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TÉZISGYŰJTEMÉNY

Tóth Tamás

The Conceptualization of Explicit and Implicit Populism in Donald Trump's Twitter Communication
című Ph.D. értekezéséhez

Témavezetők:

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1. THE THESIS' RESEARCH TOPIC AND ITS RELEVANCE

This summary aims to introduce the most important findings and the relevant theoretical concepts related to the thesis of 'The Conceptualization of Explicit and Implicit Populism in Donald Trump's Twitter Communication.' First, the thesis' core sentence, which also functions as the most important summary of the study, is provided below: '*The concept of Explicit Populism, which might be between the thin and thick political communication style, and Implicit Populism, which attempts to explore fragmented dichotomies between the ''good'' people and ''culprit'' others, also function as methodological refinements in textual analyses by focusing on the content of the discourse.*'[1] Second, the thesis has proved that Donald Trump utilized the populist political communication style with higher frequency than Hillary Clinton during the last stage of the 2016 presidential elections in the United States. Finally, the thesis attempts to prove that even though a politician who is not considered to be populist in practice, still might utilize the PPCS.

In contemporary years, many significant occurrences in politics were affected by populism. As several scholars suggest, the rise of the Greek Syriza, the successful campaign for Brexit by the UK Independence Party, Donald Trump's and Jair Bolsonaro's ascendancy to lead, Vladimir Putin's and Recep Tayyip Erdogan's obtainment of their presidencies are just some instances that might be supported by populism (Eatwell & Goodwin, 2018; Fish, 2017; Hunter & Power, 2019). As the specific instances above suggest, the analysis of

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[1] Similarly to the thesis, 'political communication style,' 'populist political communication style,' 'explicit populism,' and 'implicit populism' are referred as 'PCS,' 'PPCS,' 'EP,' and 'IP.'

populism is a crucial, if not an inevitable, task for scholars to understand the logic, the effects, and the causes of the successful, *rising* phenomenon (Hawkins et al., 2017). According to many experts, accurate responses to populism cannot be formulated without more in-depth analysis on this hot topic; therefore, the thesis implied a mixed-method examination (Eatwell & Goodwin, 2018; Rovira Kaltwasser, 2017; Tóth & Demeter, 2019).

2.   THEORETICAL BACKGROUND

Without any doubt, one of the most important theoretical perspectives among scholars is Cass Mudde's ideational approach by which he argues that populism is an ideology (Mudde, 2004). He claims in his famous study that populism is 'an ideology that considers society to be ultimately separated into two homogeneous and antagonistic groups, "the pure people" versus "the corrupt elite," and which argues that politics should be an expression of the volonté générale (general will) of the people' (Mudde, 2004, p. 543). Mudde emphasizes the homogeneity of the circles above; while the former is honest and decent, the latter is dishonest and culprit. In other words, according to Mudde's concept, populists think that the people are authentic, but the elite is not. In his argument, Mudde focuses on a vital contradiction between the two groups by stressing the moral feature of populism (Mudde, 2017).

Moreover, Mudde claims that populism consists of four features: (1) ideology, (2) the people, (3) the elite, and (4) general will (volonté général). Mudde accepts that populism is one of the *thin-centered* or *thin ideologies*, which does not reach *the same level of refinement* and consistency as the thick (or full) ones, such as Marxism or liberalism (Mudde, 2017). He cites Michael Freeden, who claims that thin ideologies have 'a restricted core attached to a narrower range of political concepts' (Freeden, 1998, p. 750). Besides, Mudde highlights Freeden's idea: thin ideologies do not provide answers or alternative solutions for core questions and problems affecting social or political issues (Freeden, 2003).

According to populists, there is a wide range of antagonist actors (Aalberg et al., 2016). First and foremost, politicians are the primary enemies who do not have concerns about the voters; they only want to maintain or obtain power (van Kessel & Castelein, 2016). Populists stress that they will not co-operate with the elite, which is a morally corrupt group, and there is no opportunity for compromises (Mudde, 2017) between 'us' and 'them.'

