Det Ny Merino

Brexit

- A discourse analysis of Twitter's role in the EU-referendum in 2016

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Abstract

Artiklens formål er at finde ud af, hvordan Hamelinks konflikteskaleringsspiral ser ud, når man sætter modellen ind i konteksten af en folkeafstemning, som EU-folkeafstemningen i Storbritannien i 2016, frem for ind i konteksten af en konflikt, der ender med eskalering i form af en krig eller en anden dødelig situation. Yderligere har artiklen til formål at undersøge diskurserne, der benyttes til at italesætte Brexit i nyhedsartikler og på det sociale medie Twitter.

For at besvare problemstillingerne har jeg valgt at lave en kritisk diskursanalyse, som følger de tre dimensioner af Norman Fairclough (1992). I de tre dimensioner analyseres den tekstuelle dimension, den diskursive praksis og den sociale praksis ud fra en bestemt kommunikativ begivenhed, som i denne afhandling er Brexit. Analysen baserer sig på 1) 222 tweets, som blev postet i perioden fra den 20. juni til den 23. juni 2016, 2) 15 nyhedsartikler, der blev offentliggjort i perioden fra 2013 og 2016, og 3) den såkaldte Bloomberg-tale, som blev afholdt af den tidligere britiske premierminister i 2013.

Brexit

Den kritiske diskursanalyse af de 222 tweets resulterer i to hoveddiskurser, som enten er pro-Brexit eller con-Brexit. Dertil kommer en række supplerende diskurser såsom immigration, økonomi, eftervirkninger og opfattelse. Årsagen, til at jeg benytter mig af supplerende diskurser, er, at den kommunikative begivenhed oprindeligt er en folkeafstemning, som har to sider – enten forbliver Storbritannien i den Europæiske Union eller også forlader de unionen. Nyhedsartiklernes og talens diskurser viste sig at være anderledes, da både nyhedsartiklerne og Bloomberg-talen giver baggrundsinformation om, hvorfor den tidligere premierminister David Cameron valgte at udskrive en folkeafstemning. Med udgangspunkt i artiklernes og talens rolle identificerede jeg diskurser, som er mere emnerelaterede ligesom flygtningskrisen i 2015, eurokrisen eller manglen af tillid i den Europæiske Union og dens institutioner.

Baseret på resultaterne af den kritiske diskursanalyse benytter jeg mig af Hamelinks konflikteskaleringsspiral, som viser, hvordan en konflikt udbreder sig og i sidste ende eskalerer. Da modellen hovedsageligt bliver benyttet i forbindelse med konflikter, der ender i krig eller en anden dødelige situation, har jeg tilpasset de to sidste faser af modellen, således at den passer til en folkeafstemning. Forud for analysen forventede jeg, at diskurserne i tweetsne og de forskellige nyhedsartikler indeholdt en diskussion af flygtninge og udlændige. I stedet var det påfaldende, at Brexit-processen begyndte langt før flygtningekrisen i 2015. Brexit har rod i eurokrisen og den store recession i 2008, hvorfor flygtningekrisen blot medvirkede til at styrke valgkampen før folkeafstemningen.

Introduction

Social media and other online sources become more important to the citizens in Western Europe under 30 when it comes to the question where people retrieve their latest news stories (Pew Research Center, 2018). A study conducted by the Pew Research Center (2018, p. 6) showed that 73% of the participants between 18 and 29 choose to access the latest news online, while only 48% of the participants that were older than 50 answered that they use online platforms to read the latest news. In contrary, 39% of the participants older than 50 still use print media and 87% the TV to stay up to date, while only 12% of the 18-29-year-olds use print media and 38% the TV (Pew Research Center, 2018, p. 6). The results of the Pew Research Center document the gain of the importance of online platforms and social media in the process of retrieving the latest news among citizens in Western Europe (Pew Research Center, 2018, pp. 5-6). Based on those results, this article will examine the role of social media and in particular the micro-blogging and social network Twitter in combination with mainstream media before the EU referendum that asked British citizens whether they want to withdraw from the European Union or remain in the community of states. Based on the outcome of the referendum, the study of this article aims to answer the question of how the situation of an EU referendum could figuratively escalate in the way it did in the UK resulting in a withdrawal of the UK from the EU. Further, it examines if one can argue that there were linguistic manipulations made by politicians and campaigners that persuaded people to vote in favor of leaving the EU.

In order to examine which news stories published by mainstream media like BBC News or The Guardian could influence the process of an escalation of the EU that resulted in the British withdrawal from the EU also called Brexit, this article aims to answer the following research questions:

1. How did the media influence people to vote in favor of Great Britain exiting the European Union? Moreover, how did the news coverage escalate the situation?
2. Which discourses were used in the media while covering the EU referendum in the United Kingdom?

Important previous literature

Fake news

Ever since the EU referendum whether or not the United Kingdom will remain a member in the European Union in June 2016 and the American presidential elections in November 2016 the term *fake news* became omnipresent in all sorts of essential news coverage.

Historically, the spreading of false news in order to gain a political or personal advantage is generally not a new phenomenon (De keersmaecker & Roets, 2017, p. 107) since fake news has existed since the beginning of human civilization (McNair, 2017, as cited in Al-Rawi, p.2) and has not been seen as a problem until 2015 (Figueira & Oliveira, 2017, p. 818). Those false news or alternate facts" (Figueira & Oliveira, 2017, p. 818) raised a public concern through

the term *fake news* which was introduced by the American president Donald Trump and communicated that fake news has its origin in politics (Figueira & Oliveira, 2017, p. 818).

The researcher Al-Rawi argues that previous studies on fake news mainly focus on bots that send out those fake news automatically (Bastos & Mercea, 2017; Bessi & Ferrara, 2016; Gallacher, Kaminska, Kollanyi, Yasseri & Howard, 2017; Howard & Kollanyi, 2016; Howard et al., 2017; Kollanyi, Howard & Woolley, 2016, as cited in Al-Rawi, 2018, p. 1) and therefore, Al-Rawi s (2018, p. 1) study focuses on a comparison of different platforms and the different fake news discourses since he argues that online news in general has a direct impact on democracy and political knowledge" (Bimber, 2003; Mossberger, Tolbert & McNeal, 2007, as cited in Al-Rawi (2018, p. 1). In his study, Al-Rawi (2018, p. 4) analyzed more than 8 million tweets that referred to #fakenews over a period of seven months and 1353 newspaper items published by 23 US and British newspapers (Al-Rawi, 2018, p. 4) on the basis of Chomsky's and Herman's (1988, as cited in Al-Rawi, 2018, p. 2) propaganda model and the theoretical concept of (networked) gatekeeping" (Al-Rawi, 2018, p. 3). Al-Rawis (2018, p. 10) findings show that fake news is presented differently on mainstream media and social media. Those results can be linked to the different gatekeeping activities, where the coverage of fake news by the mainstream media often highlights its connection with Internet sites generation revenues from Google advertising, social media especially Facebook, and Donald Trump" (Al-Rawi, 2018, p. 10). However, at the same time fake news is presented on social media from a different angle due to the centralized gatekeeping discourse by certain influentials or popular online users" (Al-Rawi, 2018, p. 12).

How much power so-called influencers have on their followers in terms of fake news was examined by De keersmaecker and Roets (2017, p. 107) as they tested how people can adjust their attitude toward someone after they learn that the initial information they received was incorrect.

De keersmaeckers and Roets study is based on the idea that initial social impressions are preservant, even when individuals learn that their initial impression is based on incorrect information" (Ross, Lepper & Hubbard, 1975, as cited in De keersmaecker & Roets, 2017, p. 107). However, De keersmaecker and Roets (2017, p. 107) argue that cognitive ability plays a role in the overall process of adjusting the initial impression of information. In their study, De keersmaecker and Roets (2017, p. 108) conducted an online experiment by using a questionnaire with a total of 390 participants. The participants were randomly separated into two groups, where each group represented either the experimental or control condition of the test. De keersmaecker and Roets results indicated that people who were measured with a lower cognitive ability were less responsive to adjust their initial impression when presented with corrective information that people with a higher cognitive ability and that incorrect information had a persevering influence on their attitude" (De keersmaecker & Roets, 2017, p. 109).

