's make some money and get out", says Parker. "This wasn't like a get-rich-quick scheme. This was 'Let's build something that has lasting cultural value and try to take over the world" (Kirkpatrick, 2010, p.47). Indeed, 6 years into the company's increasingly successful operation Zuckerberg claimed (2010, p.330):

> The question I ask myself like almost every day is 'Am I doing the most important thing I could be doing?'" he says with uncharacteristic expansiveness. "Because if not, we've built this company to a good enough point that I don't have to be doing this, or anything else.

Prior to the public expression of a particular political good that the site sought to empower, Facebook's initial design as a non-political 'social' network had already attracted millions of users and had been incorporated into the banal practice of everyday life. By then introducing changes in platform design geared specifically towards more overtly 'political' rather than simply 'social' goals, Facebook opened the possibility of a mass re-politicisation of sceptical disillusioned citizens already invested in the platform for other means. Through a combination of ideological goals and design changes Facebook were then able to nudge users towards specific kinds of behaviour Zuckerberg associates with progress - "The biggest thing is going to be *leading the user base* through the changes that need to continue to happen" (2010, p.302 [emphasis mine]) he suggests, for "The technology is the least difficult part" (2010, p.303). By opening up a 'virtual' public space for political debate, explicitly designed in the service of progressive deliberative democracy, and increasingly tailored towards a specific kind of desired behaviour, Facebook might be seen to have taken the model of a sphere for a critically discursive public and run with it, adding virtuality and digital networking to empower it for a new digital age.

As noted in Chapter 1, the ethos that ideas can change the world and should be given space to compete and connect reflects a Habermasian emphasis on critical deliberation, gathering and debate in the service of informed publics; as seen above, parties have indeed taken up the platform offered for the realisation of such, and users have flocked in response. However, if we take seriously the ideals celebrated by platform owners, then looking at the data gathered here there appear certain *unintended* consequences wrought by the increasing action of algorithmic filtering, relevance mechanisms and info-personalisation. By providing a platform for direct connection to users/voters, 'Page' design certainly allows each to stay in contact with the other. But it is not *exactly* the kinds of contact inferred by loftier pronouncements about the ideology proposed by ever more 'sharing' and 'connecting' on the part of all political actors. Whereas the design of 'Groups' allows and encourages horizontal communication between non-peers - reflecting more the ethos of bringing strangers together for discussion of political issues and deliberative debate – 'Pages' allow prominent political figures the chance to join in and get their hands dirty at the political coal-face. Yet, whilst designed to directly connect the average citizen with celebrities, big business or political leaders, Pages also signalled the entrance of 'brand growth' strategies. As opposed to Groups, Pages incorporated specific features of moderation and post-control that reinforced *hierarchical* forms of

communication. Through the workings of platform algorithms, their *visibility* then depended on the amount of likes and shares they could amass, and that were necessary to propel them to the forefront of user-timelines as 'relevant' nuggets of information amongst a massive tide of competing news.

As noted above, in formal terms parties adopt a creative style of posting, incorporating a multimodal aesthetic and networking in various supportive external platforms and organisations. Yet in substantive terms, both Labour and the Conservatives conspicuously ignore immigration as a potential topic through which to beckon the radical deliberation the platform celebrates. As revealed below, they choose instead a posting style characterised as 'promotional', thereby studiously swerving away from political issues that may alienate a user-base offline and on. Once we acknowledge the algorithmic mechanisms determining 'brand' visibility one begins to understand why such a strategy might be adopted, for a faithful user-base serves as a precious commodity enlarging the window of visibility that opens each time they contribute. Yet by taking such a stance in the wake of fears over the perceived vulnerability of voter's allegiances, the two establishment parties ultimately lose the battle for attention in spatial terms, handing victory to the very party they hope to neutralise.

Promotion and Issue-Ownership
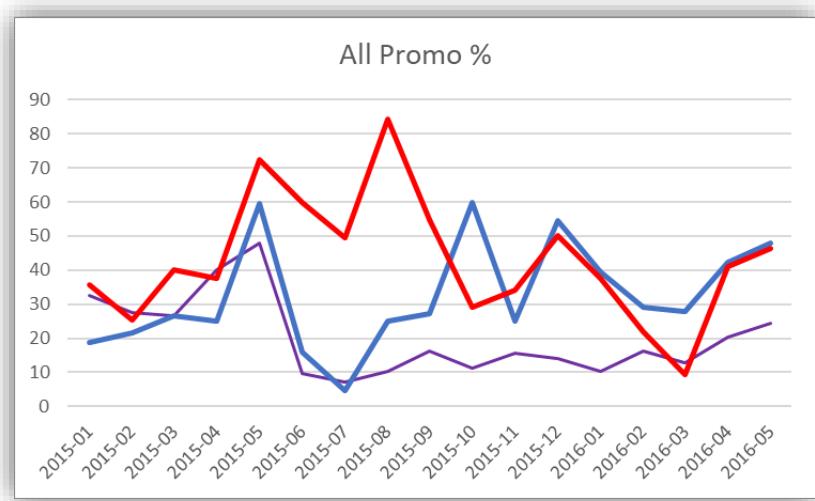
Figure 3.15 Percentage of Promotional Posts per Month

As illustrated, the contrast between posts categorised as 'promotional' and those featuring mention of immigration is vivid. Posts were categorised as 'Promotional' where constituted by: demands for Likes and Shares, calls to vote, internal party news, manifesto graphics, partisan editorial puff-pieces, and conference and campaign promotional videos reminiscent of older late-night tv electoral appeals. Labour in particular pursued an aggressive promotional strategy aimed at expanding their reach within Facebook.

Figure 3.16 Labour Promo Posts

The Conservatives too focused a steady amount of their posts on promotional matters, although in less committed terms than Labour.

Figure 3.17 Cons Promo Posts

Yet UKIP, in contrast, saw a relative spike in promotion only during the General Election. Instead of responding to the peaks and valleys of the political season with *promotional* material, they sought continued relevance via a specific *issue* focus. This difference in promotional activity was also reflected via analysis of stemmed-words littered throughout posts that might trigger a particular user-response. Of those illustrated below, the

Conservatives talked most about 'sharing', Labour of 'joining' and 'voting', whilst UKIP were the most likely to mention 'commenting' and 'liking', two particularly useful triggers in terms of brand reach. UKIP were also the most likely to urge visitors to 'watch' something, and in combination with their steady focus on 'links' as a modal choice noted above, illustrates their habit of networking in external content and pushing users towards its consumption and accreditation.
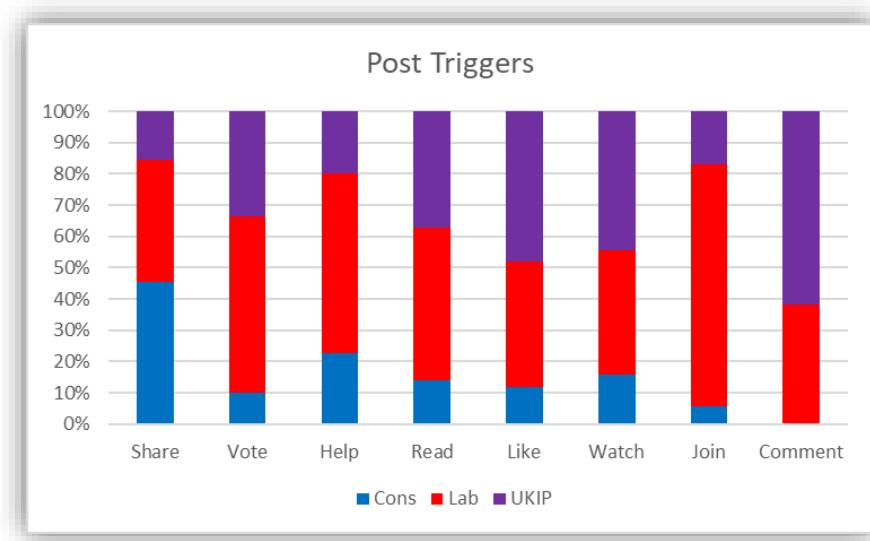
Figure 3.18 Trigger-Word Presence in Party Posts

Page-use evidenced through posting thus emerges here as heavily invested in the promoting the party-brand in refection of the battle for eyes and clicks stimulated by platform mechanics. This is not to say that these promotional posts were completely based on 'slack-appeal' or demands for users to pump up their respective metric scores. The use of graphics illustrating manifestos, or the video-campaigns and party-update diaries were a sign of the creative appropriation of the available parameters of action open to Page moderators[4]. UKIP were also not averse to using Pages in a similar monological, promotional way. Yet by consistently posting about immigration within single-issue posts, beyond a brief mention in a manifesto, UKIP were able to appear the only party taking the opportunity to truly engage voter's frustrated demands. In terms of posts *specifically* targeting immigration, Labour between the entire 2015 and 2016 period studied produced exactly '15', whilst the Conservatives had precisely '2' posts on the topic. UKIP offered, in contrast, *244* posts with immigration as the

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[4] Indeed, Labour began to use the Page to arrange Q+As with leadership candidates in 2015, and under Jeremy Corbyn began to post adverts for a separate Labour site where comments could be sent for David Cameron during Prime Minister's Questions. This small % of posts was a sign that Labour were thinking in a more interactive frame of mind, and it would be interesting to conduct further research into 2017-2018 to see if this change in attitude has continued.

primary topic. One might ask what the two establishment parties *were* talking about, if not immigration. As the charts below reveal, there were issues they chose as focus that fit their traditional campaign interests and were then reproduced on Facebook.
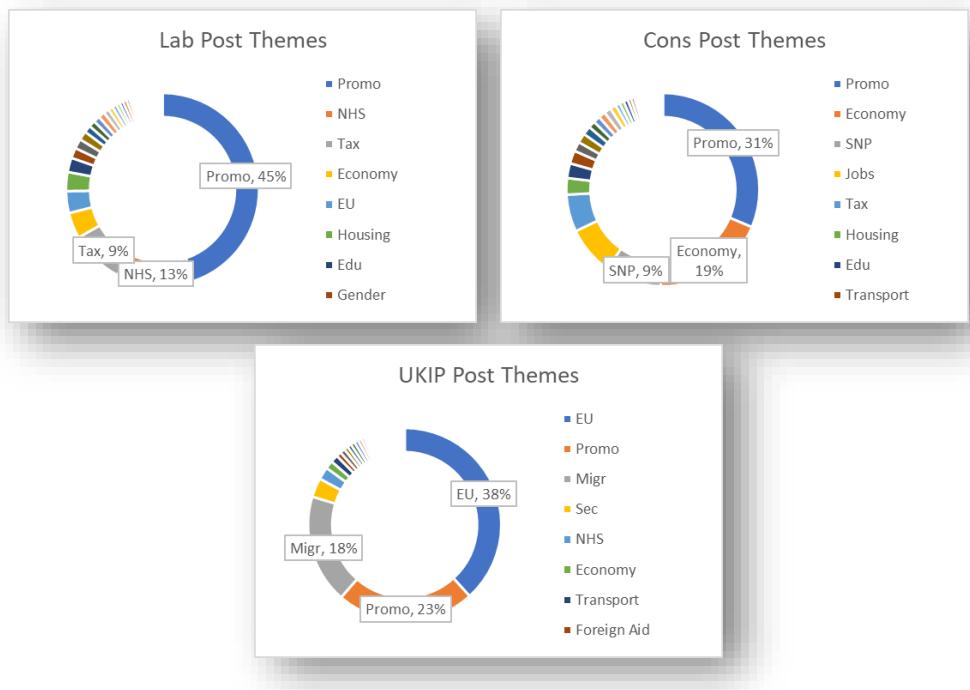
Figure 3.19 Major Post Themes

Aside from an enormous emphasis on promotional campaigning and the accumulation of likes, shares and thus 'reach', Labour focused most heavily on the NHS and its protection. Secondary attention was given to tax, including tax avoidance and cuts to tax credits for working families. The Conservatives in contrast repeated the main thrust of their electoral campaign, suggesting a firm hand on 'the economy' repeated most often in vague terms, and the dangers of letting Labour loose on the country given their infamous 'there is no money left' letter which was referenced repeatedly. For their secondary issue they chose to focus on the dangers of power given to the SNP, who they claimed would 'prop-up' a victorious Labour government. In the manifestos of both Labour and the Conservatives there was indeed brief mention of immigration, but it was a trifling concern given the dangerous ground it marks as noted above, and there was clearly no appetite amongst the two parties for its discussion online.

UKIP, alternatively, focused overwhelmingly on the twin issues of EU membership and immigration. One might mock their campaign in 2015 as lacking substance in terms of diverse policy concern, but their consistent and narrow focus on the problem of immigration, the

blame attributed to the EU and the necessity of voting for UKIP as a populist 'people's champion' allowed them to present and thus circulate through brand accumulation a strong and coherent message that appeared to find favour with users. Indeed, in Chapter 4 we see how this strong message and the structural arrangement of their campaign was to find purchase within users' articulation of a collective representation of immigration, both within the UKIP Page itself as well as across the Pages of the two other parties.

As argued above, the promotional strategies adopted by Labour and the Conservatives do fit the market for attention in which the platform operates, and thus might be considered a somewhat logical reaction to the platform's inner algorithmic mechanisms. Both establishment parties utilise the platform primarily to curate promotional material in a way that echoes older leafletting and tv broadcast strategies offline, rather than a bold new approach to public concerns that may alienate supporters or raise difficult discussions. Where they take up some of the multimodal platform affordances, they share photos and graphics promoting party policy or videos of speeches, and these are frequently accompanied by triggers designed to 'ready the troops' by urging users to share or like particular content. Yet they refuse to broach a subject consistently polling as one of primary concern.

Jackson and Lilleker (2009, p.234) argue that "Broader literature indicates that interactivity should be the goal of organizations aiming to build relationships with consumers, supporters, and message audiences via Web 2.0", where "The traditional top-down direction of political communication, from parties and government to voters and citizens, is replaced by a more horizontal style of communication without a hierarchy". Yet the evidence here suggests this *horizontal* relationship between parties and voters is largely absent. The authors note how, with the design of Facebook, "the structural basis for Castells's informational democracy appears to be in place" (2009, p.239). Yet the empirical findings outlined suggest the interactive functions the site associates optimistically with democratic engagement are typically neglected in favour of a stance "more about information provision and persuasive communication than public dialogue within a chaotic open-access environment" (2009, p.235). Indeed, the evidence here agrees with the authors conclusion that "On the whole, party presences are more consistent with free advertising and the posting of brochureware: they make few concessions to the Web 2.0 environment" (2009, p.241)". Similarly, for Marichal (2016, p.143), "emphasis on political engagement as transactional (give us money) or opinion based ('what do you think about this?') reduces politics to the realm of 'small things' at the

expense of the 'world out there' that requires a different type of communication built around 'reflection and listening'". It reflects use more coherently described as 'Web 1.5' than '2.0', where parties adopt a presence in networks primarily designed to be 'social', utilise informal language and address 'friend networks', but then reproduce older top-down monological practices of dissemination.

It is therefore important to acknowledge the 'politics' of the artefact (Winner 1980) that is Facebook - in both its social and technical manifestation. Parties respond to the design of a platform increasingly geared towards personalisation and the promotion of attention, yet at the same time they respond to a particular political context. Indeed, in terms of the lack of coverage of an issue as prominent as immigration, one might consider that it is a ferociously divisive issue, and an area covered in potential political landmines for parties. They are left uncertain how to steer user opinion in an age discursively populated by vociferous new populist contenders. Whereas UKIP might be classed as using the platform in a more substantive way, they could be more confident that Page visitors would agree with the party-line on the topic and thus are able to post about it freely; both the Conservatives and Labour in contrast face a tricky negotiation of long-term voter-attitudes towards the subject, as well as its connection to widely-held sceptical thoughts on EU membership. By promoting a particularly strong line on their digital sites, they are likely to alienate a fairly large percent of their preferred audiences, and thus reduce their brand 'reach'. It is therefore more sensible from a digital marketing stance - necessary for success within the social media landscape - to ignore the subject and pursue instead the accumulation of 'likes' and 'shares'. In this way, they negotiate the overarching political landscape whilst toeing the line of the algorithmic order.

[This image, 'Farage and Immigration', has been removed as the copyright is owned by another organisation or individual]

However, no matter how logical, these strategies have consequences in terms of issue-ownership. Indeed, where the discursive ground is abandoned by the two leading parties, new contender UKIP are able to take-up the space left by their rivals and dominate the issue-narratives that emerge, both within and beyond their own Party Page. This strategy empowers the identity crafted through successive adaptations of their own image, from a party of extreme-Eurosceptic elites to one that realises the currency of immigration, and utilises it to cleanly separate from a Conservative party increasingly leaning away from the right during the 'compassionate conservative' era and the subsequent alliance with Liberal Democrats

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(Tournier-Sol, 2015). In building a new populist front they are also able to attract those 'left behind' Labour voters, those who don't perceive themselves fitting into the cosmopolitan, multicultural middle-class demographic increasingly attended to (Ford & Goodwin 2012, p.12). As the party most able to convert their offline campaign into a coherent digital strategy that equally flatters platform mechanics, their take on the issue becomes the *only* take swirling across digital networks, in the absence of any competing alternative. As the journalist Gary Younge noted at a recent talk, it remains unknown how successful an alternative argument to the right-leaning populist suggestion may have been around immigration; such an argument was not even attempted (Younge, 2018).

UKIP were thus able to build a posting strategy around the demand for open discussion of an issue that remained toxic in the eyes of their political opponents, and forge a committed, coherent, 'strong and stable' argument, that at the same time could accommodate demands for brand reach. Rather than simply demanding users 'like and share' the Party itself, they could attach such outreach to a substantive political goal or policy argument on a subject particularly likely to draw attention. They were able to frame the issue of immigration in a simple, easily digestable way, champion a discourse, deliver it, and then see it circulated online by a willing legion of followrs algorithmically employed.

Figure 3.20 UKIP Immigration Posts

As noted below, the divergence amongst parties in terms of the issue and their overall strategy led to significant differences in terms of user response.

Slacktivism, Obedience and Reach: Success in the Attention Economy

As explained above, the changing focus on user-personalisation shapes a strategic demand for 'attention' that, where entwined with offline political strategy serves as a significant obstacle in the path of the loftier aims of political 'sharing'. Yet this sociotechnical interaction leaves a mark on the practice of users too.
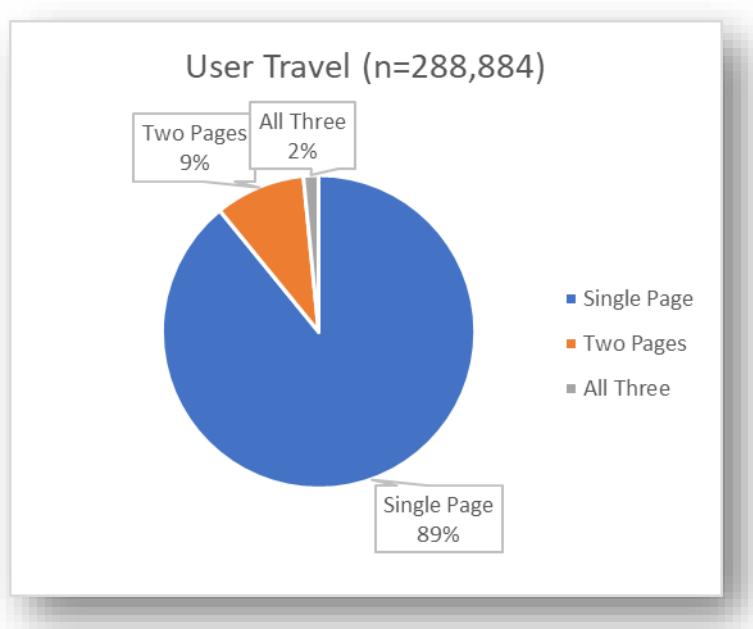
Figure 3.21 User Travel Frequency

As illustrated, the dominant blue segment suggests the effect of personalisation measures that work to shut-off content that may oppose users' ideological preferences. Only a small wedge of 'travellers' found commenting on the three Pages contribute on *more* than one, and only a tiny sliver comment on all three. With the introduction of Facebook's 'Like' button in 2009, users were able to curate and publicly display an 'interest network' composed of the various Groups and Pages serving their interests. Once liked, the party who controlled the respective Page would see their updates funnelled through the mass of information into the user's personal daily timeline, nestled intimately alongside friend updates or product announcements and opening up a text box allowing them to comment directly on party posts or respond to other users. Interaction with Pages *beyond* one's timeline requires a significant commitment to an encounter with the 'un'liked, involving the purposeful negotiation of the site's embedded recommendation features. For the clear majority of users, movement across multiple, ideologically-opposed spaces is rare, revealing the ways in which concentrated personalisation measures bent on customer satisfaction serve to reduce the political *exploration* celebrated by

the platform more generally. These sedentary political habits are also joined by a preference for 'liking' (l) and 'sharing' (s) over the more onerous task of 'commenting' (c).
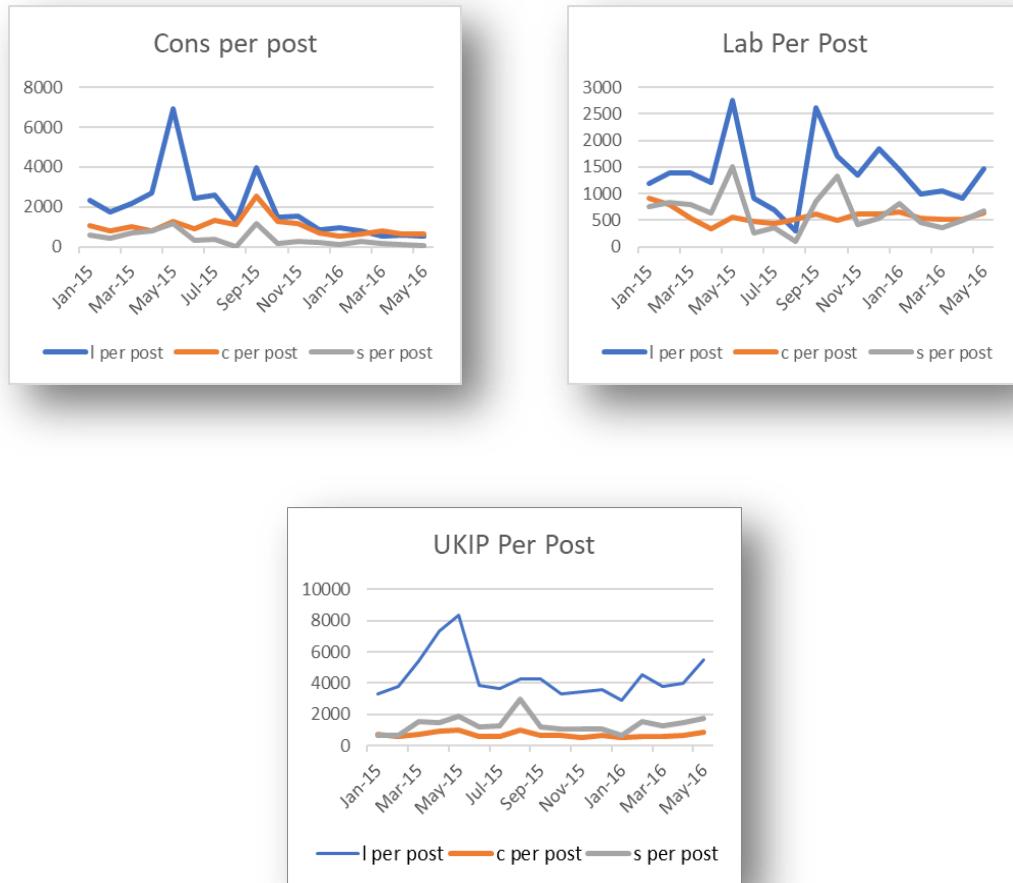
Figure 3.22 Interactions Per Post (Like / Comment / Share)

The critical analysis of Party posting strategy and their focus on promotional brand 'reach' would appear a blow to users and/or voters. Yet the overview above of user-habits in terms of platform feature take-up suggests the majority are happy to take part in such an affair, preferring to click the offered like and share buttons rather than engage with the Page in more substantial and dialogical fashion. In so doing they willingly offer up their digital 'labour', and it is labour bound to a particular party Page. Once a Page has been incorporated into a user's like-network, that is the only political actor that their attention is algorithmically connected to, unless they prove willing - in front of their entire audience of 'friends' – to 'like' a Page whose politics they nevertheless reject. Thus, users bound both at home and whilst mobile to

particular communicative actors are delivered only that shared by actors explicitly chosen and 'liked'.

This has two identifiable consequences. First, on the behalf of these liked actors, users empower their 'brand growth' and engage in 'collaborative identity construction' where they "predominantly claim their identities implicitly rather than explicitly; they 'show rather than tell' and stress group and consumer identities over personally narrated ones" (Zhao et al, 2008, p.1816). This association of slacktivist practice with 'user-friendly' consumption habits reflects not only a poorly designed personalisation interface that scuppers its own political ideals, but for Petersen (2008) a more sinister and longer history of monolithic corporations slowly taking control of mass-generated information online through "a reterritorialization of free labor into a capitalistic structure of profit–making". Personalisation metrics and their consequences become less innocent when conceived as part of the 'out of the way' design that seeks to neutralise and obscure the hidden actors involved in ensuring users are retained by the platform itself at all costs. What is obscured is the 'architecture of disclosure' (Marichal, 2012) running constantly in the background, that provides users with customised and personalised identities that are first - easily recognisable when reflected back to them, and second - ease the subsequent monetisation of 'targeted' consumer blocs. As Berry (2011, p.4) notes, the more the world is structured by software "it also withdraws, and it becomes harder and harder for us to focus on as it is embedded, hidden, off-shored or merely forgotten about".

Second, by curating a network of liked and desired interests, users do appear to bind themselves into the algorithmic 'echo chambers' and 'filter bubbles' noted in Chapter 1 where the 'disliked' is not even an option. Assuming a human desire to avoid that which is unpalatable, Facebook seeks to meet user preferences by providing an encounter with that which hopefully triggers repeat visits and willing remediation. In so doing they produce communities convinced of their own righteousness, as agreeable opinions echo back and forth in the absence of contestation. For Sunstein (2001, p.2), echo chambers increase:

> the risk of fragmentation, as the increased power of individual choice allows people to sort themselves into innumerable homogeneous groups, which often results in amplifying their pre-existing views. Although millions of people are using the Internet to expand their horizons, many people are doing the opposite, creating a Daily Me that is specifically tailored to their own interests and prejudice.

Personalisation and Relevance mechanisms may emphasise 'user-satisfaction' on the surface, but they ultimately create a direct obstacle to the democratic progress the same mechanisms are supposed to provide. As the author of a recent DEMOS study argues: "The existence of echo chambers and the idea that we are increasingly seeing things that we agree with, things that we like, things that we might buy, challenges some of the fundamental principles democracy thrives on [...] We have to be able to compromise, we have to able to read and accept and understand opposing views" (Cheshire, 2017). If we increasingly socialise in a sphere where dissent or conflict is filtered out, "the filter bubble confines us to our own information neighborhood, unable to see or explore the rest of the enormous world of possibilities that exist" (Pariser, 2011, p.222). An algorithm is designed to solve problems, "but what the algorithm solves for has political consequences" (2011, p.228). As a result, "it's becoming more important to develop a basic level of algorithmic literacy. Increasingly, citizens will have to pass judgement on programmed systems that affect our public and national life" (Pariser, 2011, p.228). As Gillespie (2012, p.167) notes:

> Algorithms designed to calculate what is "hot" or "trending" or "most discussed" skim the cream from the seemingly boundless chatter that's on offer. Together, these algorithms not only help us find information, they provide a means to know what there is to know and how to know it, to participate in social and political discourse, and to familiarize ourselves with the publics in which we participate. They are now a key logic governing the flows of information on which we depend.

Whilst the corporate exploitation of labour or the unbalanced mediation of information are not new sociological concerns, what appears to most vex critics contemplating digital changes to the space of social life are the ways an active artificial intelligence works *beneath the surface* to empower such, in a sphere ideologically promoted as 'neutral and user-focused' in the name of critical political progression. Hamilton et al (2014) suggests less than 25% of regular Facebook users are aware of an 'algorithm' at work, and that even computer science graduates were ignorant of its presence. Eslami et al (2015) too reveal that over half the users surveyed were ignorant of the way the platform nudged behaviour, but although reacting initially with surprise and anger, they soon became used to the notion and indeed reported satisfaction with the with content produced through unseen filtering. The lack of digital

literacy behind such accounts haunts the prospect of meaningful progressive politics for Cody (2017), who asks:

> who has the power; where does it lie; and is any of it coming back to the people? The public square and our right to speak our mind seems to have been privatised by some of the largest companies in the world. The corporations are hiding further back than before but are still taking the profits, as well as closing off options with algorithms predetermining what one will "like".

If Facebook and its political Pages are to provide new digital 'salons' for critical political debate, then they are ones owned by a corporation who form arguably one of "the most powerful and secretive empires we've ever known" (Goodman and Powles, 2016), and in which a calculating and unseen agent pushes users towards particular kinds of profitable behaviour. As Cathy O' Neil (2016) puts it in her description of 'Weapons of Math Destruction':

> The social network may feel like a modern town square, but thanks to its tangle of algorithms, it's nothing like the public forums of the past. The company determines, according to its interests and those of its shareholders, what we see and learn on its social network. The result has been a loss of focus on critical national issues, an erosion of civil disagreement, and a threat to democracy itself.

Partially in response, political actors appear, pronounce a particular ideology and then leave, denying the opportunity for interaction that the technology makes possible. Pronouncements are then faithfully reproduced and amplified across the network by users who appear to prefer the silent consumption and remediation of information rather than critical engagement with it. As Fuchs suggests of Habermas' original conceptualisation, "the public sphere is not just a sphere of public political communication, but also a sphere free from state censorship and from private ownership. It is free from particularistic controls" (Fuchs, 2014, p.60). As he continues: "*Monetarisation* and commodification transmogrify the public sphere into 'a sphere of culture consumption' that is only a 'pseudo-public sphere' (2014, p.64).

As noted above, the Conservatives and particularly Labour invested heavily in a rhetorical campaign built around accruing the likes and shares that would hopefully translate to votes. Yet despite their focus on promotion, the web 1.5 monological style appears to have hurt them in the battle for 'eyes and minds'. Indeed, when we look more closely at metric counts that structure relative Page 'success', we see how the confluence of personalisation

mechanisms, issue avoidance, promotional activity and user labour produced different results for the Parties studied.
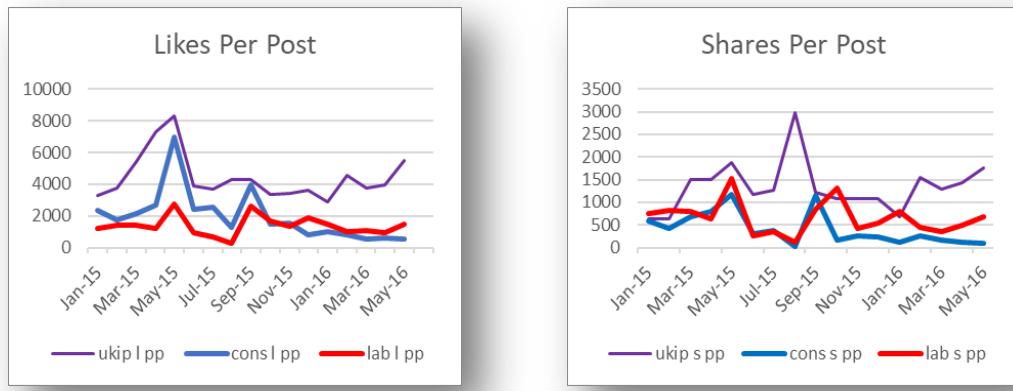
Figure 3.23 Likes and Shares Per Post Comparison

In the war for 'likes' and 'shares', UKIP appear to dominate the other two, despite their less intense posting style. Each of the precious popularity scores chased can only be accrued once a party post has been made, yet even with their relative lack of posts in comparison to Labour, UKIP were able to steadily outpoint both of their opponents. Indeed, the spike noticeable over the Summer 2015 matches the period of the alleged 'migrant crisis' and again suggests how their issue focus was a particularly fruitful strategy.
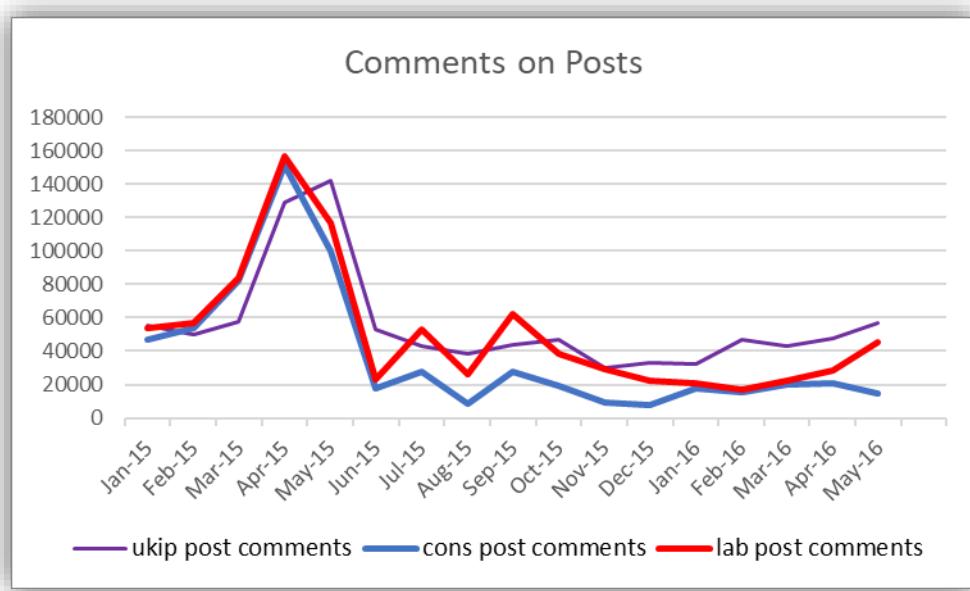
Figure 3.24 No. of Comments Over Time

In terms of total comments by users, UKIP were again able to ride out the spike around the General Election and maintain a high number of comments, consistently over the 30,000 mark even where discussion and expression on the other two Pages declined. Indeed, despite their investment in a heavy-posting communicative style, marked especially by voluminous textual contributions, Labour in fact did relatively poorly in terms of vital attention-metrics. Despite the work put into building the Party's reach on Facebook they appear to have lost the battle in popularity terms to the populist newcomer, itself lacking anywhere near the kinds organisational resources Labour possess. By selectively focusing on immigration as an issue, posting steadily across time, and by accruing the most likes and shares per post, UKIP are able to disseminate their particular agenda in combination with a willing group of faithful 'labourers'. It appears an odd finding that the party most associated with an older, 'left behind' generation would prove the most successful in what might be considered the territory of tech-savvy digital natives and millennials.

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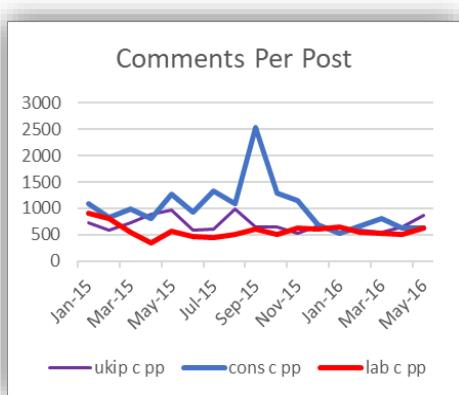
Figure 3.25 No. of Comments 'Per' Post

UKIP appear to win big in the 'attention economy' sketched out here through the successful employment of slacktivists operating within the partisan arenas described above. Yet looking at the data chart to the left, there are differences between Pages when it comes to comments by users 'per post'. Indeed, despite the failure of the Conservatives to manifest winning attention scores, they nevertheless received by far the most comments *per* post. Yet rather than suggest a minor victory, when placed alongside the metric attention data above illuminating their failed employment of user 'labour', a different picture emerges.

The evidence of slacktivism presented above suggests a more passive vision of Facebook users. Yet as noted in the following chapter, in contrast to likes and shares, comments by users on Pages are not necessarily *positive* in terms of the Party addressed. As detailed later, critical comments were in fact witnessed across Pages. Yet whilst the data above shows how most users do not engage more than one particular Page, suggesting again the effects of algorithmic personalisation and Page branding in partisan terms, amongst the determined minority who *did* travel it was in the service of political scepticism and a populist revolt against the ruling party of the day. Indeed, despite the relative lack of posts made by the Conservatives themselves, users wanted to express things on their Page when given the chance to do so; as highlighted below, theirs was the space that witnessed contributions by those most likely to post on two or all three of the pages studied.

UKIP's Page, in contrast, proved the 'stickiest' out of the three, and saw the least amount of 'visitors' as well as the most *stable* bloc of sedentary commentators.
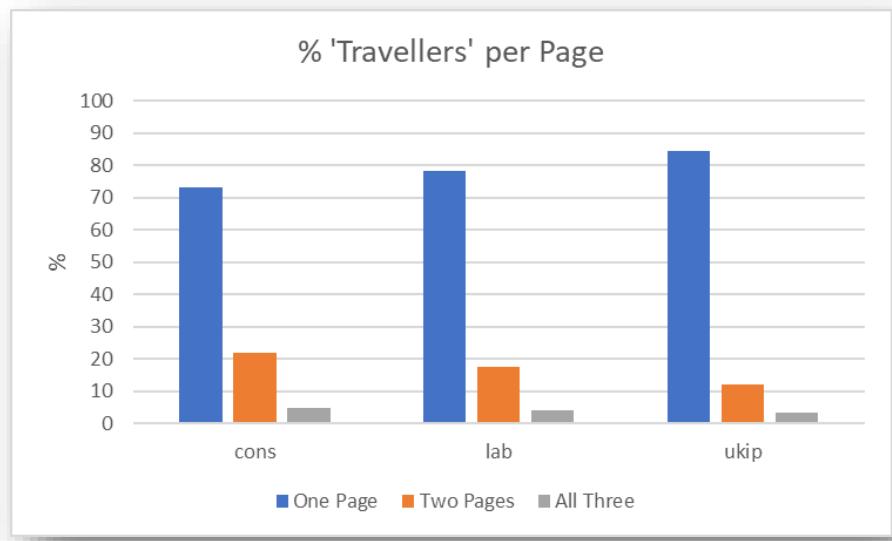
Figure 3.26 User travel habits per Page

What the above suggests when drawn together is not only something about party strategy in terms of site take-up, but also the kinds of user-body that exists on the platform. What emerges from an overview of the space manifested by the three largest political parties is a body of users most willing to support UKIP in terms of digital labour, respond positively to their substantive engagement with immigration, and whilst ignoring the demands of the Conservatives in terms of brand growth through likes and shares, appear determined to express themselves on the Page even if not the usual space they would gather or the one they might have drawn into a 'like-network'.

Indeed, when we look at the party posts from each Page across the entire period, that attracted the highest number of comments making *explicit* reference to immigration, we can see exactly where this travelling expression occurs.

Figure 3.27 Top Posts – Immigration Frequency

Post Title	No. Immigration References
Have you had your say yet? Take our quick survey	331
Take part in our Party Review	239
I want us to link up with the fastest-growing economies	168
Watch this video from Prime Minister David Cameron	147
100 days in we are showing it is a Conservative majority government which has the ideas	140
UKIP Leader Nigel Farage: The Mediterranean migrant crisis is bound to get worse	261
Cameron's latest plea on immigration is the most disingenuous yet	252
UKIP Leader Nigel Farage: Britain urgently needs a tough new approach on illegal migrants	248
Unemployed migrants are being given thousands of pounds	242
Thanks for watching the #BBCDebate last night. Share this	234
Harriet Harman tells David Cameron we have a moral duty to act and take more refugees	190
Real security comes from jobs comes from homes comes from schools comes from hospitals	102
The outcome of the European Union referendum will not only affect us today	98
This referendum has been hijacked by one man	95
SHARE >> The lowest number of homes built...	88

Labour score the lowest amount of immigration comments above, suggesting user habits reflect the party's strict avoidance of the issue. UKIP's steady frequency of topic mentions mirrors the Party's consistent focus, yet it's the Conservative Page that witnesses the highest number of issue-related user-contributions, even where the subject is not broached in the topic of the post itself; rather, the most explicit references to immigration come in the rare posts where user-input is openly requested. The Conservative Page subsequently sees frenzied immigration discussion, despite the Conservatives avoidance of the issue in their own posts, and despite their failure to engage the most likes and shares, even where emphasised in party

strategy as per the word-cloud illustrated earlier. Thus, Facebook users observed here want to discuss the issue in a space they nevertheless don't want to support, and in combination with the positive 'labour' offered up by users to the UKIP Page suggests ultimately a climate of immigration scepticism amongst users keen to critique the ruling party while supporting the digital reach of its major populist opponent. The data therefore reveals a more nuanced portrayal of echo-chamber effects, without ultimately disputing the thrust of the argument.

By focusing on immigration UKIP also appear to provoke differences in the kinds of discursive engagement offered more generally. Indeed, whilst a functional 'Digital Public Sphere' lauded by parties and platform alike would seem to necessitate an opening up and levelling of political communication in horizontal terms, and with a specific emphasis on sustained deliberation and *dialogue,* data on the actual communicative habits of users over time is damning.
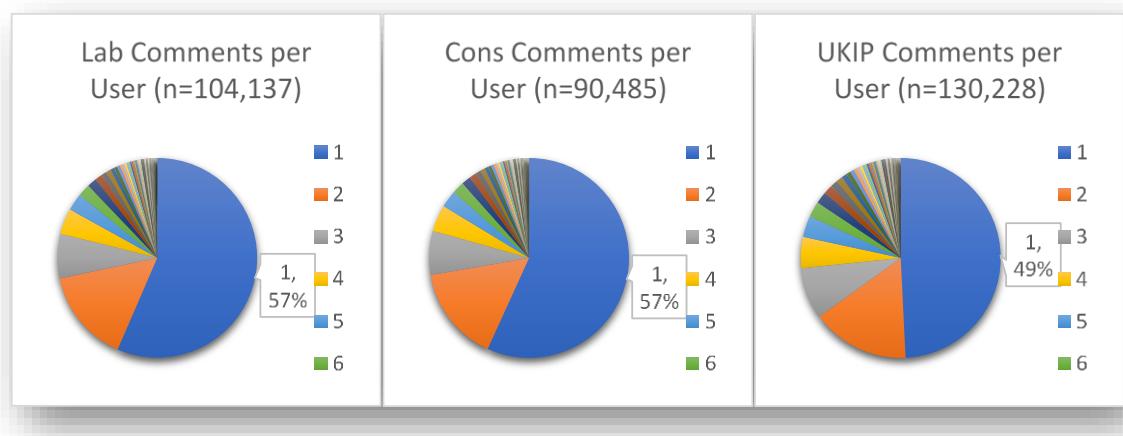
Figure 3.28 No. of Comments Per User

The vast majority of users comment only *once* across the entire period, and then vanish into the digital ether. This pattern of communication thus mimics the kinds of monological habits adopted by parties themselves. This is hardly evidence of a sustained dialogical commentariat connected productively through ever more sharing to their democratic representatives and civic peers and fits the pessimistic data on user travel and slacktivism above. It's worth noting again however that Facebook is a 'nonymomus' space, and thus different from other social networks and social media platforms where the use of avatars and nicknames is more commonplace. Facebook explicitly pursue a 'real names' strategy as part of their idealistic approach to authentic engagement. Yet as a study into 'anonymous' versus 'nonymous' digital space suggests, nonymous environments may provide more the veneer of a more 'authentic'

connection, and support less 'hostile' user interaction, but any such engagement is likely to also prove less dialogical in nature, with individual expressions favoured over lengthy discussion (Moore, 2016). However, despite the relative lack of sustained engagement across the board, UKIP again stood out - as the only page where the majority actually post *more* than once.