Even though Mudde's ideational concept is contested, this thesis does not drop the theoretical background of the thin ideology; however, the study and the new concepts presented below do not accept that populism is a thick one. The dissertation implements the fundamental piece of Mudde's approach, namely the investigation of the 'us versus them' dichotomy. Also, it utilizes the moral aspects of thin ideology in the discussion. The thesis aimed to enhance why the discursive approach of the PPCS is essential for this textual analysis: 'As many analysts have pointed out (e.g. Hawkins, 2009; Rooduijn et al., 2014), formal discursive elements are implicit in Mudde's (2004) ideological definition' (Aslanidis, 2016, p. 98). Consequently, the ideational approach and the discursive feature of PCS might shape a theoretical background by which the operationalization of EP and IP might be supported.

At this point, the second vital theoretical concept, which supported EP and IP, is provided below. As Aslanidis claims (2018), Jagers and Walgrave (2007) focused on the degree of populism in their study by which the concept of PCS was operationalized. The theoretical concept of this thesis, namely EP and IP, is primarily attached to the aspect of PCS. As Jagers and Walgrave argue (2007), PPCS has three significant elements: (1) reference to the people, (2) stressing the harmful role of the corrupt elite, and (3) excluding some particular,

dangerous groups from the society to keep the relevant territory 'safe' for ordinary citizens. As they point out: 'We will use the thin definition, only relying on the first element of merely referring to the people, as an operational definition. The thick definition comes close to the classic concept and consists of a combination of the three elements...' (Jagers & Walgrave, 2007, p. 322).

Additionally, the authors above took into consideration four types of populism: (1) complete populism, (2) excluding populism, (3) anti-elitist populism, and (4) empty populism (Jagers & Walgrave, 2007). The first type contains references to all three key elements; the second stresses the dichotomies between the 'decent' people and other minorities that risks the inhabitant's culture, welfare, and security (Hameleers, 2018); the third blames the elite, which does not listen to the citizens' voice (Eatwell & Goodwin, 2018), and the last one focuses solely on the people (Bobba & Roncarolo, 2018).

As I mentioned above, politicians who do not utilize or exploit populist ideology still might apply the elements of PPCS in their communication (Bracciale & Martella, 2017). The exploration of PPCS in politicians' communication who are not considered primarily as populists, supports the allegation that populism has the attribute of a chameleon that adjusts to the situations, to the circumstances and the political spheres (Taggart, 2000).

In the PPCS, the primary framing technique that relies on the blame attribution is the casual interpretation. The antagonist outgroups like the political elite, the economic moguls, the media, the experts, isolated minorities,

immigrants, asylum seekers are blamed for several reasons by the politicians who utilize PPCS.

Based on international literature, fear and anger are the most prominent negative emotions in the 'Populist Blame-Game' (Hameleers et al., 2017, p. 876). In line with international literature, anger provides the perception of certainty and controllability (Hameleers et al., 2017). Therefore, it might bring attention to people's dependency on the will of others (Lerner & Keltner, 2001). On the other hand, blame attributions suggest that the culprit elite or outgroup threatens the future of the people (Mudde, 2004). The blame attributions vital features, like danger and threat, might have a considerable effect on citizens' emotions. In contrast to anger, fear is used to bring attention to uncertainty about the danger that might risk decent inhabitants' welfare, culture, and security (Hameleers et al., 2017). The deprivation of stability in people's lives might be a fundamental factor that can catalyze fear.

3.   EXPLICIT AND IMPLICIT POPULISM

The concept relies on the existing international literature in which scholars highlight that the pivotal definitional elements of populism might be fragmented, clustered, or isolated from each other in the coding units (Engesser et al., 2017a). Therefore, in certain instances, direct dichotomies do not appear in every populist-like message; however, specific features might emerge alone. The reasons for the above observation might be (1) reducing the complexity of ideology to make it an easy-to-understand message, (2) to keep the thin populist ideology suitable for people with differing political attitudes, (3) avoiding pure PPCS to make it harder for political opponents or experts to label communicators as populists (Engesser et al., 2017a).