The importance of De keersmaeckers and Roets (2017, p.107) study on the relationship between cognitive ability and the adjustment of corrective information after the initial social impressions is visible when looking into how social media work. Further, one has to keep in mind that fake news and false information that spread through social media channels are hard to correct (De keersmaecker & Roets, 2017, p. 107). In order to show how easy fake news can spread through the internet, the researcher Craig Silverman (2016, as cited in Bard, 2018, p. 105) conducted a study where he found out that people interacted more with the top 20 fake news stories than with the actual news articles on the same platform in the same time frame. In the study, Silverman (2016, as cited in Bard, 2018, p. 105) measured the engagement through likes and shares on the social media platform Facebook.

Previous literature on social media focusing on Twitter

Social media can be defined as a group of Internet-based applications that build on interactive mobile and web-based technologies (…)" (Kaplan & Haenlein, 2010, as cited in Johnson & Kaye, 2015, p. 128).

For the aim of this study, it is particularly interesting to look closer into the micro-blogging platform Twitter. The micro-blogging service is an open channel where everyone can share their thoughts and interests (Saxberg & Saxberg, 2009, p. 22) as long as the user stays within the 140 character restriction that is set by Twitter (Kwak, Lee, Park, & Moon, 2010, p. 591).

Unlike the social network platform Facebook, which requires users to mutually accept each other in order to connect on the platform and share messages, Twitter requires no reciprocation" (Kwak, Lee, Park, & Moon, 2010, p. 591), which means that users of the platform can follow others without knowing them or indicate any relationship (Murthy, 2013, p. 6) and users that are followed by someone do not need to follow them back (Kwak, Lee, Park, & Moon, 2010, p. 591).

The concept of the micro-blogging platform became particularly interesting for news stations and journalists as Twitter creates an environment where news is omnipresent and where everyone can cover the latest news from their surroundings, which can quickly spread across the platform (Murthy, 2013, p. 51). Further, the concept of Twitter enables the general public to change the way journalism practices work (Murthy, 2013, p. 55) and furthermore, change the relationship between journalism and politics. Before social media and Twitter, the relationship between journalism and politicians was interdependent since politicians needed news media to distribute their messages amongst the citizens, and the news stations depend on the politicians as they considered politicians as an essential source for the news they that are important for the general public (Broersma & Graham, 2016, p. 89). The way Twitter changed this relationship is that it added a third party – the general public – to the relationship (Broersma & Graham, 2016, p. 90) because the micro-blogging network allows journalists to invite their readers and the users of the platform to participate in the news production process" (Lasorsa et al., 2011, p. 26, as cited in Murthy, 2013, p. 55). The way they

allow readers and users to participate is by giving feedback on shared articles through likes and shares and retweets of messages that might be relevant to a news event (Murthy, 2013, p. 55).

An example of how an individual became a journalist and actively participated in the process of news production through their Twitter account was the crash of US flight 1549 in January 2009 (Beaumont, 2009, as cited in Murthy, 2013, p. 56). Janis Krums, a businessman from Florida, took a picture of the downed plane that was floating on the Hudson River and uploaded it on Twitter before any news station could arrive on the scene. Further, Krums continued to tweet about how the rescue of the passengers went along, while also assisting the rescue which made him a citizen journalist and an aid worker at the same time (Beaumont, 2009, as cited in Murthy, 2013, p. 56).

The coverage of the news event of US flight 1549 by a user of the platform Twitter showed that it is capable of distributing information all over the world in real time (Bianco, 2009, p. 305, as cited in Murthy, 2013, p. 60). Because people are now able to interact with news stations, journalists and further, can actively participate in the process of news production, Twitter created an environment where journalists can be held accountable for the stories they publish, and users can evaluate the role of mainstream media, journalists are forced to maintain the trust of audiences" (Lasorsa et al., 2011, p. 23, as cited in Murthy, 2013, p. 55), since Twitter belongs to the technological developments, which democratized and changed journalistic practices and affected journalists most (Lasorsa et a., 2011, p. 19, as cited in Murthy, 2013, p. 55).

Method

I decided to conduct a discourse analysis to find out which discourses were used by media stations and the general public on the micro-blogging network Twitter. The discourses that I will find through the discourse analysis will help me to analyze the spiral of conflict escalation of the news coverage on Brexit.

Spiral of conflict escalation

The researcher Lani Watson (2018, p. 88) conducted a study on how the media shaped the outcome of the referendum about whether or not Great Britain leaves the European Union by violating epistemic rights during the Brexit campaign in 2016. Her study on epistemic rights violation, which relates to misinformation and withholding of information by the media in order to achieve a particular goal, can be described by Hamelink's spiral of conflict escalation. Hamelink (2011, p. 10) argues that it is a part of each human-being that we perceive others as our adversary. Furthermore, that this perception changes even more as global demographics change and evolve into multicultural and multireligious spaces" (Hamelink, 2011, p. 10), where people encounter an increased feeling that even more individuals are strangers because of a different origin, religion or cultural background.

Hamelink (2011, p. 10) states that relationships among humans are never free of conflict since there will always be disagreements or different opinions, which is why Hamelink (2011, p. 10) states that conflict is a constitutive element of human life."

Further, Hamelink (2011, p. 14) distinguishes between different kinds of conflicts, some of them are essential for innovation and development and some conflicts arise due to fundamental differences in terms of personality, culture or religion and those are conflicts that might be desirable to resolve are impossible to resolve because of the fundamental differences. When conflicts are impossible to resolve because of fundamental differences and the gap between us" and them" grow[s] bigger" (Hamelink, 2011, p. 19) and emotions like anger, panic or fear enter the escalation process, conflicts can escalate (Hamelink, 2011, pp. 14-21). In order to explain how conflicts escalate and how the media contribute toward an escalation of a conflict, Hamelink (2011, p. 21) developed a spiral of conflict escalation that moves through four different phases. The four stages in the spiral of conflict escalation are anxiety, agitation, alienation, and accusation in a mirror" (Hamelink, 2011, p. 21).

Anxiety

The first stage in the spiral of conflict escalation is *anxiety*, which Hamelink (2011, p. 22) describes as a mix of emotions that contain amongst other things the emotions *fear*, *anger* and *humiliation*, that lets people feel they lost control over their lives instead of being alert over dangers that might arise. The state of anxiety can not only contain basic human needs but also the territorial integrity which leads to competition with others. How anxiety can be the first stage of an escalated conflict is visible, when looking at the example of the aftermaths of 9/11. The researcher Furedi (2005, p. 126, as cited in Hamelink, 2011, p. 24) argued that [s]ince 9/11, politicians, business, advocacy organizations, and special interest groups have sought to further their narrow agendas by manipulation public anxiety about terror."

Fear is one of the emotions that supports an overall feeling of anxiety, and in the aftermaths of 9/11, the media featured predominantly fear as a part of their media discourse (Hamelink, 2011, p. 40). The researcher Peter N. Stearns (2006, as cited in Hamelink, 2011, p. 38) stated that

> [d]evelopments in the past two decades suggest, indeed, that fear stimulation has become an overwhelming temptation for media in a variety of sectors from commercial pitchman to the fine arts.

In the example of 9/11, one can see that US media included a discourse of fear in their news coverage as they included inconsiderate words like war, rogue states, and axis of evil" (Hamelink, 2011, p. 40), which are words that are negative connotated (Hamelink, 2011, p. 40).