In terms of those individuals who do comment on Pages more often, there are volatile patterns of activity. As detailed below, user comment-frequencies on the Labour and Conservative Pages see a sharp fall off from the peak election period of April-May 2015. These are violent differences in user engagement, not for example a switch from 3 or 4 comments to 10 or 20 per month, but rapid changes measured in the thousands. UKIP too see volatility in their 'Top User' outputs, as evidenced below. Again however, theirs is the only leading commentator whose output actually *increases* over time.
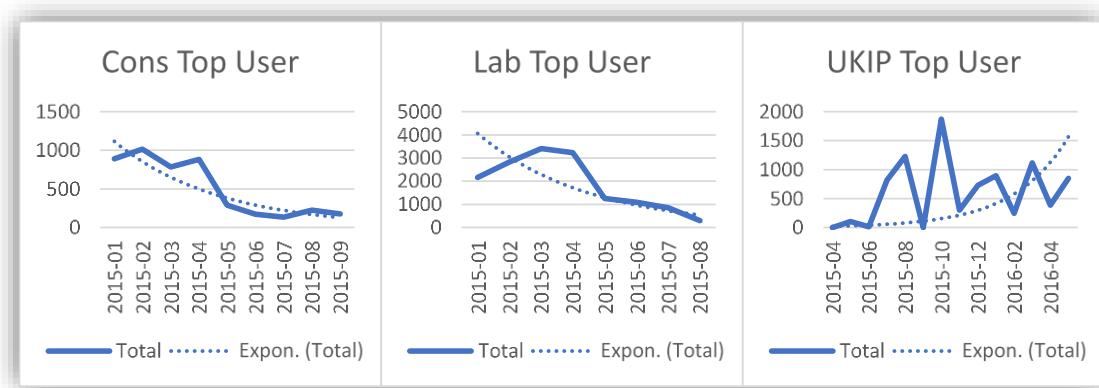
Figure 3.29 Top Single User Comment Frequency over Time

When we look a bit wider at the larger body of the 'Top 10' users in terms of output, we again see differences. The map of the most vociferous Conservative Page commentators is marked by sharp, spiky terrain, with isolated multiple peaks. Labour Page users draw a similar set of large discursive protrubarances, thin and high with a few wider, lower more stable outputs. UKIP however do show signs of more volatile, frenzied activity in stages, but overall, witness longer, more rounded, stable and consistent expressive landmarks.
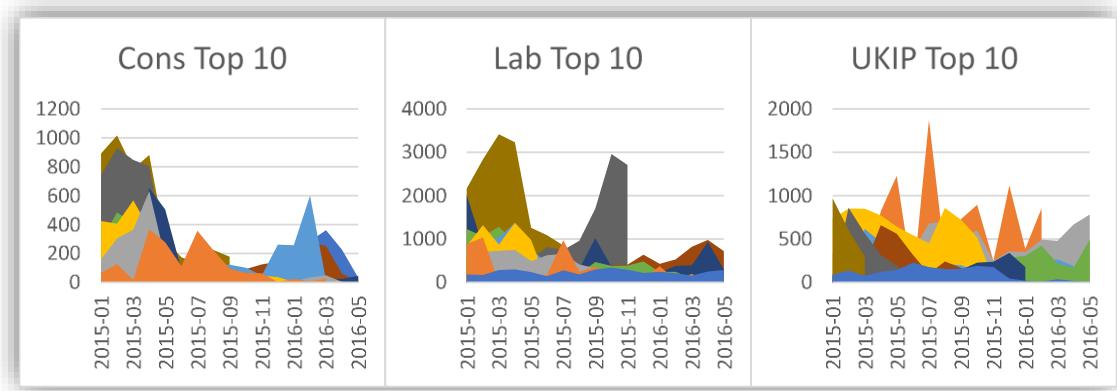
Figure 3.30 Top 10 Users Comment Frequency over Time

The output of the Top 10 users graphed here is quite remarkable in terms of comment frequency, with several of the most vocal users contributing thousands of comments within a relatively short period. A final 'zoom out' to the 'Top 500' users on each Page shows just how much influence on the landscape a relative minority of vociferous users can have, but also how successful each Page is at retaining this influential grouping over time.

Figure 3.31 Comment Body Diversity and Stability

Top 500 Users	User Body %	Comment Body %	Jan 15 – May 16 (Full Timer) %
UKIP	0.4	24	38
Lab	0.5	42	23
Cons	0.6	36	23

There are again differences evident. The 'Top 500' users on the UKIP page comprise only 0.4% of the entire commentariat but offer 24% of all comments recorded on the Page, an impressive level of output. However, on the Conservative and Labour pages, the Top 500 users contribute a staggering 36% and 42% of all comments found. Less than half a percent of the user body thus produces almost half of all the comments encountered.

As shown in the final column of the table above, UKIP also prove far more successful at *retaining* this vociferous minority, with more than a 1/3 of their Top 500 serving as 'Full Timers' and commenting from January 2015 all the way to May 2016. The UKIP Page thus proves far 'stickier' as analysis of the Top 10 also suggested, with users commenting more

consistently than on either of the other Pages. UKIP succeed in attracting more of these engaged individuals than either of the other two parties, and they stick around much longer, suggesting their posting strategy with its issue focus has successfully worked in terms of brand-reach and profile strength within the wider attention economy, where attention is the 'currency' (Davenport and Beck, 2001) which the various owners of Pages must generate in order to maintain visibility.

Even amongst these unusually persistent and vociferous contributors we see the same pattern again and again, as a colourised depiction of the comment-body below produced by the Full Timers noted above shows differences similar to the graphs illustrated previously, with UKIP Page users forming a less volatile, more stable and consistent block of opinion across time with less of a drop-off following significant political events.
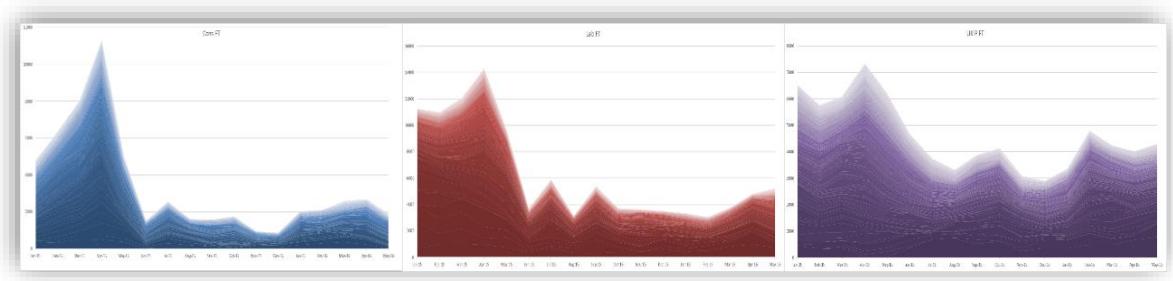
Figure 3.32 Comment Frequency amongst 'Full Timer' Users

That less than one percent of users produce such a large amount of the content on the three Pages paints a grim picture of its use as a radically accessible space and democratic instrument. That so few meaningfully engage along the lines set out by proponents of 'sharing' in deliberative ways is also a blow for digital idealists, and may ultimately reflect the kinds of obedient slacktivism nudged by design, the hands-off strategic use by parties bent on promotion, and a wider apathetic context where a single expression or networked piece of content is a much-preferred method of engagement than sustained deliberation. Yet it also reflects how few people 'offline' have traditionally shown a serious interest in the politics of the day, at least at the level of repeated and voluminous engagement.

Nevertheless, what made continued investigation important is how the existence of online political space marks also a difference in the nature of 'virtual' politicisation from older forms of direct democratic physical gathering. A key feature of the content within 'digital politics' is the 'silent majority' manifested by the millions of 'lurkers' who use Facebook, yet fail to

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register any evidence of their presence through specific contributions. Indeed, the number of likes and even shares may outweigh the number of comments, but this slacktivism also infers a sort of political 'dark matter', occupying vast amounts of space and influencing and being influenced by politics without contributing in more substantive terms. Recent work on the tactics of vociferous political trolls makes clear an awareness of the import of such massive, lurking blocs, as one notorious figure associated with the contemporary 'Alt-Right' explains in his delineation of online strategy - "You should assume that you will never manage to convince your ideological enemies of the merit of your position. Rather, the purpose of trolling is to convince people reading your comments of the merit of your position" (Hawley, 2017, p.73). Deliberation and the 'battle of ideas' sought by platforms is thus from the point of view of these committed political influencers less of a concern than the millions of eyeballs whose attention one might capture in more oblique ways.

It is, therefore, important to know exactly what *kinds* of content the single-comment communicative majority and vociferous minority produce, even where their contribution fails to result in long-term *deliberative* engagement. Although perhaps marking a failure of the ideals set out in platform celebrations associated with the manifestation of a digital public sphere, the kinds of consequences produced by the spatial relations between the human and non-human agents charted above can be immensely influential in terms of the way an issue of primary public concern is constituted and distributed across the digital political 'centre'. By assisting the constitution of the branded, segregated 'networked publics' that emerge here, taking part in what is drawn out as the "articulation of code and politics" (Langlois et al, 2009, p.427), the failure of Pages to resemble older deliberative 'salons' does not mark their impotence in political terms.

Indeed, the space manifested by the branded Pages studied here *is* influential, precisely in how it sets up the stage and provides sustenance and shape not only for the political strategy outlined and the user-negotiation in response, but what I conceive of as the 'articulation' of immigration empirically charted over the next two Chapters. As Hall notes, articulation is "the connection that can make a unity of two different elements, under certain conditions. It is a linkage which is not necessary, determined, absolute and essential for all time. You have to ask, under what circumstances can a connection be forged or made?" (Grossberg, 1996, p.141). In terms of the study here, these 'circumstances' are described in sociotechnical terms utilising the model of an assemblage outlined in Chapter 1, relating a range of users human and non, and a particular political context surrounding immigration. The assemblage model thus conceived melds conceptually with the articulation practices to be described, for "An

assemblage is a particular constellation of articulations that selects, draws together, stakes out and envelops a territory that exhibits some tenacity and effectivity" (Slack and Wise, 2005, p.129). Via the conceptual service of the assemblage, I could draw themes and narratives from data analysis that could then be illuminated as politically productive articulation practices, occurring within and *through* the specific spatial characteristics mapped out above. Noting the sociotechnical 'politics of the artefact' in this relational way pushes forward analysis of the elements put to work in the politicisation of specific issues, for "Articulation draws attention to the contingent relations among practices, representations, and experiences that make up the world. Assemblage draws attention to the structured and affective nature and work of these articulations" (2005, p.126).

What also becomes clear in the examination of shared space is not only how it beckons practices of partisan articulation, but how in both Page take-up and negotiation we see the first signs of a context fitting descriptions of a 'post-democratic' climate. In the apathetic neglect of Web 2.0 interaction, the promotional on-brand avoidance of contentious topics by both establishment parties and the whiff of PR and professionalisation, we can identify symptoms of what has been described elsewhere as the 'hollowing out' of liberal politics during the consensus-based 'long march of neoliberalism' (Hall, 2011). Where citizens fail to recognise authentic political affiliation due to this hollowing-out of the political centre, and an emphasis on third-way consensus-based parties, they turn elsewhere, becoming dissatisfied with established democratic vehicles that are alleged to represent their interests. For Crouch (2000) the term 'post-democracy' is a useful one, for:

> The idea of post-democracy helps us describe situations when boredom, frustration and disillusion have settled in after a democratic moment; when powerful minority interests have become far more active than the mass of ordinary people in making the political system work for them; where political elites have learned to manage and manipulate popular demands; where people have to be persuaded to vote by top-down publicity campaigns. This is not the same as non-democracy, but describes a period in which we have, as it were, come out the other side of the parabola of democracy.

Striking a similar note, Chantal Mouffe builds on several decades of work with the late Ernesto Laclau to describe how the move to a political 'centre' by mainstream parties characterises the way liberal-democratic politics have unfolded over recent decades across Europe and North America in the service of an alleged 'rational consensus' on the mechanics of neoliberal

globalisation. Yet with the decline of antagonistic oppositional politics in favour of a 'third way' middle-ground, there is a lack of legible democratic signs for parts of the populace 'left behind'. As she argues in a 2013 interview, "the problem with our post-political societies is that there is no difference basically between the centre-right and the centre-left. So there is nobody offering an alternative" ("A Vibrant Democracy...", 2013).

A vital tenet of the centrism these critics bemoan is the avoidance of dangerous and 'irrational' political conflict likely to unsettle proceduralism, the kinds of avoidance we see in the strategic party take-up of space noted above. Yet rather than assume that the relegation of irrational passions outside of politics will empower democratic society, theories of 'agonism' cite perpetual conflict as essential to the 'political' – "the ontological dimension of antagonism" that drives 'politics' - "the ensemble of practices and institutions whose aim is to organize human coexistence" (Mouffe, 2013, p.xii). Failure to acknowledge the formative role of passionate oppositional identities - and attempts to dismiss them - only encourage the success of populism and violent nationalism. Noting that identity is always a product of us/them conflict, agonistic frameworks see the attempted erasure of the antagonism associated with controversial issues as a naïve enforcement of a false or artificial political landscape, where consensus in the rational-critical sense may only emerge by excluding passions that are fundamental. As Honig (Pearce & Honig, 2013) argues:

> the secret lifeblood of the constitutional patriot is connected to things that are destabilising of orderly constitutionalism or proper proceduralism and therefore are defined out of the centre. But that centre of orderly politics is actually deeply dependent on the energy and animation and frankly, the fun, that come from gathering together around issues that are affectively charged.

When the centre excludes the meeting of these dangerous passions and they are confined to the fringes, they are ripe for populist harnessing.

As seen in the promotional, top-down approach detailed above, immigration appears as exactly the kind of territory too risky for centre-ground establishment parties to substantively tackle, leaving voters hungry for discussion to digitally assist in the domination of the issue by UKIP, the perceived outside challenger willing and able to offer their own radical 'amateur' propositions. As Dommett (2016, p.87) describes parties in the post-democratic era:

> As society has altered, parties were seen to need to alter their approach, no longer aggregating sectional interests but rather producing an agenda that would maximise

electoral appeal. This caused parties to move away from a bottom-up, inclusive model of politics to adopt a top-down approach where leaders, informed by professional expertise, would develop an agenda […] participatory opportunities were eroded and political choice was reduced.

We see in the data elaborated in this Chapter precisely how the two establishment parties appear to reflect the critiques above in their take-up of Facebook, as well as the way users navigate and respond to the context via the interactive platformed labour offered to a novel anti-establishment challenger. Thus, engaging the post-democratic concept through the findings established empowers an understanding of the institutional political environment in which competing political practice operates in the way described above, as well as acknowledging wider forces impacting relations than a techno-determinist portrayal focused solely on platform responsibility might beckon. At the same time, the empirical work outlined throughout the project speaks back to such work, and supplements what have often been theory-heavy approaches to the portrayal of contemporary political life typically less interested in an empirical rounding-out. In so doing, it strengthens their claims significantly.

Indeed, as we continue, I reveal how it is not only the design and negotiation of the 'space' outlined here marking the success of partisan populists and the context in which they operate, but also the kinds of digital speech and news shared within and across it; moving forward, we see users 'articulate' a political response to what is marked as a post-democratic crisis in representation.

Conclusion

As noted above, Facebook have made increasingly clear the kinds of ideological aspirations that have shaped the branding of the site, including the addition of various features and the design of its algorithmic core. Yet a focus on 'relevance' and 'personalisation' in both satisfying and maintaining users has led to patterns of use that combine with both political logic and partisan habits to manifest specific obstacles in the way of the realisation of technologically nudged democratic 'progress'. When the empirical reality of Facebook usage is held against the concepts of a public sphere drawn from historical literature, a 'digital public sphere' structurally suited to the sorts of political consequences demanded is found wanting.

Parties by and large are not utilising the interactive capacities of the site that are offered, partially as argued above as a result of the design of the site and the attention economy it

heralds, and partially due to a culture of electoral logic increasingly demanding parties avoid substantive concentration on contentious issues in order to avoid alienating potential voters. The two major parties adopt a promotional strategy ill-suited to producing the kinds of meaningful democratic interaction lauded when it comes to an issue dominating public concern. In their wake, the populist newcomer manages to achieve success in the attention-economy by pursuing the kind of issue focus they purposively avoid.

Based on 'travel' data and the analysis of response metrics, users in return appear to empower such practice by taking up the digital in ways that digital pessimists cite as harmful to the long-term health of rational, critical democracies, preferring single, monological communication and sticking to a particular Page branded within a popularity contest based on visibility and reach. These are the kinds of practices on the part of platform, party and user that result ultimately in the fragmentation and empowerment of partisan groups who are prevented from exposure to alternative views. As noted here, the relative success of UKIP in terms of issue domination and the employment of user labour suggest an appetite for populist partisanship quite at odds with the hopes of platform owners and the strategic pursuits of the major political actors taking up occupation of their site.

Given the nature of the digital 'salon' offered by Facebook, it becomes evident how certain forms of practice are empowered, yet in ways that do not meld with the ideals promoted by the 'sharing' demanded. Instead we see an arena marked by post-democratic angst and primed for the kinds of user-practice detailed over the next two chapters. The analysis to follow reveals how within the space described here particular kinds of constructive collective projects are underway, outlining how the failure of Pages to manifest a digital salon does not mean they fail to serve as a politically effective platform. As Slack & Wise (2005, p.129) argue – "To characterize that assemblage, we would have to do more than list its elements. We would be charged to 'map' the territory with attention to the power of this constellation to assemble specific bodies, actions, passions, and representations in particular ways, to give a world a shape, so to speak, in a concrete and imaginative way". In the following chapters, I map the articulation of travellers across the space detailed here and thus illuminate the world that is built around and through immigration as a primary issue of public concern.

4. Digital Speech and Democratic Deliberation

Many of the demands that exist in a society do not have an essentialist reactionary or progressive character. It is how they are to be articulated that determines their identity.

Mouffe, 2016

The subject that speaks is a warring – I won't even say a polemical – subject.

Foucault, 2004

Introduction

The last chapter detailed the nature of the space provided for the critical battle of ideas Facebook demand users 'share', and the ways in which it interacts with political strategy, user-habits and the kinds of practice manifested via relations between each. It revealed the ways in which the politics of design act in tension with a demand for personalisation, and how this tension interacts with the subsequent style of practice adopted by parties and users. In so doing, it showed Labour and the Conservatives absent from the discursive terrain of immigration, whilst UKIP took up the opportunity to capitalise on the apparent user-desire for engagement, successfully growing their brand 'reach' as they utilised immigration as a vehicle for success in the attention-economy. Despite the monological neglect of direct digital interaction shown by parties and evidenced by their web 1.5 approach, initial grounded exploration suggested that users nevertheless pursued *horizontal* interaction through comments beneath party posts. As detailed below, ideals around the sharing of 'speech' connect to democratic progress in ways that reflect their association with older 'public sphere' theory, that which emphasises rational, critical dialogue and the open and equal sharing of ideas. This chapter focuses therefore on the types of speech that emerge around immigration on each party Page, and reveals how users attempt to engage with each *other* even where parties remain at distance.

As the results indicate, given the ways literature on digital speech suggests emotive, personalised and hateful conflict characterising interaction - particularly around divisive political issues like immigration - the amount of relatively 'civil' deliberation uncovered empirically unsettles prior research. Furthermore, analysis of standalone comments breaks

down thematic content into a set of dominant problems, causes and solutions for immigration as crisis to reveal how migrants themselves are not explicitly framed here as the primary problematic element fuelling public concern. It is, rather, the failure of *politicians* to control the 'mass' numbers of migrants that emerges as the primary issue, with dominant narratives painting a general lack of faith in political institutions in ways that support accounts of the rise of populism and a decline in the public trust of political representatives.

Indeed, despite evidence pointing to elements of rational and critical justification employed in debate, consideration of alternative models of democracy that might prove a better analytical fit than a focused deliberative model illuminate the discursive co-presence of community-based language, flaming and the absence of consensus, each of these elements empowered by the character of a space outlined in Chapter 3, one that promotes sealed partisan chambers and sedentary patterns of Page browsing. By considering dialogue in threaded comment discussions that remain less 'visible' than the 'top-rated' comments one initially encounters, the latter are more accurately portrayed as the *façade* of deliberative 'consensus' drawn from monological expression. As such, the character of digital speech on the Pages studied around the issue concerned does not ultimately contribute to the manifestation of a 'digital public sphere' according to the ideals promoted in the branding of deliberative 'sharing' as a progressive democratic prescription. Rather, it suggests how platform, party and user relations come together in 'articulation' of the issue through space that is fertile for the spread of right-leaning populist sentiment it manifests.

Democratic Deliberation

As discussed in previous chapters, Facebook are not shy about the ideology behind the platform design and its projected use. Much of this emphasis has been specifically on communication, speech and the allowance for 'voice' - a term that appears in speeches by Facebook executives and stakeholders. Not averse to somewhat grandiose statements, Mark Zuckerberg argued that "we're kind of fundamentally rewiring the world from the ground up and it starts with people being able to communicate on a day-to-day basis" ("E-G8 Forum…", 2011) Indeed, "Founded in 2004, Facebook's mission is to give people the power to share and make the world more open and connected" ("Facebook to Participate…", 2015), and as Zuckerberg notes in 2010 : "that's the power of - of democracy in these systems, is that when you give everyone a voice and give people power the system usually ends up in a really good

place. So what we view our role as is giving people that power" (Sawyer, 2010). Amidst the cacophony of voices expected to emerge, he suggests that "what I expect will happen is that the best things rise to the top or it creates a much kind of fair ecosystem [sic]", for "the best opinions do win out in the public debate and everyone can participate in that" ("E-G8 Forum…", 2011). The ethos of connectedness and expressive community is thus tied to a progressive future for a better, more peaceful democracy. As part of this coming together, sharing involving self-expression around myriad issues is imagined as a global political dialogue, yet they reassure spectators that "This is not a battle of nations, it's a battle of ideas". As Zuckerberg suggested in 2016, "People go from legitimately having very few tools to make their voice heard to now having, uh, some very powerful ones and that can have big effects on, on civic discourse and make societies more open and, and be very positive" (Zuckerberg, 2016).

Indeed, speech itself emerges from discussion of platform goals as perhaps the most vital form of connection that Facebook encourage. Whilst design built around the ideology espoused does 'allow' the multimodal sharing of links and images, it is up to users how proficiently they take up these affordances and work them into the 'text' box provided on Pages. The emphasis drawn out from a study of company interviews and pronouncements suggest conversation is key, as Elizabeth Linder, former head of Facebook's European politics and government programme puts it: "Politicians have worked out that the power of social media comes from talking directly to people" (Bond, 2017). This is framed as multidirectional conversation about important matters effecting national and international citizens in a global context, and thus Facebook envisage their platform as a key vehicle for the realisation of what may be seen as an older concept of direct democracy, within which deliberation is considered vital.

Echoing the ideals illustrated above, the three British political parties in this study have also been explicit about their conception of online speech and its role in democracy. The recent and relative success of Jeremy Corbyn as Labour leader – assumed unelectable by veteran politicos - has in part been put down to his mobilisation of young voters through social media activism. Discussing the party's future following his election as leader, Corbyn suggested that "We need to get a strong, positive message across and we do that better on social media" (Edwards, 2017). Despite the older demographic associated with UKIP, social media has also been considered a key resource for them. "What is really clear is that the pickup in vote has been due to our success on social media" noted former UKIP leader Nigel Farage, as he championed the ability of social media to woo younger voters - especially women - and help ditch the 'old colonels' image of the party (Joseph, 2015). The Conservative Party too has

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invested heavily in online campaigning and Facebook has been a primary site for political promotion, as noted in Chapter 3. Perhaps the official Facebook Pages of parties are seen as likely to invite less of the vocal marginal 'extremes' Cameron denounced arising on Twitter (Cameron, 2015). Parties may differ in terms of digital strategy, but each acknowledges the political currency associated with wider, more transparent forms of communication and what Corbyn describes as a 'Politics that's kinder, more inclusive. Bottom up, not top down […] Real debate, not necessarily message discipline all the time. But above all, *straight talking* [emphasis mine]" (Corbyn, 2015)

As noted in Chapter 1, this focus on free political expression and dialogue that characterises the promotion of sharing - by all and with all - is rooted in idealistic norms outlined in earlier depictions of a dialogical 'public sphere'. This attitude to digital political speech revolves around the assumption that a vociferous battle over democracy is essential, yet should take the form of 'rational' and 'critical' deliberation towards consensus. As Zuckerberg argued in 2016 after various terrorist threats were made against him: "what Facebook stands for in the world is giving people a voice and spreading ideas and rationalism" (Stewart, 2016). The deliberative paradigm I locate in the branding of 'sharing' sees the generation of legitimacy through this public, transparent and equal opinion cultivation and exchange, resulting in rationally motivated and reasonable outcomes. As Habermas acknowledges in work several decades after publication of his 'Public Sphere' thesis: "Deliberation is a demanding form of communication, though it grows out of inconspicuous daily routines of asking for and giving reasons" (Habermas, 2006, p.413). These daily routines involving what might appear the banal 'everyday talk' do reflect the kinds of interaction associated with the always-on, embedded social network platforms that increasingly occupy the home, workplace and mobile devices. Furthermore, as Habermas continues, when "an implicit reference to rational discourse—or the competition for better reasons—is built into communicative action" then shared speech can truly become a vehicle for the realisation of "the cognitive potential of political deliberation" (2006, p.413). Thus, technologically enabled 'digital' speech on platforms - with a rational ethos 'designed-in' - may provide a novel alternative to a longstanding situation where "the political public sphere is at the same time dominated by the kind of mediated communication that lacks the defining features of deliberation" (2006, p.414). Where Facebook pursue design oriented in deliberative rationality, they seek the manifestation of a deliberative space for the allegedly natural 'desire and capacity' for rational critical dialogue.

Admittedly, Habermas was pessimistic about the potential influence of power structures and those elite "actors without whom no political public sphere could be put to work" (2006,

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p.416), and who remain likely to distort the natural dynamics of mass communication - namely journalists, politicians and intellectuals. Yet, as noted previously, social media champions of the democratic persuasion have taken the ideals of the Public Sphere and expanded upon them, conceptualising themselves as *outside* of the terrain of hegemonic mass media institutions, and shifting the emphasis to the charge of 'everybody' (Shirky, 2008) represented by their billions of non-professional users. These are the users from whom a discursive battle for ideas is assumed to emerge for the rational betterment of politics, along the lines suggested by Zuckerberg above. Although Habermas notes that "the stratification of opportunities to transform power into public influence through the channels of mediated communication thus reveals a power structure", he acknowledges that "This power is constrained, however, by the peculiar reflexivity of a public sphere that allows all participants to reconsider what they perceive as public opinion. The common construct of public opinion certainly invites actors to intervene strategically in the public sphere" (Habermas, 2006, p.419). It is on the latter point that the motivation of Facebook relies, alongside their view of the platform as being simply a *neutral* provider of opportunity and affordances.

As revealed in Chapter 3 however, the notion of Facebook as a neutral provider of shared space is deeply problematic. In the design of the space offered and the tension between its intended and unintended consequences, we saw obstacles emerge to prohibit the kinds of spatial utilisation and negotiation a functioning Digital Public Sphere demands. In terms of the kinds of speech analysed below, and the picture of user 'voice' that emerges, we see again how sociotechnical relations manifest in ways that present further obstacles to the realisation of a digitally effective 'salon', and instead characterise the *discursive* terrain as similarly dominated by right-leaning populist sentiment directly at odds with the platform ideals. However, the kind of speech that emerges is not easily categorised as what literature and more cautious accounts of digital politics outlined in Chapter 1 might term 'hate speech'. Below I describe the respective relations at work through analysis of the immigration-related comments users are most likely to encounter through 'visibility' metrics outlined in Chapter 3, as well as the longer discussions that 'quietly' emerge beneath.

As detailed in Chapter 2, the corpus for this section utilised a collection of 'most-liked' comments based on the algorithmic workings of Facebook and the heightened visibility of particular contributions, as well as a selection of discussions triggered by comments referencing immigration from three key periods: the 2015 General Election, the so-called migrant crisis in the summer of 2015 and the European Referendum in Easter 2016. Once the 100 'most liked' comments explicitly mentioning immigration were collected for all three

pages across the entire period studied, grounded exploration and iterative coding drew out particular formative and substantive patterns. This inductive work is detailed below.

Analysis of the 18 discussions constituted by long chains of comment-replies and selected across the three key periods utilises a pre-existing deductive analytical framework devised by Deen Freelon (2010). Freelon extends the work of both Habermas and Dahlberg to incorporate models of democracy that may more *aptly* characterise online discussions, beyond the dominant deliberative paradigm associated with the ideal conception of the 'public sphere'. He suggests a series of data measures allowing the categorisation of discussion contributions along Deliberative, but also Liberal Individualist and Communitarian lines: "a *deliberative* norm that entails asking questions, giving reasons, and avoiding insults when communicating across lines of political difference; a *communitarian* norm that celebrates those same behaviors within lines of difference along with advocacy of political action; and a *liberal individualist* norm in which adherents express themselves uncivilly and without listening to others" (Freelon, 2015, p.775). Given the emphasis on deliberation encoded within ideological conceptualisations of sharing, this model was adopted in order to acknowledge these modes where they do occur yet work also with alternative analytical frames that may allow critical insight into actually existing practices of shared speech. As Freelon (2010, p.1184) notes, "Instead of discarding non-deliberative posts as conceptual detritus, the framework would allow them to be contextualized alongside deliberative content within a broader conceptualization of how design influences online political conversation".

Combining inductive and deductive approaches in this way allows the evaluation of existing theoretical approaches, whilst also incorporating the potential for the generation of new theory. Together, results drawn from analysis of standalone comments as well as the discursive structure of the discussions that emerge indicate several major findings that relate to the overarching investigation.

Constructive Commentary and Popularity Metrics

As a preliminary finding, the most-liked comments explicitly referencing migration tended to cluster around particular periods. These correlate with peaks in the life-cycle of immigration as an issue, featuring the three periods noted above. There is some convergence between Pages, but a large amount of heavily-liked immigration comments on the Labour Page occur a month later than those that dovetail on the other two Pages.
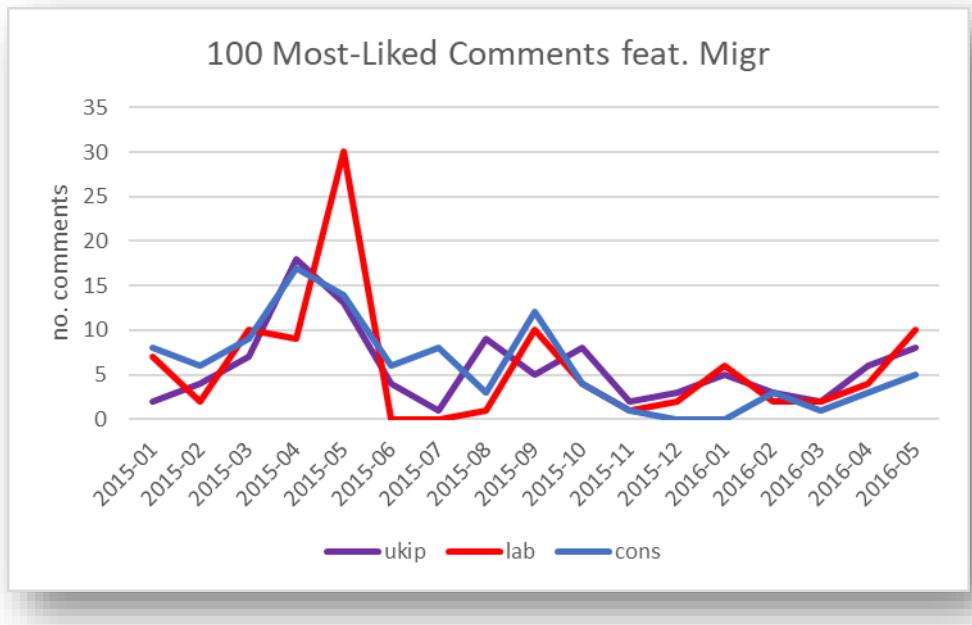
Figure 4.1 Most-Liked Comments mentioning Immigration over Time

In the wake of an unsuccessful General Election campaign, Labour saw their Page become a temporary site for user-led immigration discussion that attracted an unusual amount of attention. This indicates the ways immigration became an issue through and with which to *interrogate* party failings, illuminating the unease arising from the party's neglect of the issue as revealed in the previous chapter. Given the wider spread however, the themes drawn out below reflect not only the context of a General Election campaign, but also increased media coverage of the migrant 'crisis' over Summer 2015, as well as debate over membership of the European Union prior to the EU referendum in 2016. Given the dramatic increase in general Page activity during Easter 2015, particularly in terms of Labour's posting output, one might have expected *all* of the most-liked comments to emerge then. Instead, in drawing out a wider discursive terrain, the themes discussed below cover a longer period of time and thus present a more interesting sample reflecting the longer window opened by the project.

In terms of the relationship between political representation and technological affordance, brief empirical analysis of the directionality of comments shows some explicit desire for party response, but in general practice users are resigned to the dominant party style of 'promotional monologue' highlighted in Chapter 3. As a result, most of the most-liked comments around immigration were aimed into the digital 'ether', even where particular political actors were named as guilty for a variety of ills.
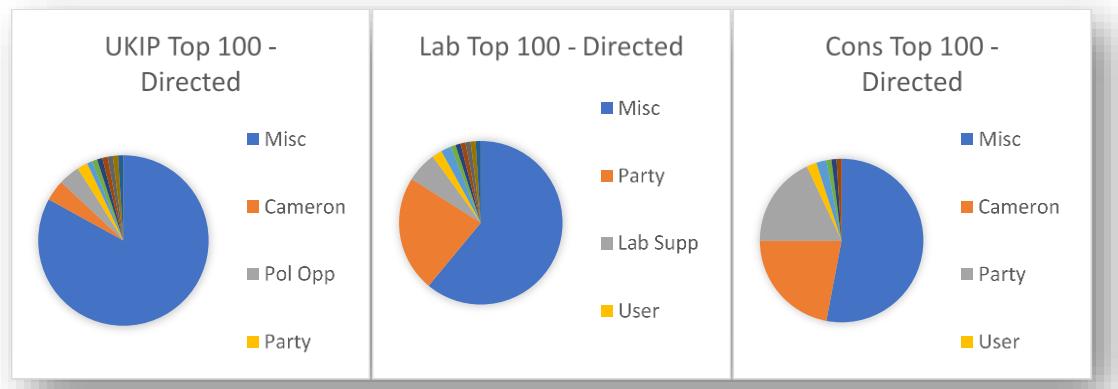
Figure 4.2 Top 100 Comments feat. immigration 'Directed To'

This was particularly the case on the UKIP Page, which saw the lowest % of specifically directed comments, with the Conservatives hosting the largest number. Instead of directing comments to the politicians Facebook seek to connect with voters, UKIP users were most likely to manifest an informal gathering of peers content to let off steam monologically, rally against party opponents and talk amongst themselves, slowly articulating a communal and discursive identity as detailed below. Users on the Labour Page also directed comments to everyone and nobody in particular, yet where they did direct messages it was most likely to the Party itself or to debate other Labour voters over issues in an *intra-ideological* fashion as noted. The Conservative Page also witnessed generally undirected speech, yet it also saw the highest amount of individually targeted messages to David Cameron, citing him and his party as directly to blame for immigration as a problem and/or exhorting him or them to take particular steps to solve it. Although a relatively minor occurrence, this take-up of space in a fashion more fitting Facebook ideals highlights the lingering demand for representative response, despite the lack of responses all three parties actually offered.

Wakey Wakey Cameron […] stealing UKIP policy […] You couldn't make it up!

Prime Minister […] We don't have enough to cover our own needs

did vote for you […] believed you […] have the backbone to stand up to Europe

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Indeed, with the personal style of presentation utilised by parties in their own posts, and a large % of communal language detailing what 'we' are - or will be - doing for 'our' country, a certain amount of directed user-responses is perhaps not surprising. However, there is a clear imbalance in terms of vertical dialogue between party and user, and as a result, users do not expect a reply from their representatives and thus do not bother to call them out directly, preferring to address a miscellaneous audience. Indeed, the relatively low number of directed messages in comparison to more generally expressed sentiments show belief in the effectiveness of such targeting was low, reflecting user scepticism towards the hands-off promotional style of the Page owners.

those wanting […] SNP/Lab […] careful what you wish for […] state we were in

you want 5 more years […] Same old Tory Bullshit […] always blaming […] immigration

Rather than evoke the kinds of representative interaction the ideals of the platform celebrate, the Page appears to resemble more of a sounding board amongst 'unknown' peers, and as becomes clearer during detailed analysis, in the case of UKIP in particular, a space for the flow of community language and partisan identity maintenance. Nevertheless, users continued to utilise the page to express grievances even where these lacked a particular direction, and they did so in surprisingly articulate form.

Figure 4.4 UKIP Comment Cloud

Figure 4.3 Labour Comment Cloud

As indicated by the word clouds illustrated here, frequency analysis of the most-liked comments around immigration tells a story of nationalism, nativism and 'truth', portraying a debate marked by anxiety around the nation and its rightful inhabitants, as well as concern over the factual representation of the issue. Closer formative and substantive analysis reveals the way arguments tease out specific narratives around the issue, that reflect the way these themes are evoked structurally. Indeed, following grounded exploration, the most-liked comments frequently appeared staged to feature description of immigration as: a problem, with an attribution of blame, and with a proposed solution.

Figure 4.5 Conservative Comment Cloud

By organising expression along these particular lines, commentators reproduced a longstanding debate strategy known as 'Stock Issues', requiring the delineation of argument into Ill, Blame and Cure sections (Jasinski, 2001, p.536; Lapakko, 2009, p.35; Hollihan and Baaske, 2005, p.82).

From the top 100 most-liked comments referencing the issue of immigration, the UKIP page saw 62% of comments feature all three of the Ill, Blame and Cure qualifications, with 53% of comments on the Labour site following suit, but only 38% on the Conservative page.

lack of housing [...] down to open door immigration [...] LibLabCon [...] UKIP for change

lying over immigration […] warned the Tories to stop […] not to vote Tory

no more immigrants […] human rights rubbish […] can't claim […] for 5 years

There is a remarkable amount of coherence in user attitudes as they explain why the issue is problematic, whose fault it is and how the issue should be dealt with.

The second most popular form of presentation saw identification of 'Ill and Blame' without explicit suggestion of a solution – 17% of comments on UKIP, 26% on the Labour page and 26% on the Conservative page.

Immigrants […] do the work […] white English […] better off on benefits […] cheers Blair

more immigration […] low wages […] Brussels interfering

Although comments varied wildly in length, and indeed styles of formal and informal language, given how many comments were staged to delineate the ill, blame and solution behind the immigration crisis, I began to wonder if the majority of most-liked comments may have been produced by a small cluster of motivated - or paid for - users. Yet analysis of the discursive 'equality' for the Top 100 liked comments reveals they were produced by 82 individuals on the UKIP page, 94 different people on the Labour page and 98 people on the Conservatives page.

Some accounts of argumentation theory and practice associate *four* 'Topoi' with stock issue debate, with the fourth being the 'cost' and consequences of the solution suggested (Jaffe, 2015). Yet it proved far more difficult to locate any substantial grappling with the issue of 'cost' within the comments analysed, despite the common identification and justification of Ill, Blame and Cure. Thus, the difficult work involved at the level of cost requiring lengthy justification of the solution presented and its potential consequences with regard other solutions was not typically pursued. That this step - vital to policy argumentation - is conspicuously absent, reflects the difficulty political parties themselves have had in articulating

a 'solution' to immigration as 'crisis'. As a result, many of the most popular, and thus most visible comments around immigration reflected a 'manifesto' style of presentation favouring identification of the issue, blame for its problems and a solution, in the absence of lengthy policy around alternative propositions.

As Hollihan and Baaske (2005, p.191) argue, "It is common for debaters to construct narratives that merge the three stock issues (ill, blame, and cure)". In order to elucidate the kinds of narrative emerging around immigration here, the suggested problems, causes and solutions were substantively categorised and compared across pages.

In describing the 'ill' immigration manifests, commentators on both the UKIP and Conservative Pages framed the issue in unambiguous terms as a clear 'problem' for the public, with a variety of causes.
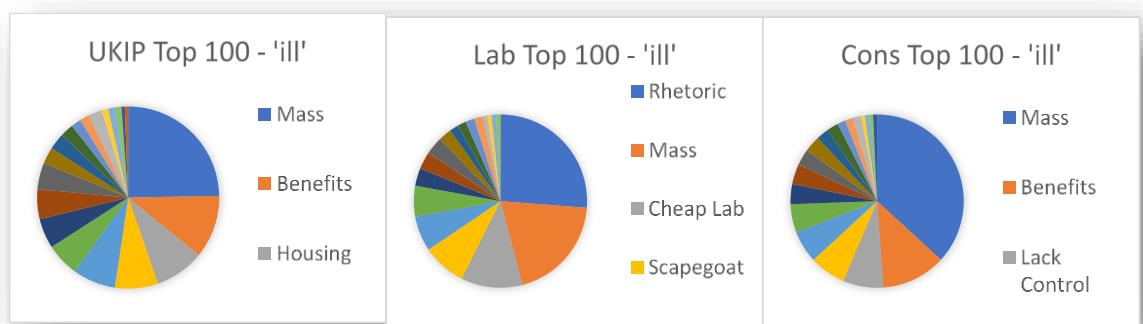
Figure 4.6 Comparison of 'ill' identified in Top 100 Comments feat. Immigration

In contrast, users on the Labour page followed a narrative that emphasised migrants *themselves* as victims, as a result of a discursively-generated 'false crisis'.