This subchapter operationalizes EP and IP to provide support in understanding this concept. The central idea of EP relies on the concept that the antagonistic actors and the people have to appear in the very same coding unit. In other words, if the homogeneous 'good' masses and the 'culprit' out-groups occur in the same coding unit, EP is present. Matrix 1 provides possible scenarios to supply an overview of EP messages. EP appears, for instance, when Donald Trump directly refers to the *elite* or *specific out-groups, like immigrants*, who abuse power, exploit *people*, mislead the *citizens*, and threaten the *inhabitants'* security. A relevant instance is provided below:

'*Thank you NH! We will end illegal immigration, stop the drugs, deport all criminal aliens & save American lives!*' Date: 2016-11-04.

It is important to notice that the category of EP does not demand the specific characteristic or identity of the enemy but the apparent presence of the antagonistic agent. As the tweet above shows, Trump lacks the precise definition of the 'illegal immigration' and 'all criminal aliens' but still stresses the 'us versus them' dichotomy. When an exact identity of the enemy occurs (e.g., Hillary Clinton), and the dichotomy appears in the message, the coding unit also falls under the category of EP. The operationalization of EP and IP might refine the research methods of textual investigations. EP, on the one hand, shows the PPCS in a pure and unambiguous form. As presented above, the conditions of EP are strict and rigid; therefore, it is much easier for coders to categorize the coding units.

Matrix 1. Scenarios in Explicit Populist Political Communication Style

	S I	S II	S III	S IV	S V	S VI	S VII	S VIII[2]
'Corrupt' Elite	✓	✓	✗	✗	✓	✓	✗	✗
'Dangerous' Minorities	✓	✗	✓	✗	✓	✗	✓	✗
'Good' People	✓	✓	✓	✓	✗	✗	✗	✗
Explicit Populism	✓	✓	✓	✗	✗	✗	✗	✗

One might think that this concept can be equated with thick populism, which consists of the three elements of (1) referring to the people, (2) anti-elitism, and (3) homogeneity/exclusion (Jagers & Walgrave 2007). However, it is between the thin and thick definitions. As such, only one type of apparent dichotomies (e.g., people versus elite, or people versus minorities/immigrants) is required to categorize a message as EP, and there is no need to implement the

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[2] The abbreviation of 'S' refers to 'Scenario.'

third element, which is either attacking the elite or showing hostile attitude towards immigrants or other specific minorities. In other words, EP provides a bridge between the thin and thick definitions.

IP might be perceived from at least two perspectives. First, even though the political agents tend to speak or write about only the people who suffer from relative deprivation (Hameleers, 2019), or being under risk from an invisible, common threat, this thesis still suggests that those messages are not necessarily parts of empty populism. For instance, Donald Trump utilizes IP as it follows:

'*Instead of driving jobs and wealth away, AMERICA will become the world's great magnet for INNOVATION & JOB CREATION.*' Date: 2017-01-03.

IP might support realizing how the causes and sources of the deprivation or risks connect hiddenly to the messages in which the people, in this case, 'AMERICA,' appear, but the 'enemy' does not. In the tweet above, the antagonist actor does not emerge, and it is not characterized. The receiver of the message does not know who brings 'jobs and wealth away' because there is no explanation. Donald Trump suggests that a severe economic deprivation is in progress, that affects people's household incomes. The persons, committees, companies, or parties who might be responsible for the threatening situation are not mentioned, referred to, or named. In short, the minimal necessary feature, namely the collective group of people, occur explicitly in the content with the emphasis of a common problem. However, there is no reference to the agent, not even in a vague way, who is responsible for the destructive processes.

A specific instance might demonstrate how IP works from another perspective:

'*The failing @nytimes writes total fiction concerning me. They have gotten it wrong for two years, and now are making up stories & sources!*' Date: 2017-02-06.

In this message, there is no direct reference to the people; therefore, it does not make sense to characterize it as an instance of EP. However, the message above implies that, by lying about somebody (e.g., the leader), the media also lie to the people because they are not writing truthful accounts. The receivers of the message are the people, not only the person who is being referenced. In other words, the people are present in IP messages but in an unseen way. Additionally, according to Kurt Weyland's political-strategic approach in the research field of populism (2017), the personalistic leader, who is Donald Trump in this case, represents the general will of the people. If the media attack the person who embodies the 'the will of the people' and fight against 'the enemy of the people,' they also attack the huge masses. Therefore, IP supports the minimum concept of populism, that of appealing to the people, as stated by Jagers and Walgrave (2007), by searching for them in messages in which, at first glance, they seem to be missing. The authors above argue that if a message lacks reference to the people, but anti-establishment rhetoric still arises, the coding unit does not fit the PPCS (Jagers & Walgrave 2007). As they state (Jagers & Walgrave, 2007, pp. 334-335): 'If discourse does not refer to the population yet fiercely criticises the establishment and at the same time stigmatises popular categories, it cannot be considered as populism since the required appeal to the people is missing (the size of the bubble will be small or