Agitation

The second stage of the spiral of conflict escalation is *agitation*, which is a continuation of the conflict escalation. During the agitation phase, the anxiety of stage one has to be transformed into an aggressive behavior of individuals in a society. The transformation of from anxiety to an aggressive behavior requires the society to have a manipulative leader who can concentrate the state anxiety on a specific target group (Hamelink, 2011, p. 26). When a conflict enters the agitation phase leaders use their rhetoric in order to trigger anger and aggression in the followers, who in turn pressure the leader further toward destructive aggression that should lead to the elimination of the object of their anxiety" (Volkan, 2004, p. 13, as cited in Hamelink, 2011, p. 27). Further, Volkan (2004, p. 14, as cited in Hamelink, 2011, p. 27) argues that in the process of agitation people lose their social trust and replace it with a sort of blind trust in the angry leader, which happens because political leaders know how they can manipulate the anxiety of the people to reach their political goals (Hamelink, 2011, p. 27). Therefore, political leaders identify target groups and create a justification for the hostility people feel toward this group and further, they create a feeling of a collective identity, where people feel a sense of community in an individualistic world (Hamelink, 2011, p. 27).

Alienation

The third stage of the spiral of conflict escalation is *alienation*, which describes the active or passive participation in joint destruction like murder another human being (Hamelink, 2011, p. 28). However, even though individuals are aggressive and fearsome toward others, most find it challenging to murder others which means that those individuals have to overcome a strong taboo and morals rules, which exist in most cultures (Hamelink, 2011, p. 28). In order to overcome those difficulties, armies train their soldiers to increase the emotional distance between the aggressor and victim" (Hamelink, 2011, p. 28).

Through the use of dehumanizing language, media support the process of alienation (Hamelink, 2011, p. 48). The researchers Ayotte and Moore (2008, p. 86, as cited in Hamelink, 2011, p. 49) noted that dehumanizing language often represents the ultimate weapon in war because it creates mental frameworks within which moral norms are relaxed." Often the dehumanizing language that is presented in media shifts toward racism when the oppositions belong to non-Western countries (Hamelink, 2011, p. 49).

The use of dehumanizing language in media leads to a dehumanization of the enemy and to a justification of the killing of the enemy, which leads to the fourth stage of the spiral of conflict escalation.

Accusation in a mirror

The last stage of the spiral of conflict escalation is *accusation in a mirror*, which refers to the dehumanization of others especially the enemy, so that individuals see the enemy as a danger and can justify the killing of another human being even though the cultural background indicates that it is not acceptable to kill other humans (Hamelink, 2011, p. 29). Further,

accusation in a mirror leads to a justification that it is legally and morally acceptable to kill others when we see that the enemy is guilty of what the angry political leaders told us and that killing the enemy, therefore, is self-defense (Hamelink, 2011, p. 29). During the stage of accusation in a mirror, the media tell stories about how the enemy threatens the us" (Hamelink, 2011, p. 54), a feeling that the political leaders spread in the agitation phase.

Discourse Analysis

I chose discourse analysis in this article because it enables me also to analyze the intertextual relations between different texts as discourses can refer to previous texts or texts that describe familiar situations (Johnston, 2008, p. 16). An analysis of intertextual relations enables researchers to analyze connections between tweets on the micro-blogging network Twitter. The network allows users to not only reply to others by using the @" in front of the user name but allows retweets, which is a function that users can use when they want to spread a message written by another user (Saxberg & Saxberg, 2009, p. 27). Those retweets are particularly interesting because it can happen that, e.g., tweet A comments on tweet B which is a retweet of tweet C written by another user, in this situation analysis of the intertextual relation between tweet A, B and C would help to decode the discourse those users range in between.

However, even though discourse analysis offers, amongst other things, an analytical view on intertextual relations, I decided to use the critical discourse analysis (CDA) mainly. CDA is not only concerned with the analysis of discourses (or more concretely texts), it is part of some form of systematic transdisciplinary analysis of relations between discourse and other elements of the social process" (Fairclough, Critical Discourse Analysis: The Critical Study of Language, 2010, p. 10).

Fairclough (1995, p. 132, as cited in Locke, 2004, p. 1) describes the aim of CDA as a method to systematically explore the relationship between texts, events and discursive practices, and social and cultural relations, structures and processes in order to determine how the power struggles in their surroundings ideologically shape those practices, events and texts. Further, Fairclough (2010, p. 96) states that the relationship between discourse and other facets of the social is not transhistorical constant but a historical variable," which is why I decided to use CDA in this paper as the distribution of news changed over the past decades. In order to answer the first research question of this article, I will use Fairclough s (2010, p. 94) three-dimensional framework of analysis, where he argues that every discursive event can be divided into three facets or dimensions. The three facets refer to a discursive event that contains *text*, which refers to written or spoken language, *discourse practice* is defined by a specific instance and contains the production and interpretation of text, which is a part of the third facet called social practice (Fairclough, 2010, p. 94). Fairclough (2010, p. 94) defines those facets as perspectives that are complementary ways of reading a complex social event." Further, he states that the three-dimensional framework of analysis focuses on politics in the

dimension of *social practice* as it focuses on the relation of power and domination (Fairclough, 2010, p. 94).

The first stage of Fairclough s three-dimensional framework is the analysis of the texts that are produced in a discursive event. In this article, the texts that I will analyze are tweets and news articles, which can be published by a media station or newspaper, on the topic Brexit. The analysis in the first stage is a form-and-meaning analysis" (Fairclough, 2010, p. 94), which is based on the texts mentioned above. A form-and-meaning analysis indicates that the first stage of the three-dimensional framework analysis is concerned with an analysis of the forms of texts, including their generic forms (the overall structure of, for instance, a narrative), their dialogic organization (in terms, for instance, of turn-taking), plex sentences, the grammar of the clause (including questions of transitivity, mood and modality), and vocabulary" (Fairclough, 2010, p. 94) in order to highlight interpersonal functions of the text that occur in a discursive event (Fairclough, 2010, p. 94).

Further, Fairclough (2010, p. 94) states that it is necessary to stress that those texts that are analyzed in the first stage are independent texts, even though every text can contain interwoven meanings, which have their domains in

> the representation and signification of the world and experience, the constitution (…) of identities of participants and social and personal relationships between them, and the distribution of given versus new (…) (Fairclough, 2010, p. 94),

which is why one has to distinguish between the interpersonal functions *identity* and *relation* (Fairclough, 2010, p. 94). Fairclough (2010, p. 94) defines the interpersonal function *identity* as a function that constitutes personal and social identities and the *relational* function as a function that constitutes relationships.

The second facet of the analysis is the analysis of discourse practice and is concerned with sociocognitive aspects of text production and interpretation, as opposed to social-institutional aspects" (Fairclough, 2010, pp. 94-95). During this stage of the analysis I will look into how the participants of the discursive event Brexit produce and interpret text, which is supported by Twitter's retweet function, and analyze the relationship between the discursive event and the discourses used (Fairclough, 2010, p. 95). Fairclough (2010, p. 95) states that his main focus on this stage is the concept of interdiscursivity which highlights the normal heterogeneity of texts," which are constituted through genres and discourses (Fairclough, 2010, p. 95). The analysis of the discourse practices and the relationship between the discourse practices and the discursive event will help to determine how the dynamics of the news function regarding the news spread and the spiral of conflict escalation (Hamelink, 2011, p. 21).

The third dimension contains an analysis of Brexit, which is the discursive event in this article, as a social practice. An analysis of a discursive event as a social practice can refer to various levels of a social organization and contains, for instance, the context of a situation or the institutional context (Malinowski, 1923; Halliday & Hasan 1985, as cited in Fairclough, 2010, p. 95). In terms of Fairclough s (2010, p. 94) three-dimensional framework, social practice represents the nature in which the texts of a discursive event occur and is mediated by the discourse practice as the process of text production shapes and is shaped by the social practice and further, the text production and interpretation leaves traces of the social practice in texts.

Data

In total, I analyzed 222 tweets, which were posted in the time frame between June 20, 2016, and June 23, 2016. The reason I chose a time frame so close to the date of the referendum corresponds with the first research question which asks how the situation could escalate on a level that led British citizens to vote in favor of a British exit from the EU. In terms of Hamelink's spiral of conflict escalation, I needed data that would provide evidence for the third and fourth stage in the spiral of conflict escalation, which is why I chose to analyze 222 tweets that were posted days before the referendum. The chosen time frame gives me an outline of what people thought and said about Brexit and the discourses connected to the referendum. In order to get a complete list of tweets within this specific time frame, I filtered the search on the micro-blogging service and social network Twitter by using the hashtag #Brexit. Twitter itself states that the hashtags have the function of key topics so that users can discuss the topics on Twitter by the use of the right hashtag (Twitter, Inc., n.d.a).