Trolls [...] blame immigrants [...] the script the Tories feed them [...] lies for years

On both of the former sites, comments identified 'Mass' numbers of immigrants as the primary problem, with the lure of 'Benefits' also scoring highly.

all these immigrants coming [...] Tories [...] Breaking all their promises

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> there's no money left [...] immigrants [...] pay in for 4 years before they can take out

On the Labour Page commentators instead pointed to right-wing rhetoric fuelled by Tory lies as the primary reason for public controversy, underpinned by UKIP's alleged scapegoating of migrants and wider racist populist attitudes.

> Ukippers [...] bunch of racists [...] bang on and on

Where alternative problems were suggested, concern over 'Mass' numbers and the related metaphors of flooding and swarming did score on the Labour Page despite the ongoing work of personalisation metrics thought to enforce ideological barriers. They emerge alongside the issue of immigrants serving as 'Cheap Labour', suggesting ongoing anxiety about surplus workers amongst users drawn to a Left Party, and foreshadowing unease within the ranks about a potential 'Lexit' that would emerge prior to the EU referendum.

> Flood the job market [...] driving down wages [...] supply and demand

Based on the data illustrated above, the fear and anxiety over immigration that emerges from a study of the 'Ills' framing it as a national problem is thus associated primarily across the centre studied here with the mass numbers of migrants on the move - the very size of human 'waves' breaking upon the British shore and importantly, the lack of political 'control' over borders. As Castles (2017, p.1540) notes:

> There is no doubt that the logic of numbers has come to dominate debates in many countries. Fears that the country would be "swamped" by mass inflows of migrants, and that this would lead to loss of jobs for nationals and a decline in wages and conditions to "Third World levels", were instrumental in the Brexit campaign, in

Trump's campaign for the US Presidency, and in the current propaganda of European extreme-right parties.

Mobility, when confined to this somewhat abstract textual form, remains a haunting 'spectre' (Diken, 2001, p.10), with a belief inferred that if the rapid movement of 'illegal' bodies and the rapid change to the 'volume' of states can be stopped somehow, everything will go back to normal and trust in effective governance might be rebuilt. There is little differentiation between refugees, asylum seekers and migrants emerging through the spoken problematisation of the issue evident in the most popular comments analysed here, with the focus instead simply on vast 'numbers' moving towards us in more general terms. Given the complementary presence of issues concerning welfare state capacity – specifically those of benefits and housing - also emerging as 'problems' more explicitly than any issue of culture, the metaphor of the nation as container in need of fortification (Taylor, 1994; Carr, 2012) from the increasingly fluid nature of global society is clearly doing influential conceptual work. As Anderson (2017, p.1533) argues, "The migrant exemplifies the fluidity of relations between nation, people, and state. Their presence becomes emblematic of the nation as beholden to business, human rights and European interests as well of mainstream politicians' disengagement with everyday problems". The problematisation of Immigration as an issue dominated by numbers and mobility thus articulates anxiety over the contemporary nation state and becomes a vehicle for a more general disenchantment with politics and democratic institutions. Yet the problem emerges here primarily as one of immigra'tion' rather than immigra'nts'; instead of the negative portrayal of migrant characteristics as an ill in and of themselves, users couch their anxiety in more abstract, 'acceptable' terms that avoid their simple categorisation as explicit prejudice. Vitriol is instead aimed at the politicians who have failed to negotiate the increasing fluidity and mobility of global life and protect citizen desire for what is assumed to be a natural and essential fixity.

Indeed, in terms of Blame, the relative dominance of particular narratives begins to become clear.
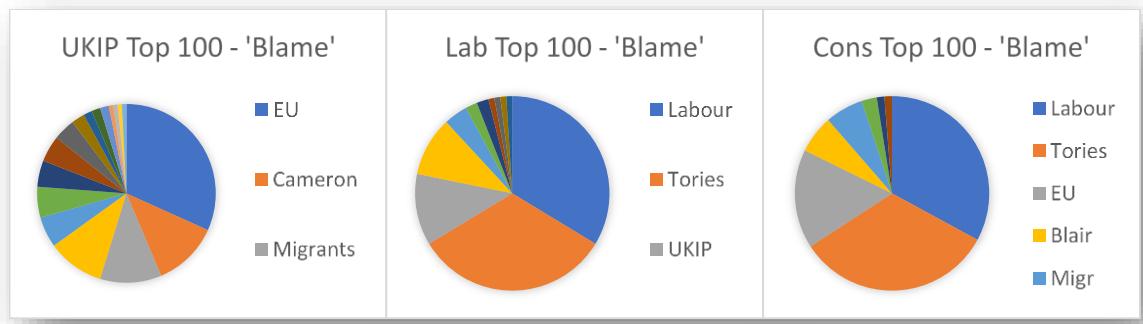
Figure 4.7 Comparison of 'Blame' identified in Top 100 Comments feat. Immigration

Perhaps unsurprisingly, the EU features heavily in blame attribution. In the wake of Brexit, assigning blame to a monolithic foreign entity appears to have had purchase *across* party divides, as the relative frequency of commentators on the Labour page blaming the 'EU' for the problems of immigration attests.

Take back control […] from the EU […] simple

Second World War […] EU is doing the same […] died in vain […] take over our borders

Yet Labour itself was also cited as a primary casual factor, *even within* the Labour page; dissenting comments expressing support for other parties thus were powerful enough to have found some algorithmic success in negotiation of platform design. These dissenting comments were also some of the few to articulate older, explicitly racist campaigns in a rare gesture towards the sorts of hate speech feared. Yet again however, categorisation as 'hateful' remains tricky, for the language used replaces a racial epithet with the term 'migrant'[5], suggesting its normalisation in speech as a more acceptable yet still affective term not quite completely obscuring its racialised past.

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[5] See for example the infamous Smethwick election of 1964

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want a migrant for a neighbour you vote labour […] get our country back

In terms of individual responsibility, Cameron himself was named fairly frequently on the UKIP page, yet a significant proportion sought to blame the legacy of Tony Blair and the previous Labour government; in fact, the leader of the party across the period studied – Ed Miliband – was largely ignored as irrelevant in causal discussions, even amongst political opponents. The narrative frequently espoused by UKIP concerned the opening of the EU floodgates by socialists bent on engineering generations of votes, and proved a popular one even beyond their own Page (Doyle, 2014).

Blair sold this country out […] open door policy […] not vote labour again

'Current Policy' was also a frequent site for blame, and on the UKIP page the identification of nefarious 'Politicians' and a broken 'System' also described several comments attacking politics and the status quo in general.

No government […] 60 odd years […] any grip on immigration […] enough is enough

Selfish interests […] put the British people before money and greed […] restore our culture

Yet again, migrants themselves escaped primary attention in the allotment of blame, coming third even on the UKIP page where they were eclipsed by aggression directed at the 'elites' in Government and Supra-National Institutions. Indeed, user-speech across Pages characterised the issue as a problem primarily through the blaming of political mismanagement and the failure of political representation. In terms of identifying the cause of the problem and those responsible, narratives are thus more easily described along lines of anti-establishment

populism than the kinds of exclusionary Othering strategies long associated with such a racially-charged topic.

Recent work by Cleland (2016, p.135) on 'fringe' group spaces within online social networks suggests attitudes towards the issue emphasise non-Muslim white 'victims' of Islamic extremism. Here, 'native' populations do indeed emerge as victims - but of the political elites in charge of demographic 'numbers' and national border 'control'. One possible explanation for the almost total absence of what might be considered 'hate speech', that which causes considerable anxiety amongst platform owners and political actors alike, is that heavy moderation by Page or platform owners has blanched the Page of any signs of extremism. Indeed, given that some comments were collected following a period of several weeks, more extreme expression may have been pruned out. It is understandable that as the official Pages of parties, moderators might seek to erase them in order to present their users - and thus assumed followers - as more reasonable than those of others. Unfortunately, platforms don't readily share deletion stats and moderation information, preferring an 'invisible removal' strategy (Gillespie, 2018).

Nevertheless, during analysis of the following section studying longer user discussions, signs of comments having been removed – through for example comments directed at contributions that no longer existed - were largely absent. Furthermore, early grounded exploration into the corpus did indeed encounter various signs of more traditional racial hatred, misogyny and generally inarticulate rage, but these were rare occurrences and typically failed to garner the kinds of liking activity that would raise their *visibility* to both platform users and Page owners alike. Moderation of the several thousand comments that typically accompany the several party posts made per day is, as discussed above, a seriously labour-intensive job. Based on the lack of concern for follow-up party responses to individual call-outs and the general hands-off treatment of Facebook pages by parties keener to adopt a monological promotional use, I remain unconvinced that they engage in such attentive moderation work. Rather, it is more likely that within this empirical measure of the most popular comments, 'hate speech' directed at migrants and minorities failed to find relative user-support and thus remained fairly 'invisible' in comparison to the vitriol aimed at politicians and institutions.

With regard to proposed solutions to immigration as problem, analysis revealed a short tail on the UKIP page, a moderately diverse list on the Conservative Page, but a far longer tail than present in assignments of Ill or Blame on the Labour page. This paints the solution 'landscape' as more heterogenous for those drawn to discussion within Labour's space, and the general

political rhetoric concerning coherent solutions to the alleged crisis as vague. UKIP discussants in contrast seemed to clearly identify a rather reductive set of steps to take, mirroring the somewhat shallow if simplistically effective manifesto of the party itself.
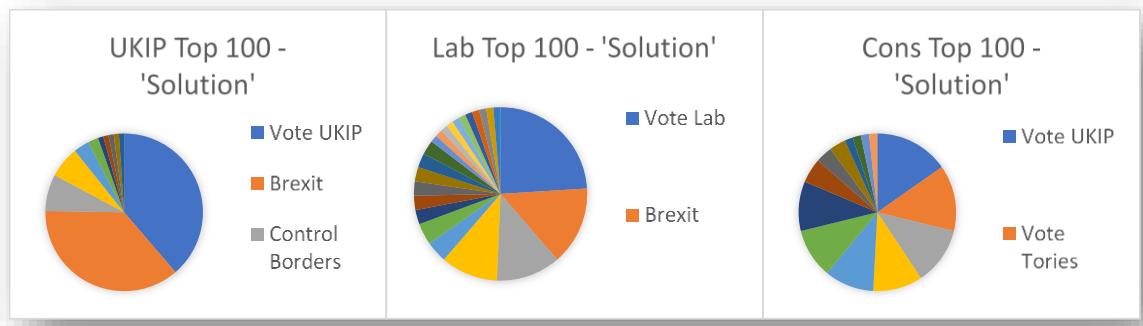
Figure 4.8 Comparison of 'Solutions' identified in Top 100 Comments featuring Immigration

Again, on the UKIP and Labour pages, 'Vote UKIP' and 'Vote Labour' were the most popular, simplistic solutions, whilst Brexit was also suggested as a major fix for immigration woes in an apparent sign of things to come. Yet in contrast, on the Conservative page the most frequent solution in fact vented disagreement with the branded owners of the space to propose *UKIP* as a solution. For commentators on the UKIP and Conservative Pages, a need to 'control borders' was also suggested as the best way to 'fix' the perils raised, with the alleged porous nature of the British Isles causing considerable anxiety. Both the Labour and Conservative Pages also witnessed several 'anything but "Not Party X"' answers, indicating that change itself was a popular choice regardless of detailed consequences, and combined with the popularity of UKIP and Brexit solutions across Pages hints at the desire for "*action for action's sake*. Action being beautiful in itself" (Ecco, 1995).

Which party opened the flood gate [...] do you realise? [...] think before you vote!

the Labour party would betray the young [...] not now vote for a party [...] idiot in charge

The appetite for some kind of 'radical change' connects with Brexit demands even where sophisticated levels of knowledge concerning the bureaucratic aftermath were low.

> causing the population to grow too fast […] leave so the government will wake up

> Thousands of migrants entering Europe […] This is the madness of the EU […] Vote Leave

There is significant empirical support here for accounts of growing scepticism within British politics, that supports the rise of a populist alternative even where weak on substantial policy proposals (Inglehart and Norris, 2016). Where commentators on the Labour Page pushed back against more negative depictions of the topic, they emphasised a need for an alternative *rhetoric* around the issue, focusing on discursive *over* material factors, and reflecting wider belief that debate over immigration had become 'toxic' to a degree that prevented objective or rational intellectual debate (Birrell, 2013).

> refer to people fleeing from ISIS as refugees […] stop encouraging the haters

> migrant rhetoric […] dichotomy of us and them […] breeds nothing but hatred

As illustrated by the comparative analysis of all problems, blame and solutions detailed below, findings drawn together ultimately hint less at the determined expression of anti-migrant hate-speech, and more at the rise of populist attitudes and anti-elitism illustrating a wider climate

of political scepticism.
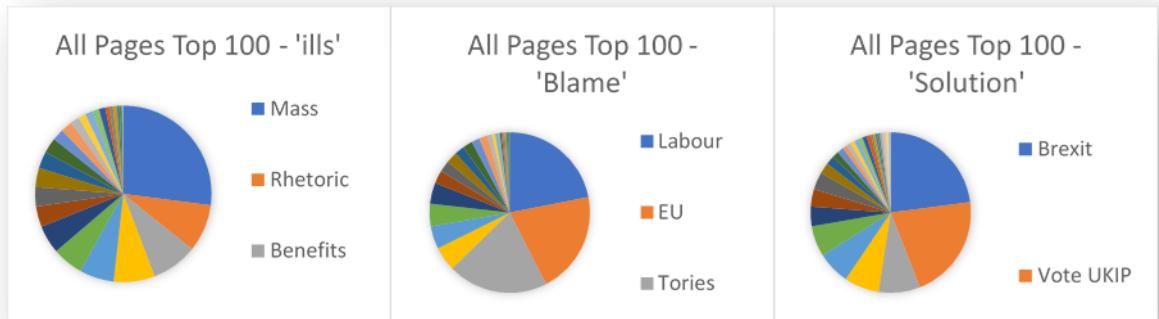
Figure 4.9 Multi-Page Comparison of 'ill', 'Blame' and 'Solutions' in Top 100 comments feat. Immigration

Indeed, if one were to walk away from an encounter with the most visible comments referencing the issue after browsing each of the major party Pages, the story encountered is of failure to control numbers amidst 'mass' immigration, and failure to *honestly* articulate the problem. This results in expression marked by anti-political frustration and the desire to enact radical political change. With 'Vote UKIP' scoring second highest on all solutions, and Brexit the first, their populist platform built almost entirely around immigration as a single issue appears to resonate with those who feel the political status quo has failed. Within Brexit debate, the leave campaigns split into 'Vote Leave' and LeaveEU, and the two camps provided very different explanations for why immigration and the EU had served as the major issue pushing public opinion and political action. In contrast to the LeaveEU camp and their campaign emphasising the tide of immigrants about to engulf a small nation-state with a particular kind of cultural identity thought to be at risk, the 'Vote Leave' campaign preferred to stage debate as one around political sovereignty, parliamentary efficacy and anxiety about the loss of political, rather than cultural heritage (Snowdon, 2016). It is these concerns that on the surface appear to reflect the narratives evoked by the most-liked comments expressed here in *textual* form.

Yet rather than set aside 'nativism' as a key factor influencing public concern, and thus assume older ideas about migrant 'Othering' have somehow lost their impact, I suggest the design and use of the platform in spatial terms is influencing the kinds of comments users produce. Thus, the sociotechnical discourses here take as much from the wider issue context as from the kinds of platform utilised for its discussion. Given the ways Facebook pages are branded as the

'home' of political parties, such virulent anti-political scepticism reflects in part the consequences of design and is indicative of user-desire for more vertical communication, the lack of which contributes to a tone heavily focused on the failures of systemic representation. Facebook also aggressively promotes the platform as a 'nonymous' space, requiring users provide a genuine digital representation. As noted in the previous chapter, research leads one to expect less violent forms of rhetoric and more implicit forms of prejudice than on platforms where the use of pseudonyms and alternative personas are more accepted.

The empirical evidence collected from the most popular standalone comments around immigration thus highlights how users negotiate party Pages primarily to express dissatisfaction with politics and policy makers. They construct narratives through the presentation of stock issues that reflect an overarching theme of political scepticism and populist anxiety resulting from the failure of political control over the mobility of non-nationals, and a lack of trust in politicians by both left and right to either handle the issue, or discuss it in honest, objective terms. As a result, anxiety abounds as users articulate a 'nation-at-risk'. Indeed, once we turn back to frequency counts for the most-liked issue-related comments and take-out party names, but *reintroduce* the common stop-words removed during typical operating procedure in the previous quantitative analysis, consistent use of deictic terms (De Cillia et al, 1999) 'we', 'us', 'ours', 'they', 'them' and 'theirs' served to build a sense of community amongst commentators painted as victims, particularly on the UKIP page; these are victims of both migration as phenomenon and a crisis in representation. They indicate the kinds of discursive work fostering an in-group response to immigration as a trigger, in which the nation is both a source of belonging, and an *object* that belongs.
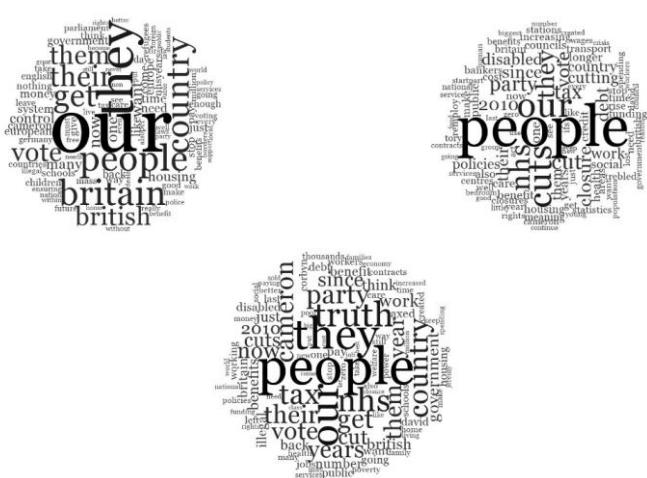
Figure 4.10 Deictic Term Centrality

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Whilst users on Pages may differ about what kind of 'truth' parties are obscuring, analysis draws out the sense that political rhetoric misleads voters - about the scope of the problem identified as well as what should be done. The amount of populist distrust in political representatives may not be an entirely novel phenomenon, but the changes in political strategy over the increased visibility of individual politicians, a growth in the media focus on their personal 'scandal' and the reach of such coverage through changing technological means contribute to the rise in expressions of scepticism that prefer to target the failure of politicians 'character' and a breakdown in trust (Thompson, 2000); it is these themes that become the focus rather than the migrant subjects. Yet as a result, these expressions also discursively shore up the nascent securitisation industries outlined above, who aim to step into the gap left by political incompetence and ensure border security via the profitable, private sector establishment of a 'Crimmigration' (Stumpf, 2006) nexus.

The formal and thematic evidence here helps to explain the contemporary political landscape around immigration, as well as the ways in which users intervene through the provision of technological platforms offered for 'voice' that in turn impacts the kind of thematic content that emerges. Whilst the algorithmic workings of the platform privilege an encounter on the respective pages with what appears on the *surface* to be rationally deliberated consensus about the primary factors involved in public concern over immigration, it is nevertheless important to note the actual levels and character of interaction taking place between users in the threaded discussion that lurks beneath. Analysis of the kinds of dialogue that emerge suggest the ideals rooted in older ideas about rational critical debate and deliberative contestation face particular obstacles, as users police their respective ideological sub-spheres, flame ideological opponents and build community intra-ideologically against political opponents.

Deliberation, Dialogue and Justification

As discussed above, noting the character of individual *monological* expression encountered through standalone comments portrays some thematic coherence emerging from what are voted up by users as the dominant narratives around the topic. Yet, given the ideals of the platform and the analysis of its actual spatial characteristics outlined previously, these are not enough to confirm the ways digital infrastructure encourage the kinds of *dialogical* interaction

and deliberation in producing a genuine consensus that ideals around the Public Sphere demand.

Indeed, although the model devised by Freelon (2010; 2015) allows analysis of the discursive characteristics of longer, threaded discussions, and suggests the deliberative and argumentative potential of platform space is in fact taken up quite eagerly, it supplements a strictly deliberative framework with alternative and illustrative interpretations that ultimately problematise the portrait of a deliberative and rational 'battle of ideas'. In its original formulation, Freelon's model suggests 15 indicative metrics to evaluate discussions, organised within Deliberative but also Liberal Individualist and Communitarian categories.

Figure 4.11 Discussion Category Features

Model	Metric
Liberal Individualist	Monologue
	Personal Revelation
	Personal Showcase
	Flaming
Communitarian	Ideological Fragmentation/Homophily
	Mobilization
	Community language
	Intra Ideological Questioning
	Intra Ideological Reciprocity/Response
Deliberative	Rational Critical Argument
	Public Issue focus
	Equality
	Discussion Topic focus
	Inter Ideological Questioning
	Inter Ideological Reciprocity/Response

Freelon does suggest however that "this list does not claim exhaustiveness" (Freelon, 2010, p.1178) and that "researchers should feel free to appropriate" the model for "it may not always be necessary to measure all 15 features, as some will almost never be present in certain forums" (2010, p.1186). Based on the platform chosen for this study, and following grounded exploration of the corpus, I have removed 'Ideological Fragmentation' and 'Personal Showcase' from the results. The first metric is more suited to an overview of discursive data

rather than analysis of individual comments within discussions. The latter – inclusion of user-generated content – was completely absent from the comments studied for this chapter, however it forms a significant part of Chapter 5's analysis of hyperlink networks. Through empirical application, Freelon's extended model of deliberative measurement allows a critical evaluation of the discussions taking place amidst Facebook's celebration of a 'battle of ideas', and in its acknowledgment of both communitarian and liberal individualist features empowers the framing of 'articulation' practices detailed below.

As noted in Chapter 2, 18 multi-comment threaded discussions were drawn from the three Pages, from the 3 key periods that developed beneath some of the more popular single comments. These covered a wide range of issues and varied in length, and although immigration formed a part of the comment triggering discussion, it often played less of a role than other topics that were simultaneously raised. Discussion would sometimes draw out immigration in order to place it at the centre of debate, whilst on other occasions it would be largely ignored as other topics came to the forefront. In several cases, the party's official post under which discussions took place made no mention of the issue at all, and it was left to commentators to organically cultivate it. This varied across pages however.

On the UKIP page, official party posts followed by immigration-focused debate featured an attack on EU directives facing UK lorry drivers, the expression of thanks for watching a BBC election debate, an attack on Corbyn's flip-flop concerning the EU and a more general attack on the EU's alleged plan for fiscal, political and military union. However, two posts specifically raised the topic, including one featuring a complaint about unskilled migrants and the impact on young unemployment, and the other offering a critique of mandatory EU asylum quotas. Posts on the Conservative page that triggered immigration-talk focused on the budget, on Labour's irresponsible attitude to nuclear power, Cameron's vision of a 'One nation' political landscape, a general survey requesting opinion around the first 100 days of government, Sadiq Khan's mayoral campaign, and a demand that users pledge to 'Vote Conservative!' in 2016 local elections. Labour posts atop immigration discussion focused on the 2015 General Election manifesto, Miliband's critique of UKIP's fear-based politics, technical advice concerning joining the party, an excerpt from a piece in the FT outlining Corbyn's attachment to the EU, an invitation to an inequality workshop and a 2016 election reminder focusing on the NHS. Thus, of the posts triggering user discussion about immigration, only two on the UKIP page explicitly mentioned the issue, whilst none of the posts on the Labour and Conservative pages signalled the topic at all. Yet, discussion was triggered by a well-liked comment relating to it nonetheless.

Whilst the design of Facebook Pages typically requires an original post before users can comment, and party posts explicitly about immigration were relatively rare over time, users were able to *drive* discussion to it, indicating an ongoing desire to debate the issue regardless of political strategy. In this way, despite the promotional use of Parties that attempts to set a particular agenda for discussion, users are able to intervene through comments and partially set their own agenda, both through expression of the issues that most concern them, and via platform features that rank and file the most 'popular' comments. In the absence of journalistic mediators, politicians were to an extent unable to retain control over the issues that arise or push discussion away from problematic areas. Were they to intervene in debate, and attempt their own measures of control, then perhaps discussion would remain closer to the party line. However, as noted, they show little interest in moving discursively 'amongst the people', perhaps fearing the tide of sentiment assembled by the masses whose gathering is enabled by Facebook's emphasis on open participation.

In formal terms, the discussions that arose featured a variety of rhetorical approaches to deliberation, justification and consensus, and are broken down as follows. First, comparison of Pages within the democratic categories devised by the model draws out minor differences in the character of discussions generated.

Liberal Individualism

Citing the work of Dahlberg, Freelon (2010, p.1176) sketches the 'Liberal Individualism' democratic model in terms of an emphasis on personal expression, self-actualisation and the pursuit of self-interest and one-way communication. Emerging from 19th Century European thought, the moral worth of individual and personal liberty is emphasised above all, beneath a neutral state framework "within which different and potentially conflicting conceptions of the good can be pursued" (Kymlicka, 1989, p.883). Based on discussion analysis, the Labour Page scores highest for the presence of the three associated major metrics noted above. Given the data established during analysis of 'blame' for immigration, and their role as the most prominent 'Remain' party during Brexit voting, it is unsurprising that Flaming was a prominent feature of commentary on their Page, particularly around the time of the EU referendum. Yet the Page also scored highest in terms of Personal Revelation, as users narrated their own position towards both the Party and the issue in terms of personal situatedness, confession and the action they would be taking as individuals with regard voting.

> Went to my doctors [...] full of aliens [...] thought I was in Pakistan

> I hate Labour [...] everything they stand for

> Numbers undercutting [...] neighbour was a bricky [...] all of the workers were Poles

Similarly, commentators on the Labour Page were the most likely to utilise a *monological* form of expression in comparison to the other parties, despite comments taking place 'within' a discussion thread.

The Conservative Page showed relatively little of the relevant discursive aspects, although flaming around discussions was slightly higher than that on the UKIP page, indicating the presence of some partisan attacks within discussions as critical commentators took aim at the Tory 'brand' more generally, stimulated by their position as the current national care-takers, and the alleged character of supporters.

> You are a true con-servative [...] conning everyone!

> a young child like yourself [...] wet behind the ears

> back up your deluded brainwashed opinions

Overall, Liberal Individualist aspects were in fact weak across Pages and throughout the time-period studied. As revealed below, there were far more habits fitting Communitarian and Deliberative modes of speech. However, the steady presence of Flaming was to prove a consistent obstacle to their potentially progressive democratic outcomes and indicates how influential even a small number of critical users can be.

Figure 4.12 Discussion Liberal Individualist Characteristics

Communitarian

The Communitarian model, "in contrast to theories that emphasize the centrality of the individual, emphasizes the importance of society in articulating the good" (Etzioni, 2015). It is primarily associated with a variety of philosophical responses to Rawls' 1971 'Theory of Justice', and its alleged devaluation of community in favour of the rationally ascendant individual. Freelon utilises it as an analytical measure that assumes a desire for 'shared understanding' between group members, marked by a rhetorical focus on community ties, in/out group empowerment and collective identity construction (Freelon, 2010; 2015). Compared to the Liberal Individualist model, each of the Pages exhibited far more speech fitting a Communitarian mode of engagement, with the UKIP page scoring higher than either of the other two sites. Commentators on the UKIP page were also far more likely to direct responses to those exhibiting the same ideological approach to the issue than those on other Pages, reflecting lower levels of dissent and ideological fragmentation on the page more generally.

I agree [...] wish we could change the system

how many of you have heard your MEP speak? [...] very interesting

immigrants need to know that we arn't racist

exactly my point

you are right [...] but they still manage to blame us

User-speech on the Labour page showed less ideological clustering, although such activity did spike during the so-called 'Refugee Crisis' in the summer of 2015, within a discussion involving intra-ideological questioning about the best kind of response to the crisis by the Labour party themselves.

How you people have fallen for this man

show a modicum of social empathy [...] you're branded "hard left"

he was remaining true to the Labour party's principles

I agree [...] should be united

In terms of the use of 'community language', the UKIP page again saw more evidence than the other two. Communitarian talk did spike suddenly on the Conservative page in August 15,

primarily due to a comment about immigration triggering discussion of the NHS beneath a Conservative post addressing David Cameron's 'One Nation' vision.

> we have a soft touch [...] we have to try and disrupt em [...] they aint getting nothing

> these people will never respect our way of life! They do not belong here.

The NHS has been the subject of heated political debate in an age of austerity, and its presence as a co-topic with immigration saw several users on the Conservative page detail their own position as workers within the healthcare system, then set forth a collection of 'objective facts' about the real impact migrants had on a system desperately in need of more support.

Together, discussions suggested a higher frequency of Communitarian than Liberal Individualist modes of engagement, particularly on the UKIP Page, indicating the discursive work done to shore up communal attitudes towards the issue concerned and illustrate the ongoing construction of partisan boundaries.

Figure 4.13 Discussion Communitarian Characteristics

Deliberative

In contrast to the prior models, the Deliberative mode emphasises "rationality, equality, reciprocal listening, political topicality and cross-cutting debate" (Freelon, 2010, p.1177) and is the one most reminiscent of Habermasian ideals and reflective of Facebook's mission statement. It is said to emphasise the exchange of reason in pursuit of the better argument "excluding the naked expression of individual or group interests, taken simply as such" (Weinstock and Kahane, 2010, p.2). It is also the one literature on digital interaction would lead us to assume is the hardest to identify.

Yet surprisingly, and as evidenced below, the most frequent categorisation of speech on all three pages did in fact best fit metrics within the deliberative model. Almost all of the comments within discussions maintained a focus on immigration as a public issue, as well as

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the initial comment topic that triggered the thread. 'Equality' amongst commentators was consistently high, indicating that comments were widely distributed across a large body of users. Labour showed the lowest equality score in May 16, within a thread where only 35 unusually vocal users managed to produce 122 comments around the notion of Corbyn neatly solving the country's major problems, including that of immigration. In terms of cross-cutting inter-ideological debate, both Labour and the Conservative page scored highly, largely as a result of opposing partisan commentators who successfully navigated 'un-liked' terrain. Yet there were ultimately far more 'responses' between partisans than 'questioning', with the former often also involving flaming and/or personal insults along Liberal Individualist lines. Nevertheless, inter-ideological 'questioning' did occur, featuring in almost half of all discussion comments on the Labour and Conservative pages - although less on UKIP's page - and indicating a more open approach to debate and a desire to confront, if not *believe* the presence of challenging, oppositional dialogue.

You put yourself in their shoes would you behave any different..?

who took us into a false war..?

can you not see how those statistics are skewed…?

I take time to check data […] wish to contribute to an intelligent debate…?
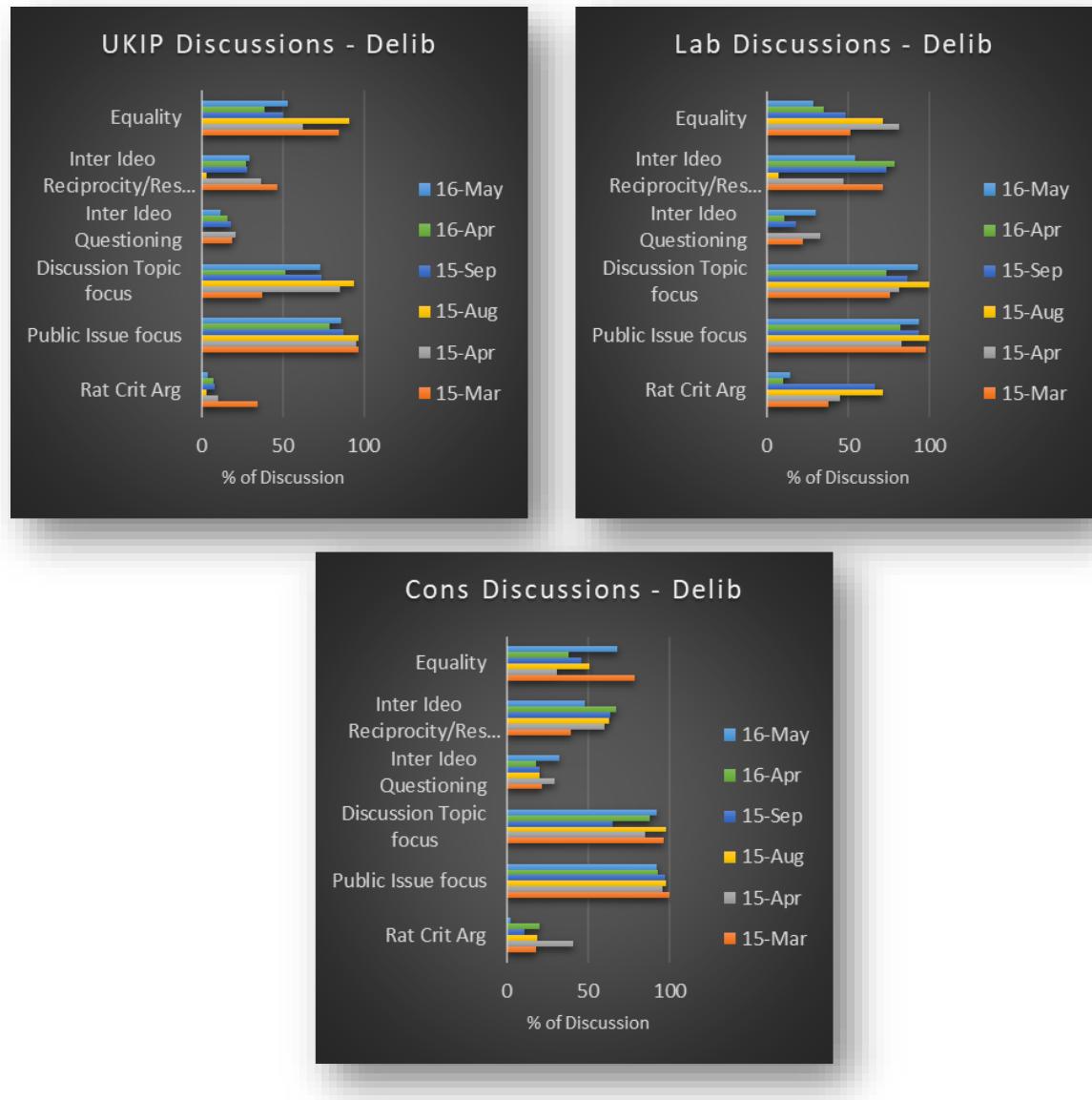
Figure 4.14 Discussion Deliberative Characteristics

Perhaps the key aspect of the deliberative model in terms of the ideals associated with conceptions of the Public Sphere is that of 'rational critical argument'. Again, given the literature, one is led to assume that online discussions rarely feature speech that would qualify. Yet analysis of the comments studied drew out some evidence of such interaction, although this varied across pages with the Labour page the most likely host. To qualify for the measurement, comments should incorporate "the willingness (to say nothing of the ability) to use logical, methodical appeals to the common good in arguing for one's position" (Freelon, 2010, p.1181). They should also include *justification* for the position taken.

Comments on the UKIP page showed by far the lowest amount of such speech, save for a discussion during the 2015 General election in which the triggering comment made explicit the user's opposition to *immigration*, rather than *immigrants*.

I dont hate immigrants I hate mass immigration […] public services […] nearly at breaking point

This careful justification appeared to stimulate more 'rational critical' debate, and thus the nature of the initial comment appeared able to set the tone for the discussion that followed.

As illustrated below, when taken as a whole, discussions emerging around immigration on these pages showed a surprising amount of speech that would fit a 'deliberative democratic' conception of engagement on the platform. This was found despite the emotive and divisive nature of the issue at hand, as well as the design of the platform itself that might have stifled the deliberative ideals encoded within the mission statement through its personalisation tendencies and the consequences for partisan debate.
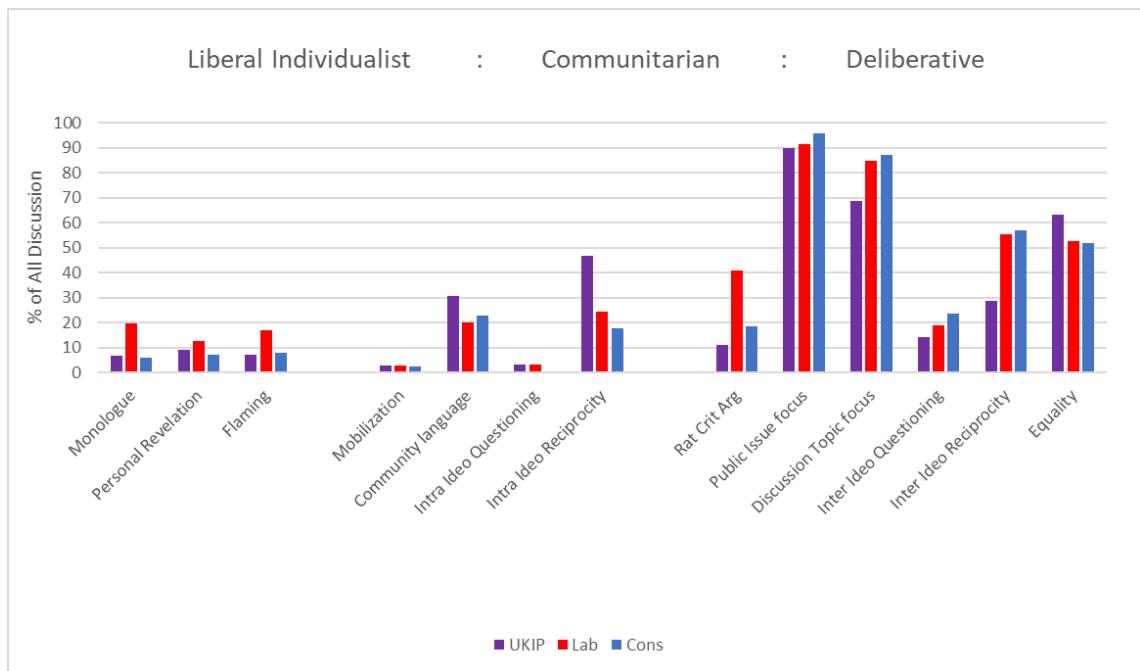

Figure 4.15 All 18 Discussions - Comparison

More accurately, however, they are best described as 'largely' Deliberative, with consistent Communitarian aspects and a minor amount of Liberal Individualist engagement. The UKIP Page was the most likely to witness discussion between a wide body of participants, engage intra-ideological discussion amongst those with similar stances on the issue and most frequently utilise communal language. The Labour Page was the most likely to see rational, critical use of argument, yet also the most open to user monologues, personal revelation and the use of flaming and personal attacks. The Conservative Page saw the most consistent topic focus, and the highest number of users asking questions of ideological opponents yet featured the lowest amount of speech encouraging political mobilisation and the lowest amount of personal revelation.

That discussions take on a significant deliberative character appears surprising given what we expect from online talk more generally, but particularly around a contentious and divisive issue within a space designed to personalise content and, as a result, empower barriers around ideological communities. However, the presence of other characteristics that point to alternative conceptions of discursive democratic engagement offer a challenge to those who might eagerly beckon a digital public sphere.

Indeed, although Liberal Individualist elements were sparse, flaming in the form of personal insults was evident to an extent across all discussions and throughout time, and as Freelon (2015, p.786) notes in a later study on discourse architecture, "insults may thwart the ostensibly salutary effects of deliberation. Indeed, there is reason to suspect that *insults may exert a stronger influence than reasonable talk*" [emphasis mine]. Similarly, the Communitarian use of in/out-group language was persistent on all three pages, alongside the presence of cross-cutting inter-ideological debate. Around an issue like immigration, such language infers a natural and essential national 'we' and 'us' indicative of what Oaten (2014) suggests as a preoccupation with identifying the 'true' victims of unpopular political policy in what becomes a 'zero-sum' game. Yet, as noted in the previous section, talk on these Facebook pages was more likely to utilise such rhetoric to construct boundaries between citizens and politicians or voters of one party or another, rather than 'natives' and 'foreigners'.

Again, given the way platform design emphasises Pages as the respective 'homes' of particular parties and thus their supporters, much of this communal language was used in the discussions studied to *police the travel* of other voters that shouldn't be 'here' if not one of 'us', a sentiment common across Pages.

You are NEVER off these pages going on and on […] Tedious!

Why post on here? […] go and post on the labour page

This is a PM page not somewhere to air your pathetic hate messages

why on earth are you on their page?

This is labour page […] don't come here!

wonder what you are doing on here [..] sod off to your own page

There are few Facebook Groups or Pages explicitly set-up for open political debate, but the top search result for such a Page within the platform ('UK OPEN Political Debate'[6]) has likes in the thousands, rather than hundreds of thousands, and indeed closer inspection of the posts and comments reveals it as a UKIP-affiliated, anti-EU populist community. The relative absence and lack of visibility of unaffiliated 'general debate' sites means that users in search of partisan dialogue must travel to fenced-off ideological chambers. This however they do to some extent, indicating a desire for political conflict despite the structural platform limitations they are forced to negotiate.

Perhaps the most troubling aspect for deliberative proponents despite the prevalence of certain deliberative characteristics, was the general lack of consensus resulting from the large body of inter-ideological debate, illuminated by the intersections highlighted above between the modes of discussion associated with alternative democratic conceptions. Although partisan debate through inter-ideological conflict *did* take place, often utilising argumentative justification and references to the common good, it also frequently included resorts to flaming and the prevalence of exclusionary community language as indicated. As a result, although

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[6] See - https://m.facebook.com/UK-OPEN-Political-Debate-812707315509772

discussions unfolded in deliberative fashion, they would often culminate in a small collection of personal insults and partisan attacks in the absence of deliberative consensus and mutual understanding. Thus, whilst users showed a degree of 'competence' in their attempts at rational justification, the absence of consensus saw discussions often fizzle out with participants exhibiting no particular ideological movement, and in many cases, reaffirming partisan leanings.

Together, analysis of discussions indicates therefore a surprising amount of deliberative content, as users highlight public issues, stay on topic, engage and question ideological opponents and stage arguments utilising aspects of rational justifications. Yet the penchant for communitarian behaviour evidenced by in-group rhetoric and exclusory partisan language, and the continued if relatively minimal presence of personal attacks lead conclusively to a lack of consensus. In concert with the findings drawn from analysis of standalone comments above, various conclusions emerge about the way user habits, party attitudes and issue themes interact with the agentic design highlighted in Chapter 3 to shape a particular discursive environment.