even non-existent).' In contrast, the thesis endeavors to show, by operationalizing IP, that despite the absence of explicit references to the people in specific texts, they might be the invisible part of individual coding units. Thus, IP is a possible unit for measuring the PPCS. In sum, the political agents might focus explicitly on either the people or the enemy in IP messages; however, another entity is still part of the coding unit in a concealed way.

In a nutshell, future textual research with differing languages can adopt the method above to find the invisible components of PPCS and explore the deeper layers of coding units. Even though the majority of the words in the populist topic dictionary might attract a populist context and spread populist messages, there are certain instances in which these words arise in a neutral or a non-populist setting.[3] In other words, the NS appears in texts in which populist-like words emerge, but neither the EP nor IP dichotomy occurs in the analyzed sentence.

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[3] Neutral or non-populist results are referred as 'NS.'

4.   METHODOLOGY

The comparison of the two nominees' PPCS focused on the last stage of the presidential election in 2016. It started on the 1st of September 2016 and lasted until the 8th of November 2016. This part of the scrutiny was labeled Period One[4], in which 738 and 1,595 tweets from Donald Trump and Hillary Clinton were analyzed. A second comparison also emerged in this dissertation. The study compared Donald Trump's PPCS in the campaign and after his victory. Therefore, the thesis aims to scrutinize 798 tweets from Donald Trump in Period Two.

In the quantitative, computer-assisted approach, tweets in P1 and P2 were analyzed by MAXQDA 2018. The total number of unique words in P1 was 2,230 (the entire sample with word duplications was 7,311 in this period), while the frequency of the individual words was 2,618 (7,879 words total) in P2. The thesis also analyzed the near correlation of the topics to quantify which topics emerged together in the tweets. The near correlation method showed how many topics were in two paragraphs. If one topic belonged to 'Enemy,' and the other was connected to 'Election' in two paragraphs next to each other, the number of correlations between the two topics was equal to one. The thesis applied the two-paragraph-method because tweets and hashtags occurred in two different paragraphs within the same message. Consequently, this scrutiny made an effort to keep the computer-assisted analysis working with a lower margin of error. The number of the entire correlation in the 'near topic method' was 4,230.

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[4] In this study, Period One and Two are referred as 'P1' and 'P2.'

The examination aimed to find similar patterns in @realDonaldTrump tweets to characterize specific topics in his messages. After cleaning the irrelevant and general language units, the thesis focused on the explicit, targeting words that support the characterizations of the categories. As a result, a list of specific words, which may support the results, is provided (Aslanidis, 2018; Kriesi & Pappas, 2015; Pauwels, 2011; Ribera Payá, 2019). Similarly to previous quantitative research (Pauwels, 2011; Ribera Payá, 2019), a list of specific individual words was supplied, and a topic dictionary shows the weights of issues quantitatively from the sample. The key aspects of Donald Trump's tweets can be listed as follows: 'Economy,' 'Election,' 'Enemy,' 'Foreign Policy,' 'Nominations & Policies,' and 'Other.' Based on the findings, the 'Enemy' is the most complex, detailed, and developed category in Donald Trump's tweets. Therefore, six subcategories were created under the 'Enemy' topic deductively as it follows:

1) Antipathetic Countries,
2) Democrats and Other Home Affairs' Opponents,
3) Fake News (Media),
4) Hillary Clinton,
5) Moderate Generalization,
6) Terror Organizations/Attacks.