Furthermore, I narrowed the search further through the filters that allowed me to set the time frame in which the tweets were posted and the language that is used by the users. Because the EU referendum was held in the United Kingdom and concerned the British citizens primarily, I chose to narrow my search to English tweets only.

In order to get an overview of what led to the referendum and which factors triggered the wish among British citizens and politicians to withdraw from the European Union, I analyzed a total of 15 newspaper articles published by the British newspaper The Guardian and one speech that was held by the former British Prime Minister David Cameron. The reason I chose to only include The Guardian as a source for the newspaper articles is that The Guardian was listed as one of the most trustworthy newspaper brands (Pew Research Center, 2018, p. 31). The time frame in which the 15 newspaper articles were published differs from the tweets because the newspaper articles and the Bloomberg speech because those will act as background information that initiated the four stages in Hamelinks spiral of conflict escalation. Because the articles show the beginning of the conflict surrounding the EU referendum in the UK, the articles were published between 2013 and 2016, and the Bloomberg speech which David Cameron gave in 2013.

Discussion

CDA results vs. previous literature

The single most striking observation to emerge from the critical discourse analysis of the 222 tweets, the 15 newspaper articles and the Bloomberg speech is that each analysis item can be placed into one of the four different stages in Hamelink's spiral of conflict escalation.

However, the fact that the tweets, newspaper articles, and the Bloomberg speech do correspond to the four stages of Hamelink's spiral of conflict escalation was not the only striking observation that could be made. Another observation that could be made is the overlapping of the results with the study conducted by the researcher Ahmed Al-Rawi, who examined the discourses on fake news in the news coverage conducted by mainstream media and compares it with social networking sites (SNS) users who reference the term fakenews" in their tweet" (Al-Rawi, 2018, p. 1). If one compares the study of this paper, which focuses on the different discourses that can be found in the news coverage of the EU referendum that was held in the UK in 2016, with the study conducted by Al-Rawi, one can see certain proximity between the two studies. However, Al-Rawi s study aims to compare the discourses of fake news in the news coverage by mainstream media and on social media and is based on over 8 million tweets and about 1350 news items from different media outlets (Al-Rawi, 2018, p. 2). Through the focus on fake news and the discourses that come along in the coverage of fake news in news items and on social media, Al-Rawi provides a needed inside knowledge on fake news on social media and the discourses that come along with the news coverage of fake news as it is a phenomenon of our modern lives (Al-Rawi, 2018, pp. 1-2). This study, however, uses Al-Rawi s study as a basis that focuses on the overall coverage of the discursive event Brexit and takes into account that some of the tweets can be categorized as examples of fake news like, e.g. the tweet that was published by the user *@The_Fogey* PLEASE RETWEET THE QUEEN S THOUGHTS ON A BREXIT. #VoteLeave #LeaveEU #EUref #Brexit #Lexit #leave #EU #UK" which includes a picture that states EU referendum: Queen asks guests to give her three reasons why Britain should remain in Europe".

However, even though the aims of the two studies are different with one focusing on fake news and the other taking fake news into account as part of the news coverage of the discursive event, one can find similar discourses in both studies which can have its reason in the time frame when the data of both studies were published. The first of the two data sets in Al-Rawi s study consisting of over 8 million tweets was retrieved from Twitter for a period of over 7 months (from January to August 2017)" (Al-Rawi, 2018, p. 4) while the second set of data includes 1,353 news items from media outlets in the US and the UK that were published in the years 2016 and 2017 (Al-Rawi, 2018, p. 4).

Compared to the data sets in Al-Rawi s study one can see similarities to this study because the tweets of the first data set were published between June 20, 2016 and June 23, 2016

compared to January to August 2017 in Al-Rawi s (2018, p. 4) study. The second set of data in this article included newspaper articles that were published between 2013 and 2016, which can be the reason that some of the top phrases and topics clustering that Al-Rawi found in his analysis correspond to the discourses that I found in the critical discourse analysis. An example is the topic clustering Terror; Protest" (Al-Rawi, p. 10) that corresponds to the immigration and migrant crisis 2015 discourses because the keywords that Al-Rawi found in relation to this topic clustering are Terror; Protest; Muslim; Anti; Isis; Caught" (Al-Rawi, p. 10) and relate to the topics that were communicated within the discourse migrant crisis 2015 in the newspaper articles and the discourse immigration in the tweets. Further, the topic clustering Retweet; Agree" (Al-Rawi, 2018, p. 10) relates to the discourses that I found in the analysis of the tweets because both sets of data share the same social network as their origin. Like Al-Rawi, I decided to analyze the tweets that were posted on the micro-blogging service and social network Twitter because Twitter is a preferred platform for political discussions especially by famous figures and celebrities" (Parmelee & Bichard, 2011, as cited in Al-Rawi, 2018, p. 4). Moreover, the retweet function is a popular function on Twitter to share posts that were published by another user within one s network.

Since the social network Twitter forms the basis for the analysis in both studies, it is not striking that the topic clustering Retweet; Agree" (Al-Rawi, 2018, p. 10) relates to one of the two main discourses that I found among the tweets.

The central discourse that corresponds to the topic clustering is pro-Brexit as it agrees with the suggestion of the EU referendum that the United Kingdom should withdraw from the European Union. Further, the retweet part of the topic clustering Retweet; Agree" (Al-Rawi, 2018, p. 10) corresponds with the results of the textual analysis, which is part of Fairclough s (2010, p. 94) three-dimensional framework of analysis. The results of the textual analysis show the word *retweet* was often used in order to create an imperative that had the aim to encourage other users to share the posted (network) with others.

The retweet function itself leads to another observation that could be made when looking closer into the tweets that could be classified as fake news like the already mentioned tweet by the user The_Fogeys, which displays a screenshot of a newspaper article can include the primary information of this tweet. The fact that the primary information of the tweet is coming from another source that distributed the misleading news relates to the study conducted by the researchers De keersmaecker and Roets. The two researchers examined the relationship between cognitive ability and the ability to correct previous false information (De keersmaecker & Roets, 2017, p. 107). De keersmaecker and Roets found out in their study that people with a lower cognitive ability can be influenced by incorrect information and cannot correct those even when new information arise which correct the previous incorrect information (De keersmaecker & Roets, 2017, p. 110). Even though I did not examine the cognitive ability of the users on Twitter that expressed their opinions about the EU referendum with the question whether the UK should leave the EU or not, the results of the

critical discourse analysis show tendencies that fake news with extreme attitudes are shared more often than tweet containing a link to a newspaper article of a popular newspaper.

An example would be the tweet Map of rapes and attacks on children! How enriched do you feel now? Sickening I want our Europe back", which was shared 119 times and uses an image of Google Maps containing marks that should show all rapes and attacks on children according to the user.

Compared to the tweet by David Peterson, the tweet Who will make the coffee in a Britain after #Brexit? bloom.bg/28K881c" posted by the financial newspaper Bloomberg was shared 25 time, which is 94 times less than the tweet that contains misleading information, especially because the tweet shows a map of Germany and not the UK in the context of the hashtag #Brexit and the main discourse pro-Brexit. I argue that even though I did not examine the individual cognitive ability of the users who post their opinions on the micro-blogging service and social network Twitter that the popularity of a tweet (the likes and shares) reflect a tendency of a lower cognitive ability. Moreover, I argue that they show a tendency of lack of ability to correct the information of the misleading or fake news because of the number of tweets that provide a more differentiated view on the topic by also stating the possible aftermaths of the referendum.