As noted previously, speech is not always progressive or positive, and increasing pressure has been put on platform owners to monitor, and in certain cases supress, the 'wrong' kinds of speech that technologically enabled citizens may profess. Amongst warnings about the proliferation of 'hate speech', various topics liable to induce hateful communication have been identified, with immigration front and centre. Yet messages emanating from platform owners remain mixed. Gillespie (2018, p.8) notes how "platforms generally frame themselves as open, impartial, and noninterventionist – in part because their founders fundamentally believe them to be so, and in part to avoid obligation or liability". Yet their hand has in certain situations been forced, for a variety of reasons. A 2016 interview with Zuckerberg saw him reflect on the German legislative landscape, where he claimed that "Hate speech against migrants is an important part of what we now have no tolerance for on Facebook" ("Facebook wants to crack down…", 2016). Yet according to leaked moderator guidance reported by the Guardian, things are not quite so clear-cut. As one form of guidance puts it: "Migrants are a vulnerable group, and we would like to remove dehumanizing speech directed at them on Facebook […] However, we also want to allow for a broad public discussion about immigration, which is hot topic in upcoming election [sic]" ("Hate Speech and anti-migrant posts…", 2017). Indeed, this tension between encouraging and moderating public opinion is reflected in an earlier 2011 interview, in which Zuckerberg notes uneasily how: "on the one hand people are like, 'Okay yeah, you enabled this big change that was sweet.' But on the other hand like, 'You're enabling

all the sharing and that might be kind of scary and we're not sure if we like that.' And it's like I think it's really hard to have one without the other" ("E-G8 Forum…", 2011). Reflecting on the 2016 Presidential elections and the victory of Donald Trump - a deeply polarising figure prone to controversial announcements around immigration in particular - Zuckerberg suggests how:

> that kind of content we would have thought that previously that would make a lot of people feel uncomfortable and, um, people wouldn't want that but at the point where the person who is elected president of the United States, um, is expressing that, um, opinion and has 60 million people who are, who are followers, then the question is, okay, that that is mainstream political discourse that I think we need to be pretty careful about, about saying that that's not (Zuckerberg, 2016).

Given how the anger present in user-led narratives about the topic emerges here, this focus on explicit hate-speech would appear to be less relevant for the political centre-ground manifested by the three major Party Pages. Instead of focusing on migrants themselves, anger is directed largely at politicians. As noted, moderation of offensive content may play a role in those appearing as the most-liked and most visible, yet a Facebook source reported the difficulty with moderating the wealth of material rapidly emerging, and that as a result "meant moderators had 'less than 10 seconds' to make a decision that might require intimate knowledge of a terrorist organisation and its leaders. 'It's a mission impossible' the source said" (Hopkins, 2017). There are trickier and more subtle obstacles to the deliberative rationality desired that may be at work here, and these are less easily pushed to the fringe as 'extremism'. Various factors problematise the 'objective reasoning' towards consensus at the root of 'rational critical' speech, even *before* consideration of digital structural affordances. As such, the Facebook ethos concerning political speech may from the get-go operate on a faulty premise, in both their assumptions echoing Habermasian ideals of natural, rational argument, and in their reliance on the likelihood that digital space will empower, rather than *incapacitate* it. In terms of the former, research in the fields of cognition and social psychology unsettles ideas about the naturally 'rational' individual liberated by deliberation towards consensus and political progression.

The work of Taber et al (2009) highlights the power of 'motivated biases' in general political discussion, and their role in the formation of polarised attitudes highly resistant to argumentation regardless of its form or place. Key is their emphasis on 'disconfirmation bias' – that not only do individuals serve 'confirmation bias' through information selection and

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processing, but the alleged power of reasoned argument to dispel such discursive 'faults' is overstated and in fact, contributes to the shoring up of prior attitudinal prejudice. Research into the normative conflict characterising political communication around particularly controversial issues also highlights the importance of stubborn bias, and more specifically the work it does for 'identity protective cognition' (Kahan et al, 2007); regardless of the presentation of alleged 'facts' and 'objective' evidence, participants process such information performatively according to whether it effectively signals loyal membership to their socially competing groups. These result in a preference for direct, reductive explanations about polemic issues that directly impact the deliberative quality of policy formation (Lakoff, 2016). As a result of the kinds of cognitive work such research highlights, even where controversies may witness the cultivation of rich debate, they see only belief-reinforcement occur through what Chateaureynaud (2009) describes as a "dialogue of deafs".

The presence of the tendencies noted above thus interacts in particular ways with specific design structures and the spatial characteristics noted in Chapter 3. For Langlotz and Lochler (2012), the high levels of emotion present in online debate emerge as users signal their orientation to issues and thus the *clarification* of their personal social position. As a result, networked 'affective publics' form (Papacharissi, 2015), as users tell stories and negotiate collective identities. Older work on the maintenance of identity and in-group/out-group boundaries (Tajifel, 1982; Jenkins, 1996; Melucci, 1996) suggests a danger to democracy envisaged as chiefly deliberative and critical, if clusters of partisan communities form yet fail to engage discursively in the 'correct' fashion. Given the findings illustrated in Chapter 3, where digital infrastructure and user-preference contributes algorithmically to the formation of 'echo chambers' and 'filter bubbles' increasing patterns of 'homophily' (Himmelboim et al, 2014) - it is likely to directly constrict the potential for critical and reflexive deliberative identity work.

When considering the kinds of discursive policing that Page users adopt above, and their penchant for community language and consistent flaming of ideological opponents, the deliberative habits engaged are ultimately impotent in terms of reaching critical and reflective consensus ideals demand even where they emerge in a potentially 'suitable' form. Rather than combat these predilections, the platform and its workings outlined in fact *empower* them. Buoyed on by the branding of Pages, the personalisation metrics highlighted previously, and offline habits for the avoidance of 'un-liked' material, users do not manifest the kinds of ideal public sphere when taking up the specifically designed platform outlined here but, entwined with platform design, indulge less 'desired' habits.

<u>Voice and Articulation</u>

Rather than focus on the substance of the voice that emerges in normative terms, Facebook might therefore have spent more thought on how the design of the site itself encourages user-habits less identifiable as direct obstacles. Indeed, as Couldry argues, "the *site* of voice is a really key question" (Couldry and Ruiz, 2012, p.87), lest a situation arise where we see "an apparently democratic approach that claimed to be listening and to be participatory and to voice certain notions of popular politics and yet was profoundly anti-democratic as all of its instincts were to close down debate" (2012, p.74). Despite the provision of space for expression, the habits of users interact with it in ways that ultimately contradict the ideals behind it. This occurs at the same time as political representatives drawn in by a sharing paradigm remain at a comfortable distance, and thus neglect its interactive potential; this ferments scepticism that any concrete change may occur as a result of this new form of 'digital politics'. In his discussion of Governmental efforts to incorporate digital technology and engage citizens in debate, Fairclough argues that certain requirements must be met for "real as opposed to apparent dialogue" regarding: equality of access, the cultivation of disagreement, and the structural possibility for consensus generation allowing for direct *action* (Fairclough 2000, p.124). Absence of the latter is particularly disturbing for Couldry (2010) and reflects the limitations of a wider climate where the simple ability 'to express' is not nearly enough to excite democratic pretensions; there must instead be a sense that *real* consequences unfold based on citizen intervention. Expression in the *absence* of effective representation and the mobilisation of change is said to lead to the structural muting of opinion, and a closing of 'voice' regardless of any technological affordances.

However, despite the nature of the space drawn out in critical terms earlier, and the absence of deliberative and reflexive consensus emerging within it, we do see how 'voice matters' in terms of how users narrate the world and their place in it. Despite the 'closing' marked by particular design affordances and their interaction with users - in the sense of deliberative, democratic ideals - what the platform appear does appear to do quite effectively is serve as an interactive site for the construction and recognition of a 'collective will', around elements of what is however a Right, rather than Left politics. We see both party and users on the UKIP Page in the last chapter negotiate the platform spatially in a fashion that works to value and promote their brand, reach and agenda, and with the populist 'anti-political' post-democratic narratives emerging here we see similar kinds of success through dominant discursive practice

in user comments and discussions. These find metric success both within the UKIP Page but also across those of their *opponents*, as particular thematic elements within immigration are *connected* to present a particular vision of reality that emerges 'Top' of the Facebook encounter. What users *do* through the expression of their primary ill, blame and solution themes, and in rejection of reflective critique and thorough intra-ideological questioning, is to 'articulate' the issue in allegedly objective terms - to 'reveal' the truths that constitute the issue controversy. Yet this is done in ways that are collective *constructions* obscured beneath their revelatory form and attempts to fix a reality that is never total but always partial, and always open to contestation.

Thus, the expression of opinion encountered in the comments here may appear to lack interactive political efficacy in more obvious and measurable ways, but is in fact considerably effective in the sense that it contributes to a particular ideological formation that attempts to remake 'what can be said' about the issue. Through partisan practice that frames immigration in the dominant ways noted above, users discursively oppose alternative, positive frames, or those that refuse to address the deep sense of anxiety felt. This is an active and dynamic process, requiring engaged and vocal -rather than passive - users, drawing upon particular political and historical contexts and the availability of particular technological tools. Indeed, as Clarke (2015, p.277) notes, "In developing his work around the concept of articulation, Hall always emphasized a double meaning, in which the ideas of 'to give voice to' and 'to connect' are always implied and always co-present". In the comments detailed above, we see older thematic elements about 'national borders' involving ongoing concerns Hall would note as "lines of tendential force" (Grossberg, 1996, p.53), sticky and tenacious things that 'stay' articulated at the core of national identity. But we see also novel patterns of revolt against what's presented as a political consensus on 'mobility' seen as unimpeachable, and one that Orr (2014) argues establishment parties have failed to coherently explain:

> Politicians have had decades to explain that high levels of immigration are part and parcel of neoliberalism, because they offer speedy, few-questions-asked economic growth. For some reason, however, both Labour and the Conservatives have shied away from explaining to "ordinary people" that immigrants provide a steady supply of labour, stopping "ordinary" wages and expectations from getting out of hand. It's a strategy that has placed Britain in the extraordinary position whereby it now has a record number of people in low-paid jobs amid historically low levels of wage inflation. That's a hard "achievement" for any political party to sell. So they simply don't try. Labour and the Conservatives just carry on blaming each other.

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In the absence of substantial party attention to a difficult issue marking schisms within *and* across their specific ideological camps, the differing attitudes on the part of Labour and the Conservatives as to how and why mobility should be accommodated fail to appear and gain any purchase, and those who struggle to find an avenue for their anxiety around the issue turn to a novel populist challenger happy to move into the discursive gap with simple, consistent rhetoric. As noted in Chapter 3, in the crafting of their own focused issue-specific party posts UKIP clearly communicate why and how immigration is a problem, twinning the subject to their long-running theme of Euroscepticism. Users can thus draw on such discursive material in their own articulation of the ill, blame and cure elements of the topic, whilst folding in experiences and anecdotes through more personal performative practice, resulting in a heady and effective combination.

Indeed, a discursive turn to concepts of articulation and hegemony is useful in acknowledgment of the data here because it encourages conceptual evaluation of the kinds of voice we see actually emerge in this potential Digital Public Sphere. Considering user-comments as articulation illuminates the way diverse material and symbolic elements are joined in the expressions detailed above, and presents a certain vision of both the issue and the user expressing it in relation. In the dominant problematisation staged we see anxiety over sovereignty and security associated with older Right concerns, joined with fears about welfare access and surplus labour rooted in older Left approaches to globalisation. These elements are 'chained' through articulation in the service of a new collective identity, wired through UKIP in a sociotechnical fashion, with immigration as the vehicle for the establishment of a new 'common sense'; this is a common sense that 'reveals' division between the globally mobile and those 'left behind' by global change - those real victims truly 'subject' to failing political elites. Drawing out and categorising the thematic constitution of comments in the way illustrated above beckons the tracing of these articulations, and through analysis of longer discussions, reveals the power of communal language and partisan hostility in obfuscating the potential of the rational critical deliberation where it does occur and where it might loosen the discursive-links engineered. It reveals how the aspirations of the platform are thus selectively taken up in parts, and rejected in others, through creative and participatory negotiation with its own (re)active mechanics.

Thus, what emerges from an analysis of the discursive practice expressed through comments is not simply a failure of the rational, deliberative ideals held by the concept of the public sphere at the root of 'sharing' that suggests the platform as an ineffective tool for intervention and users as passive 'voiceless' subjects; it instead highlights the way users *can* 'produse' political

contributions and manifest constructive 'sharing', yet in a way that fundamentally opposes the kinds of politics claimed as the site's inspiration. Rather than appear either a positive force for the liberal democratic program, or even a neutral platform, the site and its design are entangled with user-practice through its actorial impact on the ordering of specific contributions, and the heightened visibility resulting from slacktivist patterns of engagement within branded partisan and personalised camps. The populist right-leaning flavour of immigration that is drawn from the centre-ground studied here can thus be considered the result of what I conceive as 'algorithmic articulation', as the negotiation and use of the space by parties and users highlighted in Chapter 3 melds with the expression found in comments noted here, resulting in success for the populist party fighting for reach within the attention-economy outlined, and against a wider, post-democratic background.

The linking of platform and practice through analysis of the socio-technical assemblage in this way thus extends articulatory practices formerly conceived in the older post-Marxist and cultural studies literature referenced; it takes up acknowledgment of the wide variety of elements within processes of meaning-making and moves towards an interrogation of how they are networked in novel ways that draw in the specific properties of the particular platforms incorporated. 'Algorithmic articulation' reveals digital politics manifesting in ways alien to utopian and progressive dreams, but that at the same time do not deny them an effective political character. Sharing is *doing* things through relations established across digital issue-networks empowered and enabled by platformed sociality, and that engage and link elements together in specific representations of demanding political issues. On Facebook, the particular platform mechanics outlined in Chapter 3 serve this constructive work by branding political homes in certain ways, shaping the flows of information users encounter and constructing particular relations and the visibility of such. For immigration, the connections established are engaged most effectively by the populist anti-immigration party, and by users obedient to it in terms of their proffered digital labour. Theirs is the cultivation of communal interest, pushed into an apparently coherent and stable representation by platform metrics, avoiding and 'passing over' elements that might appear to trouble the unity of expression – the *un*liked or *un*shared.

Through the articulation charted in comments here, users target political representatives in the framing of immigration as a problem, and express frustration with the 'professionalisation' of communication (Negrine and Lilleker, 2002) noted in Chapter 3. They discursively empower the rise of what appears on the surface a more 'amateur' populist party, as they take hold of issues the centre-ground is unwilling to substantively debate, due to the dangerous and

passionate elements contained within that reveal the façade of consensus they impose. Where demand to embrace issues fuelled by virulent antagonism clashes with the wishes of parties who prefer to avoid and confine them to the fringes, it signposts the post-democratic denial of the pluralistic nature to the social world which *always* involves conflictual situations, and choices that have ultimately no chance of rational consensus, for the many perspectives and values around such issues cannot be brought together harmoniously. Any attempt to enforce a consensus thus "leads to the impotence that characterises liberal thought when confronted with the emergence of antagonisms and forms of violence that, according to its theory, belong to a bygone age when reason had not yet managed to control the supposedly archaic passions" (Mouffe, 2013, p.4). Within the 'political' conceived in more fruitful terms, "the antagonistic dimension is always present, since what is at stake is the struggle between opposing hegemonic projects which can never be reconciled rationally, one of them needing to be defeated" (2013, p.9). Populism thus becomes a consequence, rather than cause, of political malaise, for "it is the lack of political channels for challenging the hegemony of the neo-liberal model of globalisation that is at the origin of the proliferation of discourses and practices that seek to radically negate the established international order" (2013, p.19). Where parties seek to ignore the concerns of voters relegated as passionate and archaic and hostile to middle-ground consensus, disaffection and apathy breed dangerous contempt and the subsequent success of "right-wing populist parties who present themselves as the only ones concerned with offering alternatives and giving *voice* to the people neglected by the establishment parties" (2013, p.140 [emphasis mine]).

As users articulate immigration here as the issue of primary public concern, we see in the selection of ill, blame and solution rampant hostility towards democratic representatives who have failed to justify an apparent consensus on the necessity of mobility, and a failure to discuss the issue in ways that reflect the ideals of critical, rational deliberation supposedly held dear by both parties and platform alike. In such a climate, the discursive labour offered to the populist challenger appears as response to the kind of landscape resembling accounts of post-democracy. Yet, rather than emerge in the deliberative fashion favoured by more authentic democratic mores, the interaction of opinion with particular kinds of active platform workings emphasise the communal construction of partisan camps, sectioned and branded through personalisation metrics that ultimately flatter particular kinds of expressive performances and actively hinder others. In terms of the spatial and discursive impact on the issue's manifestation in and through the platform here, this melding of active participants buoys the

reach and rhetoric of right-leaning populism, fully *owning* immigration as the other parties turn awkwardly away.

As we see in the next chapter, the party and user-practices detailed in terms of spatial take-up, negotiation and issue dominance in Chapter 3, as well as the kinds of commentary engaged here in Chapter 4, are empowered further by specific forms of news and information circulation - networked into and across Party Pages through hyperlinks. As Deluca (1999, p.335) suggests, "Articulation has two aspects: speaking forth elements and linking Elements". The speaking and linking of thematic elements within immigration witnessed here is however not *only* manufactured through spatial take-up and textual contributions. Indeed, through the multimodal practice described next *hyper*linking serves a vital role, curating editorial stances on the issue via legacy media, coordinating the distributed production of 'quantifiable' crowd-sourced expression through petition circulation, and staging what emerges as an affective visual 'spectacle' through video. As argued in Chapters 5 and 6, acknowledgment of such practice further illuminates how the failure of the site to resemble a Digital Public Sphere nevertheless marks its peculiar efficacy, as it contributes to the kinds of post-democratic partisan populism that ultimately emerge.

Conclusion

As witnessed here, users are clearly taking up the opportunity to 'speak' on politics via the space provided by platform owners, and these do, in part, take a deliberative form reflecting the optimistic platform ethos. Indeed, although the design of the space may encourage partisan bubbles containing and potentially *constraining* various ideological communities, certain users negotiate structural constraints such is their desire to engage in cross-cutting ideological debate. In terms of the content of such speech, evidence of explicit extremist or 'hate speech' was lacking. Although moderation may clearly play a role in shaping the sorts of material found, the onus on a hands-off form of censorship by Facebook itself, and the relative lack of interest shown by political parties in engagement with content beneath their own promotional posts suggests that the sorts of speech voted up and algorithmically encountered by users is surprisingly civil, even if charged along partisan lines.

There is little to suggest that the sorts of *explicit* racial hatred and abuse found in studies of fringe groups or alternative digital arenas where the disinhibition effect is most prominent makes up a majority, or even substantial minority, of the textual comments one is most likely

to encounter on the mainstream party pages discussed here. Instead, users speak about anxiety over immigration in more vague, acceptable terms that avoid the demonization of migrants themselves, preferring to castigate political representatives for their failure to control migrant mobility, evoking a democratic crisis in representation. Where naming sources of blame, the most popular of these are directed in a vertical fashion at parties themselves and the political establishment more generally, even when the issue concerned is one haunted by vicious and dehumanising rhetoric.

As noted, the ways in which the platform organises space for speech is identified as a causal factor here, and thus users appear to envisage the official party pages as a branded virtual 'doorstep' in which they – in their correctly identified 'nonymous appearance - have a chance to speak back to political representatives and enact the kinds of direct democratic debate politicians appear reluctant to engage; these are practices reminiscent of older forms of public, interpersonal politics that have waned with the arrival of mass-media in an age of public relations and politics at a comfortable distance. From evaluation of the most-liked stand-alone comments, users take-up technological affordances to make fairly sophisticated arguments in which politics itself is more often than not blamed for issues considered the most pressing topics of the day.

In terms of horizontal peer-to-peer debate, there are signs that the literature may have underestimated the amount of deliberation taking place in digital space that fits to an extent the wishes of platform owners and the deliberative ideals they evoke through the promotion of political 'sharing'. Signs of focused, justified and reciprocal inter-ideological discussions reveal a level of discursive competence and a minority of vociferous travellers wiling to break free from the political enclaves that follow the economic needs of the platform. Yet by considering user-discussions in more nuanced terms as reflecting a variety of conceptions of democratic engagement, forms of interaction that do not fit a deliberative mould, yet accompany those that do, present several obstacles conflicting with Facebook's deliberative progressive ethos. Where comments are not directed at politicians themselves, technology is used here to enact partisan identities alongside a tenacious habit for communal identity maintenance and boundary work and in the absence of consensus and the promised dissolution of antagonistic confrontation; this despite the 'façade' of consensus presented by 'top-rated' metrics.

Delineating the service of such speech enacted in comments and discussions ultimately paints it as a form of articulation, in which 'common sense' around immigration is collectively

constructed, popularised and maintained against detractors, through the specific kinds of space negotiation outlined previously and the discursive policing highlighted here. The dominant frames of interpretation that emerge are anti-establishment, anti-mobility and demand protection of a 'people' constructed in opposition to its chief antagonist - the failed political establishment. Yet whilst the textual articulation charted here reveals a perhaps surprising level of normative recognition in terms of the avoidance of older, less palatable racial framing of bodies, we see in the next chapter how hyperlinking activity serves to *flesh* out in multimodal terms what is revealed as a 'double antagonism'; this directed towards both border *controllers* and border *crossers*, within a hegemonic battle to assert a particular representation of the issue and its relation to a democratic context viewed with increasing scepticism.

5. Issue-Networks and Aesthetics

> Science has provided the swiftest communication between individuals; it has provided a record of ideas and has enabled man to manipulate and to make extracts from that record so that knowledge evolves and endures throughout the life of a race rather than that of an individual.

<div align="right">Bush, 1945</div>

Introduction

Thus far, empirical exploration of shared space and speech – both key pillars of a functional public sphere for deliberative action proposed in older conceptions and echoed in Facebook's mission statement – suggests significant obstacles impede the realisation of the platform's expressed ideals. This chapter moves on to the third aspect of sharing that contributes to the articulation charted across the assemblage in previous chapters: the circulation of information and news. Crucially, in a digital era in which text and the visual intertwine in the cultivation of networked political narratives and identities, this incorporates multimodal practice beyond the distribution of pamphlets and literary journals associated with previous visions of an effective deliberative public. This chapter reveals the ways this hyperlinked, *multimodal* curation is embedded within narratives that utilise media both 'old' and 'new'.

The day before the murder of British Labour MP Jo Cox in June 2016, her colleague Ben Bradshaw was sent a voicemail message. The message was filled with racist and homophobic threats, and the caller claimed his rage was triggered by a Facebook video about Muslim extremism ("Man given suspended sentence…", 2016). Contemporary access to the sorts of affective, controversial political media shared on 'social' platforms is unprecedented. It comes at a time where media consumption habits and traditional 'legacy' media strategies face drastic change as a result of sociotechnical digital practice; a Pew Research Center report notes 44% of the American public get news from Facebook alone (Gottfried & Shearer, 2016). As a Forbes author covering the Pew report notes, 'If it isn't on Facebook, it didn't happen' (Leetaru, 2016). As Newman et al (2014) reveal, viewers no longer *start* their news consumption with legacy media but are increasingly re-directed to them *via* social media, with news websites reporting increases in referral traffic. Whilst peers may long have been held as

primary sources for news and political opinion, their adoption of networked online platforms suggest a changing media ecology, unsettling established theories about 'agenda-setting' and news 'gatekeeping'. This chapter interrogates this alleged change by revealing how users 'share' political news and what kind of 'information' circulates around the issue of immigration. Analysis of the mode and themes that constitute such sharing delineate a diverse range of platforms and sources taken up in 'hybrid' media practice.

Nevertheless, as I argue below, whilst social media offers novel tools with which users might share information in the generation and continuation of political debate, the elite status of legacy news providers continues to loom large through the willing service of remediating partisan 'produsers', algorithmically pushed towards longstanding ideological camps as part of the sociotechnical architecture illuminated in previous chapters. Whilst users do take-up the availability of new technical *means* by which the issue might be framed and (re)mediated, and creatively curate various visual or textual modes dependent upon specific issue subthemes, the *ends* ultimately reflect an intensification of the historically reductive mediation of debate. The hyperlink issue-networks detailed below manifest populist sentiment primarily signalling anxiety over 'loss'; this emerges through an obsession with the numerical properties of debate drawn from older media actors, resource-allocation anxiety displayed through e-petition websites, and spectacular video representations of specific types of bodies on the move or 'uncomfortably' embedded in the national fabric; together these highlight concern over loss in both economic *and* cultural forms.

Indeed, whereas in previous chapters 'mobility' is presented through speech as an abstract source of anti-immigration anxiety, the multimodal circulation of content indicates the curation of a digital aesthetic that explicitly *fleshes* out the 'spectre' of mobile bodies implied in speech, revealing the ways technological platforms help users negotiate entrenched norms rooted in liberal democratic ideals that are nevertheless viewed with increasing scepticism, particularly by publics willing to support populist, right-leaning actors. Users show creative flair and the ability to express opinion via different media platforms networked into comments, but these ultimately work on behalf of a partisan, populist form of politics subsidised by dominant tabloid editorial narratives and supplemented by the hybrid take-up and 'convergence' of media old and new. In combination with the space and speech shared through the sociotechnical relations outlined in Chapters 3 and 4, this third aspect of sharing contributes a final piece to the puzzle, illustrating the collapse of the idealistic vision of a critically reflective, deliberative public empowering progressive, liberal democratic pursuits.

Hyperlinks and 'Mass' Media

As noted in Chapter 2, a grounded approach uncovered 'hyperlinks' forming part of the sharing practice observed on and through the Facebook pages studied. This finding is noteworthy for any student of political 'cultures' for as Castells argues, "culture is mostly embedded in the processes of communication, particularly in the electronic hypertext, with the global multimedia business networks and the Internet at its core. So, ideas may be generated from a variety of origins and linked to specific interests and subcultures" (Castells, 2011, p.776). The battle over ideas maintained - and adapted - via networks is important, for as Castells continues:

> social power throughout history, but even more so in the network society, operates
> primarily by the construction of meaning in the human mind through processes of
> communication. In the network society, this is enacted in global/local multimedia networks
> of mass communication, including mass self-communication, that is, the communication
> organized around the Internet and other horizontal digital communication networks (2011,
> p.779).

An emphasis on the 'linking' practice of users populating these 'horizontal digital communication networks' is worthwhile when, as Landow (2006, p.343) suggests in his description of our Hypertext 'era', "one sign of the disappearance of boundaries between author and reader consists in its being the reader, not the author, who largely determines how the reader moves through the system, for the reader can determine the order and principle of investigation". There are therefore significant changes in the control over meaning and interpretation of 'texts' once they feature hyperlinks as navigation tools. Indeed, for Fuchs (2008, p.287), "the emergence of a transnational, networked form of domination that makes use of new communication technologies, and has been termed Empire by Hardt and Negri (2005), has resulted in new forms of networked protest that *challenge* the Empire" [emphasis mine]. Digital inhabitants may not only reconstruct meaning by doing 'things' with words but can take up changing forms of technical language as noted to do 'words with things' (Isin & Ruppert, 2014, p.68). This can involve clicking the 'like' or 'share' actions built into platform designs as detailed in Chapter 3, but also placing critical or supportive hyperlinks at points in discussion that nudge participants within the encounter towards meaningful positions around particularly contentious issues.

The hyperlink networks that manifest around topics of discussion in digital social spaces therefore unsettle older ideas about how knowledge is produced, disseminated and exchanged. This problematises the ways critical literature has previously conceptualised the 'flow' of news and information and offers digital citizens a new set of tools, with which they might intervene dialogically around issues marked by longstanding hegemonic frames. Although journalists connected to major organisations are accustomed to being members of the informational elite, hyper-linking technology threatens this prestige. As Weinberger (2009) points out, "Why should we trust what one person - with the best of intentions - insists is true when we instead could have a web of evidence, ideas, and argument?" De Maeyer and Holton (2015) note the uneasy realisation that 'linking matters' manifesting in contemporary digital news practices. This reflects the changing structure of a media landscape which Baresch et al (2011, p.5) call a move from an 'ink' to 'link' economy.

Given the new means for social media users to intervene in the flow of news outlined above, there is a need to examine the kinds of linking-practice users engage around political issues in the contemporary digital political climate, and the ways in which it might challenge the dominance of a gaggle of media companies, potentially unseated by rapid technological change. Given the focus on 'attention' outlined previously, this is a space where user-practice shapes a political encounter in which certain 'brands' can appear more successful in their promotion of a particular information ecology. Facebook also remains under-explored in terms of news and information circulation, for as Kumpel et al (2015, p.3) argue, "In the context of news sharing, we find Twitter to be the most important platform for researchers (69% of the studies investigating a specific platform), far ahead of Facebook (17%)". Below, I work to fill this gap as I analyse a gathered corpus of links shared around immigration discussion to draw out the source and content of related news. In so doing, I ascertain how the platforms, sentiments and themes curated in such practice speak to critical conceptualisations of the modern media landscape. I was motivated in particular by work on the importance of 'issue-networks' that manifest around controversial topics in the contemporary digital climate. As Marres (2006, p.5) explains:

The concept of the *issue network* is used today to characterize a variety of political practices that add to and intervene in the representative politics characteristic of national democracies and the international system. The term has been taken up to describe the

issue politics or "lifestyle politics" pursued by grassroots organizations and individuals in mobilizing around affairs that affect people in their daily lives

I take up this term to reflect the sociotechnical networks that emerge around a controversial issue like immigration, 'prodused' by the charge of 'everybody' into formally sacrosanct journalistic realms. My focus is on the issue-networks emerging as a result of the banal, micro-activism (Marichal, 2013) constituted by 'everyday' interaction on Pages. I draw out and map the news and 'information' that networks immigration hyper-textually, connecting diverse sources through the epistemic curation of ideological (non)peers. As Marres (2006, p.7) suggests:

> Issue formation is something that happens in the circulation of information: as reports, press releases, news, articles, slogans, and images circulate in the network, the stakes are defined, addressees for the issue emerge, and its urgency is made apparent. Thus, in this context, issue formation takes on the aspect of a collective, technologically mediated, distributed practice.

Below I ascertain what kind of info-environment is present around the linking that forms a part of this 'distributed practice', and how this contributes to the conception of Facebook Pages as spaces of user-production, curation and encounter that unsettle established flows of political news and information. As a 'semiotics of links and nodes' (Livingstone and Das, 2013), I utilise approaches to media, science and technology that focus on the 'produser' as always between what becomes te(ch)xt and conte(ch)xt. As revealed below, user practice shows tension between the ongoing control and re-production of narratives around immigration emerging from media-party relations, and the radical potential for subversion that has increased anxiety about a subsequent loss of the 'objectivity' allegedly held dear by legacy media actors. First, analysis of frequency, form and sentiment of links towards both party and issue show the dominant styles of hyperlinking on Facebook Pages, ones that indicate winners and losers in the 'info-wars' shaping 21st Century news consumption and creation.

Form and Sentiment

As noted previously, linking was a less common practice than simply 'liking' or 'commenting', for which the design of the space analysed in Chapter 3 is no doubt partially responsible.

Facebook comment boxes nudge users towards textual rather than *intertextual* practice, in line with the wishes of platform owners to erect the 'walled garden' of content noted earlier. Users needed to exhibit some flexibility and creativity to embed links within comments, revealing a more sophisticated awareness of the networking potential of digital opinion curation. This they did however, although a more determined exploratory method was required as noted in Chapter 2, featuring a database constructed from a combination of the most-liked immigration-related comments and those from the key-periods highlighted previously. Results were then separated and sorted into categories, including platform, party sentiment, topic sentiment, link format, issue theme and mode, as a result of a constant-comparative process (Glaser and Strauss, 1967). A total of 1,550 comments featuring immigration-related links were retrieved. These included: UKIP – 422 by 218 linkers; Labour – 394 by 192 linkers; Conservatives – 734 by 306 linkers.

First, as illustrated, there were differences within and across Pages in terms of the frequency of comments including links, and the likelihood users would drop one or more across time. Relatively few users contributed links multiple times. Whilst 'link-spamming' was present, the majority linking to immigration news did so *once*, suggesting linking was not habitual, nor the reason for users' presence. It was, therefore, a casual act amidst general commenting behaviour used to signpost information or critique ongoing arguments.[7] There was very little variation across Pages here in terms of linking frequency. The design of the space by platform owners was thus successful in reducing the chances users would seek to bring in external platforms as part of their interactive experience. Nevertheless, where this did occur, it had different effects for Party Pages in terms of the frequency, form and sentiment established.

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[7] It would be interesting to consider further longitudinal data to clarify whether both linking and the amount of links included in comments increases over say, a 5-year period, and whether given the novelty of such practice users are simply unfamiliar with the possibilities and potentials of crafting – and curating - digital politics.
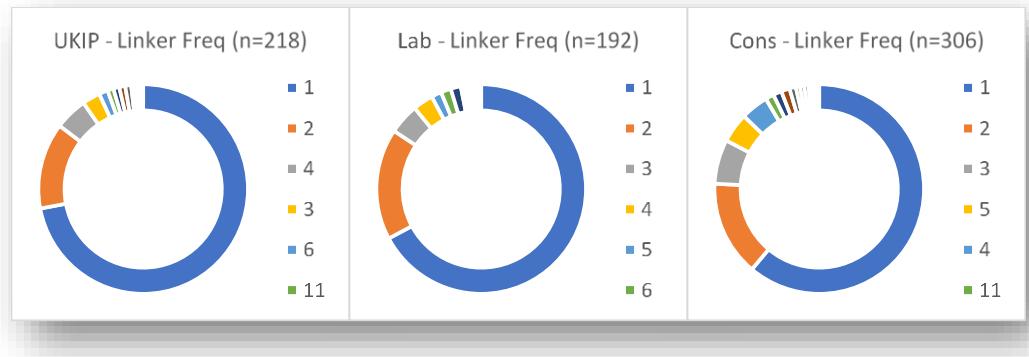
Figure 5.1 Comments w/Immigration Links per User

In terms of communicative *form*, the majority of comments featuring immigration links were standalone, rather than replies to other users. There are differences however in patterns between the pages studied.
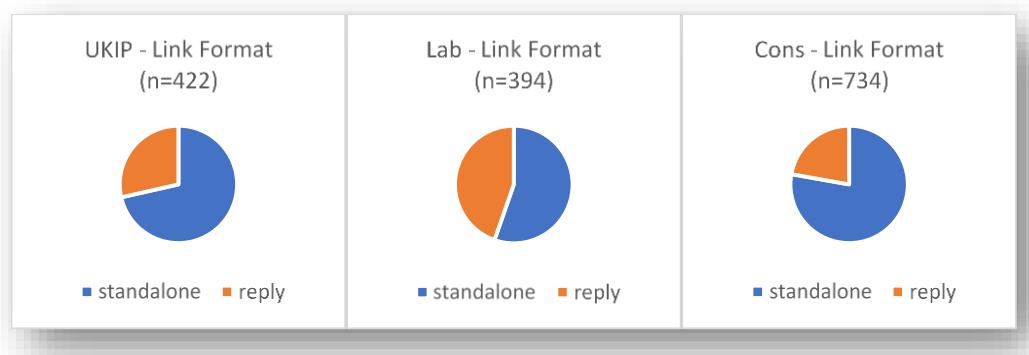
Figure 5.2 Immigration Link Comments as Standalone / Replies

Commentators on the Conservative Page were the most likely to include links to external sources *without prompting* from other users, with 78% of immigration-related links coming as unsolicited contributions by those unwilling to engage deliberatively, yet willing to signpost news or information. The Conservative Page also saw the most amount of links *without* any textual explanation of their content, and thus the least amount of *assisted* interpretation.
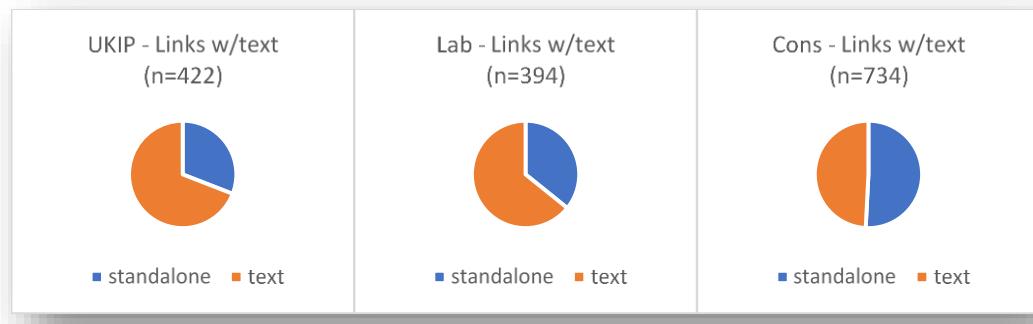
Figure 5.3Immigragtion Links with Description

Users on the UKIP Page were, in contrast, the *most* likely to annotate the links offered, reducing the need for others to follow 'blindly' – a somewhat risky proposition - and indicating a desire on the part of linkers to share a particular understanding of the material offered, or 'prime' it in a specific way.

In terms of linking form, users on the Labour Page were also keen to prime the links offered, yet as noted above, they also exhibited the largest amount of 'reply-links', with 45% of linking specifically in response to another comment. As detailed in Chapter 4, Labour also saw the highest amount of 'intra-ideological questioning' practice in discussions, suggesting a relationship between linking and critique. Indeed, this notion of 'critical linking' illuminates the *tone* of links detailed later.

As indicated, disparity in the amount of links uncovered around immigration per Page was reflected by the presence of links within *all* comments from the entire period more generally.
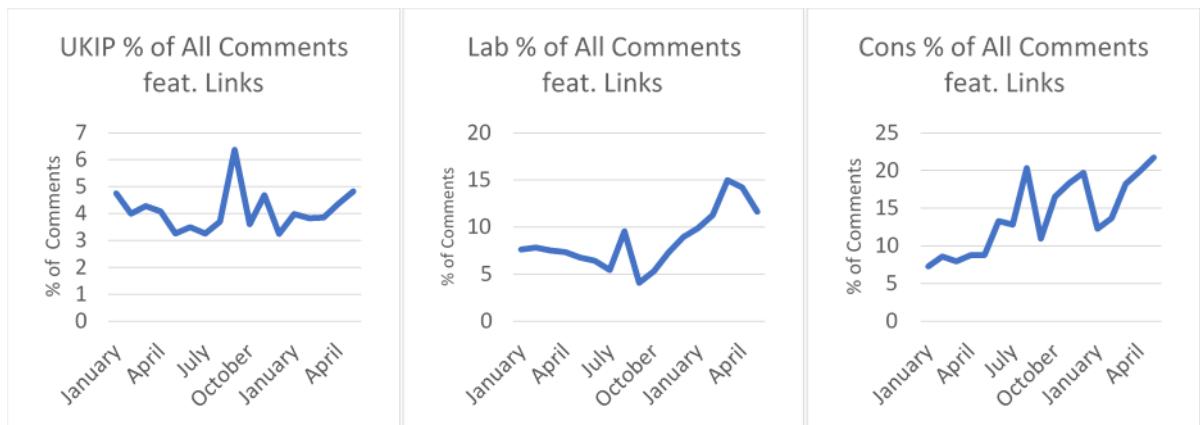
Figure 5.4 All Comments feat. Links over time

Users on the UKIP Page were far less likely to use hyperlinks when commenting on Party posts, whilst those on the Conservative Page used links far more often, with frequency scores climbing to over 20% of all comments over time. One might expect followers of the Labour page, assumed to be the youngest and most 'digitally native' to link more often, and that the older, working-class 'Left Behind' supporters associated with UKIP would link least. Whilst the latter appears true, one might also assume that the wealthier, better-educated users associated demographically with the Conservatives are more technologically adept and digitally 'literate', and thus more likely to butress their discussions about politics with all the novel means available to them – hyperlinks to external or supplementary information one example. However, one can also consider such practice as reflecting less need on behalf of UKIP Page users to respond to the content of party posts or other users with *external* information, suggesting a higher level of 'obedience' than on the home Page of the ruling party of the day, echoing the statistics on Page travel and 'obedient' Page attendance noted in the 'stickiness' revealed in Chapter 3.

Indeed, users who do not support the Conservatives yet visit their Page could challenge what they perceive as the 'Tory lies' or 'false rhetoric' around immigration uncovered in Chapter 4, as well as subvert the allegedly nefarious government relationship with dominant media organisations by linking to alternative media sources. As illustrated, links posted on the Conservative page were indeed the most likely to adopt a stance *critical* of the Party itself. In contrast, the UKIP page saw the least amount of 'critical linking', and users were also the most likely to post links supporting the Party and its agenda.
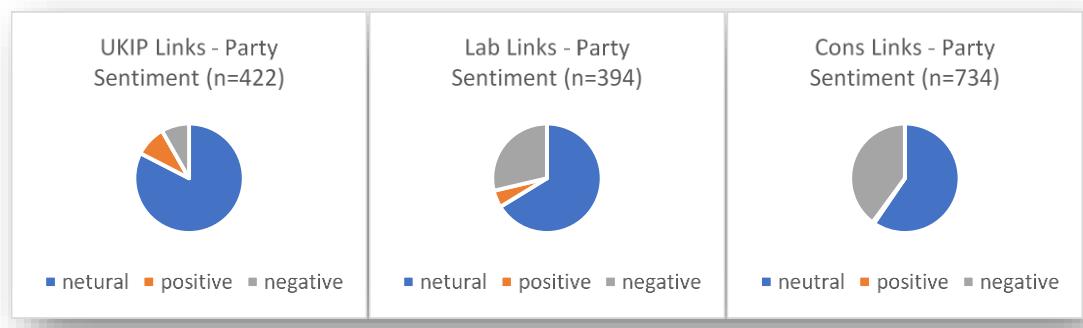

Figure 5.5 Immigration Links and Party Sentiment

In terms of attitudes towards immigration itself as topic, sentiment analysis of issue-related links produced overwhelmingly negative results, reflecting its position atop opinion polls concerning major political issues of public 'concern'.
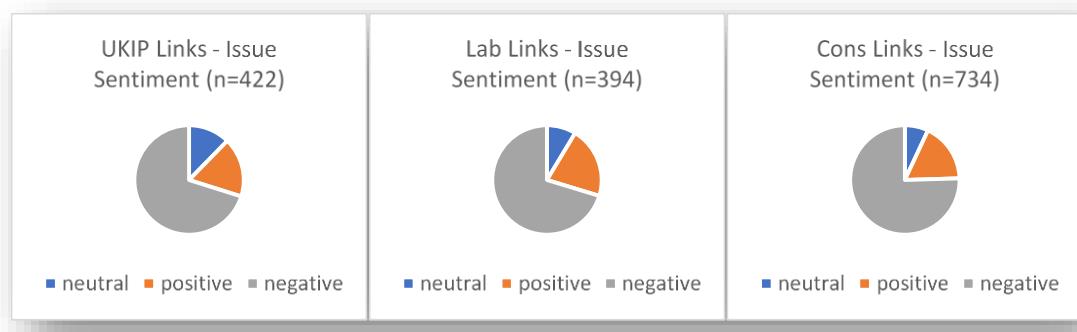
Figure 5.6 Immigration Links and Issue Sentiment

Anti-immigration attitudes dominated the content of links offered, even on the Page of a Labour party typically considered less hostile and more empathetic to the plight of immigrants. Once again, linking takes on a 'critical' character here, and the fact that relatively few 'neutral' sources are linked also indicates how few pro-immigration pages are taken up via links, showing both the narrow range of media actively curated by most users as well as the relative lack of interest by pro-immigration users to utilise circulated content.