Based on the Populist Dictionary in @realDonaldTrump's tweets (see Table 2), the implied method intended to list the tweets in which possible populist words and dichotomies emerged. A random sample was collected from the tweets (ten percent) in both periods. Therefore, trained persons coded 225 tweets considering EP and IP. The numbers of decisions are 140 in P1 and 85

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in P2. Intercoder reliability was analyzed and validated by Krippendorff's Alpha. After the validation, the results provided the agreements, disagreements, and reliability about P1, P2, and the entire analyzed sample. To seek a supportive answer for RQ 7, this analysis aimed to check quantitatively and qualitatively whether the Republican leader mentioned specific, isolated groups like women, young people, ethnic minorities, asylum seekers, veterans, and people in need in EP tweets. This part of the study also examined whether Donald Trump appealed to the people universally. To characterize IP tweets, a mixed-method was utilized for exploring the portions and ratios between people-centrism and antagonism in IP tweets during the whole period and separately in P1 and P2.

Hillary Clinton tweeted 1,595 times during the analyzed period. To provide a list of tweets in which the PPCS appeared, populist words, which might have referred to antagonist actors and the people from the cleaned database, were collected. The minimal necessary frequency of the populist words was eight. The proportion above provided a 0.06% share of the entire sample. The Populist Dictionary referring to Hillary Clinton is presented in Table 3. Comparable to subchapter 3.1., the populist dictionary below was provided by the operationalization of anti-elitism and people-centrism (Mudde, 2004); however, an inductive method was utilized as well. 'Ostracizing others' was not appropriate in Hillary Clinton's tweets, except for one suggested exclusion (see subchapter 6.1.5.). Words such as 'Donald,' 'Trump,' 'Mike,' 'Pence,' 'Putin,' and 'Republicans' were parts of the elite, while the category of the people consisted of broad or fragmented 'good' groups of the nation. At first glance, the clustered segments did not represent the homogeneous masses, which is one of the main features of PPCS. However, if one 'unites' all of the

fragmented groups targeted by Clinton, it becomes apparent that she tried to gain trust in the majority. The moral aspect of PPCS (Mudde, 2017) magnetized 'lied' and 'wrong,' while resisting and negative identity dimensions consisted of words such as 'against,' 'reject,' and 'stop' (Bruter and Harrison, 2011). The inductive reading and searching progress supported that 'fighting' also became part of the resisting feature. 'Dangerous' identifies the repressive authoritarianism, while the group of 'immigrants' was an element of positive populism (Tóth and Demeter, 2019) because Secretary Clinton depicted them as the future victims of Trump's aggressive policies that might lead to bans and deportations. Words such as 'hate,' 'he,' 'his,' 'him,' and 'unfit' were implemented by the inductive approach (Bonikowski & Gidron, 2016).

During the analysis, trained coders examined a random sample of ten percent (211 hits) from the tweets. The coders' decision relied on the codebooks where the characterizations of EP and IP were introduced. It is important to note that if a group emerged explicitly more than once in a tweet, the scrutiny recorded them with weighted occurrences regardless of whether the groups had specific attributes. Therefore, for instance, the study took the appearance of females into account with the frequency of three if Secretary Clinton referred to women three times in the very same tweet. In the qualitative coding sessions, two trained persons decided whether the relevant tweet was part of explicit, implicit, or neutral categories in terms of PPCS. After the coding process, intercoder reliability was supplied (Freelon, 2013). For supporting in-depth analysis, the reliability was separated into agreements and disagreements in all categories.

5. RESULTS

The findings of the thesis supported that 4,137 hits emerged among the six main topics in Donald Trump's Twitter communication. The most frequent category is the 'Enemy' in the entire sample. The emphasis of the antagonist entities was slightly higher in the Republican politician's tweets, rather than relying on ordinary citizens, in the last months of the campaign period. Although the electoral race was finished on the 8th of November 2016, the 'Election' was the second most used topic by Donald Trump during the whole period. The third regular topic was 'Other' as it took slightly more than one-fifth of the entire sample. The categories above dominated the analyzed segments of the corpus, as they represented almost eight tweets out of ten (79.2%) in the entire sample. As the outcomes showed, Hillary Clinton was the primary antagonistic individual opponent in the analysis; Donald Trump focused on stressing the differences between him and his political rival with a remarkable but not severe frequency within the same tweets. This part of the analysis provides the intercoder reliability referring to each period and the entire sample. Trained coders' analysis supplied high reliability, namely $\alpha = 0.831$ in P1, $\alpha = 0.826$ in P2, and $\alpha = 0.829$ in P1+P2. Based on the results, Donald Trump shifted the blame attribution from Hillary Clinton to another primary opponent in P2, namely the dishonest media. In general, IP tweets dominated Donald Trump's Twitter PPCS, while the shares of EP and neutral agreements were very close to each other.