Spiral of conflict escalation

In order to answer the first research question of how the outcome of the EU referendum figuratively represent an escalation of the situation after the results showed that the UK will withdraw from the European Union, I decided to utilize Hamelink's spiral of conflict escalation. Though, Hamelink's spiral of conflict escalation is a tool to display the escalation process of a conflict that is political, ideological or religious motivated (Hamelink, 2011, p. 31). I argue that the four stages of conflict escalation; anxiety, agitation, alienation and accusation in a mirror can be transferred to the Brexit timeline and the EU referendum in the UK. The referendum itself was a political referendum that was based on the significant problems within the EU like the currency and debt crises (Cabinet Office; Prime Minister's Office, 10 Downing Street; The Rt Hon David Cameron, 2013) and was led by the former British Prime Minister David Cameron and other politicians. The fact that the EU referendum was a political referendum that included various politicians in the campaign for either the remaining or leaving side makes the referendum transferable into the four stages of Hamelink's spiral of conflict escalation with the escalation being the outcome of the referendum in 2016 that the UK will leave the European Union.

Anxiety

The first stage in Hamelink's spiral of conflict escalation is the *anxiety stage* and is concerned with the concept of anxiety to describe a mixed bag of emotions, including primarily fear, anger, and humiliation" (Hamelink, 2011, p. 22). Hamelink uses the example of the post-9/11 era when the George W. Bush administration used the terror attacks in the US on September

11, 2001, and manipulated the public anxiety among US citizens to justify the war against terror (Hamelink, 2011, p. 22).

However, as I mentioned above the Brexit referendum and its outcome was not the result of an ongoing conflict that is political, religious or ideological motivated, yet, it was a situation that played with the emotions of the people and ongoing frustration. The difference between Hamelink s definition of the first stage and the EU referendum became apparent in the analysis of the Bloomberg speech, which was held by David Cameron, who, in 2013, was the British Prime Minister, and the tweets that were posted days before the referendum. In the Bloomberg speech, Cameron expressed three significant problems that he sees within the institutions of the European Union and therefore, the speech gives reason why Cameron would suggest a political referendum on the possible withdrawal from the EU in the United Kingdom and the basis for the first stage in the spiral of conflict escalation. The first two significant issues Cameron addressed in the Bloomberg speech were of economic nature. Cameron stated that the eurozone and the low competitiveness of the EU are major problems that need to be solved in order for the UK to be able to remain in the single market (Cabinet Office; Prime Minister's Office, 10 Downing Street; The Rt Hon David Cameron, 2013).

The single most striking observation to emerge from Fairclough s (2010, p. 94) framework of analysis was that the discourses of the analyzed tweets mostly correspond with the third and fourth stage of Hamelink's spiral of conflict escalation because the tweets were posted within a few days before the referendum. Though, some tweets utilize the discourses that I found in the newspaper articles and the Bloomberg speech as supportive discourses. The aim of the use of the newspaper discourses as supportive discourses in the analyzed tweets remind people of the anxiety and distrust against the institutions of the EU that arose because of the debt and currency crises (Traynor, 2013) and the resulting lack of competitiveness (Cabinet Office; Prime Minister's Office, 10 Downing Street; The Rt Hon David Cameron, 2013).

The tweet: [t]hese are the very same people today telling us it s critical we remain within an EU, WRONG" was posted together with a picture that states

> We were sold a common market but we got a federal EU. It was imperative we joined the ERM (Exchange Rate Mechanism). WRONG We were told that we had to join the €uro to remain competitive. WRONG.

is an example of how the economic discourses that I found in the analysis of the newspaper articles and the Bloomberg speech were taken on in the tweets to remind people of why the referendum happened in the first place.

The statement within the picture that was attached to the tweet [t]hese are the very same people today telling us it s critical we remain within an EU, WRONG" shows that there are people that are anxious about how the European single market functions. By looking at the

likes and shares of the tweet with the picture, one can see it was shared 156 times and got 93 likes, which proves that people share, interact and agree with the statement by liking the original tweet. Further, the quotation marks that surround the expression *common market* together show distrust in the European single market and its use. However, I would argue that the numbers of the likes and shares of this particular tweet prove that people are anxious about the economic factors than the tweet and the statement of the picture itself. The reason why I argue that the people are more anxious about the economic factors is the username of the user that posted the tweets. The user is named Stop the EU", which leads to the suggestion that the user is eurosceptic and aims to share adverse facts and/or fake news on the social network. Further, it appears as if the user campaigns for the pro-Brexit side that posted the information on the micro-blogging service and social network Twitter.

The researcher Fromm (1964, as cited in Hamelink, 2011, p. 24) argued that [m]odern capitalism tends to isolate people from each other and creates the lonely, anxious individual as a result of relentless competition." If one looks closer at this quotation and puts it in a bigger picture, I will argue that the isolation based on modern capitalism is what happened in the UK and also the rest of Europe, and that the currency and debt crises reflect modern capitalism named in Fromm s quotation.

The currency and debt crises within the EU hit the overall frustration and lowered the trust in the institutions of the European Union (Traynor, 2013), which at the same time is the third major problem expressed by David Cameron in the Bloomberg speech. A study by the European Social Survey shows that soaring unemployment, anxiety, and insecurity had eroded faith in politics" (Traynor, 2013). Furthermore, the lack of trust in the institutions of the European Union is one of the three major problems that need to be solved within the EU, according to the Bloomberg speech. David Cameron expressed in the speech that the frustration among the citizens increases as they feel that decisions are taken further away from the citizens. Moreover, they feel that their taxes are not being used to change the situation for them but to help and bail out other governments on the continent (Cabinet Office; Prime Minister's Office, 10 Downing Street; The Rt Hon David Cameron, 2013).

Hamelink (2011, p. 39) argues that media play a crucial role in making people anxious through the news coverage of e.g. the credit crisis or in Europe the currency and debt crises that report on an uncertain and troublesome future in the daily news. Further, media support the rendering of anxiety as a perspective on life and the future that is shared by the citizens (Hamelink, p. 39). I argue that not only the basic news coverage of TV stations and newspapers influence people and foment anxiety but mostly the opinion pieces in a newspaper because those articles are based on the personal opinion of the journalist. Further, the results of the textual analysis of the opinion pieces show that those articles address the readers of the opinion piece directly through the use of personal pronouns like *I* and *we*, whereas the personal pronoun *I* introduced the personal opinion of the journalists and made the reader aware that this is not an objective news article.

Regarding the currency and debt crises, the results of the analysis show that the journalist Larry Elliott uses the personal pronoun *I* to show that he writes about his personal opinion on the eurozone but also to grant himself credibility and create an ethos about him as a person. In the example, Dan Atkinson and I spent the winter working on a book about the single currency commissioned in the wake of last summer s Greek crisis" (Elliott, 2016), Elliott influences his readers through the use of the appeal function ethos, which in traditional rhetoric is concerned with authors authority and credibility (Jørgensen & Onsberg, 2015, p. 70). The appeal function ethos awards Elliott credibility because it gives the reader the information that he did research on the Greek crises and the eurozone over a period of time and wrote a book about the topic together with Dan Atkinson (Elliott, 2016). By that, Elliott proves his credibility, because writing a book about the Greek crisis is not something anybody does. This implies that if someone, who wrote a book about the Greek crisis and the single currency in the European Union, calls the problem of the single currency in the eurozone the eurozone crisis" (Elliott, 2016), it will have a more significant impact on the readers of the opinion piece. Further, the word *crisis* is negatively connotated and can amply anxiety as a societal feeling when one includes Hamelink and his view on media.

Hamelink (2011, p. 44) states regarding the financial crisis that the most used terms in the media coverage were fear" and crisis." Furthermore, Hamelink (2011, p.44) argues that the regular report on an impending global disaster may have contributed to the loss of trust in financial institutions and supported societal anxiety. Regarding the increased frustration among citizens in the EU-member states toward EU institutions, José Ignacio Torreblanca (2013, as cited in Traynor, 2013), the head of the Madrilenian European Council on Foreign Relations (ECFR) office and expert on populism and Euroscepticism in Europe (ECFR, n.d.), raised the concern that if the European Union continues to act as a watchdog, it will feed the vicious circle between anti-EU populism and technocracy" (Torreblanca, 2013, as cited in Traynor, 2013). Based on Torreblancas statement and Hamelink s (2011, p. 44) argumentation that specific terms with a negative connotation can support the societal feeling of anxiety through the constant use of those terms in the media coverage, I argue that the news coverage of the migrant crisis, which also symbolizes one of the discourses I found, contributed to the societal anxiety. Even though the migrant crisis hit Europe (Helm, 2015) two years after the Bloomberg speech.