In terms of form then, we see links on the Conservative Page the most likely to be unsolicited, lacking supplementary description and critical of the party itself, whilst links on the UKIP Page were in contrast the most likely to include textual accompaniment, and the most likely to indicate a positive attitude towards the party. These different patterns highlight the way information is curated into Party Pages in different kinds of service to the parties themselves, with one form resembling an enrichment of a specific ideological environment through external info-networking, and the other resembling a form of antagonistic, digital-graffiti.

Alongside difference in frequency and form, there are also a variety of sources selected that indicate the diverse field of media producers now available online; crucially, for a study of a potentially radically active and interventionist publics, these include 'user-generated content'. As illustrated below however, with the dominant platforms drawn out alongside categorisation of the 'modes' utilised, users are seen to negotiate dominant media actors through the

presentation of amateur and 'bottom-up' content to an extent, yet they exhibit consistent patterns of obedient legacy *remediation*.

Platforms and Modes

Figure 5.7 Media 'Modes' Table

Mode	Description
OM	Old Media - Legacy media orgs/corps, eg. BBC, Telegraph, Guardian
SM	Social Media - Facebook, Twitter
M	Multiple – comments featuring multiple links/sources
BLOG	Various blogs
NGO	Non-Governmental Organisations
GOV	Official Governmental pages
NM	New Media - Independent media orgs, Digital only news (i-papers), Individual websites
PET	Petitions - Petition pages, incl. Petition.Parliament.UK, Change.org, etc.
VIDEO	Video sharing platforms, eg, You Tube, Live Leak, Dailymotion
TT	Think Tanks
EDU	University and Academic Journal pages
POL	Political Party / Organisations
IMG	Image Storing platforms

As illustrated above, links were reduced to their source 'platforms', and then categorised as particular 'modes'. This sought in some respects to transcend lingering ideas that 'the media' might be identified as a 'singular entity' rather than diverse field (Moffit, 2016, p.169). Whilst the terminology opposing 'old' and 'new' media categories that have emerged for analytical and methodological reasons is not unproblematic, it is used here for purposes of clarity to differentiate between the digital presence of older traditional or legacy print and televisual organisations with an established 'offline' market position, and newer 'digital-only' news organisations and personal websites. 'Social' media is used here to identify social-networking sites, rather than to make a philosophical claim that 'old' or 'new' media actors are not in some way also 'social'. There are also relationships *between* the different modes in terms of

reciprocity, reproduction and 'remediation' (Bolter and Grusin, 2000), that become clear in analysis of user practice.

Indeed, although several users posted multiple links featuring multiple platforms within longer single comments, a few primary 'platforms' nevertheless emerged, both within and across pages; despite a 'long tail', the Top 10 platforms for immigration links are identical for all three Pages. There are dominant organisations represented here, and in terms of platform choice, users engaging the topic of immigration do exhibit a strong desire to take-up the potential of User-Generated Content to bypass traditional gatekeepers and curate an info-network around immigration by crowdsourcing the content of millions of other users through a selection of Parliamentary petitions, Facebook posts and YouTube videos. This illustrates the ways this particular issue flows through user-focused content production vehicles, and does so primarily to express scepticism about politics and the legitimacy of information provided by political representatives.

UKIP Links - All Platforms (n=422)

Parliament.uk, 9%

- Parliament.uk
- Multiple
- Express.co.uk
- Facebook.com
- YouTube.com
- DailyMail.co.uk
- Telegraph.co.uk
- BBC
- TheGuardian.com
- Independent.co.uk
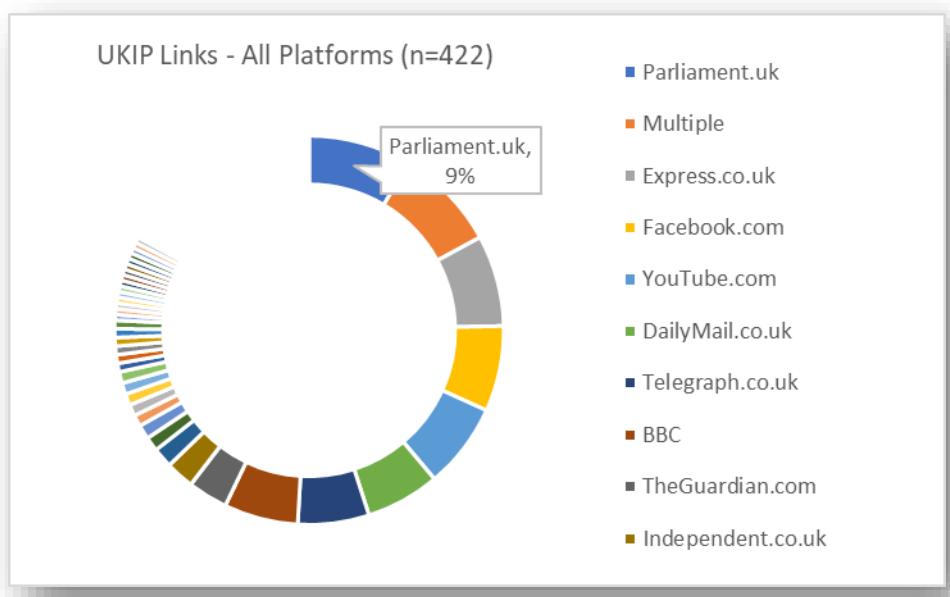
Figure 5.8 UKIP Immigration Links - Platforms

For UKIP, the most linked single domain is Parliament.UK. Parliament.UK, where it occurs here, is used to link to various immigration-related petitions through the website 'Petition.Parliament.uk'. The most prevalent petition by far urged the Government to 'Stop

allowing Immigrants into the UK'[8], which at close listed 216, 949 signatures. This current digital 'petition' service was organised by the Coalition Government in 2011, following the demise of the 'Downing Street E-Petitions' launched on the personal website of Tony Blair during his final term in office. It was revitalized by the Coalition to "build bridges between people and Parliament" and "provide a 'megaphone' through which the public could make their views heard" following the expenses scandal and an assumed drop in public trust (Rath, 2012). If a petition receives 10,000 votes, the Government is required to respond, and if that number rises to 100,000 the petition may be debated in Parliament. Wright (2016, p.850) suggests that people perceive a wide range of benefits from completing and organising petitions, but these benefits are hard to measure with standard means; rather, petitions and their use should be seen as empowering participation, amidst demands for a "broader campaign to leverage organizational resources into power".

It is a significant finding that the most controversial of topical public issues is utilising the service, and indeed it is utilised most amongst those users of the UKIP page, a party whose ideal demographic typically poll as the 'most concerned' of all voters about immigration as a subject. These are users associated with the most politically-sceptical populist party turning to new forms of crowd-sourced opinion sharing in ways that infer its successful representation as a novel tool for citizen engagement, albeit perhaps not the progressive democratic kind utopian visions might have hoped for.

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[8] See - https://petition.parliament.uk/petitions/106477

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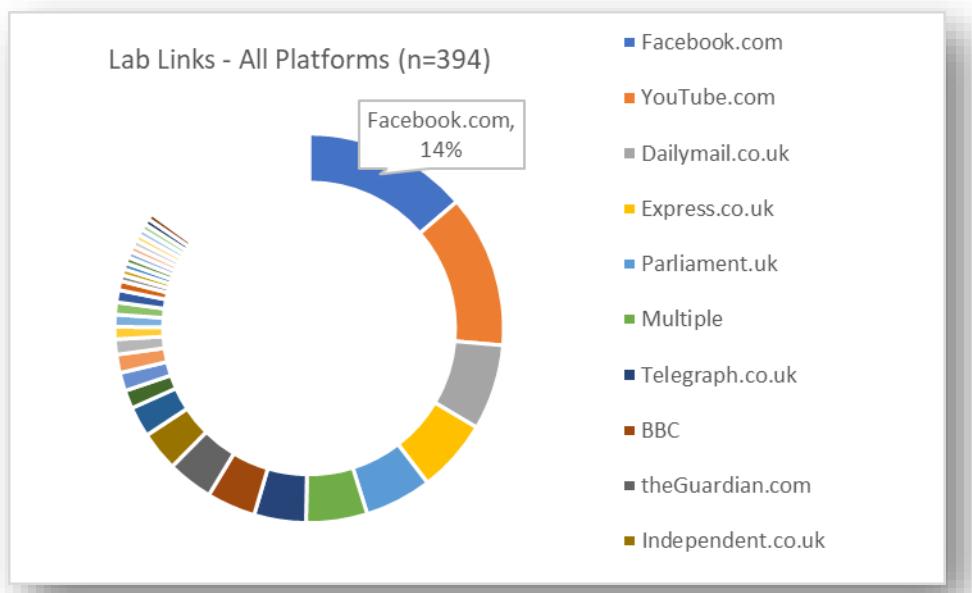
Figure 5.9 Labour Immigration Links - Platforms

Despite its aversion to claims it has become a media company itself (Castillo, 2018), Facebook was the most linked single platform on the Labour and Conservative Pages and made a strong showing on the UKIP Page. Links came in the shape of alternative political and community Pages and Groups demanding particular political action on immigration-related issues. Again, it is significant that a user-centric alternative information arena is linked so frequently around the issue. The UKIP page saw links to a 'Smash Cultural Marxism' Facebook group, the official page of Jean-Claude Juncker (president of the EU commission), and the official VoteLeave and LeaveEU pages. There are also various International and Grassroots alt-media pages reproducing sentiment that the 'mainstream media' refuse to spread the 'truth' about immigration. This theme of media scepticism was a common occurrence, suggesting public scepticism in political elites is mirrored in scepticism about the organisations whose business it is to 'objectively' report politics. Facebook then becomes an alternative taken up by those wishing to bypass legacy corporations.

Facebook links on the Labour page actually shared similar sources to UKIP - including the LeaveEU page - but also the official BNP page, PEGIDA UK, and several links to the official UKIP and UKIP TV Pages; these typically featured content *mocking* Labour's stance on the issue. There were, however, a few pro-immigration links critiquing the racist tone of debate around immigration – in line with the critical speech about debate rhetoric uncovered in Chapter 4 -

including images of the Holocaust, images of drowned Syrian refugees and more ironic graphics depicting ways to 'spellcheck a racist'. Many of these included personal posts on the profile pages of users who have chosen to make their profiles public, and who share news reports, images or 'remixed' multimodal content, including memes - although the latter are few and far between in terms of the data gathered here. Links *within* Facebook on the Conservative page also shared some of the sources mirrored on the Labour page that took a humanitarian stance towards the plight of refugees. However, it also included several links to graphics depicting the plight of homeless ex-military officers allegedly put behind 'migrants' in the housing queue. These were posted repeatedly by several users, suggesting some virality was present around the theme. There were also repeated links to Eurosceptic Facebook pages warning about the dangers of Turkey's membership, viral images on personal profiles depicting 'migrants' as hulking ISIS soldiers, and legacy media headline images critiquing the government's lacklustre response to the threat of Foreign Criminals. Links to these dominant single platforms were utilised in clear partisan ways, avoiding a 'neutral' stance on the issue and frequently using emotive negative visual representations.
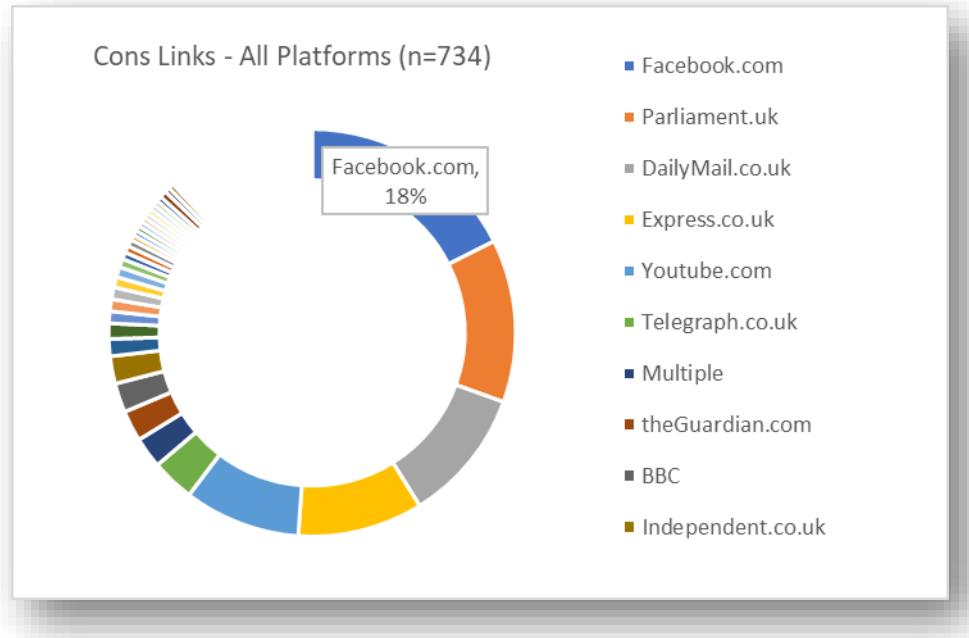

Figure 5.10 Conservative Immigration Links - Platforms

Also scoring in the Top 5 Platforms of each Page was YouTube, suggesting a desire to 'visualise' immigration as a controversy. The utilisation of 'visual politics' has been covered across a range of disciplines going back several decades, with writers illuminating the power of the

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'spectacle' on the public consciousness, particularly where images are naively taken as being 'without coding' and representing reality (Petchesky, 1987). This strain of thought builds on Debord's (1967) critical work, in which he warns against the rise of the 'representation' as unproblematic marker of authenticity, especially where mass mediation has transformed human relationships as part of the commodification of exchange. This would famously be taken further by Baudrillard (1983), who sees the lust for spectacle as forming part of a hyper-reality where the *simulation* of the 'real' becomes a key constituent of contemporary society. The notion that vital political decisions may rely on public opinion, formed via the sharing of spectacular affective political images claiming to represent the truth of a complex situation, would no doubt disturb many of the critical thinkers who have devoted various tomes to it. Thus, the presence of video sharing through 'digital' media around an incendiary issue like immigration is noteworthy. Indeed, of the videos analysed across the three Pages studied, many emphasised a spectacular, dramatic tone towards immigration. Whilst YouTube remains the dominant platform for video sharing, Live Leak and Dailymotion were also linked on several occasions, and many of the Facebook Groups and Pages that were linked also featured videos. The power of *viral* video content was indicated by the fact that certain videos were posted and reposted across platforms and Pages, often featuring the same content with slightly different textual markers added by users.

As illustrated by analysis of the most popular single platforms sourced, users are clearly taking up the technical potential of hyperlinks to render immigration a controversy marked by a diverse collection of sources and info-providers. Indeed, on the UKIP Page this platform hybridity was particularly evident as 'multiple' platforms were often curated in a single comment. One might consider this a result of the inevitable fragmentation of news-publics arising under a 'hybrid media system', characterised by the unstoppable flow of information and a diverse range of mediators seeking to control and deliver it through a variety of multimodal platforms and devices (Chadwick, 2013, p.43). Chadwick (2013, p.205) describes the rise of 'hybrid interstitial spaces' between old and new media, reflecting rapid changes in information-flows amidst the technological presentation of new user-centred opportunities. Indeed, he notes the complaints of an Associated Press member about the "new cluster of new noise", where "The rush to break news and compete with bloggers, online activists on Twitter, and digital-only media organizations like the Huffington Post has led to older news organizations often churning out insubstantial stories based on PR releases, in order to stay in the game" (2013, p.162). In terms of platform selection then, users *are* taking up the chance to make their own 'news' in these hybrid spaces, via the available platforms offered for 'voice'

and the means by which to express opinion. Around the topic of immigration, they use these dominant platforms to circulate grassroots petitions indicating a demand for more concrete political involvement, to reference Facebook Posts from across the platform that take a critical stance on both parties and the issue itself, and to share videos that render immigration as a dramatic spectacle marked by anxiety. These are creative methods manifesting issue-networks that - in line with Chapters 3 and 4 - take on a populist, sceptical tone, shaping immigration as a national, and in cases described in further detail below, *existential* risk.

Nevertheless, whilst these three single platforms score particularly highly, the charts above also reveal the hulking presence of other, *older* media actors frequently linked by users. Indeed, modal analysis of link-comments reveals how beyond individual platforms, the 'Petition' (PET), 'Social Media' (SM) and 'Video' 'modes' described above ultimately pale in comparison to the frequency of 'Old Media' (OM) links. The dominant status of these legacy organisations thus eclipses the spectre of a user-generated media revolution amidst established media allegedly 'in crisis' (Trappel et al, 2015). This indicates how the sharing of links around immigration appears to resemble *less* a radical wave of user-generated politicisation, and more the practice of *remediation* by an army of loyal partisans.
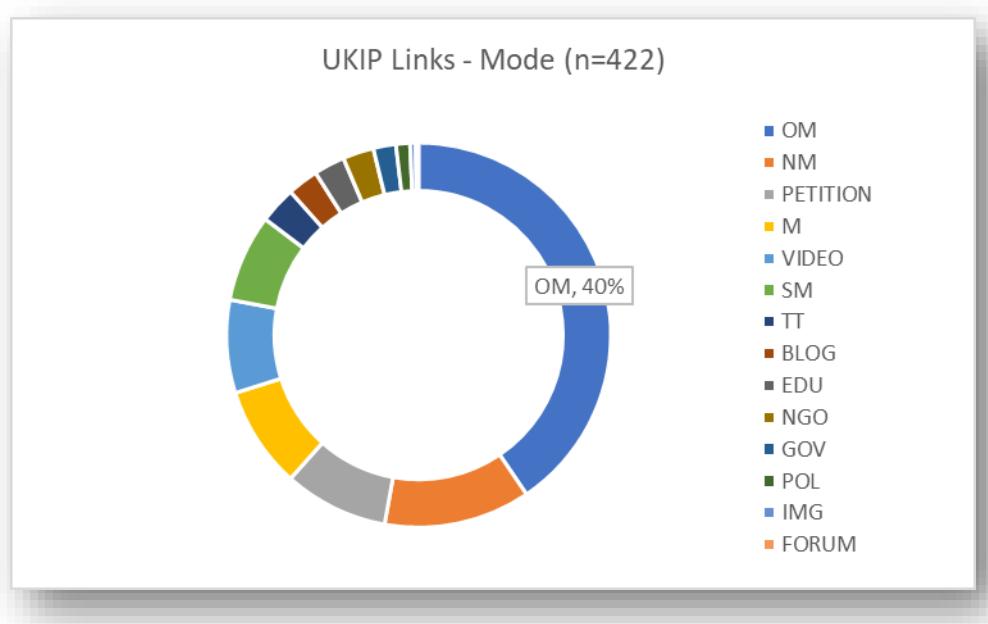
Figure 5.11 UKIP Immigration Links - Modes
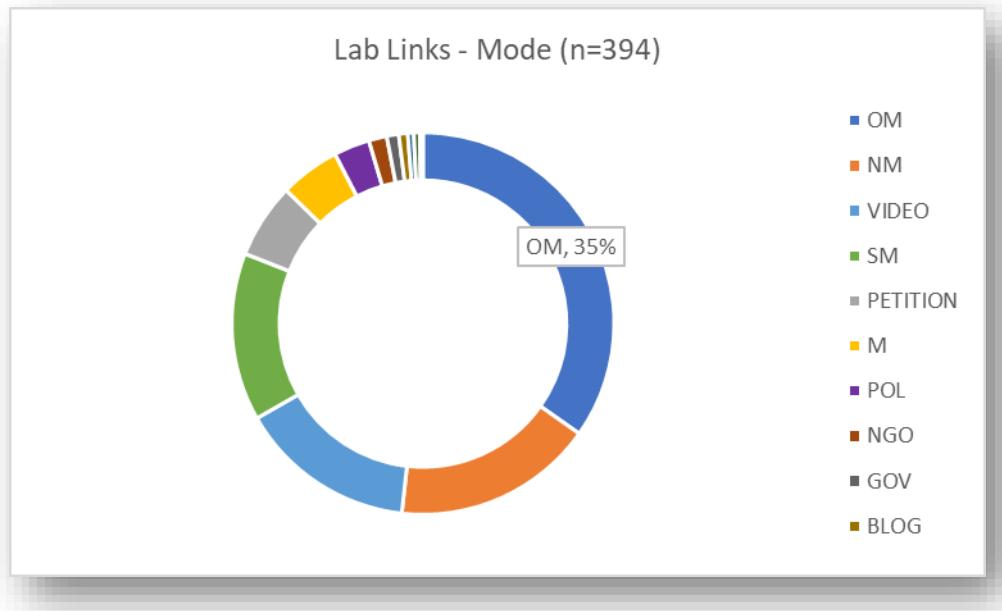
Figure 5.12 Labour Immigration Links – Modes
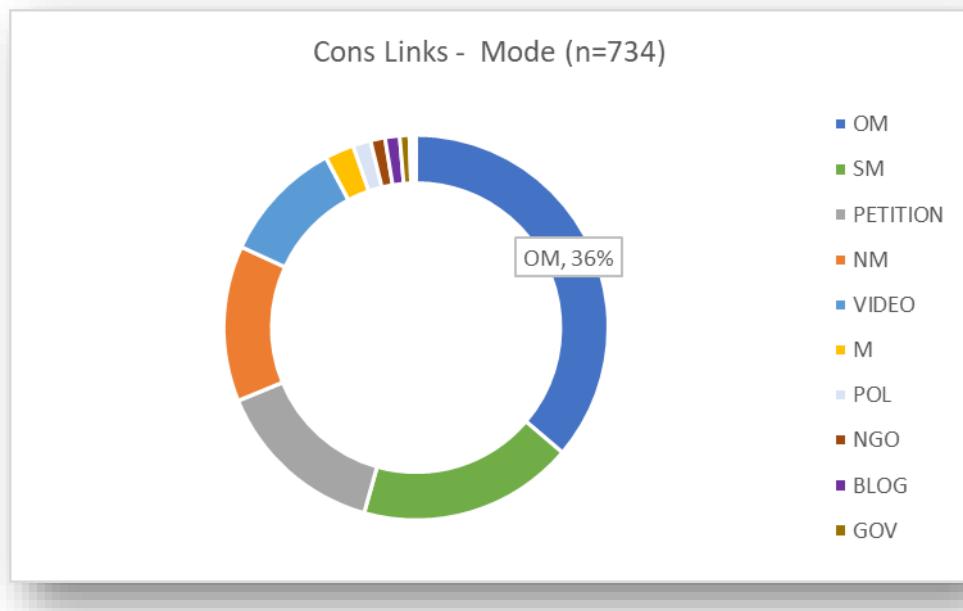
Figure 5.13 Conservative Immigration Links - Modes

In terms of 'modal' frequency, data reveals how each of the user-generated platforms fall far behind a variety of Old Media legacy organisations whose presence dominates Facebook info-circulation. As Chadwick et al (2016, p.15) note, recent research suggests "social media come

to play a greater role in the *distribution* of news and in audience consumption patterns than they do in the everyday *production* of news content". Rather than *challenge* the stance of the established print media organisations through novel digital means, the 'audience' become curators working in the service of editors to carry their 'news' into new realms, shifting the flow of news characterised by concepts of 'mass society' to multiway modes of communication more suited to a 'networked society' (Livingstone and Das, 2013). Print media have been unsettled by the rise of digital media and the increased competition of alternative news sources. They have difficulty gaining access to the ever-larger 'walled gardens' of social media users on dominant platforms like Facebook who have their own algorithmic ways of selecting sources they consider the 'most relevant' and appear successful at their strategy of 'first-contact'. Yet the analysis here shows how older, established media actors remain authoritative sources in terms of sheer volume when it comes to issues of primary public concern; they maintain therefore their central role in the 'political information ecology' (Thorson and Wells, 2015, p.32). Of these established bodies whose output is carried *over* the walls of Facebook, three specific organisations dominate, and their status illuminates the negative sentiment around immigration conveyed more generally.

Old Media Dominance

For each of the pages the same top 3 OM sources are clear - The Daily Mail, The Telegraph and the Express - despite different approaches to the issue taken by the respective parties. Each of these 'private' sources also out-ranks the presence of the only publicly-funded media actor, the BBC, reflecting the anti-BBC comments revealed in Chapter 4.
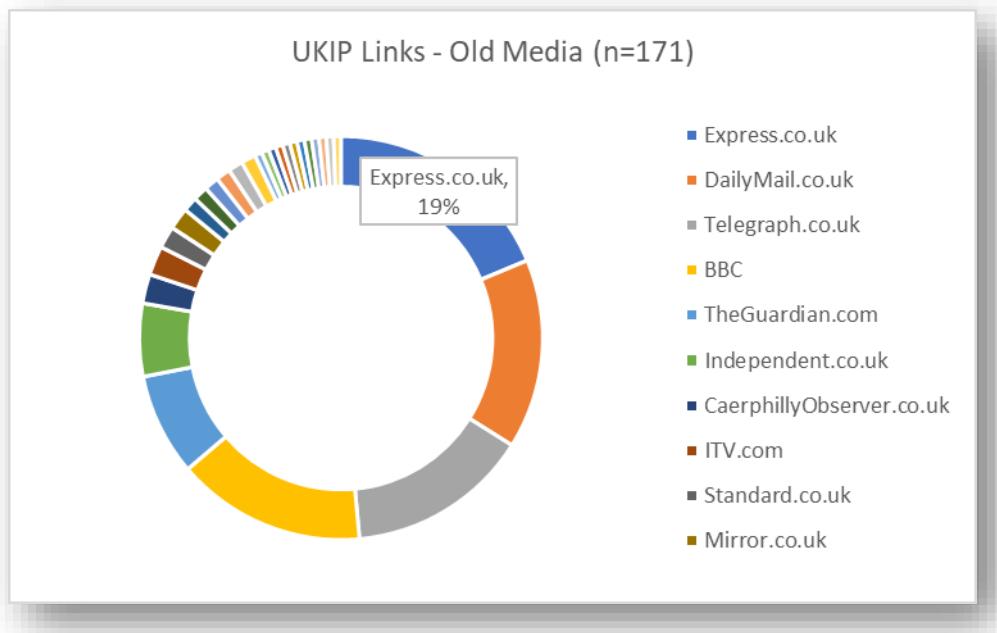
Figure 5.14 UKIP Immigration Links - Old Media Platforms
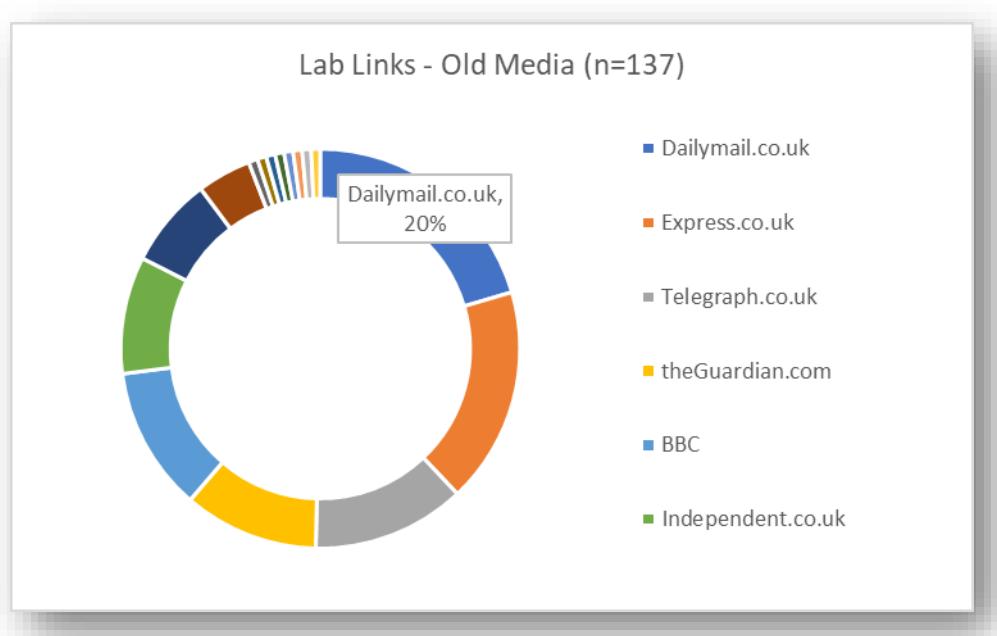
Figure 5.15 Labour Immigration Links - Old Media Platforms
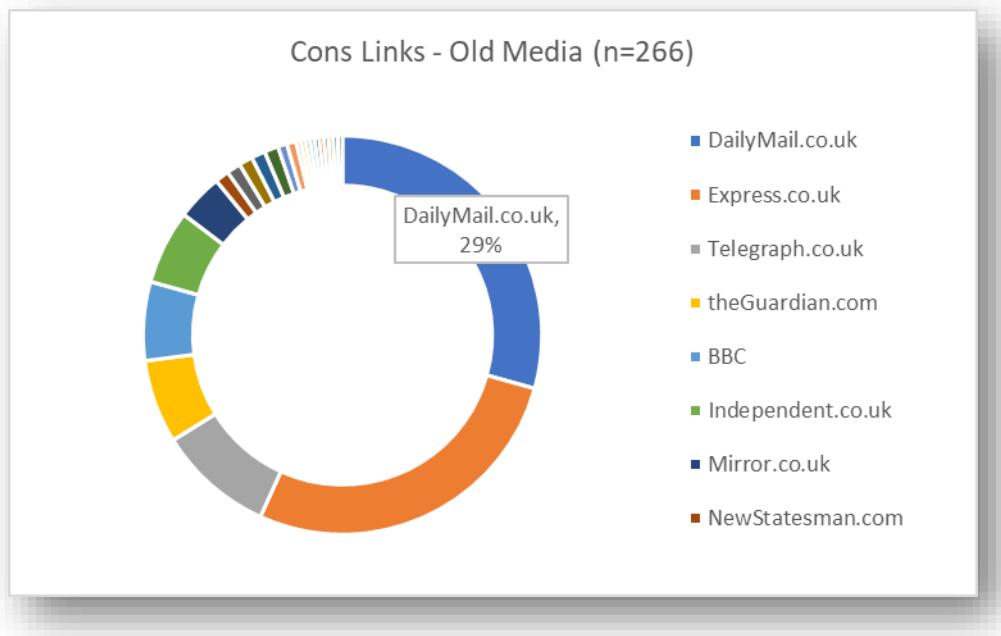
Figure 5.16 Cons Old Media Platforms

These three organisations are all right-leaning media actors who have taken a consistently negative approach to immigration. One might have imagined the Guardian would be the most popular source on the Labour Page, yet the use of links within it reveals again how 'critical linking' is taken up by users to express dismay or anger about Party attitudes towards the issue, circumventing both Party statements and the content (or absence) of immigration posts by parties themselves. This is perhaps not surprising however, given the amount of coverage each of these media actors has given to Immigration; the top three noted here produced a vast array of immigration related material with which users are able to narrate a specifically negative partisan stance. As noted by a LexisNexis search for 'immigration' and 'migrant' between 2015-2016, they score amongst the highest for articles referencing the issue.
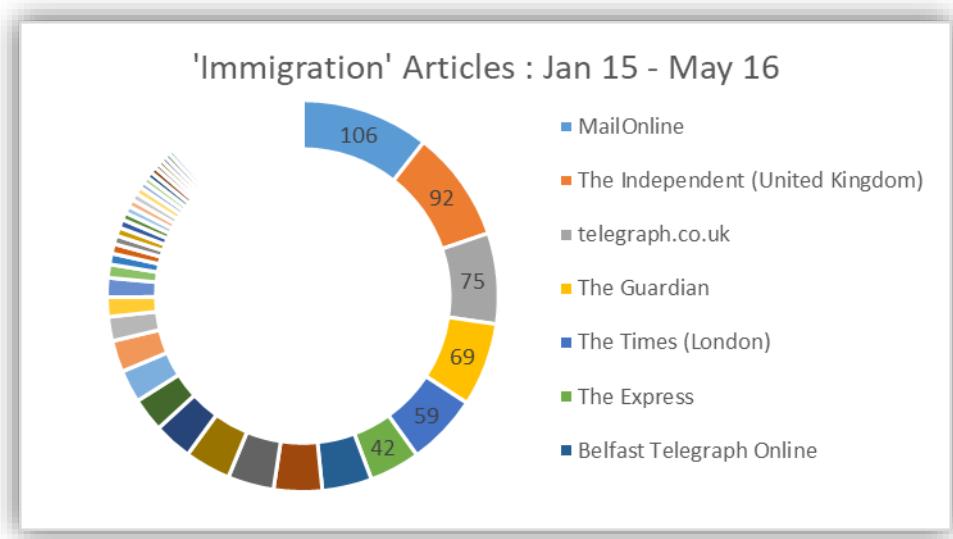
Figure 5.17 Immigration Articles – Top LexisNexis Results

Whilst the chart above reveals how the Guardian too has devoted a significant amount of coverage to the topic, it nevertheless fails to break the stranglehold in terms of link-frequency maintained by more anti-immigration organisations. Despite the novel platform potential for users to challenge dominant media frames, overwhelming and continued obedience to longstanding media actors is evidenced by the willing remediation of their content into a domain thought to challenge legacy actors editorial reach, and it is the *anti*-immigration frames within such that prove most successful in this novel space constituted by Pages that mark the political centre.

Indeed, the major media winners here - the Daily Mail and the Express - are tabloid newspapers, linked to a reliance on attention-grabbing content that has been associated with societal division and conflict; as a European Commission Against Racism and Intolerance report in 2016 warned: "hate speech in some traditional media continues to be a serious problem, notably as concerns tabloid newspapers" ("Council of Europe's...", 2016). The Telegraph, in contrast, might be regarded as a 'broadsheet' paper, responsible for 'real news' and thus perhaps more objective when it comes to racially-charged controversial issues like immigration. Yet as Willems (2015, p.303) argues, "The history of the Daily Telegraph is inextricably caught up with the expansion of British imperialism, although this official history is largely silenced in the paper's current corporate identity". Willems charts the various pro-imperialist owners and editors up to the arrival of right-wing Canadian Conrad Black in 1987,

and the solidification of the papers ongoing reputation as the 'Torygraph' in line with its support of Conservative policy.

Similarly, as the organisation Global Justice Now argue, the Daily Mail has been associated with fascism back to their early support for Hitler in the 1930s, and their encouragement of Mosley's Blackshirts and his British Union of Fascists. In more recent years the paper has made clear its opposition to immigration, as well as the notion that those not born here but naturalised were simply 'plastic Brits' (Barreda, 2017). The Mail hired Columnist Katie Hopkins after her representation of migrants as 'cockroaches' in The Sun received much condemnation (Plunkett, 2016), whilst a cartoon published in the paper in 2014 appeared to depict migrants as 'rats' alongside several other racial stereotypes.

[This image, 'Daily Mail Immigration Cartoon', has been removed as the copyright is owned by another organisation or individual]

In terms of the Daily Express, it is perhaps not surprising that it should be the most-linked Old Media source on the UKIP page, as the promotional graphic below suggests.

Figure 5.18 Richard Desmond UKIP Support

The Express owner Richard Desmond donated £1 million pounds to the UKIP campaign in 2015, and Nigel Farage began regular contributions to the paper with his 'Farage on Friday' column in 2013. Yet work by the Ethical Journalism Initiative report that members of the National

Union of Journalists have long protested the explicit prejudice towards migrants demanded by the paper's controllers. A book published by the organisation (White 2008, p.98) notes:

> NUJ members at the Express group of national newspapers have mounted a long campaign of resistance to pressure from their proprietor to produce brutally racist headlines about immigrants and immigration. The journalists have not been helped in their campaign to uphold standards by the fact that the 'self-regulatory' body in the UK, the Press Complaints Commission (PCC) is dominated by industry employers and consistently rejects complaints that may threaten their autonomy.

That the most linked Old Media sources each have a history associated with anti-immigration right-leaning politics reflects the negative sentiment recorded around issue hyperlinks more generally, and suggests a vast pool of news and information available to those who wish to subsidise their Facebook contributions along partisan lines by remediating coverage of the issue, thus expanding the editorial reach of these particular companies. Where occurring in parallel with the relative *lack* of pro-immigration content, in terms of the pool of news available *offline,* or the desire of users to spread it *online,* the networks produced around the issue take on a very specific partisan, populist character.

Older, legacy organisations thus find themselves carried over competitive corporate walls, expanding not only their practical reach but also the kinds of narratives long followed around the nation and its 'Others' in thematic terms. This is therefore less a radical intervention around the topic exhibited by subversive media interventions on the part of linkers, but rather novel *means* for older *ends.* Below I delineate the specific themes that emerge within the content shared, revealing ultimately how a sense of 'loss' emerges, reflecting less some radical or novel concerns forged through careful critical reflection in line with platform ideals, but rather, longstanding anxiety about the stability and character of a post-colonial state persistently characterised by dominant partisan media bodies. Through hyperlinks, this feeling of loss is curated and expressed in ways that connects with the fearful spectre of mobility outlined *textually* in Chapter 4. When analysed in *multimodal* terms, I show how specific subthemes connect to the dominant modes and platforms outlined above, and how crowd-sourced and visual platforms are utilised for different, affective articulations of 'voice'.

Common Themes Across Pages: Thematic and Modal Intersections

As per the formal categories developed for modal platform analysis, I constructed a variety of substantive thematic categories induced from both the link content as well as any comment attached to it. Drawing on data inferences, initial research questions, policy issues and contextual knowledge (Dey, 1993, p.106), I analysed each link qualitatively, noting the specific aspects of immigration constituting its content and separated them into topics. Once the long-tail had been acknowledged and analysed, themes were sorted into a 'Top 10' for each page[9].

Despite categorisation efforts there remained a large variety of sub-themes. This suggests how disparate topics of political concern are connected within the articulation efforts observed and thus no individual theme dominated. Whilst some lesser-linked themes appear *across* pages, several more frequent categories emerged repeatedly. As illustrated, five themes appeared in the top 10 theme-lists of all three Pages: Islam, Numbers, Refugees, Benefits and Turkey, with Numbers, Benefits and Islam the three themes most typically linked in terms of frequency. According to a large mixed-methods polling project, concern about sheer numbers, the capacity of benefits and services, and issues of cultural change dominated the anxieties people professed about immigration (Ashcroft, 2013), and these appear to be reflected in the sources of information people shared around the topic between 2015-2016. As illustrated, the top 10 themes are variegated in terms of platform source.

Yet considering the frequent themes emerging *across* Pages, patterns appear to indicate a particular kind of theme/mode relationship, illuminating the way users take-up the novel technological means by which knowledge around the issue might be shared in order to craft a specific digital aesthetic that nevertheless harks back to older notions of national 'fragility'.