Donald Trump sought the opportunities to utilize the PPCS against the *relevant* enemy to acquire and maintain trust and disregard the irrelevant antagonist

actor(s) or the explicit and direct references to the people at the same time. In a nutshell, the circumstances and the actual political situation determined his style. The situation changed in Donald Trump's political career; thus, P2 showed an unbalanced frequency between antagonism and people-centrism in favor of the former. The contribution of significant adjustments shaped Donald Trump's PPCS in terms of the usage of EP and IP tweets. As the results supported, IP dominated Donald Trump's messages in both examined periods. The ratios between the EP and IP did not change significantly in the two phases. As a result, Donald Trump's and his communication team's strategy relied on the idea that one of the core elements of populism had to be emphasized intensively. Antagonism and people-centrism define the core idea of populism (Jagers & Walgrave, 2007), and as the results of this dissertation presented, populist words might have magnet EP, but mostly IP, PCS in the analyzed sample.

The investigation of Donald Trump's PPCS in the two periods might complete international literature. First, as Hameleers et. al (2017) argue that the populist discourse and blame attributions are attached to affecting fear than anger. Donald Trump's negative labels might dominantly have affected anger; however, he also made an effort to influence people's fear by moderate generalization. Besides this, as Aslanidis examines (2018) in his research relying on populist movement's manifestos in Greece, Portugal, Spain, and the United States, the political organizations above were focusing on primarily people-centrism. Donald Trump utilized a relatively balanced PPCS in P1 when he mentioned the two vital elements of populism, but he changed the ratio between targeting the culprit out-group(s) and the people by increasing the ratio of blame attributions.

Relying on Krippendorff's Alpha method, the trained coders' results supported significant reliability in the segment of the analysis related to Clinton's tweets (0.7727). The scrutiny discerned the highest agreement in NS, followed by IP, and EP. Neither explicit nor implicit PPCS dominated the analyzed sample; however, the latter emerged with a slightly higher frequency.

As the results support, Hillary Clinton utilized attacks against Donald Trump to make a clear distinction between herself and the Republican candidate (Benoit et al., 2003). However, the Democratic leader could not blame Trump by exploiting the antagonist role of the challenger political elite (Mudde, 2004) because the Republican nominee had no history in politics at all. In her tweets, Clinton used PPCS by referring to the broadest range of the nation, namely the people (Stavrakakis & Katsambekis, 2014), and made an effort to gain significant support from specific groups that might reject Trump's 'insult-driven' campaign like women, African Americans, Latinos, Muslims, and veterans.

Despite the balanced structure of the blaming tweets, Clinton did not aim to focus primarily on why the fragmented groups should have avoided voting for her rival in her EP messages. Nevertheless, she highlighted implicitly the threat that Trump and Mike Pence represented.

EP and IP might be a useful method to support further textual analyses. To achieve analytical precision and comprehensive findings, several coding units encompassing the PPCS are given scrutiny (Aslanidis, 2018):

i) The sentence in which specific populist words appear,

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ii) The sentences before and after the central sentence (i.e., the coding unit where the particular terms occur),

iii) The paragraphs containing populist expressions.

As such, there might be three different coding units: a *micro-contextualized*, a *macro-contextualized*, and an *uncontextualized* one. One of the future core aims is to measure to what extent political agents utilize EP or IP in the micro-contextualized, macro-contextualized, and uncontextualized method. As Aslanidis argues (2018) in his methodological overview, quantitative research on populism can be divided into three categories: dictionary-based analysis, holistic grading, and traditional thematic text scrutiny. Every method might have different types of coding units; therefore, all of the methods above have their limitations. This research method attempts to provide three different coding units to reduce the limitations that can emerge from one specific coding unit. Whilst there is no perfect method in the textual analysis that might produce results without limitations, this approach aims to avoid as many limitations as possible to provide in-depth research.

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