Helms (2015) headline [t]he migrant crisis, Islamist terrorism, Grexit and Brexit: a perfect storm of crises blows apart European unity" consists of two different terms and one expression which have negative connotations.

The two terms and the expression can arguably have amplified the societal anxiety and mistrust adverse the institutions of the European Union that were elicited through economic factors within the European Union. The two terms and the expression with a negative connotation that Helm (2015) uses, are *crisis*, *terrorism*, and *the expression to blow apart*

European unity. Throughout the two terms and the expression, the term *terrorism* is outstanding because it is a term that evokes fear in the era after 9/11 and various other terroristic attacks in the past 18 years. Hamelink (2011, p. 40) states that fear is one of the emotions that can constitute anxiety and that fear became a dominant feature in media discourse in recent years.

Regarding Helms article, I see clear tracks of an objective news coverage, which definition includes factualness, balance, neutrality, truthfulness, impartiality and detachment (Hellmueller, Vos, & Poepsel, 2013, p. 289), even though, I will agree with the researcher Mindich (1998, as cited in Mindich, 2002, p. 23), who argues that objectivity is impossible to reach because the accurate picture of a situation will always be clouded by one s own opinions, perceptions, and cultural background. Therefore, I argue that the adding of the term *Islamist terrorism* in the headline of an article that does not describe a terrorist attack shows no sign of objectivity because it is irrelevant information that does not correspond with the content and the topic of the article. Further, I suggest that the use of the expression *Islamist terrorism* creates a connotation with the actual topic – the migrant crisis – and creates a new discourse that is concerned with the societal anxiety and forms the basis for the spiral of conflict escalation.

In summary, I argue that the main discourses that I found through the use of Fairclough s (2010, p. 94) three-dimensional framework of analysis, play a vital role in the formation of the first stage in the spiral of conflict escalation. The main discourses that I found were currency and debt crises, economy and the refugee crisis in 2015 because those discourses simultaneously form the topics that create fear among people and can amplify anxiety.

Agitation

The second stage in the spiral of conflict escalation is the *stage of agitation* that requires a leader that can concentrate the state of anxiety (Hamelink, 2011, p. 26). One of the leaders in the Brexit referendum was David Cameron, who held the Bloomberg speech. The Bloomberg speech was a crucial situation in the Brexit campaign because it was the starting point of the idea to let the British citizens vote on whether the UK should remain in the European Union or leave. Furthermore, the speech included, except for the discourse *refugee crisis* in 2015 as it was held two years before the crisis, all main discourses that I found in the three-dimensional framework of analysis of the newspaper articles and the speech. Cameron highlighted three major problems that the EU faced at that moment in time and expressed based on those problems his ideas how the European Union could or should improve so that the UK could strengthen its position within the EU (Cabinet Office; Prime Minister's Office, 10 Downing Street; The Rt Hon David Cameron, 2013).

The textual analysis of the speech showed that Cameron made use of the personal pronoun *we* to show that everyone, David Cameron included, is affected by the problems within the European Union. This observation coheres with the fact that the medium of the text that I

analyzed has initially been a verbal speech, which aims to convince the British citizens of Cameron s visions of how the EU can change (Cabinet Office; Prime Minister's Office, 10 Downing Street; The Rt Hon David Cameron, 2013).

The agitation phase can be defined as a phase in which the leader expresses anger, identifies the object of anger (the others), and uses inflammatory rhetoric that activates anger and aggression in the followers" (Volkan, 2004, p. 13, as cited in Hamelink, 2011, p. 27). Furthermore, the rhetoric of the leader can lead to an elimination of the object in society based on the pressure of the leader s followers (Volkan, 2004, p. 13, as cited in Hamelink, 2011, p. 27). Compared to the definition of the agitation phase, the Bloomberg speech does not show signs of inflammatory rhetoric or displays Cameron as an aggressive leader. However, Cameron accepts the European Union in the figurative sense as the object of anger by pointing out the problems of the institutions of the European Union, which have to change according to Cameron.

Further, he points out those problem, so that the United Kingdom can continue to grow economically in the pace the UK wishes to grow and states examples of how the EU institutions intervene with the competitiveness of the UK (Cabinet Office; Prime Minister's Office, 10 Downing Street; The Rt Hon David Cameron, 2013).

Examples of how the speech points at the EU institutions in the figurative sense as the object of anger" (Volkan, 2004, p. 13, as cited in Hamelink, 2011, p. 27) are [w]e understand and respect the right of others to maintain their commitment to this goal. But for Britain – and perhaps for others – it is not the objective" (Cabinet Office; Prime Minister's Office, 10 Downing Street; The Rt Hon David Cameron, 2013) and [a]nd we would be much more comfortable if the Treaty specifically said so freeing those who want to go further, faster, to do so, without being held back by the others" (Cabinet Office; Prime Minister's Office, 10 Downing Street; The Rt Hon David Cameron, 2013). Notably, the elements being held back by others" and [b]ut for Britain (…) it is not the objective" show signs that Cameron does not agree with the politics of the EU and suggests that those treaties do not support economic growth within the EU and the United Kingdom.

Based on the expressed problems within the European Union in the beginning of the Bloomberg speech, I argue that the most powerful sentence of the speech is [a]t the end of the debate you, the British people, will decide". In this example Cameron refers directly to one of the core problems and one of the central discourses I found in the analysis of the newspaper articles and the Bloomberg speech. The problem the former British Prime Minister David Cameron refers to is the lack of trust of the British citizens in the institutions of the European Union (Cabinet Office; Prime Minister's Office, 10 Downing Street; The Rt Hon David Cameron, 2013). By stating that the British people will decide whether the new deal is acceptable and support the economic growth of the UK, Cameron brings back the decision-making to the British people. As the British citizens felt that decisions, which were made in the EU

institutions, were carried further away from them by using e.g. the taxes to bail out other governments (Cabinet Office; Prime Minister's Office, 10 Downing Street; The Rt Hon David Cameron, 2013).

Though I stated earlier that the Bloomberg speech does not contain inflammatory rhetoric, I argue the example [i]t is time for the British people to have their say. It is time to settle this European question in British politics. I say to the British people: this will be your decision" (Cabinet Office; Prime Minister's Office, 10 Downing Street; The Rt Hon David Cameron, 2013) shows tendencies of an inflammatory rhetoric (Volkan, 2004, p. 13, as cited in Hamelink, 2011, p. 27), which defines the agitation phase of the spiral of conflict escalation. The reason, I argue for the tendencies of an inflammatory rhetoric by the Cameron, is the repetitive emphasis on the goals of the nation by stating that it is the time of the British people and British politics (Cabinet Office; Prime Minister's Office, 10 Downing Street; The Rt Hon David Cameron, 2013). Further, Cameron addresses the British citizens directly in this example, when he says: I say to the British people: this will be your decision" (Cabinet Office; Prime Minister's Office, 10 Downing Street; The Rt Hon David Cameron, 2013).

The use of the personal possessive pronoun *your* emphasizes Cameron s statement that the decision whether the United Kingdom will remain in the European Union or not lies with the citizens of the UK. The quotation [b]ecause I believe something very deeply. Britain s national interest is best served in a flexible, adaptable and open European Union and that such a European Union is best with Britain in it" (Cabinet Office; Prime Minister's Office, 10 Downing Street; The Rt Hon David Cameron, 2013), is an example that shows tendencies of a speech that gets hold of its audience but at the same time utilizes the societal anxiety that arose because of the currency and debt crises in the eurozone and the subsequent loss of trust in EU institutions (Traynor, 2013).