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[9] perhaps most conspicuous in its absence is a potential 'EU' category. Indeed, such was the overwhelming frequency of the EU as a parallel sub-theme within immigration - in both the media linked and the comment accompaniment - that I chose to draw out its relation to the other categories within their respective discussions.
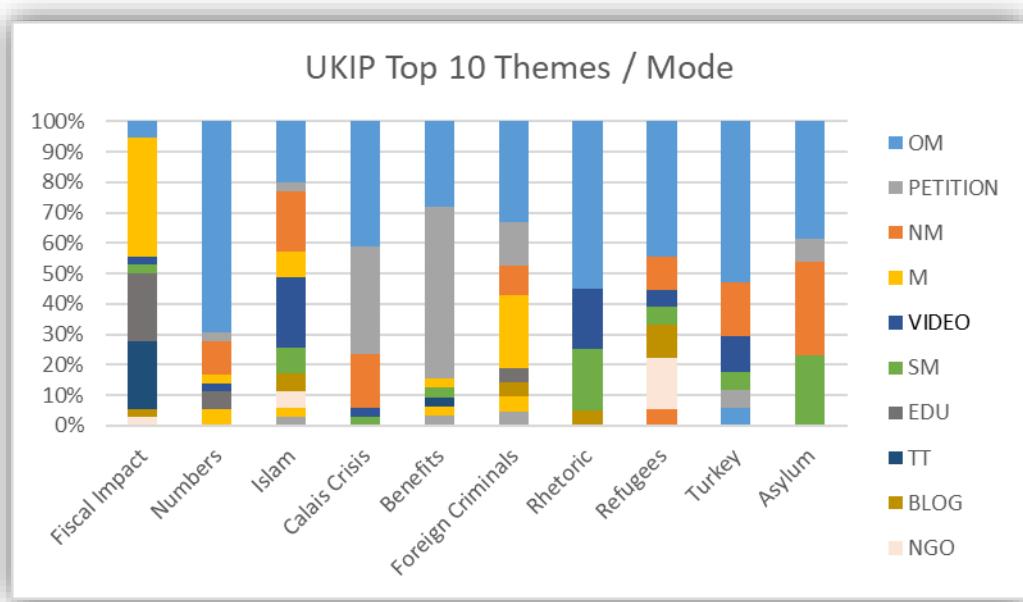
Figure 5.19 UKIP Top 10 Theme / Mode Intersections
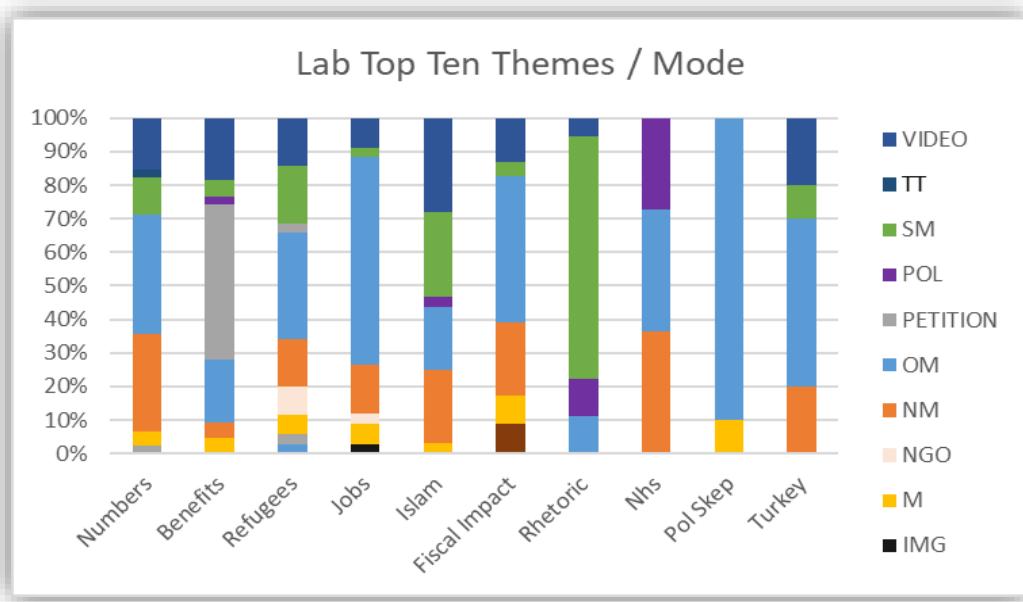
Figure 5.20 Lab Top 10 Theme / Mode Intersections
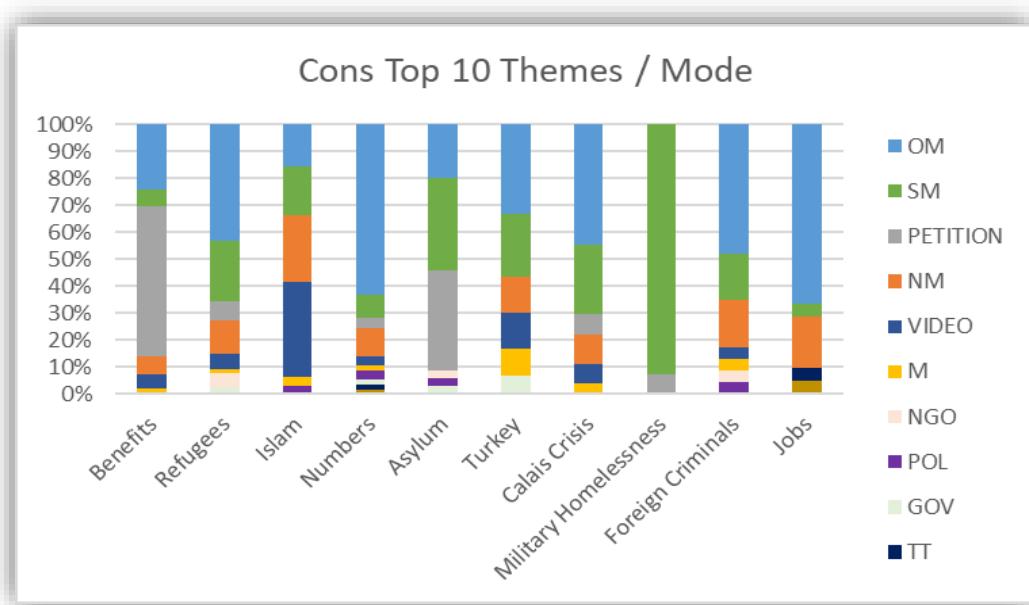
Figure 5.21 Cons Top 10 Theme / Mode Intersections

Of the dominant categories *within* themes on each Page, the first major theme *across* them was 'Numbers', reflecting the anxiety over 'mass' mobility raised in the previous chapter. Content was assigned to this category where articles adopted a focus on the metric properties of immigration – including government promises about migration 'caps' and 'limits'.

[This image, 'Numbers Row', has been removed as the copyright is owned by another organisation or individual]

Links on the UKIP page focused heavily on National Insurance statistics and talk of population growth[10][11] and what was conceptualised as the ideal numeric properties of states[12]. Deportation figures were also cited as part of the debate around migration vs emigration stats[13]. The Conservative page again saw links focused on government culpability and the broken promises associated with the so-called 'immigration cap'[14]. These included stories about the 'missing millions' indicated by National Insurance stats and an increase in passport allocations also linked on the UKIP page.

[This image, 'Tories Promises', has been removed as the copyright is owned by another organisation or individual]

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[10] "Row over 1.2m EU "Immigration Gap"
[11] "National Insurance Number Allocations..."
[12] "Immigration and Gobstoppers..."
[13] "Deportations, Removals and Voluntary Departures…"
[14] Chorley (2015) "Tories WILL Repeat Broken Migration Promise…"

ONS statistics were cited[15], whilst anxiety about the potential numbers of migrants from new EU states[16] featured alongside a 'Gumball' illustration of the sorts of pragmatic number control states should enact[17]. Several links to the 'Overcrowded Britain' documentary were shared from YouTube and from various anti-EU Facebook pages[18]. As the major linked theme also appearing on the Labour page, sources featured similar articles about population stats[19], with again a heavy focus on Cameron's broken promises from a Labour slant[20]. The Farage flip-flop over UKIP's own 'cap' policy was also critically interrogated[21][22]. The 'Gumballs' video noted above made its appearance on a third Page, and the same 'Overcrowded Britain' documentary also appeared. Anti-Immigration think-tank 'MigrationWatch' also received several mentions and links both direct and indirect, noting the benefits of Brexit in terms of reducing immigration figures[23]. The intersections emerging here painted a clear link to Government (in)capability, and show signs of the political scepticism and helplessness associated with EU regulations and the looming shadow of supranational bodies expressed in comments detailed in Chapter 4.

For Numbers, the dominant mode was indeed 'Old Media', as users curated an existing journalistic focus on the failure of parties to control mobility, particularly the failure of the 'immigration cap' and the portrayal of Cameron as weak and prone to falsehoods. Concern over the notion of increasing 'numbers' and a desire to link the mediation of such reflects both traditional polls and a dominant strain of anti-political discourse as noted in the rhetorical patterns identified in user speech. This is empowered by the prevalence of such attitudes in the mainstream press, *despite* user expressions of scepticism for it. Indeed, critical approaches that built on Marxist interrogations of media power have been forced to acknowledge the significant structural changes resulting from the rise of digital, networked socialisation. This signals in part a collapse of the boundary between interpersonal and mass communication utilised in prior critiques, and of conceptualisations of the 'audience' as passive subjects (Livingstone and Das, 2013). Technological development has offered novel ways for audiences to take up more interactive roles, as parallel growth in 'new media' sectors continually

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[15] Silvera (2015) ") 'Pressure Mounts for David Cameron…"
[16] "Romania and Bulgaria Migration Rises"
[17] NumbersUSA (2010) "Immigration, World Poverty and Gumballs…"
[18] Brown (2013) "Overcrowded Britain"
[19] "Migration Statistics Quarterly Report…"
[20] "Labour has changed on immigration…"
[21] Mason (2015) "Nigel Farage drops Ukip's 50,000 cap…"

[22] Bennett (2015) "Exclusive: Ukip's Migration Cap Was Scrapped…"
[23] Barrett (2016) "Brexit would cut Net Migration…"

threatens the power and scope of traditional legacy media bodies. In 1982 Curran (1982, p.212) had already noted how "The introduction of new techniques of mass communication has tended to undermine the prestige and influence of established mediating organizations and groups. By providing new channels of communication, bypassing established mediating agencies, new media have also posed a serious threat to the stable, hierarchical control of social knowledge". However, as seen here, the fact that older legacy media still exert considerable influence on the thematic substance of an issue, as it arises in new social spaces, shows the tenacity and in some sense *flexibility* of 'old' media, even where platforms erect walls to manage the circulation of these external media actors.
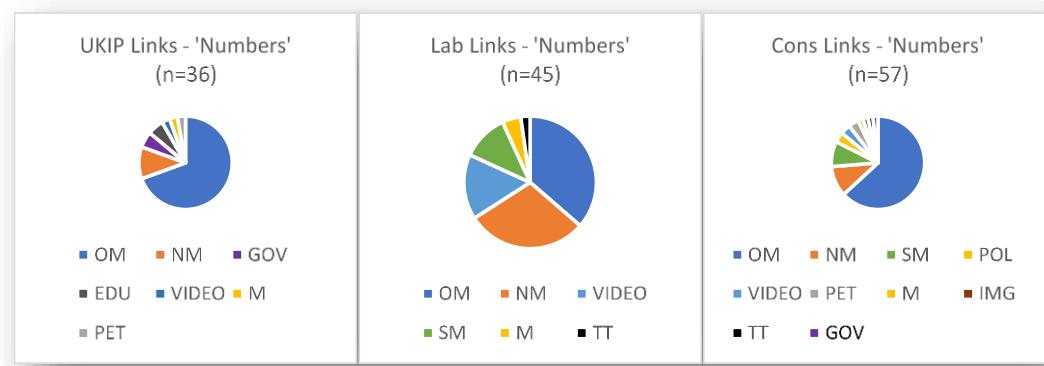
Figure 5.22 'Numbers' Theme / Mode Intersections

As illustrated above, 'Remediation' and 'Obedience' habits amongst Facebook users allow these media-elites access to spaces they may have feared would pose considerable obstacles to their reach. In terms of the thematic content engaged by these media actors, there have been calls by some politicians to "move the immigration debate on from the single issue of numbers that has dominated for the past decade" (Travis, 2012). Nevertheless, there may be good reasons "why policymakers seek simple solutions, why the public supports such solutions, and why the media fail to provide meaningful coverage of intractable issues" (Petersen, 2010, p.1). The empowerment and circulation of easily 'objectifiable' and palatable areas of discussion that avoid the murky depths of nationalism allows the reduction of complex issues to a simple question of say, numbers, to which policy might respond in equally simple numerical terms. Politicians are able to express 'expertise', the media are able to assemble click-bait headlines and the public can do without the hard work and research required to express a 'legitimate' and respectful opinion. Such would appear the set of

relations one might expect in an era of constant electoral, 'mediatised' (Livingstone, 2009; Couldry, 2012; Couldry and Hepp, 2016) politics powered by an attention-economy (Livingstone and Lunt, 2014; Landerer, 2013).

As one report describes the representation of the issue (Suro, 2009, p.3):

> Immigrants and political actors are the primary protagonists of these dramas, while the public is a passive bystander. And as the transformation of the media has taken hold, this pattern has been repeated over and over again for many years with increasing intensity. The breathless, on-and-off coverage—more opera than ooze—has mischaracterized a massive demographic event that has developed over decades and mostly through legal channels. And at the same time, it has helped create contours in public opinion that have rendered the enactment of new immigration policies ever more elusive.

The link between dominant themes and dominant sources emerging thus suggests a revolution is yet to be witnessed in ways that counter fears of elite media domination present in Habermasian accounts, as well as in critical Marxist takes on agenda-setting, although it is important to acknowledge that Old and Legacy media bodies no longer retain *sole* control over issue narratives. As Meraz (2009, p.701) argues in her study of political linking on blogs, "elite traditional mass media entities are more likely to exert their agenda setting power at the "short head" of the long tail of media choices while citizen media influence aggregates agenda setting power down the "long tail" of media options". By taking advantage of the wealth of new platforms, citizens can express themselves in ways that establish small networks of influence and attention. However:

> though traditional media's agenda setting power is no longer the sole influence, its influence still remains a driving, "A-list" force in the creation of blog agendas. As predicted by long tail media theory (Anderson, 2005), citizen media's efficacy is in its aggregate effect, an effect which is able to blunt traditional media's singular agenda setting effect (ibid.)

Indeed, for Benefits and Islam, the remediation story is not so straightforward. For these two consistent themes novel means *are* taken up to create networks of concern that utilise alternatives to Old Media sources, however, again, the thematic ends resulting from such practice are hardly new.

As the second major category of links, 'Benefits' included any source and/or comment focused on the consequences and causation of the link between benefits and immigration[24]. On the UKIP page, links formed a narrative of 'Soft Touch' Britain[25][26] and the perils of 'benefit tourism'[27] amidst alleged widespread public discomfort with benefit regulations and their role in the growth of Immigration figures. However, there was also some critical linking by UKIP *opponents,* sourcing coverage of 'emigrant benefits' and suggesting Britons abroad relied on the welfare systems of hosting states in equal if not higher measure[28].

On the Conservative page, Benefits as category formed the largest theme for triggering linking practice. Links took a critical stance on the story of the drowned Syrian child Alyan Kurdi, alleging that his father's motivation was benefit-related[29], whilst the topic of in-work benefits was also linked[30], along with a story about 'Gypsies' and their lack of shame at being welfare-dependent[31]. Links on the Labour page pursued similar issues, with several links to the story of Aylan Kurdi's father.

[This image, 'Father Wanted Teeth', has been removed as the copyright is owned by another organisation or individual]

The sharing of *emigration* stats again pointed out the weakness of the 'benefit magnet' argument, however a popular petition *against* immigration proved a more typical source, even on the page of Labour, the only ostensibly 'pro-immigration' party. Indeed, whilst several Old Media articles covering Benefits were posted on each page, the most frequent mode was in fact 'Petition', largely due to one particular petition posted multiple times by multiple people across all three Pages.

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[24] Whilst links describing 'Fiscal Impact' were common enough to warrant a category, this was used for news focused specifically on analysis of GDP and 'net' economic impact, associated typically with a series of academic articles produced by researchers at University College London that garnered significant media coverage and represented the few positive voices assessing migrant impact. These were 'link-bombed' onto the UKIP page frequently enough to mark it as the most-linked theme resulting from the critical linking practices of a small band of Page 'travellers', showing how – amongst the relatively lower propensity for linking by Page supporters - critical linking can prove effective, if ultimately a small drop in the ocean of negative sentiment.

[25] Reid (2014) "Your benefits system is crazy…"

[26] Carlin (2015) "Free Hotels…"

[27] Batchelor (2015) "No migrant benefits for FOUR years…"

[28] Nardelli et al (2015) "Revealed: Thousands of Britons on Benefits…"

[29] RobinHoodUKIP (2015) "Syrian Boy Drowned because…"

[30] "Migrant Benefit Row at the heart of Brexit…"

[31] Dassanayake (2014) "Romanian gypsy aims to earn £40,000…"
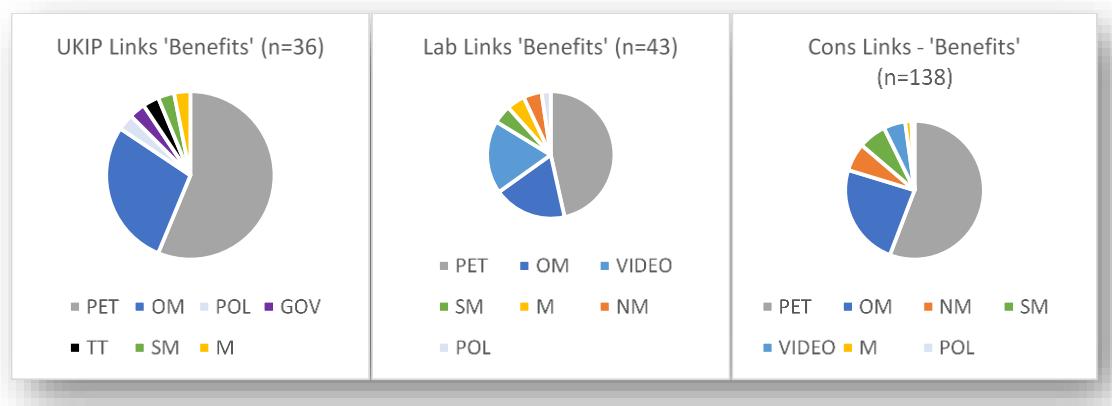
Figure 5.23 'Benefits' Theme / Mode Intersections

Titled 'Stop Allowing Immigrants into the UK', the petition opens with the claim of an attack on entrenched welfare systems and the theft of precious benefits from 'natives'. It then ties in Muslims as a secondary factor, and those most likely to abuse the system: "Foreign citizens are taking all our benefits, costing the government millions!"[32]. The further description then warns readers "If the Government does not do anything, then Britain may take in 12 million more immigrants by 2060". Although opening with benefit abuse as an attention-grabbing hook, it swiftly connects intersecting themes of Islam, and Numbers. Perhaps as a result of the weaving of such key concerns, the petition received 216,949 signatures, forcing a parliamentary debate on the 19th October 2015.

As shown in Chapter 3, there is little to no vertical communication between party and user, rather, parties use their Pages largely as monological promotional devices, suggesting they are uninterested in pursuing the kinds of direct and interactive 'digital democracy' that Facebook as platform potentially makes available. Thus, the popularity and virality of e-petitions as shown here, and the necessary response by Government, suggests these *crowd*-sourced platforms are taken up by users frustrated by the lack of direct engagement elsewhere. The popularity of such links goes some way to empower Bennett and Segerberg's (2012) notion of 'connective action' inspired by technological change in the absence of an overarching controlling organisational body. There are 43 such petitions that have been debated in Parliament thus far, ranging across a variety of issues. According to the site itself, the petitions with the most signatures included 4, 150, 258 people demanding a second EU referendum 'if the remain or leave vote is less than 60% based a turnout less than 75%', 823, 348 people who

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[32] "Archived Petition: Stop Allowing Immigrants into the UK…"

wish to 'Give the Meningitis B vaccine to ALL children, not just newborn babies' and 586, 932 people who believe we should 'Block Donald J Trump from UK Entry'.

However, before identifying e-petitions as the heart of a bottom-up digital revolution it is useful to consider a comparative study of e-petition systems by Lindner and Riehm (2009). Of those taking up such novel practice they suggest "The typical user of the German, the Scottish and the Queensland systems tends to be a middle-aged male with an above-average level of formal education"; under-represented groups appear to be subject to the 'digital divide' characterising ongoing digital 'inequality' that poses a challenge to more inclusive depictions of a digital political future. Furthermore, as Moss and Coleman (2014, p.423) argue, e-petitions:

> also rehearse and reinforce a key weakness of actually-existing democracies: the lack of *meaningful* opportunities for citizens to compare and contrast their reasons for holding views and to engage in such activity in the knowledge that public authorities and political representatives are similarly engaged. Non-deliberative practices can contribute to enacting democratic ideals, but they remain of limited value in the absence of public *deliberation* [emphasis mine].

It is worth acknowledging this 'non-deliberative' public practice inherent to the petition system, and that in fact renders it more like the sorts of *slacktivist* 'liking' parameters within Facebook more generally. If e-petitions are 'counted' by the government as a sign of valid 'public opinion', it is in the *absence* of inclusive 'democratic dialogue' lamented above. As analysis by the New Statesman revealed of the top 10 shared e-petitions in 2016 - "Despite accumulating millions of signatures and hundreds of thousands of shares, however, not a single one of these campaigns succeeded in obtaining its intended outcome" (Tait, 2017). Sharing, Liking and even signing such petitions becomes a political performance for other users on Facebook and suggests expression of a certain aspect of a citizen's 'voice', yet ultimately fails to achieve any sort of concrete result. As the article concludes, "Though many might argue that such campaigns are instrumental in raising awareness, they arguably also allow people to feel as though they have taken action when they haven't, potentially preventing individuals from pursuing more hands-on activism" (Tait, 2017). Similarly, a political strategist warns that such networked slacktivism is not nearly enough to achieve the goals the petition claims to desire (Ablow, 2017):

> If you care about an issue, your job is not done after you sign, says Mogus. "Social change has almost never been made because of what [organizers] call 'low-risk, loose

ties' types of actions." The classic example of a "high-risk, close ties" action, he says, comes from the civil rights movement of the '50s and '60s, when protesters got arrested at segregated lunch counters. Those protesters trusted organizers and put their physical safety — even their lives — on the line.

Although users appear to be gathering at a grassroots level and celebrating crowd-sourced activities reminiscent of the hopes of digital optimists, they do so via a tool specifically presented by the state to *suggest* a serious engagement with the digital that is nevertheless easily dismissed. Again, such a strategy echoes the hands-off style outlined in Chapter 3 as a form of 'Web 1.5' politics and represents another failure of Facebook to serve as a node in a network for the kinds of political practice they celebrate. As a former Labour minister noted of e-petitions with dismay in 2011, "I think they're useless in the fact they have no effect on anything; they're pointless in the fact they don't lead to anything; and they're pernicious in that they lead people to believe that by signing an e-petition they will actually change policy" (Wright, 2015, p.418).

 It is also worth noting that the most popular petition shared on these major Party Pages essentially echoes the perils of Immigration and the dangers of uncontrolled mobility associated with right-wing populist manifestos, at odds with Facebook's espoused ideals. Indeed, although a petition to 'Accept more asylum seekers and increase support for refugee migrants in the UK' collected 450, 287 signatures – far more than the negative petition above, it had a much *lower* profile on the three Pages studied here than its alternative.

[This image, 'Cameron Exposed Video', has been removed as the copyright is owned by another organisation or individual]

The third major category scoring in the Top 5 themes drawn out across Pages described links focused on the theme of 'Islam'. From analysis of the content of the links and the comments attached, Islam emerged as a consistent link-triggering theme. It included a variety of negative representations of Muslims, Islamic culture, Islamic 'states' and an ensemble of Islam-related conspiracies. Several links specifically mentioned ISIS as primary focus, rather than Islam more generally, and these were categorised separately. There were both implicit and explicit ways immigration was anchored in the theme. From links posted around the subject on the UKIP Page, a heavily gendered narrative emerged around 'women in peril', with several links to stories about the sex attacks in Cologne and their alleged connection to migrant men of 'Arab Origin'[33]. Comparison between Muslim populations and Rape statistics in Europe also

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[33] "New Dimension of Crime: Crowd of Arab Origin blamed…"

appeared[34], complemented in narrative terms by complaints about media blackouts as a result of 'political correctness'[35]. Several links favoured a conspiracy theme about Labour and the Conservatives socially engineering a Muslim nation[36][37]. On the Conservative page the 'women in peril' frame also manifested in similar links about the Cologne attacks but were less common than on the UKIP page. Several critical links were posted focusing on the alleged grovelling to Muslim demographics by the Conservatives[38], and the hypocrisy of wealthy Arab states who refused to 'chip in' their support for the plight of Muslims in war-torn locales[39]. Video links suggested how scenes of aggressive migrants chanting Islamic slogans were rarely shown, as media scepticism again emerged in comments and in associated coverage through video[40]. Even on the Labour page, the motif of cultural threat and women in peril was repeated, although less frequently, with similar links to the alleged failure of Arab states to care for their 'own', and the demographic risks posed by the spectre of 'Eurabia' also appeared[41].

[This image, 'Muslim Rampage', has been removed as the copyright is owned by another organisation or individual]

For Islam, the source make-up varies somewhat, yet the most frequent mode for links with a primary Islamic focus was in fact 'Video'. Whilst Social Media links were also common, many of these directed users straight to multimodal content, with 25% of the Social Media links on the UKIP Page featuring videos, 30% on Labour and 31% on the Conservative Page. In terms of specific Video-based platforms, links included 'Muslim-rampage' videos[42], anti-Cameron videos with an Islamic twist noted above, anti-migrant compilations describing the 'coming Caliphate' and obligated "interracial marriage"[43], and videos made by Christian evangelists featuring a foreboding soundtrack and painting a spectacle of Islamic anarchy unleashed across the continent during a prophesised 'Rape of Europe'[44].

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[34] "Muslim Asylum Seekers…"
[35] SargonofAkkad (2014) "Rape Culture UK…"
[36] "Too many White Christian Faces…"
[37] Iancy (2014) "We need more Muslims…"
[38] ChristianStandinFirm (2013) "David Cameron Exposed on Islam"
[39] "About those 3.9 million desperate Syrian Muslim…"
[40] Migrant Truth (2014) "Migrant Crisis: The footage…"
[41] "'EURABIA? EUROPISTAN?..'"
[42] "Muslims Rampage through Paris…"
[43] TheUnfeignedWitness2.0 (2015) "Must See! Crazy European Immigration…"
[44] DavidHathaway (2014) "The Rape of Europe…"
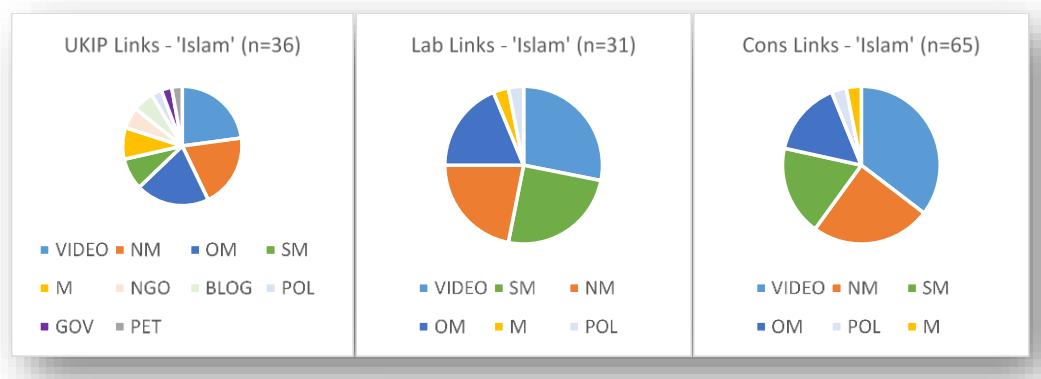
Figure 5.24 'Islam' Theme / Mode Intersections

Various talking-head channels on YouTube – including Pat Condell, 'Sargon of Akkad' and M.A.R.I.A.S (Mothers Against Radical Islam) – sought to provide a face-to-face 'straight-talking' account of the role of Islam in stoking uncertainty over European identity, and the complicit nature of politicians in promoting cultural change, or failing to protect European values[45]. These particular channels also featured a variety of anti-feminist, anti-multiculturalism speeches, and in the wake of the US election victory of Trump, could be described as part of the 'alt-right' movement gaining ground and driven by social media 'activism' (O'Brien, 2016). As informal, confessional and close-up appeals, they invite viewers into their homes for a personal consultation – a virtual pressing-of-the-flesh that politicians themselves specifically appear to *avoid*.

[This image, 'Goodbye Sweden', has been removed as the copyright is owned by another organisation or individual]

The utilisation of these visual channels for the sharing of politically-charged opinion pieces, remixed media content and memes highlights the way particular platforms become vehicles for particular kinds of affective content, and reflects the literature noted above that outlines the way the 'visual' is utilised in representing particular kinds of 'authentic' existential anxiety and controversy where it features embodiment as primary factor. In their desire to drive home the 'threat' framing of immigration, users appear eager to take-up recently developed technological means to visually *flesh-out* the racialized shape of the frighteningly mobile, in ways that a study of user-speech alone does not so explicitly convey.

As Mitchell (1994, p.3) notes, "Books have incorporated images into their pages since time immemorial, and television, far from being a purely 'visual' or 'imagistic' medium, is more

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[45] PatCondell (2010) "Goodbye Sweden"

aptly described as a medium in which images, sounds, and words 'flow' into one another". The political force of ideology supplemented by visual media that operationalises this flow of image, text and sound has long aroused cultural critics, with work on the power of the image a focus of investigation into the transmission of meaning, as noted earlier. With the arrival of cinema, evaluation of the way "a medium such as cinema helps control the masses by dulling their senses to the inequalities inherent in the capitalist system" (Gray, 2010, p.110) aimed to establish how a populace might be hoodwinked into accepting an inherently unfair society. Indeed, as Debray (2007, p.18) argues: "Photocomposition destroyed the last cultural bases of the workers' movement; both the bookmakers' craft and its traditional caste of pundits and commentators were rendered technologically redundant. Print lost its lead, the critical intellectual his milieu, socialist politics its reference; all three were thrown into crisis". Yet the utilisation of affective visual media to make political points – to *stir* passion rather than dull it – has been acknowledged through agentic frameworks that note how signs "are motivated, not arbitrary relations of meaning and form […] part of the semiotic resources of a culture (Kress, 2010, p.55). Newspapers and legacy media have long utilised images, as seen in the tabloid cartoons above. But the sharing of *videos* to make points about controversial politics is a feature of social media that offers those who generate content, or remediate those of others, an intervention in the form of spectacular representation more akin to televisual 'news'.

The kinds of videos shared here offer both the 'professional' newsreader style of authoritative judgement - by a talking-head on YouTube - and the more dramatic conjunction of clips and music that conjure a cinematic news-style. The former reflects a sober, pained take on the events of the day that in careful and coherent rhetoric confesses difficulty about the forced negotiation of xenophobia and a fascist European past, 'it's just that things are simply to perilous to bury one's head'. As Condell states at the start of the YouTube video illustrated above – "Well, this is a video I didn't want to make". By highlighting wider European events as well as those in the UK, these videos draw out a narrative of global change that suggests the helplessness of one small, vulnerable nation-state at risk as a result of interconnectedness and the overarching system of globalism. They flirt with professionalism yet at the same time exhibit some humility, in their simple aesthetic choice of a platform that empowers the audience to make their own confession - to be active, rather than passive consumers.

The latter cinematic and dystopian style presents vast numbers of 'migrants' moving rapidly across states, towards borders and through towns in what appears an anarchic fashion that upsets what order one is moved to presume existed 'before'. It combines anxiety over the movement of the masses – reflecting the fear over mobility outlined in Chapter 4 - whilst also

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presenting in colour exactly what 'kinds' of strange bodies are on the move along what are presented as pathways of post-imperial contagion that a neoliberal order demands are 'necessary' for the success of modern states. As Anderson (2017, p.1530) argues, these scenes of the 'wretchedly' mobile storming borders and towns construct:

> the very antithesis of 'managed migration', the careful identification, points systems and processing of migrants that lies at the heart of migration and refugee policy. It invokes old fears of the mob (quite literally, the mobile) at the same time as contrasting the democratic people and the labouring class with the dangerous and disorganized masses.

As a third form of presentation that compliments the 'talking-head' and cinematic 'rampage' styles, the 'Growth of Islam' videos provide compilation clips that highlight the alleged *factual* basis of our 'Islamification'. They edit together a variety of speeches by British politicians themselves that appear to downplay danger, empower more acceptance of the religion and specifically target Muslims as potential social climbers that should be helped to reach the highest perches in government. Politicians are presented boldly ignoring the concerns of the public – those forced to appear 'prejudiced' against a multicultural norm – as they confess the conspiracy of which they are accused, whilst turning away from the scenes of rampage and destruction in a complete betrayal of the nation at risk.

However, critical interrogation of that which characterises anti-Islamic feeling within the kind of digital content circulated suggests ultimately that nothing in the *sentiment* expressed is really 'new', despite its novel vehicle (Sherman, 2016). It reflects instead the persistence of ethno-nationalism in Europe and North America that has naively been consigned to war-torn states in the Balkans or Africa, amidst politically strategic portrayals of a 'post-racial' age for the West. A study by media intelligence company MediaTenor (2015) suggest "Terror and Fear" shape coverage of Islam by International News organisations, accompanied in large part by what Green (2015, p.240) describes as the constant framing of passive 'Oppressed Muslim Women'. Joined by a general ignorance about the religion, and lack of personal contact with Muslims on the part of most 'Westerners', mediation by legacy organisations is said to have long shaped popular understandings (Green, 2015, p.233). Thus, where the Video category and its User-Generated Content makes a strong showing in comparison to Old Media, it is not 'saying' anything particularly radical, but is utilising a space encouraging disinhibition to express traditional grievances, and then expand textual narratives aesthetically through

multimodal visualisation, ultimately supplementing longstanding narratives *remediated* on behalf of tabloid actors.

By favouring critical visual sources that focus on the spectacle of a 'male rampage' amidst a 'migrant crisis', the multimodal practice seen here makes more explicit the anxiety over mobility illuminated in Chapter 4. By highlighting the threat facing Europeans in racialised and gendered ways, these representations visually re-activate older colonial-era tropes around miscegenation and sexual morality (Stoler, 1995; McClintock, 1995). They echo fears of a 'Black Peril', and "the need to protect and affirm hegemonic white male authority and supremacy through exclusive access to white women, as boundary-markers and symbols of morality" (Musila, 2015, p.69). Through curation of multiple modes of anti-immigration sentiment, the practice here thus dramatically enjoins a range of economic *and* cultural threats. In the case of the videos gathered, a whole cast of sociotechnical 'actors' are put to work to articulate a particular political identity built in opposition to immigration. Such performances may not *rely* on the editorial stance of Old Media entities but indicate how persistent discourses of past and present interact with various human and novel non-human materials, in the contemporary 'doing' of contentious politics.

Practice, Convergence and Hybrid Populism

Drawing out the narratives emerging from the kinds of political curation manifested by hyperlink practice, we see again common themes of mobility and an alleged lack of control that describe *movement* itself as a threat to stability and fixity. However, through hyperlinks, users are able to *embody* the consequences of the numerically depicted mass movement triggering the anxiety found in textual comments, with *loss* emerging as a key concern involving threats to an entrenched welfare system whose protection is demanded via crowd-sourced petitioning. Anxiety around movement and loss is then further described by visual depiction of *who* is coming and taking, and why they are *illegitimate* bodies in terms of national belonging and the conservation of national security. Through hyperlinking, users are thus able to make vivid their hostility to immigration through the discursive utilisation of remediation that at the same time *distances* them from personally uttering prejudiced pronouncements, and thus sidesteps liberal normative restraints on speech. In this way, users avoid any language one might easily classify as 'racist', or that would manifest the 'hate speech' that one might expect to emerge via the effects of despatialisation or disinhibition associated with online realms.

Together, the modes and themes that underpin the kinds of narratives that emerge here show how media platforms and modes are entangled in user practice, albeit not in equal measure. Yet each serves a purpose in the promotion and circulation of a specific stance on the topic. Bartlett (2014, p.93) argues in his coverage of the rise of populist sentiment in Europe that Social Media serves as an excellent 'populist' medium, primarily because "The medium fits the message: it is distributed, non-hierarchical and democratic. It is an alternative to the mainstream media, which many supporters of populist parties strongly distrust. It is not controlled by the elites. Instead, the content is generated by us – the honest, hardworking, ordinary citizens, exactly the people who the populists are defending". Indeed, Kramer (2017) notes how "the few existing studies of right-wing populist online communication [...] have emphasized that populists use the Internet to circumvent the established media". Yet as seen here, linkers in fact prefer to network in older, established media entities, long entwined with political parties and reproducing older tropes of otherness and national fragility. These stubborn thematic elements are then enlivened and made vivid by the availability of novel multimodal platforms in supplementary form, allowing the affective elements entrenched yet obscured at the heart of debate to be thrust forward, in ways that nevertheless carefully absolve those who traffic them from direct responsibility for their 'hateful' production.

By taking up specific hybrid practice in this way, analysis of the data gathered from hyperlink analysis reveals not only the ways in which anxiety and scepticism about the failures of political representation emerge, echoing the concerns raised through textual comments about mass numbers and a lack of control, but how the mobility formerly inferred in vague terms is made more tangible in reference to particular kinds of people who are not only 'mobile', but *mobilising* to plunder precious resources and stain the cultural fabric. In this way, multimodal thematic analysis reveals anxiety and antagonism towards the elites - in terms of the political establishment thought to have failed - but also the older forms of Othering that were less apparent in analysis of textual comments in Chapter 4. As such, it reveals "the right-wing populist discursive strategy of constructing a double antagonism between 'us' and 'them' (the Elite) and 'the others'" (Ajanovic et al, 2016, p.131). It shows how this 'construction' is achieved through the specific potentialities of social media platforms in combination with older media vehicles. For Canovan (1999, p.2), populists present themselves as "true democrats, voicing popular grievances and opinions systematically ignored by governments, mainstream parties and the media". This is an approach clearly taken up by UKIP in their own campaigning, supported by user negotiations of Facebook's 'space', and repeated in comments contributed across all three Pages, detailing the successful ownership of immigration as an

issue. However, here the media are not simply bypassed in favour of novel User-Generated Content but folded into narratives with a little splash of extra, bottom-up technicolour added for affective purposes. Although there was evidence of white nationalist and far-right content more easily labelled 'extreme' linked in by a tiny proportion of commentators, the majority did not need to look further than the dominant tabloids that scored so highly here in terms of frequency, to either extremist material or indeed the 'Fake News' held responsible for a variety of unexpected political outcomes; the underlying themes were already present and available and fertile for multimodal revitalisation and supplementation.

As a result, media 'Old' and 'New' both 'collide' and 'converge' (Jenkins, 2006). Rather than completely 'decentralise' media however, the active 'audiences' acknowledged here contribute to the empowerment of older corporations as well as those who own the novel multimodal platforms networked over the Facebook wall. Popularity metrics then amplify certain contributions, increasing their virality, enlarging the group of users likely to encounter them and signal-boosting the ideological content within. As a result of re-mediation habits, users serve the platforms utilised, the particular ideologies operationalised upon them *and* the Political party whose brand is attached to such, as they perform a partisan political identity in pursuit of a crafted digital self. Within the info-networks drafted in service of what comes to resemble a 'transmedia' politics enacted through both media consumption and production in user practice, we do see signs of a 'new synergy' and 'technological hybridity' lauded by theories of convergence (Hay and Couldry, 2011, p.473). However, whilst we might identify 'new' cultures of 'use', these are 'old' and reactionary - rather than revolutionary - cultural motifs that are operationalised. Whilst on the one hand these serve forms of cultural *stratification* rather than cultural *convergence*, they seek on behalf of a populist political agenda the articulation of a collective in opposition to a mainstream viewed with increasing scepticism in a climate reflecting post-democratic portrayals. In the antagonistic spaces opened within what appears more coherently at each empirical stage a *counter*-hegemonic response to the avoidance of the issue's passionate dynamics pursued by mainstream parties - users enact hybrid, multimodal approaches in the articulation of the issue, that nevertheless looks *backwards* rather than *forwards* for solutions. In so doing, they enrol a vast array of sociotechnical actors, across a contingent, unstable and un'fixed' political landscape.

The hyperlinking acts engaged here thus join modes of textual articulation detailed in Chapter 4, within the specific kind of spatial production and negotiation outlined in Chapter 3. The algorithmic articulation encountered through popular user comments is therefore revealed though analysis of hyperlink curation as 'multimodal'. Grass-roots crowd-sourcing platforms,

Old Media and User-Generated Content are *hyper*linked in the articulation of news and information necessary for the representation of a collective will, and then 'nudged' by the platform in response to user interpretation and reaction and promoted through metric ordering. Hyperlink practice reveals the lingering dominance of Old Media organisations through their circulation of representations of immigration, and these both repeat and at the same time contest elements of the professionalised political 'agenda' adopted by parties. These are taken-up by users who do things with, but also 'to' the editorial stance at work, as it is folded into partisan narratives, entwined with the content of amateurs and channelled alongside quantified public demands for political action. The symbolic power of media in naturalising particular depictions of immigration as public issue through processes of mediatisation is here distributed across agents old and new, human and machine, and through articulations of a particular stance that ultimately buoys the issue-ownership and spatial domination by the 'anti-establishment' populist party and their supporters; it becomes "part of the complex web of symbolic interactions that constitute the fabric of political communication and of society […] interrelated parts of the overall, ongoing power interplay" (Block, 2013, p.261). Linking within 'Sharing' thus further emphasises the relationship between culture, identity and communication, yet in ways that refuse the granting of 'determination' capacities to one all-powerful actor - whether political party, media organisation or the user herself.

These hyperlink practices mark the third aspect of sharing measured empirically, alongside the constitution and negotiation of space and the discursive practice detailed in Chapters 3 and 4. They exemplify how 'social' life and processes of meaning-making draw upon a context and landscape that are increasingly lived in digital terms, and impacted by the specific range of digital affordances within the platforms that capture both their attention *and* their labour. The forms, modes and themes of information and news circulation signal a change in media consumption, and production, as a range of new authors seek 'voice' and find willing audiences for the amplification of their specific ideological stance. By charting how users articulate, join and fold together disparate themes in diverse multimodal fashion, within a specific kind of acting space with its own ideas about collectivity and community, we see the articulation of immigration emerge within partisan spheres, and then travel across networks to leave its mark as the dominant framing of the issue. This is characterised in overwhelmingly negative terms and draws in themes of loss and risk - political, economic and cultural. It draws together what are at times competing political factions in its articulation of an anti-establishment, counter-hegemonic challenge to what is presented as a consensus on the unending flow of capital and the surplus bodies vital to its maintenance. As reflected here,

longstanding 'common sense' appears increasingly unsettled by new collective challenges within the populist sociotechnical practice 'shared' most effectively.

Regarding an alleged media 'crisis' marked by "increasing consumer time and attention for social media and online content at the expense of legacy media" (Meier and Trappel, 2017, p.219), we see here quite the opposite thanks to the work of committed remediators. The role of old media in the articulation practices engaged here thus appears somewhat paradoxical amidst narratives anchored in hostility to the 'establishment' and the status quo. As Fenton (2016, p.82) argues, "the wily entanglement between political elites and media elites" characterising contemporary journalistic practice is a depressing realisation for older idealistic notions of journalism's role in democratic renewal. She depicts a "'post-democracy' characterised by increasing deregulation of corporate media interests that allows excessive influence over and inappropriate interference in the political public sphere", and indeed, whilst users appear happier to rail against the alleged bias of the public BBC, they continue to serve the interests of private partisan tabloids as long as it serves *their* attempts at the construction of particular ideological narratives. Here, legacy entities remain influential purveyors of 'reality'. When amidst the rampant acceleration and commercialisation of digital news "the values of professional journalism are quickly cast aside in order to indulge in sensationalism, trade in gratuitous spectacles and deal in dubious emotionalism" (2016, p.82), a vast reservoir of affective content might be drawn upon by those crafting contemporary multimodal representations.

Yet where old media do not provide the specific kinds of material vital to the nevertheless *careful* fleshing out of counter-hegemonic angst noted above, new forms of user-generated content can be chained into populist projects in an uneasy but productive symbiosis. Although their status is buoyed by their tenacious hold on the audiences long established along partisan lines, media elites surely tread carefully, with an eye on the fortunes of political parties whose favour they both court and dismiss in turbulent times and on a growing army of competent curators demanding their own editorial role in which the explosion in novel sources offers new content outside of elite control. For now, however, users are reluctant to give up their attachment to legacy organisations, and maintain an interest in their productive capacity as purveyors of authentic information on the most pressing issues of the day, even where they pick and choose the elements most useful in shaping their own contribution to novel collective projects.

Brought together, these novel articulation practices amongst an ever-wider range of assembled actors constitute the effective, and affective sharing that nevertheless fails to manifest a recognisable Digital Pubic Sphere. Yet they *are* consequential enough to lead to the problems Facebook are facing as outlined at start of Chapter 1. Given the surprising if relative success of UKIP in 2015, and the extreme turbulence unleashed by the Brexit referendum, one is moved to take seriously the practices engaged and outlined here if the goal is to make sense of the increased anxiety surrounding social media and its relation to politics. The theoretical interrogation of 'sharing' detailed empirically helps us to understand the relations drawn out, and their role in the political events that currently face increasing scrutiny, marked by agitated attempts to finger a sole source of blame and dissolve particular actors of responsibility. Conceptualising the three forms of sharing studied here as articulation serves accounts of post-democratic tension, and provides insight into the populist trends increasingly witnessed within and beyond the UK. In terms of what might be done about the situation, in ways that might manifest a politics more in line with a Digital Public Sphere – one that as noted continues to loom over ideas of rational, critical 'publics' - several accounts of post-democracy offer particular prescriptive measures. However, as discussed in the final chapter, these face their own obstacles amidst forces that in the absence of the Digital Public Sphere have rendered Facebook politically useful in quite a different sense.

Conclusion

There are, then, several key findings that emerge from a study of the major intersections between platforms, modes and themes manifesting the stubborn elements of immigration - those that dominate the hyperlinked issue-networks that manifest.

The prevalence of anxiety around 'numbers' and its linking practice reflects concern over mobility suggested in other chapters, and when discussion focuses on 'numbers' of people crossing borders it empowers metaphorical discussion of migrant 'swarms' and 'waves' that have long characterised political and mainstream media rhetoric around the issue. The prevalence of Old Media sources indicates that presentation of immigration as primarily a 'quantitative' problem is common to both political rhetoric and its reproduction in editorial coverage and users find a large pool of material from which to draw. However, when wishing to utilise links in explanation of *why* such mobility is problematic, relating primarily to what is lost, and to whom, alternative platforms and modes are taken up. Fear over threats to benefits – a tricky theme for politicians to negotiate regarding public opinion and policy – is

characterised by links to an e-democratic platform indicating an embrace of alternative means of representative engagement and what is apparently seen as an 'official' way to rally and mark public concern in ways that illuminate a desire for digital means to realise concrete political change. Yet by manifesting forms of slacktivism, it also allows the state to sidestep direct personal or public communication whilst nevertheless ensuring opinion is 'counted', and sheds light on how a digital 'public sphere' might emerge in ways far removed from visions of the digitally-engaged deliberative Polis. The prolific sharing of information around Islam is done in a way that indicates users do not seek to share content about the religion itself but prefer to amplify its characterisation in racialized and gendered terms echoing traditional stereotypes, ones that fit easily into an ontological frame constructed atop notions of a civilisation hierarchy and militarised nation-states separated by clear-cut cultural borders. That these sources are typically visual suggests which kinds of platforms prove most suitable for the marking of difference, and serve as most useful in framing the Other in terms of a frightening and alien 'spectacle' where normative restraints on racialized speech linger.

Highlighting the modal choices and thematic networks uncovered reveals how the issue-networks around immigration contribute to a traditional conservative narrative of waves of economic and cultural invasion, particularly by those 'in, but not of Europe' (Hall, 2003), generating a prime source of anxiety. This is constructed and curated through media 'Old' and 'New', comprising affective videos and sensational headlines, the crowd-sourcing of 'official' recordable concern, and amidst a current of political scepticism that maligns Government failure to deal with increasing immigration numbers.

Given the apparent amount of user-labour involved in the sharing of various Immigration links and their discursive content, consideration of relations between the actors present in the above suggest how politicians, citizens, legacy media corps and new media entities both use, and are used by, profit-seeking platforms whose goal is for everyone to 'share everything'. Legacy media clearly retain significant amounts of editorial power and buoyed by various forms of labour, find new realms in which to unfold, despite the various platforms through and with which users curate content across networks, and the different ways themes are operationalised in order to create an affective response. As a result, the data outlined here suggests how issue-networks associated with immigration and British politics reflect the notion of the 'hybrid media system' outlined above, that entwines diverse media platforms and modes in the promotion of particular political agendas and different strategic stances that nonetheless contribute to the persistent framing of immigration as problematic.

Ultimately, the heavy remediation of Old Media sources suggests those concerned by the colonisation of information by a select group of private media corporations are likely to despair at the lack of alternative means utilised in the curation of narratives. Where alternative multimodal sources *are* utilised, it is more likely to work in the shoring up of partisan communities through affective, spectacular representations rooted in essential biological hierarchies long considered at odds with liberal democratic futures. What is perhaps key is the way that analysis of speech in Chapter 4 suggests a more civil form of anti-immigration rhetoric that might fit rational-critical models of debate optimistically associated with radical digital politics; yet where multimodal curation is analysed, it reveals a more explicit sharing of *illiberal* attitudes, as users are able to signpost the 'distributed authorship' of non-textual work that would more easily be associated with the hate-speech elements seemingly absent in user-comments.

With the spatial character of Facebook Pages drawn out in Chapter 3, the formal and substantive constitution of user speech noted in Chapter 4, and the hybrid media practice outlined here in Chapter 5, it's clear that the ideals behind Facebook that demand a revitalisation of liberal democratic engagement, along Habermasian lines of rational critical deliberation and reflection, do not materialise in any convincing way. Instead, we see fertile ground for the rise of populist sentiment, utilising immigration as a vehicle for the articulation of immigration and of a crisis in democratic representation. In Chapter 6, the empirical findings elaborated over the last three chapters are thus reviewed in the portrayal of what emerges here as a 'post-democratic' context, with and through which sociotechnical relations flow. In so doing, the interrogation of findings shows how and why the space, form and substance of the articulation of immigration charted here emerges so successfully *across* the political centre, amidst a struggle on the part of the Left to articulate a coherent sociotechnical 'response'.

6. Whither the Digital Public Sphere?

the old is dying and the new cannot be born; in this interregnum a great variety of morbid symptoms appear.

Gramsci, 1971

<u>Introduction</u>

In this final section I conclude the argument built throughout the project by considering the empirical findings detailed over the last three chapters, and by reflecting upon the research questions set out in Chapter 1. Reviewing the ways in which the three aspects of sharing explored fail to illuminate a functioning digital public sphere, I summarise how the politics of design, user practice, and political context assemble to present the series of relational obstacles to the kinds of progressive sharing celebrated as Facebook's ideological goal.

As noted in the concluding sections of the previous chapters, each part of the empirical evidence contributes to an understanding of why the kinds of practice emerging fail to illuminate the ideological mission Facebook 'brand' in their celebration of 'sharing', and why instead populist trends emerge. In each case we saw how the space, speech and news 'sharing' revealed currents of political scepticism, frustration and a willingness to labour on behalf of a new populist challenge to the political establishment, as well as the platform itself; user practice thus entwined actors in a way that directly negates Facebook's stated ideals. I utilise this final chapter to bridge the conclusions from each empirical section and to expand on the points raised. In so doing, I interrogate agonistic critiques of, and prescriptions for, contemporary liberal democracy, as I evaluate the fertile ground discovered for the rise of right-leaning populists.

In consideration of future avenues for research I then point to several 'alternative' social media platforms, designed to rehabilitate democratic deliberation and provide a more likely location for the kinds of practice a recognisable digital public sphere would manifest. However, these too appear problematic in terms of the political consequences of their design, and thus may struggle in the kind of 'culture war' the ascendant populist-right portrayed here has made it clear it wants to fight.

A 'Digital' Public Sphere?

[This image, 'Economist Headline', has been removed as the copyright is owned by another organisation or individual]

As noted in Chapter 1, I sought to answer increasingly anxious questions relating to the role of digital technology in social life, and the consequences for contemporary liberal democracy - the assumed order of progress for the 'end of history' (Fukuyama, 1992). As the graphic from a 2017 copy of The Economist illustrates ("Do Social Media Threaten Democracy?", 2017), new digital spaces for socialisation are thought to threaten entrenched Democratic orders and serve as the 'smoking gun' where explanations are sought for recent success by the populist Right. The anxiety marked by the growing volume of voices taking a dystopian outlook on the internet's impact on politics is at odds with earlier utopian visions outlined in earlier chapters, of a globalised network society enriched by grassroots collectivism and bottom-up challenges to problems held responsible for ongoing inequality and global crises. Seeking to intervene in the uncertainty, this project identified particular goals associated with the design of the most popular social media platform that reflected ideological belief in the power of deliberative spaces characterised as rational-critical public spheres in Habermasian parlance. It sought to establish whether, in line with the kinds of sharing branded as the prescription for democratic ills, a functioning digital public sphere was emerging. In so doing, it asked: Do sharing practices around immigration on three major political Facebook pages denote the effective operation of a Digital Public Sphere?

-What kind of space has been designed for this sharing and how do parties and users negotiate the parameters of action?

-What are the deliberative properties of this sharing illustrated by the form and substance of user comments and discussions?

-What sources of 'knowledge' around immigration are shared through hyperlink-networks?

As noted in Chapter 2, a preliminary finding addressed the way this project should be designed in order to answer the research questions posed. In line with calls for a 'Digital Sociology', explorative grounded study of the respective field revealed the ways online data does not exist in a vacuum but manifests an assemblage of actors - human and non-human. It demanded appraisal of the politics of the 'artefact', revealing the ways in which the shared space itself is co-produced by an acting component designed with particular ideals that then *interact* with

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both user-preferences and the political economy of social media. As a dynamic entity, the platform itself warranted study in order to find out how this potential digital 'salon' contributes to the kinds of politics that emerge with, and within. A quantitative approach to the data allowed a focus on the general take-up of platform features over time, and combined with content and topic analysis, revealed levels of deliberative interaction and the networked circulation of media. Together these methods made vivid an assemblage and allowed a thematic evaluation of the relations that manifest it. At the same time, they made clear the kinds of questions the project would not be able to answer as a result of ethical decisions that were made and that precluded particular forms of demographic inquiry. The promises and pitfalls of Big Data encouraged a reflexive take on 'digital trace' research and served to emphasise the political ramifications of what people actually do online.

Indeed, Facebook is the largest, most populous platform to the extent that it is almost running out of potential customers. It has an explicit ideological outlook, which has struggled to find balance with the increasing monetisation of 'public' data. As outlined in Chapter 3, the space 'provided' for users - that has been designed to act in accordance with these ideals - has also increasingly been been crafted to 'retain' users through a variety of 'personalisation' measures based on the kinds of practice users appear to prefer. In exploration of the spatial relations that flow from this arena, the empirical data gathered here revealed how this kind of algorithmic personalisation contributes to a landscape of echo-chambers and filter-bubbles, in which presentation of the 'Un-liked' is avoided, and in which political parties whose Pages are branded as 'homes' must compete in an 'attention economy'. Data revealed how establishment parties adopt a promotional culture of use that both avoids substantive issues of concern that may potentially alienate user-voters, and at the same time, recruits their digital labour to spread Party reach. This is done to ensure attention remains focused on respective pronouncements simply that they might remain 'visible' amidst the growing tide of daily information with which users are bombarded. In the case of immigration, both Labour and the Conservatives sidestep a prominent issue of contemporary public concern, whilst populist party UKIP find their sole focus on the topic a particularly successful way of increasing user-engagement.

Nevertheless, in the case of all three parties, actual dialogue between user and party is neglected. The potential of web 2.0 participation wrapped up in corporate and political branding is thus scuppered - that interaction celebrated in more utopian accounts of digital political futures and marked as a specific design affordance by Facebook chief Mark Zuckerberg. Instead, parties pursue a monological form of top-down billboarding, and as

revealed recently, much of their effort appears to go instead into demographic profiling and the delivery of so-called 'dark-ads' onto user profiles (Cadwalladr, 2017; Waterson, 2017). Rather than reject this approach however, a culture of practice amongst users themselves shores up the anti-dialogical stance, as followers of party Pages work 'for' them by liking and sharing through 'obedience' habits. As users interact in these ways within personalised spaces of the 'daily-me', encountering the liked and the easily digestible, they enforce barriers between spaces, effectively reducing the heterogenous nature of the political landscape and the chances for effective contestation that would more accurately reflect deliberative public sphere ideals. As revealed by the data, most users do not travel heavily across Pages to engage with political opponents, but stay within familiar territory, cultivate and maintain partisan identities and 'police' the travel of those who engage critically in spaces seen as only for the faithful. Rather than assume such behaviour on the part of both users and parties is simply a result of technological determinism however, pre-existing political attitudes intertwine with particularly designed spaces to manifest and empower obstacles in the way of the contestation that deliberative outlooks actually necessitate.

Runciman (2011) argues that "People aren't stupid, but when it comes to politics they are ignorant, lazy and easily satisfied with pat answers to difficult questions". Despite the somewhat disenchanted tone, his point suggests acknowledgment of how the design and actions of the 'ghost in the machine' do not solely *determine* the politics that emerge. They intertwine with party and user habits and reflect the tension between the ideological goals of the platform, and the economic pressure emerging from its corporate development. It is not solely Facebook's fault that online echo-chambers emerge when they may in large part mirror *offline* tendencies for people to avoid information and pursue practices that eliminate the threat of cognitive dissonance (Friedman et al, 2017). Nevertheless, the situation is not helped by a platform built entirely around connecting 'friends'. Although some researchers have grown sceptical of the 'echo chamber' thesis, claiming social media users reveal diverse patterns of media consumption incorporating the 'un-likeable' (Bruns, 2017; Dubois and Blank, 2018), the results in Chapters 3, 4 and 5 show how on these political Pages users reveal patterns of party 'brand' loyalty, collective linguistic identity maintenance and policing, and the obedient remediation of partisan narratives that illuminate the impact of platform mechanics as they meld with identity-protective habits. The kinds of critical deliberation celebrated in Facebook's Habermasian promotion of sharing would appear to need a space and design built more around the connection of ideological 'opponents', but this is unlikely to

prove popular given the risk of alienating users from a platform increasingly concerned with the demands of profit-driven shareholders.

Facebook has manifested a carefully designed, dynamic and evolving ecosystem aimed at extracting value from the willing labour of users drawn to public performance by contemporary cultures of socialisation, incorporating the networked curation, expression and confession of identity and 'virtue'. These are performances that appear to be fuelled by the desire, and demand, for constant attention; as such, people subject themselves to daily surveillance that increasingly extends far beyond the confines of the Facebook site. Indeed, as Skeggs (2015) notes, "a great deal of the activity that takes place on the web outside Facebook flows through the Facebook universe in one form or another in an exponential process". The littering of the wider internet with Facebook Like and Share buttons allows the browsing habits of users to be collected, characterised and sold for a variety of economic and increasingly 'political' purposes even when they exit and log-out of the site itself. The cultures of use emerging on the part of economic and political actors keen to utilise access to massive bodies of users – for a variety of ends - respond to the structural characteristics shaping the political economy of social media, and as a result, impede the professed democratic aims of the platform that infer a progressive and transparent levelling of 'connectivity'.

In terms of the shared speech cultivated in such space, Chapter 4 revealed several characteristics that also problematised the realisation of a recognisable Digital Public Sphere, but again, these reflect relations that both pre-exist and emerge 'from' and 'with' digital practice. Older accounts of the salons at the heart of the celebrated Public Sphere reflect Zuckerberg's own political visions, and see critical, rational deliberation and contestation as central to the progress of democracy. By considering what kind of commentary emerges around immigration, the data presented here revealed what users actually say about the issue. Despite widespread concern about hate speech and hostility, surprisingly 'sophisticated' arguments emerged from analysis of the 'Top Comments' one is most likely to encounter on Party Pages. These featured relatively civil forms of expression, displaying anxiety primarily around immigrants 'mobility' and aiming blame not at migrants themselves but at a political system that has consistently failed to control their movement. Users articulate a chain of elements in the service of a particular kind of narrative evoking anti-immigration sentiment that highlights the complicity of particular political antagonists, and suggests a set of procedures necessary for a solution to the problem. But this suggestion of a recognisable consensus is problematised when one acknowledges it within the sociotechnical assemblage as the result of an algorithmic popularity contest within a space branded in partisan terms. As a

result, the kinds of 'rational agreement' revealed by thematic appraisal of 'top comments' appears in one sense to reflect what Melucci (1989, p.44) describes as the 'myopia of the visible'.

When we delved beneath the top-ranked comments to look at the sorts of dialogical back and forth in longer threaded discussions between Page users, we did see more deliberative Democratic ideals than might be expected from both the design of the space and literature emphasising the low quality of amateur social media debate; users stay on topic, maintain a focus on public issues rather than personal problems and present a critical and rational approach to argumentation. There were also small signs of cross-cutting dialogue and inter-ideological contact within discussions. Yet concentrated analysis of the ebb and flow of longer discussion chains showed no sign of the kinds of consensus demanded by champions of reasoned inter-ideological debate, for the horizontal back and forth between users where it did occur included persistent forms of community-language and flaming that serve to directly prohibit the development of meaningful ideological movement. Users prefer to perform their partisan identities unreflexively and resist the adoption of alternative ideological outlooks as they solidify a partisan community around the issue.

The apparent lack of interest shown by parties in communicating *back* to users to any significant degree further emphasises the impotence of debate with regards the platform's grander pronouncements about political connectivity. As Couldry notes, "it is the interactive dimension of voice that is crucial; technological forms enable, but cannot guarantee, this" (2010, p.143). Although Labour show the most interest in responding directly to user-concerns, the data revealed how even they prefer to retain distance in ways that scupper Zuckerberg's plan to effectively 'connect' voters to party representatives. As suggested, the signs of populism and political scepticism that emerge in comments perhaps leaves parties queasy about the prospects of direct digital interaction with voters, or the potential for older forms of doorstep-style democracy to translate into novel digital arenas. As noted in Chapter 4, party officials are fearful about the abuse received from various social media platforms when their profile is made more visible and accessible, and appear to feel despatialised arenas are no place for pressing the virtual flesh with constituents. Yet given the significant amount of interaction taking place despite their absence, a strategy of voter-avoidance would appear to leave fertile space for the attitudes expressed to fester. Facebook have moved to ban and expunge various 'extremist' populist Pages and Groups, with anti-immigration organisation 'Britain First' the most recent casualty of note (Cellan-Jones, 2018). Yet it is not so easy to gloss

over the spread of resentful narratives more generally, as illustrated by their tenacious presence on the 'mainstream' political Pages studied here.

Indeed, as a result of hyperlinking practices, Facebook Pages, Groups and Timelines across the political spectrum are rich arenas of affective partisan 'information'. Growing concern over 'Fake News' has been linked to an apparent increase in anti-democratic attitudes across Europe and the United States, and the changing fortunes of populist actors. This is a time of uncertainty over where users get their news, and how they themselves might intervene in the traditional modes of gatekeeping associated with the corporate power of select elite journalistic agencies. Yet as revealed in Chapter 5, although users spread particular narratives through hyperlinking practice, the time period studied involving both the UK elections of 2015 and the EU referendum of 2016 suggested users work 'with news' but also 'for news', sharing editorial reach through the remediation of select older, dominant legacy media actors. The prominent use of these established media bodies sees users draw from a focus on the quantitative aspects of immigration debate to again highlight anxiety over mobility and a lack of border-control. Indeed, that Old Media dominates, and *numbers* emerges as a key theme in 'links', as well as a consistent theme in the most popular user 'speech', suggests theories of legacy media agenda-setting remain relevant despite the recent focus on the alleged influence of nefarious media infiltrators. Users appear perfectly capable of cultivating attitudes that shore up populist partisan fervour by drawing on long-standing networks of traditional media output, without the need for a foreign state or malicious hackers bent on manipulating opinion.

However, analysis of linking habits shows that a smaller crowd of users do also go *beyond* reference to 'Old' Media in their adoption of User-Generated Content, to raise subthemes about *what* these mobile 'numbers' are taking, a form of loss felt both economically and culturally and expressed in terms that are less in line with liberal norms. In economic terms, it is access to the entrenched welfare system by 'natives' that users raise as vulnerable to foreign influx, operationalising benefit-magnet theories of migration that tabloids have indeed pursued in recent years. Yet users exhibit concern over this loss by taking up the potential of digital e-petition platforms, in order to share news about ongoing projects to rally those rightful citizens they paint as subject to such theft. Nevertheless, as noted in Chapter 5, this apparent utilisation of a grassroots crowd-sourced style of activism is rendered in less digitally 'optimistic' terms once we consider how it relates to wider patterns of slacktivism, and indeed, the habits of a state unconcerned with actually ensuring such expressions of 'voice' are enacted into policy once digitally 'counted'.

Where other alternative modes to Old Media sources are taken up to describe the sense of 'loss', it is *cultural* loss fleshed-out primarily through the use of multimodal sources. Through multimodal linking practice, users do effectively intervene in the flow of media in novel ways by developing the particular aesthetic quality of debate. Yet they adopt these novel means for older ends, by visualising the spectre of the uncontrollably mobile through operationalisation of racialized and gendered tropes featuring rioting dark male bodies. More insidious partisan themes appear through multimodal practice than arise in speech around immigration. Rather than express sentiment *themselves* in terms that draw out racial anxiety around the bodies of the frighteningly mobile, users *pass along* the visual curation of others, as they remediate more extreme elements without needing to 'personally' voice such hostility and fear. Thus what 'sharing' includes is not simply sharing of one's own content, but the produce of others that emboldens a more explicit narrative that might otherwise remain 'unspoken' and obscured. It is this latter form of linking that may be particularly relevant to contemporary immigration debate at both the national and global level in terms of 'what can be said' about the issue. The so-called 'Alt-Right' currently troubling the political mainstream on both sides of the Atlantic is often seen as a largely digital 'movement', made up of transgressive, technologically-adept groups of those happy to produce and circulate multimodal viral content that explicitly visualises classical racist tropes. This allows themes to spread without either the use of 'hate speech', upon which platforms like Facebook have focused, and without the need for users themselves to utter any kind of pronouncement liable to transgress liberal norms. Instead, they merely forward such material with a single click, ensuring its virality without assuming any responsibility.

In combination with the implicit Othering emerging in speech, the emphasis on communitarian language, and the attempts to legislate opinion through crowd-sourced petition mechanisms, more explicit multimodal remediation rounds out the anti-immigration narratives curated here and contributes to an understanding of their effectiveness. Again, there is little sign of the state-sponsored 'Fake News' alleged to have influenced more recent electoral outcomes in the data gathered here, even where users are showing some desire for alternative sources through their circulation of multimodal content from across the web, in ways that supplement the consistent remediation of older, more established organisations. The articulation emerging from the assemblage is thus empowered by the incorporation of multimodal tools that bring the narrative to life in visual, affective technicolour through curation practices that draw on media old and new in staging the crisis along specific partisan lines. These utilise a double-antagonism towards both migrants on the move and the failed political representatives

charged with their management and containment, and the containment of a nation under assault.

In concert, the conclusions drawn from each of these empirical areas show that there are clear obstacles in the way of the 'progress' Facebook extoll in their political branding of sharing. As a result of the relations emerging from engagement with the platform, the kind of space shared, the kind of speech shared and the sort of information that circulates suggest a digital politics that does not manifest visions of an enlightened salon peopled by rational, reflexive citizens and enriched by the critical, independent and objective mediation of political events. Rather, the interaction of human and machinic agency produce a series of allegedly 'unintended' outcomes. Instead of evidence that a Digital Public Sphere is emerging along progressive, deliberative lines, we witness practice befitting the rise of empowered partisanship, political scepticism and partisan viral remediation ultimately serving the interests of illiberal right-wing populism as it dominates the centre-ground presented here. As Aalberg et al (2016) suggest:

> Almost a decade ago, colleagues Jagers and Walgrave suggested a distinction between different types of populism: complete populism, which includes reference and appeals to the people, anti-elitism, and exclusion of outgroups; excluding populism, which includes only reference and appeals to the people, and exclusion of outgroups; anti-elitist populism, which includes reference and appeals to the people together with anti-elitism; empty populism, which includes only reference and appeals to the people.

What emerges from the data joined together here indicates the 'complete populism' growing in these online spaces, and it is UKIP that appeared to make hay whilst the sun shines, utilising immigration in its manifestation of a bete-noire for establishment parties. Stanyer et al (2017, p.166) concur, noting that "UKIP and the BNP could best be described as complete populists. Each makes reference and appeals to the people, is anti-elitist, and calls for the exclusion of EU migrants". Through strategic and aesthetic representation witnessed in the data here, they "present themselves as the voice of the silent majority, speaking the direct, politically incorrect language of the common man, pitched against an oppressive or unresponsive elite" (2017, p. 168). Findings also reflect Moffit's (2016, p.2) belief that "populism is back – and it is back with a vengeance. What was once seen as a fringe phenomenon relegated to another era or only certain parts of the world is now a mainstay of contemporary politics across the globe". Fraser (2017) argues that we can trace a global socio-political 'general crisis' where "forces have been grinding away at our social order for quite some time without producing a political earthquake. Now, however, all bets are off. In today's widespread rejection of politics as usual, an objective

systemwide crisis has found its subjective political voice. The political strand of our general crisis is a *crisis of hegemony*". Yet rather than the simple resurgence of older, familiar antagonisms, new dynamics illustrate "a rapidly shifting political and media communications landscape" (Moffit, 2016, p.3). Entangled with these developments, it seems that sharing beneath the brand surface is not what was intended by the ideological design of Facebook as platform, but in-part *is* empowered by its economic demands, those that nevertheless also respond to apparent user-desires. Yet despite these consequences, users are clearly 'sharing politics', if not in the form or substance required for the manifestation of a functional Digital Public Sphere in line with the ideology espoused.

Referencing Stuart Hall, Davison et al (2017, p.10) point out that "the strategic objective of politics is not to 'awaken' social actors, as if they are dormant and only awaiting the summons from on high, but to create the contexts in which they can discursively 'construct' themselves as a collective political force – in which they can become political agents of their own making". From an overview of the relations empirically illustrated here, right-leaning populist supporters ultimately use the platform Pages as space for these processes of 'becoming', and to articulate a "'collective will' struggling for another hegemony" (Mouffe, 2018). Yet the space itself acts alongside this, as noted in Chapter 3, not to confront it in pursuit of the reflective, rational critical debate celebrated as democratic progress, but by encouraging and empowering this flavour of partisan collective expression through popularity metrics resulting from slacktivist forms of user-labour. This then shapes the encounter users experience when browsing Facebook political Pages, along the lines of a curated - and multimodal – counter-hegemony, expressing a double antagonism towards both elites - witnessed most explicitly in comments drawn out in Chapter 4 - and towards migrants, as seen more vividly when multimodal elements are delineated from circulation habits in Chapter 5. The absence of coherent and affective 'left' articulations of immigration as a primary issue of public concern, and the avoidance also by the neoliberal establishment 'right' leaves issue ownership in the hands of UKIP.

Through the practices of articulation noted here, UKIP's Page and supporters curate an anti-immigration 'common-sense' that targets political elites and migrants in their antagonistic construction of opposition crucial to the formation of a hegemonic identity bloc; it is hostile to the neoliberal consensus around mobility, the sharing of national welfare and to progressive ideas of multiculturalism and pluralism. They frame immigration textually *and* via multimodal digital sources, drawing upon the networked capacities of diverse assembled actors. Human and non-human actors are entangled in ways that illuminate not only the failure of the Digital

Public Sphere, but the emergence of opposition to rational deliberation, resulting in support that anti-establishment populists are most effectively able to harbour.

Post-Democracy, Agonistic Prescriptions and Identity Politics

As argued throughout this project, I don't propose that the design of Facebook is *solely* responsible for the kinds of practices that appear to support the right-leaning populist narratives that emerge, in ways that might flatter a perspective wedded to notions of technological determinism. As part of the assemblage identified here, interaction of the digital with the surrounding context is a key relational aspect. The practice uncovered through analysis of the sharing of immigration is not therefore *simply* reflective of the history of this embittered issue nor *solely* its technological representation, but is embedded in a wider political context, in which the issue serves as a vehicle for frustration with a political landscape painted by the data as 'post-democratic'. Indeed, whilst the platform effects on segregation as noted produce *separated* camps and chambers of partisan opinion, we see their impact in changing what becomes the mainstream 'common sense' via their maintenance and successful growth in the wider attention-economy, and via the small groups of determined users who *negotiate* personalisation to dispense their dominant issue articulation within *and* beyond their particular branded arenas. Yet the success witnessed by the spread of such themes across all three Pages studied must also acknowledge apparent frustration with politics even amongst those who might prefer an alternative framing to the dominant right-leaning narratives witnessed. This frustration manifests in both a poorly articulated competitive response to the former, as well as a predilection for the *abandonment* of conflict altogether.

The accounts of post-democracy and the agonistic portrayals of the 'political' outlined here illuminate the context in which the political practice unfolds, manifests and maintains. Yet they also offer prescriptive measures, should populist attacks on liberal democracy wish to be overcome. Indeed, whilst passion and conflict must be accepted as essential for democratic politics, the key for democratic societies is said to be the ways in which the antagonism that results is harnessed and *tamed* within institutions that do not relegate them to the fringes. In pragmatic acknowledgement of the essential nature of opposition, the political system must provide recognisable democratic positions for conflict to take place within and from politics, otherwise natural passions are likely to take a different non-democratic outlet:

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Despite what many liberals want to believe, the specificity of democratic politics is not the overcoming of the we/they opposition, but the different way in which it is established. The prime task of democratic politics is not to eliminate passion or relegate them to the private sphere in order to establish a rational consensus in the public sphere. Rather, it is to 'sublimate' those passions by mobilizing them towards democratic designs, by creating collective forms of identification around democratic objectives (Mouffe, 2013, p.9).

By focusing on the acceptance and embrace of antagonism and political partisanship, but maintaining a belief in the power of democratic institutions to accommodate and sublimate them, progressive movements that in contrast turn their frustration on democracy itself thus appear misguided. Mouffe sympathises with activism taking aim at the elite control of politics and agrees that there is a need to "challenge the new capitalist order by launching a counter-hegemonic offensive in a variety of fields where the nodal points securing the new post-fordist mode of regulation of capitalism have been established" (2013, p.73). However, to *abandon* the democratic system altogether in ways that she associates with horizontal Leftist movements seeking to work *outside* of politics - like 'Occupy' for example - would be fatal. Rather, in contrast to the work of Hardt and Negri (2001) that inspires attempts at political exodus, she proposes "a different conception of radical politics envisaged in terms of 'engagement' with institutions, with the aim of bringing about a different hegemony" (Mouffe, 2013, p.71). Where movements on the Left reject both contemporary democratic parties and the success of right-leaning populist alternatives to focus solely on street-level protest and disruption, what is overlooked for Mouffe is how "the second moment, the moment of rearticulation, is crucial. Otherwise, we will be faced with a chaotic situation of pure dissemination, leaving the door open for attempts at rearticulation by non-progressive forces" (Mouffe, 2013, p.73). That the dominant forms of this articulation find purchase on all three Pages studied here suggests a serious lack of competitive opposition in line with the fears she expresses.

The results of this project and the kinds of sharing practice around immigration detailed here thus compliment agonistic accounts of post-democracy in several ways. They foster understanding of why users might take-up the technology in particular expressive ways, and how the design changes to that technology over the years empower this kind of use and thus contribute to the failure of 'sharing' as ideally professed. As noted, sharing on Facebook fails to manifest a recognisable Digital Public Sphere, and one of the reasons relates to the interaction between platform and user-desire. Given their need to retain users for economic purposes,

Facebook might be excused for thinking that giving users what they appear to *want* would not inherently impede the emergence of a deliberative and rational salon for democratic progress, as it 'neutrally' enriches their demand for categorizable user blocs susceptible to profit-accumulation through targeted advertising. Yet what these critical appraisals of the offline context do is contribute theoretical acknowledgment of why contemporary user-desire might favour the intensification of partisan and populist sentiment, and why both Facebook and traditional political parties struggle to understand, and more importantly, to address it in ways that could neutralise its illiberal consequences.

[This image, 'Common Sense Bus', has been removed as the copyright is owned by another organisation or individual]

Furthermore, in their reflexive critique of liberal democracy, and what they term a misguided Exodus strategy on the Left, they illuminate why right-leaning populist narratives appear to dominate even the centre-ground, in the way we see them networked here and in their stubborn presence even on the Labour Party Page. There are clear signs of articulation by forces on the Right in the immigration sharing noted here, that reflect the way "*common sense* can be transformed through counter-hegemonic interventions, and this is where cultural and artistic practices can play a decisive role" (2013, p.90 [emphasis mine]); these are cultural and artistic practices that increasingly include the expression and curation of opinion and 'information' on social media as detailed here.

By illuminating the wider context in which users interact with technology, critical analysis of the surrounding democratic moment enriches interpretation of the data outlined in this project and provides balance to accounts stressing social media as a 'Deus Ex Machina', one that can be held up as the *real* reason a confusing and disconcerting populist attack on the liberal order has somehow found favour. It might be easy to point to Fake News, the foreign perversion of the democratic process, or an evil corporation where explanations for surprising political outcomes are sought. Political analyst Rob Ford described the hysteria greeting coverage of the recent Cambridge Analytica scandal as the kind of 'Wizard of Oz' thinking often seen after elections, where explanations search out a convenient master-mind behind the curtain (Ford, 2018). Confusion on the part of metropolitan, cosmopolitan citizens or media commentators when faced with the Brexit vote or the Trump presidency might be nullified by the presentation of an overarching villain, in the place of more difficult, complex analyses of diverse contingent factors. Where political shock combines with novel technology, a haunting Cyborgian presence can be blamed for unforeseen events. Discomforting reflexive analysis might be avoided if "our machines are disturbingly lively, and we ourselves frighteningly inert" (Haraway, 1991, p.152). Yet accounts provided by agonistic theories - incorporating

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contemporary neoliberal centrism, increasing political apathy and a crisis in representation - contribute a far more coherent take on events, and one that melds with the findings noted here in which the agency of users is not simply eclipsed by that of machines. Although agonistic theorists have yet to delve seriously into the role of the digital in political action, my analysis moves forward with their arguments by appraising the unintended consequences of platform design as it interacts with users' offline predilections and the status of political institutions; each acting component comes together in the production of the relations that shape the political trends witnessed.

In terms of the potential *rehabilitation* of 'sharing', and a resolution to the democratic crisis emerging, what theories of agonism ultimately suggest is that conflict around controversial issues is embraced and acknowledged rather than avoided or isolated, lest negative anti-democratic sentiment fester. As described in earlier chapters, Facebook and traditional political parties express a desire for more connection, interaction and 'sharing' through the use of technology, yet each fail to establish the goals outlined due in part to the contradictory desires that lie beneath the sharing rhetoric: whether the avoidance of alienating or controversial political issues and the pursuit of monological promotional politics, or a design strategy of giving users a comforting information environment unlikely to conflict with their prejudices or challenge them into uncomfortable, *unprofitable* reflexive positions. Yet by avoiding the kinds of antagonistic conflict kept at bay they ultimately fail to grasp the need for the difficult kind of contestation, that which is central to what agonists see as truly functioning democratic systems.

If the goal is to continue pursuit of an authentic digital public sphere, agonism demands that political actors of all persuasions must not withdraw from battle but should instead embrace political conflict, no matter how distasteful, and reject the comforting climate of avoidance. In the emphasis on the perpetual struggle over narrative outlined here, the hegemonic theory of Gramsci is drawn out to suggest the ways in which "power is not exerted and sustained by means of coercion (economic or otherwise) alone, but through persuasion and the creation of consent"; what is called for is "a *war of position*: the construction of a counter-hegemony, achieved by engaging with existing institutions, establishing counter-institutions, and promoting new forms of *common-sense*" (Stockman, 2017). However, the adoption of a politics based on the embrace of perpetual conflict faces several socio-political difficulties that appear entwined with the personalisation effects of social media platforms like Facebook, particularly around an issue like Immigration as revealed in the analysis here.

Mouffe (2013, p.142) suggests that "We could say that the distinction between left and right has been replaced by the one between right and wrong. This indicates that the adversarial model of politics is still with us, but the main difference is that now politics is played out in the moral register". This appears to be a problem where these antagonisms are to be converted into productive agonistic conflict, for "when the opponents are not defined in a political but in a moral way, they cannot be seen as adversaries, but only as enemies" (2013, p.143). There are however, deeper, more existential reasons the Left might wish to avoid the kinds of confrontation agonism ultimately demands, and that explain the poor currency of *pro*-immigration narratives emerging in the political centre-ground studied here.

The success of digital populists on the Right in the absence of effective counter-arguments around controversial issues like immigration suggest a 'battle of ideas' is something the Left have little appetite for, leaving wide open this new terrain for actors on the Right to dominate narrative space. As such, the echo chambers and filter bubbles empowered by platform design are not equally effective in terms of their impact on what becomes the new 'mainstream'. One particularly critical account of contemporary Leftist attitudes is provided by Nagle (2017), whose work charts the rise of the 'Alt-Right' through digital networks of white nationalists, men's rights activists and 'lulz-obsessed trolls' - those who relentlessly target high-profile figures on the Left with racist and misogynistic abuse, and launch viral campaigns that mock activism around issues of refugees, immigrants and asylum seekers. Where the Right successfully circulate multimodal attacks on contemporary liberal mores within and *beyond* their branded spheres as their dominant narratives bubble-over, the Left according to Nagle, eschew confrontation. Influenced by what she describes as 'Tumblr-style' politics, they pursue a strategy of no-platform, safe-space and trigger-free spheres that attempt to make central the avoidance of microaggressions and 'trauma'. This is a trauma defined less in terms of post-war PTSD diagnoses, and more any form of encounter with oppositional ideology that might upset one's personal sensibilities or cause 'offense'.

[This image, 'Offended Millenial', has been removed as the copyright is owned by another organisation or individual]

Similarly, Halberstam (2014) describes the strategic deployment of "a rhetoric of harm and trauma that casts all social difference in terms of hurt feelings and that divides up politically allied subjects into hierarchies of woundedness", noting how:

> In a post-affirmative action society, where even recent histories of political violence like slavery and lynching are cast as a distant and irrelevant past, all claims to hardship have been cast as equal; and some students, accustomed to trotting out stories of

painful events in their childhoods (dead pets/parrots, a bad injury in sports) in college applications and other such venues, have come to think of themselves as communities of naked, shivering, quaking little selves – too vulnerable to take a joke, too damaged to make one.

From this perspective, parts of the Left are thus seen to have moved from a traditional mode of transgressive radicalism to new forms of fragile moral righteousness, that seek to erase the opinion of opponents and bubble-wrap the normative framework and championed yet vulnerable identities under attack. This account of the *Right* as the new transgressive elements unconcerned with normative orders manifests a significant reversal, as the Left become the 'Conservative' actors and their opponents those fighting censorship and attacking the essential sanctity of various 'sacred cows'. Significant hostility greeted Nagle's work, built primarily around complaints that she indulged victim blaming (Gleeson, 2017; Stewart, 2017). Yet in her accordance of blame to those who refuse conflict and avoid antagonistic confrontation, her account is similar to the lament shared by agonistic theorists who cite the rise of populism in the discursive spaces that are increasingly abandoned by those on the Left. As Honig (Pearce & Honig, 2013) argues:

> People who would like to be able to withdraw from politics, who are tempted by the pleasures of private life untouched by contestation – in other words, who don't think the private sphere is infused with power relations that need to be addressed – may feel put upon by the claims made by agonistic politics. It seems to refuse to them the withdrawal they seek. From their perspective, then, the claim that political contestation is unending seems to be quite pessimistic because, if your goal is withdrawal to a private life untouched by political engagement, the argument that engagement is inescapable seems pessimistic.

Honig argues that 'vulnerability' cannot be a central pillar for effective progressive activism, for "Vulnerable people are not ones who mount the barricades, or put themselves at risk in the streets, or immerse themselves in communities that need help, or release confidential documents". Demand for ongoing conflict might appear unpalatable to those seeking to avoid any form of trauma resulting from political confrontation with opponents, yet as she continues, "if you crave withdrawal but find waiting for you in the so-called private sphere, accretions of power and privilege that signal your impotence in a world beyond your control and influence, then agonism's commitment to action in concert is for you, and its screams optimism" (ibid.).

Accounts of how parties on the Left have responded to the rising demand for immigration debate appear to indicate the ways in which the subject is considered too soaked with passion, too fertile a ground for irrational conflict and thus in need of dismissal. As one Labour activist warned in 2014, illuminating the findings in Chapter 3, "we can spend the next year and a half banging on and on about immigration. Or we can talk about the *real* problems that face the country" (Cobley, 2014 [emphasis mine]). This strategy of avoidance where public attitudes towards certain issues are seen as beneath contempt appears to result in the relative disinterest shown in tackling the subject in offline *and* online Party spaces, evidenced not only by the lack of coverage the issue is given on the Labour Page, but also by the way its users in Chapter 4 highlight the offensive nature of 'rhetoric' itself as the main problem with immigration, rather than tackling the substantive claims of opposition. The ground is thus left open to actors more inclined to negotiate the normative restrictions.

It should be noted that there are longstanding elements of romance associated with boldly embracing debate, no matter the wounds one might suffer, reflecting Milton's (1644) impassioned argument that "I cannot praise a fugitive and cloistered virtue, unexercised and unbreathed, that never sallies out and sees her adversary, but slinks out of the race where that immortal garland is to be run for, not without dust and heat." Nevertheless, there appears something particularly difficult about a subject like Immigration, that troubles the prescription for the embrace of conflict suggested and helps to explain why Right-leaning narratives appear to flow so freely. Put simply, how can one of the sides invested in the issue be convinced to re-enter battle and render opponents as adversaries rather than enemies, when the philosophical foundation of much of the ideology afloat considers their like essentially 'sub-human', based not on the quality of their ideas but on their embodiment. Where arguments concern policy around attitudes towards gun-control, abortion, or the merits of religious faith, three incendiary political topics, then even the most fervent antagonists might be willing to consider their opponents as operating on a somewhat level playing-field. However, when the issue concerns the essential qualities of various racialized bodies – historically situated hierarchically and in Darwinian conflict – it appears uncertain what chances *agonistic* conflict emerges rather than existentially *antagonistic* hostility. Where it is claimed that the Right attack the censorious new moral ground established by borrowing transgressive tactics associated with the Left, tactics that they themselves are now said to have dismissed, it may *appear* the work of radical normative subversion yet its aims are ultimately the conservation of a white, patriarchal order. Given the social, economic and political history of societies in the West, and

the ongoing factual basis for explanations of systemic racism and misogyny, how transgressive *really* are the populist narratives that emerge?

The material historical order cherished by the Right has been largely maintained even while its philosophy has been 'partially' discredited. As a result, the renewed philosophical support of the existing order might now paradoxically *appear* transgressive. Yet one might understand a reluctance on the part of the Left to engage, having recently emerged from hard-fought battles to gain even minor concessions that have nevertheless failed to establish a post-racial, egalitarian 'level playing field' accounts from the Right assume. As such, it would seem to be less the responsibility of the Left to adopt a framework allowing inclusion of opponents as 'adversaries' rather than 'enemies', and more those on the Right still promoting ideas about racial essentialism like 'Human Bio-Diversity' (Feldman, 2016). Given their ongoing success in both online realms and mainstream politics however, reflecting the findings presented here, this is not a move they would appear particularly inclined to make.