Another influential leader in the Brexit campaign was the UKIP leader Nigel Farage, who expressed his opinion about the EU policies strongly during the migrant crisis in 2015 (Mason, 2015). He appears as an angry leader who identifies not only the European Union but also the refugees that came to Europe in 2015 as the object of anger and manipulates the anxiety of the British citizens to his benefit (Volkan, 2004, p. 13, as cited in Hamelink, 2011, p. 27) as he campaigned in favor of Brexit. Farage s campaign with the UKIP in favor of Brexit leans on one of the central discourses in this article, which are migrant crisis 2015 and its supportive discourses open borders and immigration policy.

Furthermore, the central discourses of this article represent simultaneously the societal anxiety, which is the basis of the spiral of conflict escalation and the agitation phase. The societal anxiety gives Farage the possibility to concentrate the public anxiety and give people the justification they need to bear hostile feelings toward the EU and the refugees that came to Europe in 2015 (Hamelink, 2011, p. 27).

On a trip to Strasbourg in 2015, Farage claimed that   half a million Islamic extremists could cross the Mediterranean and gain access to the UK as a result of European Union policies to address the migrant boat crisis" (Mason, 2015) because he considers the EU policy as a direct threat to the British civilization (Mason, 2015). Those statements are examples of inflammatory rhetoric because Farage directly addresses the societal anxiety by using the expression   Islamic extremists" (Mason, 2015), which bears not only a negative connotation but also the connotation of the anxiety that arose after the 9/11 attacks in New York City in 2001. Further, I argue that Farage s statement that the EU policy on how the European Union should react to the migrant crisis, which threatens the British civilization, symbolizes an inflammatory rhetoric. The expression   threat to our civilization" (Mason, 2015) implies that the civilization, the United Kingdom had known until that moment in time, would be in danger and under attack by the refugees that come to Europe to seek asylum.

In another statement, Farage implies that out of all refugees half a million jihadists will enter Europe and seek asylum in the EU member states. Compared to a statement made by a senior UKIP member, who expressed that Farage warns about the jihadists that will be among the millions of people coming from the African continent (Mason, 2015), I argue that Farage s statement is part of an exaggeration. Further, I argue that his exaggeration supports his inflammatory rhetoric in order to convince people that the anxiety that the people feel when thinking about the possibility of terroristic attacks in Europe is genuine if the EU borders remain open. Furthermore, in my opinion, Farage seeks to stack up the societal anxiety by comparing the eurozone crisis with the migrant crisis and stating that   [t]his is the biggest crisis the European Union has faced – it is actually bigger than the eurozone crisis" (Farage, 2015, as cited in Mason, 2015). Regarding the supportive discourse open borders, Farage posted a tweet that

> [b]order chaos across Europe is making immigration issue even more of a concern for the British people than ever before. Choice is clear: either we vote to leave the EU & start controlling immigration sensibly or we have EU open borders (Farage, 2015, as cited in Dixon, 2015).

This statements - in my opinion - can be classified as another try to convince people that their fears are valid, even though the UK legally   never gave up control of [its] borders" (Dixon, 2015) because Britain did not   sign the Schengen agreement, which removed border controls between 22 EU countries and four other non-EU countries" (Dixon, 2015). However, even though the information Farage published about the Schengen agreement and the fact that in his rhetoric the UK would suffer from the open borders within the European Union appear to be false, Farage continued to spread the news by publicly calling the Brexit party Vote Leave to integrate the topic about the open borders within the EU in their campaign program (BBC News, 2016).

Alienation

The third phase of the spiral of conflict escalation is the *alienation* phase (Hamelink, 2011, p. 27), is the phase that deviates mostly from Hamelink's definition. This article's origin is a political referendum that ends in an election in contrary to the conflicts that end in e.g. war or destruction that is used by Hamelink to explain the individual phases of the spiral of conflict escalation. Hamelink defines the alienation phase as a phase in which all factors have to be removed in order for a human being to kill another human being, as most people will still be resistant to kill others even if they are anxious, angry and aggressive (Hamelink, 2011, p. 28). Therefore, Hamelink refers to modern armies [that] focus a great deal of training on techniques of psychological conditioning in order to overcome soldiers resistance to killing" (Hamelink, 2011, p. 28). The quotation, which is part of Hamelink's description of the alienation phase, illustrates that the alienation in its original definition does not fit to the EU referendum and its question whether the UK should remain in the European Union or not.

However, as I understand the alienation phase in the situation of a political referendum is that the referendum on the one hand does not aim to be destructive in the sense of Hamelinks (2011, pp. 27-28) definition, but on the other hand could end in a destructive situation, namely the withdrawal of the United Kingdom from the European Union. Further, I argue that alienation is a phase in which the political campaigns begin to intensify, and the general public begins to discuss and balance both sides to decide which part of the referendum they will support. In order to further explain how the alienation phase was represented in the EU referendum in the UK, I will look further into the results of the three-dimensional framework of analysis (Fairclough, 2010, p. 94) of the 222 tweets that were posted days before the actual referendum. The results were outstanding in the sense that the two main discourses that I found among the tweets were either related to the side in favor of staying or the side that is in favor of leaving the European Union. The single most striking observation I made when looking into the results of the analysis of the tweets was that some tweets posted by users who were in favor of the British withdrawal from the EU showed tendencies of the dehumanization of the enemy" (Hamelink, 2011, p, 28). Hamelink (2011, pp. 28-29) describes the dehumanization of the enemy" (Hamelink, 2011, p. 28) as necessary in order for people to kill each other because they consider their enemy no longer as a human being but as an animal or as demons.

The tweet #Brexit #Leave @ukleave_eu @ElContador2000 @David_Cameron these are not educated law abiding migrants or Syrian" shows the tendency of a dehumanizing language toward the migrants that came in 2015 in connection with the migrant crisis.

In the example, the user Dagenham Man directly addresses Cameron and two other users to point out that the men on the picture below, which shows migrants, who try to enter a truck on the highway, in other words, they are abiding the effective laws. Based on the previous two phases of the spiral of conflict escalation, I argue that this tweet is an example of a tweet that includes a tendency of dehumanizing language as it relates to Nigel Farage s statements in

Strasbourg. In those statements, he claimed that more than half a million people from the African continent would come to Europe and the United Kingdom and threaten the civilization as people knew it (Mason, 2015). However, even though the tweet has the aim to directly address British politicians like the former British Prime Minister David Cameron and the political party that supports the site of the referendum that is in favor of Brexit, the picture appears to be an incident on a French highway, not British.

This hypothesis is supported when taking a closer look at the word rappel", which is French. Moreover, one can spot the steering wheel of the truck, which appears to be on the left side of the car, unlike British cars, in which the driver s seat is on the right.

Another tweet that stood out and can be referred to Farage s statement of the threat to civilization (Mason, 2015), was the tweet [m]ap of rapes and attacks on children! How enriched do you feel now? Sickening I want our Europe Back #Brexit". This tweet included a picture of a map which marks several points in predominantly Germany, where those rapes should have happened. Based on the previous literature on fake news, I argue that with the lack of reference to where the information come from one needs to be careful stating that the map contains all the location where children were raped in Europe. Further, the tweet refers to the British withdrawal from the European Union through the use of the hashtag *Brexit,* but does not include information on how the map of rapes refers to the UK, as it only shows central Europe with Germany in focus. Even though the two examples of tweets that I quoted above refer to Nigel Farage s statements on the migrant crisis and illustrate how Farage reached out to people by objectifying the migrants that came in connection with the migrant crisis in 2015 as the enemy, it is uncertain whether those tweets were posted by real people or automatic bots. Those bots typically aim to automatically spread fake news on social network platforms (Bastos & Mercea, 2017; Bessi & Ferrara, 2016; Gallacher, Kaminska, Kollanyi, Yasseri & Howard, 2017; Howard & Kollanyi, 2016; Howard et al., 2017; Kollanyi, Howard & Woolley, 2016, as cited in Al-Rawi, 2018, p. 1).