Indeed, there is growing confidence to be found amongst the networks of YouTube commentators and viral remixers who curate and circulate the kinds of content detailed in Chapter 5, in arguing that *they* are the true victims in the 'contest of victimhood' underway. As seen across data in both Chapters 4 and 5, victimhood is specifically denied migrants in the dominant forms of articulation witnessed, for it is the 'native' population that emerges as the true victim - their access to authentic representation, precious welfare resources and the maintenance of a true national culture lost to failed political elites as well as the frighteningly 'mobile' represented as an existential threat. This zero-sum 'cult of victimhood' framing who the true 'people' are presents significant problems for an agonistic pluralism. Although accounts detailed above suggest the Left as too entrenched in sorrow, and too delicate to fight the required 'war of position', as we see here the Right also fight for recognition as the 'actually' oppressed, via their own form of identity politics. As Robert Hughes (1993) describes in an earlier essay, "Since our newfound sensitivity decrees that only the victim shall be the hero, the white American male starts bawling for victim status too". Hall notes the ability of the Right to harness themes of subjugation formerly associated with a dogmatic view on the historical trajectory of the working-class Left:

> Since, in fact, the political character of our ideas cannot be guaranteed by our class position or by the 'mode of production', it is possible for the Right to construct a politics which does speak to people's experience, which does insert itself into what Gramsci called the necessarily fragmentary, contradictory nature of common sense,

which does resonate with some of their ordinary aspirations, and which, in certain circumstances, can recoup them as subordinate subjects, into a historical project which 'hegemonises' what we used—erroneously—to think of as their 'necessary class interests' ("Stuart Hall: Gramsci and Us", 2017).

There seems then an impasse in the way of the Digital Public Sphere that is illuminated by the study of controversial topics like immigration carried out here; right-wing populists march with increasing effectiveness across social networks conducting and curating info-war in frustration with the dominant centre-ground, whilst the Left understandably are hesitant to engage substantively with the rhetoric at its heart and, themselves frustrated with the middle-path of mainstream politics, may be inclined to turn away. Rather than dissolve this impasse or create novel avenues for its negotiation and contestation in their manifestation of an effective Digital Public Sphere, the use of a platform like Facebook appears to shore-up partisan communities whilst favouring *separation*, with each convinced of their own position by the façade of metrically-imposed consensus. However, amongst those who seek to negotiate these effects in order to locate opponents it is the Right who prove more effective at disseminating ideology across the centre-ground studied, fostering and maintaining their antagonism and empowering and encouraging it to seep out into opposing territory won in the absence of effective combatants.

From the answers to the research questions set out in Chapter 1, and the argument carried throughout the project, we see how Immigration politics on Facebook reveal the struggle to define a 'people' that interacts with platform effects that lean towards profitable segmentation. It is a 'people' constructed around a double-antagonism towards both the political establishment and migrants, portraying a Right-populist outlook, and astride an 'anti-establishment' party articulating its own 'common sense' about the nation in need of rescue from subjugation by both the frighteningly mobile masses of the Other, as well as the corrupt political elites tasked with representing the real left-behind victims of globalisation. The acting platform evident here is thus effective politically in terms of empowering user 'voice' to an extent, but it is certainly not towards the kinds of 'networked community' idealised in liberal progressive 'sharing' that evokes older deliberative Habermasian ideals.

If we return to the controversy engulfing Facebook noted at the start of Chapter 1, one question ultimately drawn out here is whether we see these populist outcomes as the genuinely 'unintended' consequences of novel sociotechnical habits resulting from the growth of social media, or rather, from a more sceptical point of view, precisely the 'intended'

consequences of key decisions made by Facebook about the branded Pages, relevance and personalisation noted in Chapter 3. In Kirkpatrick's (2010) history of the company, Zuckerberg's aims indeed emerge as 'authentically' idealistic. He notes for example an early investor who complained, "Mark was kind of against ads, as far as we could tell", she says. "But I just sat there salivating and thinking how easy it would be to monetize this. I had to bite my tongue" (2010, p.110). Kirkpatrick describes how Zuckerberg initially fought to remain in tight control of how commercial interest would be reflected in any design changes and continued to downplay the advice of those focused primarily on the potential of advertising revenues. However, a set of changes indicated a dynamic shift between ideology and monetisation as the company approached 5 years of continued growth – the arrival of a new Chief Operating Officer, and the company deciding to go public. Considering the results presented here, together these somewhat problematise the notion that the consequences for the form and substance, or rather 'absence' of a 'Digital Public Sphere' detailed were truly 'unintended'.

[This image, 'Zuckerberg and Sandberg', has been removed as the copyright is owned by another organisation or individual]

First, 2009 saw the arrival of ex-Google advertising executive Sheryl Sandberg, and "From the moment she arrived, Sandberg was the company's top advertising champion and salesperson. She had immense experience with advertisers from Google and a deep appreciation of the importance and potential of ads on the Net" (2010, p.255). Yet ambivalence over adverts at the highest level remained due to a central focus on the long-term vision, and as such "Sandberg had some work to do". (2010, p.255). In an early meeting following her arrival, the new stance towards the potential reconceptualization of Facebook was illuminated when "On the whiteboard Sandberg wrote, in big letters, 'What business are we in'?" (2010, p.257), whilst noting how "Facebook has a springboard to monetization that is as clear as anything I've ever seen […] Like night follows day" (2010, p.271). This change in mood and continued startling growth led to a second significant shift, and in what The Atlantic describe as "The year Facebook finally tried to make some money" (Greenfield, 2012) they filed for their IPO in 2012. In the build-up to the public offering, demand for the exhibition of determined monetisation strategies increased, and as a result, design tinkering produced "a fleet of new money-making initiatives to prove Facebook could generate as much in revenue and profit as it could in likes and shares […] initiatives to make money off of you — you being its product, of course" (ibid.).

These two changes are particularly relevant reflections on the business of social media more generally, and indeed on the kinds of practice charted throughout this project. As Van Dijck (2013) notes, the explosion in popularity of multiple online social networking platforms meant competing corporations had to carefully *manage* their user-base with profit demands set-out by investors, with the most successful ultimately choosing "expeditious growth while conducting careful experiments with monetizing schemes" (2013, p.15). Yet at the same time, such schemes sought to downplay such rampant profiteering by "tapping into academics' celebratory rhetoric of a *new public sphere* of non-market collaboration" (2013, p.15 [emphasis mine]). The dominant belief emerging was that "the long-term viability of web 2.0 platforms depends on a pristine equilibrium between attracting and exploiting communities, between entertaining users and making them participate" (2013, p.63).

Given the findings here, the increasingly aggressive attempts at monetising user data that accompanied the new focus on economic goals thus beckon a different conceptualisation of a company like Facebook, and ultimately problematise its emphasis on progressive connection and democratic empowerment. With an unprecedented database of individuals, an archive of their beliefs and desires, and an increasingly recognisable strategy based on profiting from such, the workings of an 'active' platform tasked with monitoring, curating and nudging behaviour begin to appear less innocent than something via which the user experience is simply 'optimised' in the name of customer satisfaction and progressive political change. Nevertheless, as demonstrated by the relational approach taken throughout, I reject the temptation to lay responsibility for political outcomes entirely at their door. Indeed, I believe that the selection of immigration as an issue case-study illuminates the fact that users do not operate within political contexts that reflect the kind of post-racial level playing-fields more optimistic accounts of 'shared progress' might assume. Instead, tenacious older issues of Othering and the hierarchic classification of bodies linger here, revealing the very heart of nation-states, their 'people', their entrenched media organisations and their political ideologies; these come together through creative modes of articulation within the sociotechnical practice witnessed, and the subsequent relations formed contribute to the trends and the outcomes that continue to emerge.

In light of these conclusions, one wonders what might happen if we were to remove the influence of this platform - the biggest and still most expansive in the world. Might alternative forms of 'voice' be harnessed through and with technology towards democratic aims that seek to avoid the illiberal, populist landscape appearing on the horizon? Whilst the agonistic

theories taken-up here effectively critique the contemporary democratic landscape, and emphasise the need for a democratic 'taming' of passions, they are less specific about exactly what kinds of deliberative public spheres might be pragmatically established for such. As Karppinen et al (2008, p.12) suggest, "it appears that the lack of institutional proposals or interest in concrete political questions is a rather general feature among the postmodern theorists of radical difference and pluralism". In the agonistic push for a taming and rehabilitation of passions through existing democratic institutions, rather than exodus from them, there is perhaps for those inclined to the latter a whiff of the 'domestication' of critique when it comes to the lingering question of 'what is to be done'. In terms of how social media platforms might be 'rehabilitated' given their enduring status and growth, critics are also likely to doubt whether effective means to realise the alleged ideals at their core can overcome the principles of design and the increasing emphasis on their economic demands. Yet looking beyond this dominant social media platform it becomes clear that there *are* attempts to establish the kinds of digital space which might harness political frustration, in the service of political action that does not reject democratic means, and that seeks to connect voters directly to representatives and offer new forms of 'alternative social media' (ASM) less susceptible to the demands of the digital political economy shaping 'commercial social media'.

For Gehl (2015, p.2), 'ASM' "not only allows for users to share content and connect with one another but also denies the commercialization of speech, allows users more access to shape the underlying technical infrastructure, and radically experiments with surveillance regimes". Below I build on the results from this project to briefly outline some potential avenues for future research into the likelihood of the above, and the capacity of digital politics to manifest the goals celebrated yet unrealised. I describe several examples of alternative platforms and the ways they might supplement or replace political activism on social media, in accordance with the demands of both deliberative and agonistic pursuits. I consider whether they might beckon a more functional critical sphere for public debate, realising a "clear-eyed commitment to new, uncertain, inevitably conflicted, long-term processes of cooperation that can take better account of people's capacities for collaborative reflection on every scale" (Couldry, 2010, p.149). Nevertheless, caution is raised off the back of the findings here, for similar obstacles that trouble Facebook's stated ideals are likely to manifest elsewhere.

Future Research: An 'Alternative' Social Media?

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Whilst work on new social movements has detailed activist claims that 'We are not on Facebook, we are on the streets' (Gerbaudo, 2012), others have sought to engage existing social media platforms whilst at the same time developing their own more effective and functional online spaces. These are engineered to provide terrain in which digitally networked decision making may result in real political change. The aim is to transform both horizontal *and* vertical interaction between users and politicians into concrete results that reflect more coherently the failed ideals of Facebook noted here. One prominent example involves the Spanish Party 'Podemos'. Initially utilising space on major social media platforms like Facebook, Twitter and Reddit, the party have also pursued alternative digital ground to harnesses political frustration. As Podemos leader Inigo Errejon describes, "The party's success also came from deep changes to the way politics has been done, says Errejón, a combination of bold reforms and use of technology to make the decision-making process as inclusive and transparent as possible" (Frediani, 2014). As the Podemos website notes ("Releasing the Code of Podemos", 2015):

> Podemos IT team has been pursuing a clear goal from the very beginning: to develop free technologies that would allow the massive online participation. Since the summer 2014 it has been developing a unique platform also accessible for mobile devices allowing anyone to register in Podemos and participate in online votes.

In opposition to the promotional, hands-off approach of the Parties studied here, "Mr. Iglesias explained Podemos's direct and open democratic nature to the Guardian: 'It's citizens doing politics. If the citizens don't get involved in politics, others will. And that opens the door to them robbing you of democracy, your rights, and your wallet'" (Kassam, 2014). As one observer notes, "the key of this social media whirl is to situate the citizen as a protagonist and not the reverse, as they normally do the other parties, who see social networks as a highly unidirectional instrument" ("Podemos Twitter Strategy", 2015). Podemos link online deliberation within a 'Podemos Plaza 2.0' and 'Ask Podemos' discussion forum on their subreddit, with an open-source voting platform 'Loomio', and with offline citizen assemblies known as 'Circles' (Blitzer, 2014).

[This image, 'Loomio Graphic', has been removed as the copyright is owned by another organisation or individual]

The emphasis for Podemos is on moving past the sorts of Web 1.5 top-down strategy drawn out by the empirical work in Chapter 3, and fully embracing the interactive potential of '2.0' platforms. The innovative use of digital platforms led to their rapid growth and relative success in Spanish politics, indeed "the results of the regional and local elections of 24 May 2015

granted considerable institutional power to Podemos [...] Podemos and its partners have gained significant positions, such as the city halls of Madrid and Barcelona, and hold important roles in regional governments and administrations" (Zarzalejos, 2016, p.187).

[This image, 'Rousseau Graphic', has been removed as the copyright is owned by another organisation or individual]

Somewhat similarly, Beppe Grillo's *Movimento 5 Stelle* (Five Star Party) in Italy have ridden diverse technological means to considerable political success. Whilst some distance away from the political stance of Podemos - they contain what has been described as a "ragtag army of populists, euroskeptics, environmentalists, centrists, right-wingers and left-wingers" (Reguly, 2017) - they have also utilised a mixture of traditional activism and novel means of gathering and deliberating. The party introduced an 'electronic parliament' system in 2013, where citizens not only comment or vote, but are able to contribute to the writing of legislation (Chao, 2013). They also use 'Rousseau', a platform whose name explicitly references its direct democracy goals. As one Five-Star lawmaker argues, "I say this with great humility, but equally great firmness: there is nothing similar in the world, no one else has ever created such a way of aggregating people and ideas as us" (Politi & Roberts, 2017). Such efforts have proven particularly successful at winning young voters, and with the upcoming elections in Italy in March 2018, "Half of Italian voters aged between 35 and 44 have pledged to back the anti-establishment Five Star Movement in elections on March 4" (Kington, 2018).

Alongside the Loomio and Rousseau platforms used by the parties above, one might also place other *e-democracy* systems taken-up around Europe and indeed further afield, including LiquidFeedback[46] and DemocracyOS[47]. These systems aim to function as both deliberative and operational tools, with the former affordances designed to "facilitate the extension of deliberative skills that are ordinarily the purview of professional politicians to ordinary citizens" (Deseriis, 2017, p.56). Indeed, many of these digital platforms do not disregard consensus and deliberation *per se,* but seek to bring it down from a sphere controlled by managerial technocrats fabricating consensus through issue-filtering, and thus hand substantive control back to the population. As a designer of the Loomio system describes – "Loomio's main feature is to nudge groups towards consensus. After discussing a proposal, every member of a Loomio group can in fact make one of four choices: agree, disagree, abstain, or block. The latter is a form of *veto power*, which forces the group to reconsider the initial proposal and amend it until consensus has been reached" (Bartlett & Deseriis, 2016).

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[46] See - Liquidfeedback.org
[47] See - DemocracyOS.org

This conceptualisation of consensus is not necessarily at odds with the agonistic theory described above, indeed as Mouffe acknowledges - "Consensus is needed on the institutions that are constitutive of liberal democracy and on the ethico-political values that should inform political association. But there will always be disagreement concerning the meaning of those values and the way they should be implemented. This consensus will therefore always be a 'conflictual consensus'" (Mouffe, 2013, p.8). This conceptualisation reflects what Mouffe has described elsewhere as the 'pacification' of antagonisms within existing democratic institutions (Carpentier & Cammaerts, 2006). The efforts to *rehabilitate* deliberation manifested by these e-democracy systems aim to provide an inclusive system where consensus is regarded as a pragmatic and dynamic stage in political outcomes, in ways more sympathetic to the critical accounts above:

> The added value of Loomio is that the deliberation and the conclusion are displayed side by side. The disagreement is visualized through a pie chart, in a way that you must pay attention to it, so that the concerns can be resolved. This is the difference with polls and other voting mechanisms: you can change your mind as you discuss the proposal. So it becomes almost like a game, participants have to work through the concerns and get them to change (Bartlett & Deseriis, 2016).

A recent book of interviews between Mouffe and the current Podemos leader (Errejon & Mouffe, 2016) suggests her optimism for this form of digitally-fuelled 'left populism' potentially serving as a counter-hegemonic force to those right-leaning populists achieving success online. These examples would appear to reflect the concerns of both deliberative and agonistic theorists and offer the kinds of connective action digital optimists have long sought - minus the economic demands that scupper cultures of use on mainstream social media platforms. They form part of new attempts to make digital activism politically effective in real terms and reverse the tide of scepticism, perhaps neutralising the illiberal consequences of personalised, money-driven filter platforms and thus rescuing the tattered image of the public sphere still cherished.

Key to the operation of these digital platforms is their emphasis on binding obligation and actionable results, and as such they flatter the foundational aims Zuckerberg himself has expressed. In older interviews he notes his concept of 'sharing' in similar terms of obligation and duty, referencing older literature on the role of 'gifts' when asking an interviewer "Are you familiar with the concept of a gift economy? […] It's an interesting alternative to the market economy" (Kirkpatrick, 2010, p.287). Zuckerberg believed Facebook could expand systemic

obligation and reciprocity beyond the limitations typically associated with the rapid growth of societies. As Dodd (2016, p.33) suggests, the relation between sharing and obligation at the heart of Gift theory remains pertinent for the contemporary age, for "Modern society as a whole is permeated by the atmosphere of gift exchange: in the mutualism of insurance and Friendly Societies, in our personal relations, and even in the markets, 'obligation and liberty intermingle'". However, the political sharing observed within Facebook Pages currently fails to represent a functional and productive system of exchange for its users, for Parties continue to pursue a monological and promotional approach that partially responds to the working of the platform itself as a result of its economically-led design alterations. In that sense, these 'alternative' platforms seem far more effective vehicles for citizens online expression in ways that do not stray far from Facebook's original ideals.

Nevertheless, small binding platforms built atop 'direct democracy' models present problems of their own, concerning not only the will of political actors to adopt them, but also the attitude of general internet users in ways that hark back to critiques of the idealised Habermasian public noted in Chapter 1. In terms of user-based obstacles, these platforms demand significant time and effort, and appear to attract specific demographic groups, illustrating the ongoing 'digital divide' that hinders the realisation of an inclusive digital public. As of 2017, Five Star's Rousseau platform has been adopted by only 140,000 members of the 9 million potential voters (Deseriis, 2017), and as Sgueo (2015, p.82) describes, "62% of Italians have never interacted online with public administrations. Another 52% do not know what 'e-democracy' or 'digital agenda' means". There appears a wider problem facing the adoption of digital democratic platforms that reflects issues with technology take-up more generally and is confounded when intertwined with political activism. As Flesher Fominaya & Gillan (2017, p.397) argue:

> The gendered digital divide is also extremely pronounced within the communities that paradoxically offer the greatest opportunity for harnessing the power of the digital for progressive social change: the civic-technology and open source community. Not only are women woefully underrepresented in technology engineering and coding, but they are also silenced within the community through the privileging of male voices and the value placed on male dominated roles.

These problems concerning the labour demanded, and the impact of such on less-fortunate economic groups, thus combines with the demand for technical savvy in a way that prohibits

an egalitarian pursuit of digital activism. Qureshi (2006) outlines the three aspects of the digital divide formulated by Pippa Norris:

> The *global divide* refers to the divergence of Internet access between industrialized and developing societies. The *social divide* concerns the gap between information rich and poor in each nation. And finally, within the online community, the *democratic divide* signifies the difference between those who do, and do not, use the panoply of digital resources to engage, mobilize, and participate in public life.

In this sense, the banal every-day, always-on mobility of mainstream, globally-dominant platforms like Facebook - that are not specifically 'political' - offers far greater equality of access and a much wider potential reach, despite lacking the binding forms of obligation and thus the concrete returns in the sense of reciprocity and actionable results. Yet given the rapid change in technological development and changing social practices, we might nevertheless imagine how "platforms used only by specialized activists today may become widespread tomorrow" (Fominaya & Gillan, 2017, p.397).

However, based on the findings established here, there is a second problem facing the nature of these 'procedural' platforms in terms of their relative impact on politics more generally, that raises questions about how they might contribute to demands for the kinds of counter-hegemonic work on 'common-sense' seen as necessary for the revitalisation of democracy, and particularly the potential empowerment of an effective left-populism to deliberatively contest an ascendant right. As Errejon notes, the struggle facing Podemos is on two fronts – "on the one hand, popular articulation, and all the pressing tasks of the moment in conditions which we haven't chosen; on the other, in parallel, a more molecular process of education and construction […] without the second it will be difficult to resist the powerful forces ranged against us in an enduring way" (Errejon & Mouffe, 2016, p.115). Given the conclusions offered here, these projects of articulation and construction will need to involve more than the incorporation of procedural, e-democracy platforms.

Indeed, as noted, the fact that Facebook fail to realise their ideological goals in terms of manifesting a recognisable Digital Public Sphere does not mean the platform has failed to influence politics. As suggested, the very failure of their goals renders it immensely influential where entwined in a relationship with politically productive and creative users. Facebook amassed the billions of users it possesses by foregrounding its *social* affordances. Users may not utilise the platform for 'politics' in any primary sense, but 'political' material is not bracketed off from user's timelines – the main area in which they 'dwell'; it is encountered

between comments, pictures and various updates by friends, families, popular celebrities, and sandwiched between advertisements. It is entangled with news and information drawn from cultural reservoirs that serious political platforms would ignore or purposefully exclude. People encounter the political material within Facebook without necessarily interpreting it as such. If people are aware they are entering a political domain, and likely to face competing explanations for things they have developed particular identity-protective (Kahan, 2017) explanations for, they might prime themselves for cognitive dissonance. On Facebook however, users are bombarded everyday with information they do not treat as arriving in a political realm, but that in its guise as merely 'social' or 'cultural' matter is perfectly capable of politicisation.

As authors have long warned, the 'personal is political' (Hanisch, 1969), and as the late Breitbart founder and kingpin of much of the increasingly influential alt-right's media landscape argued, 'politics is downstream from culture' (Oney, 2010). Any formal platform focused on the procedural necessities of voting, deliberating legislation and consolidating agendas may serve as a useful addition to democratic politics in terms of authentic representation - where it is taken-up. It would miss, however, the vast circulation of more general cultural output that traverses the timelines of billions of users every minute of the day, and inevitably influences their particular political and cultural cognition and the kinds of contributions they ultimately articulate within the political Pages studied here, whose status and comment boxes they encounter wedged between familial news, peer updates and a variety of social events. If attempts to create strictly 'political' platforms lack this 'less-serious', informal social aspect, how much impact are they likely to have on the contemporary power of the right-leaning popular narratives that dominate the banal micro-activism around an issue like immigration?

The power of Facebook's vision was to 'add' more formal political content to a huge social gathering that was already captured. Where platforms conceptualised as 'add-ons' skip this step, and ignore what might be considered simply 'social', it is uncertain how many users are ultimately likely to take-up their affordance, and how their use might counter the influential sociocultural narratives emerging elsewhere. Given the way digital politics on non-political platforms has empowered the rise of populist groups in both the United States and Europe, and shaped the character of the sociotechnical manifestation of immigration observed here, there appear to be winners and losers in the digital culture war.

What appears to have made Right-leaning populists so successful online is the utilisation of digital means to establish a counter-hegemonic strategy by taking up the wealth of informal 'cultural' material not strictly described as 'political', in order to "repurpose media to influence hearts and minds through movies, pop music, and, crucially, the aesthetic and political tinderbox of social media" (Weatherby, 2017). Where they manage to dominate discourse on mainstream social media platforms, right-leaning troops amassed for an 'info-war' - and their own 'long march through the institutions' of social media - may snatch the precious attention of users whose minds may not be made up on the controversial issues of the day, especially where these threaten to radically change entrenched systems of privilege. The provision of e-democracy systems that are not designed to accommodate user-efforts at more banal cultural transmission may thus have little chance of equalling a platform like Facebook in terms of both use and influence, even if the practice therein fails to enact the kind of pro-social deliberative sphere its owners claim to pursue. There are, therefore, significant obstacles facing these platforms too if they are to be held up as an 'alternative' site for the sort of digital public sphere we fail to locate in this study.

Conclusion

The adoption of new technologies changes social practice, and as a result, media landscapes, political strategy and political rhetoric change in response. 'Digital Politics' is not simply business as usual. The relations between actors established as part of the 'sharing' that is a fundamental pillar of social media platforms manifest new vehicles for the doing of politics, the expression, cultivation and articulation of opinion and the aesthetic content and form of controversial issues. There is increasing concern that the rhetorical relations 'within' digital political practice are manifesting an obstacle to the kinds of progressive rhetoric 'about' it that reflect older Habermasian ideals. As detailed here, there is significant evidence that social media is producing an array of unexpected outcomes at odds with the kind of Digital Public Sphere 'sharing' once promised; however, social media platforms alone cannot be held as the sole cause in ways that relieve political parties or users themselves of any responsibility for unpalatable consequences. Indeed, the argument made here affords considerable agency to users potentially conceived as passive subjects, even if the outcomes of user practice around this issue are not flattering.

Longstanding tension over immigration policy features anxiety over changes in the demographic make-up of the 'massively mobile' that nevertheless echo older, colonial-era

fantasies of national purity, and these fuse with the availability of new kinds of expressive technology and speak back to a political context that leaves millions apathetic about the promises of democracy. As noted by the call for Digital Sociology detailed in Chapter 2, it is not enough to study technology, politics or specific identity-driven issues in isolation given the character of contemporary sociotechnical practice. An inter-disciplinary approach is needed to understand the kinds of relations that emerge from the assemblage envisioned here.

What then of a Digital Public Sphere? The kinds of sharing extolled as the ideal path to its realisation are clearly not producing the desired outcomes. Facebook is in its 14th year of use, and there are increasing signs that its owners are not blind to the kinds of conclusions offered here. The evidence amassed across the empirical chapters suggests that it is one thing to successfully design a platform attracting an enormous user-base that dominates the market; it is quite another to design-out the political habits of these users when it comes to the ways in which they take-up the technology offered to perform partisan commitments. Facebook currently appear unable to square the provision of user-desires with the promotion of a particular user-consciousness, and as noted, much of this reflects the tension over profit versus ideology that drives their design practices.

Perhaps reflecting the findings here, there exist lurid accounts of Silicon Valley billionaires planning a dramatic escape from civilizational collapse to hidden, high-tech bunkers in New Zealand (Carville, 2018). However, there is also some talk of how to 'fix' the problems identified. On January 22nd, 2018, Facebook finally addressed many of the concerns highlighted at the start of this chapter in an official paper titled 'Hard Questions: What Effect Does Social Media Have on Democracy?'. The Product manager in charge of 'Civic Engagement' begins by noting that "Facebook was originally designed to connect friends and family — and it has excelled at that. But as unprecedented numbers of people channel their political energy through this medium, it's being used in unforeseen ways with societal repercussions that were never anticipated". He then confesses that "we at Facebook were far too slow to recognize how bad actors were abusing our platform. We're working diligently to neutralize these risks now" (Chakrabarti, 2018). Yet the key term here is 'abusing', with the notion that 'use' of platform features are not a causal factor per se, rather 'abuse' is to blame. As such, there remains an unwillingness to consider how the natural consequences of their design goals can in fact empower their very opposite outcomes. In this way, the tension between retaining users for profit purposes and realising political ideals is side-stepped.

Again, the point here is not to assign responsibility for practice to the technology itself, yet this sort of deterministic attitude remains apparent in the outlook demonstrated above. Indeed, as noted, assigning the blame to technology is a convenient narrative that is proving increasingly popular. This project began in late 2014, seemingly a lifetime ago given recent political changes and the fortunes of Facebook itself. The research presented here adopted a critical focus on 'sharing', and this is a stance reflected in the kinds of media – and governmental – attention Facebook has recently received, following the surprise election of Donald Trump in the United States, the results of the Brexit referendum in the UK and the subsequent controversy that erupted around the work of Cambridge Analytica. The resulting furore shone a light on the kinds of platform design, data collection and user-labour analysed throughout this work, and Facebook have faced increasing pressure to justify and make transparent their business model, and to accept primary responsibility for what have been seen as shocking political outcomes.

I believe it naïve to blame Facebook alone, when the data presented suggests users are not simply passive audiences who in the absence of agency are unknowingly led along the populist path; they serve as active and creative prod-users in the kinds of mediated political relations studied. Nevertheless, as an actor itself, the platform also clearly contributes to the outcomes seen, and a different approach to the design of its immersive social sphere might conceivably contribute a range of alternative interactive patterns. However, Facebook may not ultimately be the ones responsible for any proposed rehabilitation of sharing. As a result of the recent data revelations, the platform lost $50 billion dollars in market value in a single March week, and Zuckerberg's eventual televisual 'confession' did little to arrest their plummeting shares (Baccardax, 2018). A diverse array of 'whistle-blowers' continue to appear, denouncing predatory corporate tactics that abused the prevalence of user data, with various figures including Zuckerberg himself called to give evidence to the US senate and the UK parliament. Increasing concern about the role of data consultancy firms in the Brexit vote in the UK is contributing to an overarching narrative connecting global political events to foreign and corporate manipulation that, as noted previously, provides a convenient explanation for what otherwise might need to be addressed as a more complex crisis of representation. Yet the critical appraisal of democratic theory incorporated here demands an emphasis on understanding the nature of politics and the political attitudes that interact with the technology available, and thus co-produce the kinds of populist relations considered undesirable in the way they fail to meld with the democratic ideals pursued.

If in a democracy people get the government they deserve, then perhaps they get the social media they deserve. Yet if the desire exists to change the political outcomes that emerge, research that balances evaluation of the multiple elements at work, in constant contestation, may ultimately contribute to alternative pursuits.

Appendix 1 – Primary Data Sources

UKIP

https://en-gb.facebook.com/UKIP/

The Conservatives

https://en-gb.facebook.com/conservatives/

Labour Party

https://en-gb.facebook.com/labourparty/

Appendix 2 – Data Collection Application

Netvizz v1.6

https://apps.facebook.com/107036545989762/

Bernhard Rieder

http://thepoliticsofsystems.net/

https://twitter.com/riederb?lang=en

nb. Facebook's 2018 purge of research 'applications' formerly approved to work *within* the site included Netvizz. It is not currently functional.

Appendix 3 - Party Post Themes

UKIP Post Themes

- EU
- Promo
- Migr
- Sec
- NHS
- Economy
- Transport
- Foreign Aid
- Elec Reform
- Terrorism
- Housing
- Enviro
- Edu
- Tax
- St Georges
- TTIP
- Scotland
- Racism
- Royals
- Jobs
- Islam
- British Values
- Benefits
- Airports
- Gender
- Crime
- BBC
- Wages
- Trident
- Tobacco
- Privacy
- Freedom Of Speech
- Fifa
- Falklands
- EVEL
- Energy
- Devolution
- Cigarettes
- Childcare
- Child Abuse
- Wales
- Veterans
- Travellers
- Tourism
- Sov
- Somaliland
- Snp
- Pubs
- Pensions
- P.C
- North England
- N.I
- Multiculturalism
- Magna Carta
- Lords
- Hillsborough
- City Planning
- Churchill
- Christianity

Cons Post Themes

Legend:
- Promo
- Economy
- SNP
- Jobs
- Tax
- Housing
- Edu
- Transport
- NHS
- Crime
- Pensions
- Wages
- EVEL
- Sec
- EU
- Terrorism
- Childcare
- Gender
- Benefits
- Unions
- Royals
- Trade
- Wales
- Sikhs
- Scotland
- Christianity
- Foreign Aid
- Migr
- Film
- Steel
- Energy
- Poverty
- Judaism
- China
- North England
- Royal Mail
- Porn
- Greece
- Children In Care
- Countryside
- Inequality
- Trident
- Islam
- Pensioners
- Japan
- Sports
- St George

Lab Post Themes

Legend:
- Promo
- NHS
- Tax
- Economy
- EU
- Housing
- Edu
- Gender
- Hum Rights
- Zero Hrs
- Rail
- Crime
- Unions
- Wages
- Migr
- Child Benefits
- Cuts
- Childcare
- Steel
- Terrorism
- Poverty
- Energy
- Enviro
- Jobs
- Disability
- Mp Reform
- LGBT
- SNP
- Banks
- Campaign Funding
- Holocaust
- Paternity Leave
- Vote Reform
- Benefits
- Carers
- Co-Ops
- Devolution
- Diverstiy
- Fees
- FOI
- Hillsborough
- Hinduism
- Islam
- Saudi
- Scotland
- Arts
- Care Act
- Child Abuse
- Digital Politics
- Facebook
- Foreign Policy
- Hunting
- Pensioners
- Porn
- Royals
- St Georges Day
- Transport
- Trident
- Voting Records

Appendix 4 – Stock Issues

UKIP Ill

- Mass
- Benefits
- Housing
- Culture
- Nhs
- Lack Control
- Islam
- Illegality
- Schools
- Cheap Labour
- Crime
- Services
- Put First
- Mobility
- Roads
- Unskilled
- Fake
- Enviro
- Rhetoric
- Child Ab

UKIP Blame

- EU
- Cameron
- Migrants
- Gov
- Politicans
- Labour
- Anti-Racists
- Ger
- Current Policy
- Tories
- Elites
- Corbyn
- System
- Pol Corr
- France
- Miliband
- Media

UKIP Sol

- Vote UKIP
- Brexit
- Control Borders
- Deport
- Brits First
- PBS
- Not SNP
- Not Cons
- No Benefits
- Halt Migr
- 5 Yr Bens

Cons Ill

- Mass
- Benefits
- Lack Control
- Housing
- Terrorism
- Illegal
- Nhs
- Cheap Lab
- Rhetoric
- Islam
- Schools
- Scapegoats
- Services
- Culture
- Crime
- Put First
- Lack Integ
- Fake
- Enviro

Cons Blame
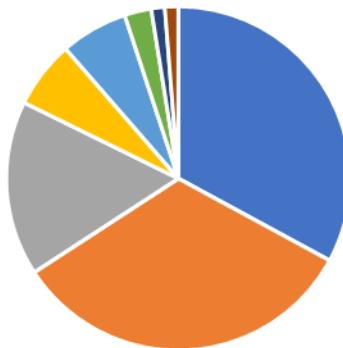
- Labour
- Tories
- EU
- Blair
- Migr
- UKIP
- Media
- Elites

Cons Sol

- Vote UKIP
- Vote Tories
- Brexit
- Not Tories
- Not Lab
- Control Borders
- Change Benefits Policy
- Deportation
- PBS
- Listen to Voters

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Lab Ill

- Rhetoric
- Mass
- Cheap Lab
- Scapegoat
- Housing
- Lack Control
- Nhs
- Unskilled
- Child Ab
- Services
- Homeless
- Lab Avoid
- Put First
- Islam
- Benefits
- Terrorism
- Schools
- Roads

Lab Blame

- Labour
- Tories
- UKIP
- EU
- Media
- Curr Policy
- Anti-Racists
- Racists
- Leavers
- ISIS
- Farage

Lab Sol

- Vote Lab
- Brexit
- Not Tories
- Not Lab
- Remain
- Vote UKIP
- More Houses
- Brits First
- Not Pander
- Control Borders
- Not UKIP
- Return Roots
- Causal Focus
- Halt Migr
- Compassion

Appendix 5 – Hyperlink Themes

UKIP Links - All Themes

- Fiscal Impact
- Numbers
- Islam
- Calais Crisis
- Benefits
- Foreign Criminals
- Rhetoric
- Refugees
- Turkey
- Asylum
- ISIS
- Jobs
- Racism
- White Genocide
- Multiculturalism
- Free Movement
- NHS
- Housing
- Points-Based System
- Far Right
- Cultural Marxism
- Misc Humour
- Security
- Protest
- Homelessness
- Anti-Semitism
- Schools
- Foreign Aid
- Services
- Russia
- Border Control
- British Fascism
- Emigrants
- Trump
- Visa Regulations
- Xenophobia
- Wages
- Sovereignty
- British Identity
- Child Poverty
- Elderly
- Global War
- Nationalism
- Thatcher
- Disabiility
- Migrant Votes
- Non-EU migration
- Birth Rates
- Humanisation
- Voting Rights
- People Smuggling
- Syrian War
- Bankers
- London
- Anti-Polish attitudes
- Child Abuse
- WW2
- Amnesty
- Commonwealth
- Labour Social Engineering
- Iraq War
- Brexit
- Misogyny

Cons Links - All Themes

- Benefits
- Refugees
- Islam
- Numbers
- Asylum
- Turkey
- Calais Crisis
- Military Homelessness
- Foreign Criminals
- Jobs
- NHS
- ISIS
- Rhetoric
- Brexit
- White Genocide
- Fiscal Impact
- Alt Media
- Politcal Skepticism
- Multiculturalism
- Homelessness
- Sovereignty
- Free Movement
- Libya
- Housing
- Nativism
- Civilisation Collapse
- Schools
- Services
- Environment
- Visas
- Cultural Marxism
- Anti-Semitism
- Capitalism
- Hate Speech
- Child Abuse
- Labour Policy
- Inequality
- Enoch Powell
- People Smuggling
- Security
- Morality
- Child Poverty
- Fascism
- HIV
- Foreign Students
- Disability
- White Working Class
- Election Manifestos
- Border Control
- Pensions
- Colonialism
- Illegality
- Germany
- Public Opinion
- Conspiracy
- Xenophobia
- Remittances
- Albania

Lab Links - All Themes

- ■ Numbers
- ■ Benefits
- ■ Refugees
- ■ Jobs
- ■ Islam
- ■ Fiscal Impact
- ■ Rhetoric
- ■ NHS
- ■ Political Skepticism
- ■ Turkey
- ■ Public Opinion
- ■ White Genocide
- ■ Military Homelessness
- ■ Racism
- ■ Calais Crisis
- ■ Civ Collapse
- ■ Foreign Criminals
- ■ Free Movement
- ■ Misogyny
- ■ Multiculturalism
- ■ Asylum
- ■ ISIS
- ■ Border Control
- ■ Illegality
- ■ Misc Humour
- ■ Inequality
- ■ Conspiracy
- ■ Alt Media
- ■ War
- ■ HIV
- ■ Anti-Semitism
- ■ Labour Policy
- ■ Environment
- ■ Migrant Riots
- ■ Corbyn
- ■ Anti-Trans
- ■ Fascism
- ■ Segregation
- ■ Labour Laws
- ■ South Africa
- ■ Military Contribution
- ■ Child Abuse
- ■ Cultural Marxism
- ■ Morality
- ■ Space
- ■ Facts
- ■ Commonwealth
- ■ Libya
- ■ National Identity
- ■ Schools
- ■ Services
- ■ Unions
- ■ Sovereignty
- ■ Visas
- ■ British Culture
- ■ Disability
- ■ Elite Immigration
- ■ Irish Genocide
- ■ Capitalism
- ■ White Working Class
- ■ Protest

Appendix 6 – Comment & Discussion Posts

As noted, for ethical reasons - and indeed practical space concerns - user comments and discussions analysed in Chapter 4 are not reproduced in full. They were drawn from the following:

UKIP

https://www.facebook.com/UKIP/videos/940915785930312/
https://www.facebook.com/UKIP/videos/939765812711976/
https://www.facebook.com/UKIP/videos/932972933391264/
https://www.facebook.com/UKIP/videos/925368530818371/
https://www.facebook.com/UKIP/posts/999356110086279
https://www.facebook.com/UKIP/posts/993254120696478:0
https://www.facebook.com/UKIP/posts/990276234327600
https://www.facebook.com/UKIP/posts/989039064451317:0
https://www.facebook.com/UKIP/posts/988951697793387
https://www.facebook.com/UKIP/posts/975790629109494:0
https://www.facebook.com/UKIP/posts/964103130278244
https://www.facebook.com/UKIP/posts/962949447060279
https://www.facebook.com/UKIP/posts/959245047430719
https://www.facebook.com/UKIP/posts/957480267607197
https://www.facebook.com/UKIP/posts/954616654560225:0
https://www.facebook.com/UKIP/posts/953490061339551
https://www.facebook.com/UKIP/posts/950909681597589
https://www.facebook.com/UKIP/posts/943896742298883:0
https://www.facebook.com/UKIP/posts/943534699001754
https://www.facebook.com/UKIP/posts/943336275688263
https://www.facebook.com/UKIP/posts/943251689030055:0
https://www.facebook.com/UKIP/posts/943195582368999
https://www.facebook.com/UKIP/posts/942268929128331
https://www.facebook.com/UKIP/posts/941811572507400
https://www.facebook.com/UKIP/posts/941415449213679
https://www.facebook.com/UKIP/posts/940967569258467
https://www.facebook.com/UKIP/posts/94063836595 8054:0
https://www.facebook.com/UKIP/posts/938790829476141
https://www.facebook.com/UKIP/posts/938782752810282
https://www.facebook.com/UKIP/posts/937315379623686
https://www.facebook.com/UKIP/posts/937089052979652
https://www.facebook.com/UKIP/posts/933353803353177:0
https://www.facebook.com/UKIP/posts/933084260046798
https://www.facebook.com/UKIP/posts/931932006828690
https://www.facebook.com/UKIP/posts/928374337184457
https://www.facebook.com/UKIP/posts/927157310639493
https://www.facebook.com/UKIP/posts/926687740686450

https://www.facebook.com/UKIP/posts/925474677474423
https://www.facebook.com/UKIP/posts/924577117564179
https://www.facebook.com/UKIP/posts/923081271047097:0
https://www.facebook.com/UKIP/posts/918292038192687
https://www.facebook.com/UKIP/posts/917426944945863
https://www.facebook.com/UKIP/posts/917410361614188
https://www.facebook.com/UKIP/posts/912932652061959
https://www.facebook.com/UKIP/posts/911433555545202
https://www.facebook.com/UKIP/posts/910529792302245
https://www.facebook.com/UKIP/posts/907551752600049
https://www.facebook.com/UKIP/posts/907379462617278:0
https://www.facebook.com/UKIP/posts/900410636647494
https://www.facebook.com/UKIP/posts/886571501364741
https://www.facebook.com/UKIP/posts/879854885369736
https://www.facebook.com/UKIP/posts/1020070091348214
https://www.facebook.com/UKIP/posts/1017160351639188
https://www.facebook.com/UKIP/posts/1016879265000630
https://www.facebook.com/UKIP/posts/1009996569022233
https://www.facebook.com/UKIP/posts/1009262835762273:0
https://www.facebook.com/UKIP/posts/1002012363153987:0
https://www.facebook.com/UKIP/posts/1001955443159679:0
https://www.facebook.com/209101162445115/posts/1147554101933145
https://www.facebook.com/209101162445115/posts/1143947278960494
https://www.facebook.com/209101162445115/posts/1141916995830189
https://www.facebook.com/209101162445115/posts/1140340525987836
https://www.facebook.com/209101162445115/posts/1137832622905293
https://www.facebook.com/209101162445115/posts/1136670219688200
https://www.facebook.com/209101162445115/posts/1135860873102468
https://www.facebook.com/209101162445115/posts/1130737980281424
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