The tweet PLEASE RETWEET THE QUEEN S THOUGHTS ON A BREXIT. PLEASE #Vote Leave #LeaveEU #EUref #Brexit #Lexit #leave #EU #UK" is an example of how users that are in favor of the United Kingdom leaving the European Union try to influence others. Moreover, users ask others to share their opinion even though the shared information can be identified as fake news. The picture added to the tweet mentioned above shows Queen Elizabeth II. and the headline EU referendum: Queen asks guests to give her three reasons why Britain should remain in Europe".

I argue that the headline of the news article shared by the user The_Fogeys contains two major issues, why one can identify the article as fake news because firstly, Queen Elizabeth II. only has ceremonial and formal roles in the government of the United Kingdom (The Royal Household, n.d.), but has to remain strictly neutral with respect to political matters, unable to vote or stand for election" (The Royal Household, n.d.). Those rules imply that it is not

allowed to the Queen of the United Kingdom to influence people and choose side in the EU referendum. Secondly, the referendum in the UK only asks the British citizens whether the UK should leave the European Union, which is a political and economic alliance of 28 member states (Europäische Union, n.d.), and not if the UK should leave Europe. The question to leave Europe is not possible, as the name Europe refers to the continent and not the alliance of the members of the EU, as Cameron stated in the Bloomberg speech: If we leave the EU, we cannot of course leave Europe. It will remain for many years our biggest market, and forever our geographical neighbourhood" (Cabinet Office; Prime Minister's Office, 10 Downing Street; The Rt Hon David Cameron, 2013).

Grammatically, it was outstanding that, compared with the textual analysis of the newspaper articles and the Bloomberg speech, only the analyzed tweets contained imperatives as the general grammatical mood. The tweet mentioned above, PLEASE RETWEET THE QUEEN S THOUGHTS ON A BREXIT. PLEASE #Vote Leave #LeaveEU #EUref #Brexit #Lexit #leave #EU #UK" can be categorized as one of the tweets that uses an imperative in order to encourage other users to share the post and spread the message with the picture of Queen Elizabeth II. Although I argue this is an example of fake news, it still has the aspired effect to the target audience, who, cf. De keersmaecker and Roets (2017, p. 109), do not have the ability to distinguish true and false information due to lower cognitive ability. Another example of a tweet that makes use of an imperative was the tweet Goodbye Europe, it was fun while it lasted. Make your vote count! #Brexit or #Remain? #TransporterThurday", which is an example of a tweet that prompts others to vote and thereby contribute to the fourth phase of the spiral of conflict escalation (accusation in a mirror), which will be the outcome of the referendum.

Further, it was outstanding that the two main discourses of the 222 tweets were respectively pro-Brexit and con-Brexit, and that the central discourses of the newspaper articles and the Bloomberg speech only appeared as supportive discourses that formed the basis of the argumentation of the users. Even though the analysis showed that economic factors like the currency and debt crises and the distrust adverse other EU policies and treaties that slow down the economy of the UK (Cabinet Office; Prime Minister's Office, 10 Downing Street; The Rt Hon David Cameron, 2013) form the basis for the EU referendum. The analysis of the discourses that appeared as the main discourses in the newspaper articles and the Bloomberg speech reflect situations that were fearsome for the British citizens. Moreover, those situations introduced the first phase of the spiral of conflict escalation and led to the agitation phase in which the Cameron called for a referendum whether the UK should remain in the European Union or not, if the EU institutions would not be compliant to negotiate new treaties that would be beneficial for the United Kingdom.

Further, it was remarkable that economic factors like the currency and debt crises that acted supportive in order to spread societal anxiety and make people anxious about Britains future within the European Union were being used by the Twitter users, who were in favor of staying

in the European Union. Examples are the tweets Hong Kong s richest man Li Ka-shing says #Brexit is not in Britain s interest bloom.bg/28KuofR" and George Soros warns of a slump in the pound should voters back #Brexit bloom.bg/28JVXoK" posted by Bloomberg, a U.S. based financial newspaper. Those two tweets are examples of how the economic factors, which in the analysis of the newspapers and the Bloomberg speech introduced the first phase (anxiety) of the spiral of conflict escalation, are used to predict the possible aftermaths of withdrawal from the European Union as an outcome of the EU referendum in the United Kingdom. Moreover, those tweets are an example of how the discourses again are being used to spread fear of what could happen to the UK if they leave the EU.

I argue that the spreading of fear in connection with the aftermaths of a possible Brexit would align with the campaigners, who campaign for the disposition of the United Kingdom in the European Union.

Moreover, it would benefit their campaign if people would become too anxious about the possible economic aftermaths in the case of the British withdrawal from the EU. Therefore, in order to stop the dehumanization (Hamelink, 2011, p. 28), which does not entirely align with the political EU referendum as the EU itself is an institution and not a human being, individuals share links in their tweets to attract attention to the possible aftermaths like the tweet EU leaders, facing the once-unthinkable, warn the Brits:Expect unforgiving response if #Brexit wins. @StevenErlanger nyti.ms/1UhBwMi."

However, compared to the tweet [e]verything you need to know ahead of the #Brexit vote. Our guide to Britain s #EUref econ.st/28QtdtP", which is supported by a picture stating 45% of British exports go to the EU countries, but only 7% come of their total exports come to Britain" and supports the Brexit campaign to leave the EU; the tweet by rickgladstone does not reach out to as many people as the tweet posted by The Economist. The tweet by the user rickgladstone was shared nine times and received three likes, while the post by The Economist received 22 comments and 133 likes and was shared 181 times. Based on the numbers of shares, likes, and comments, I argue that the parties that are in favor of the British withdrawal from the European Union were more successful in the agitation phase of the spiral of conflict escalation. Those numbers show that the interactions with the tweet by The Economist are more significant, which leads to a further spreading of the tweet and more significant influence for the campaigners in favor of Brexit.

Accusation in a mirror
The fourth and last phase in the spiral of conflict escalation is the phase *accusation in a mirror* (Hamelink, 2011, p. 29). Hamelink (2011, p. 29) defines the fourth phase as the phase in which the conflict escalates, and the dehumanization of the previously identified object of anger wears on to the point that the people can view at the object of anger and recognize them as a danger. The recognition of the dehumanized others as a real danger then leads further to the justification that it is self-defense to kill them (Hamelink, 2011, p. 29).

Further, Hamelink (2011, p. 29) states that [w]hen we see the other is guilty of what the aggressor plans to do, he deserves to be punished for intending to exterminate us." This quotation and Hamelink's overall definition of the accusation in a mirror phase cannot be transferred directly into the original situation of this paper, which is a political referendum. I argue that the outcome of the vote represents the escalation of the conflict around the political EU referendum in the UK within the spiral of conflict escalation. This implies that I consider all statements regarding the British withdrawal from the EU as examples of users that went through the stages of conflict escalation and were convinced by the influential leaders, who manipulated their anxiety, that an exit from the EU would be the best choice for the United Kingdom. The implication I made is based on the various tweets that request others to retweet the messages and pictures with which the messages can spread further across Twitter and reach out to as many users as possible. Therefore, I consider those tweets containing statements in favor of the British exit from the EU as the accusation in a mirror phase, as the EU referendum does not aim to persuade people to kill others, but in the broader sense to *kill off* the relationship between the United Kingdom and the European Union.

Based on my ideas on how one can adapt to the accusation in a mirror phase so that it fits a situation that contains a political referendum and not an escalated conflict in the sense of, e.g. war, I argue that two tweets represent the accusation in a mirror phase best. The tweets Let s make June 23rd our Independence Day with a VOTE LEAVE #Brexit #VoteLeave" as well as the tweet GOOD LUCK Tomorrow to all the Brexiters Thank you to all who have worked tirelessly supporting to LEAVE EU #Brexit" supported by the picture that states LEAVE EU 23rd June 2016 Independence Day BE PROUD AGAIN AND VOTE TO LEAVE THE EU" represent the accusation in a mirror phase since those tweets refer to the day, when the referendum was held as the Independence Day of the United Kingdom.

Another example of a tweet that represents the accusation in a mirror phase of the spiral of conflict escalation is this is your one & only chance to vote out the #EU #EUReferendum #LeaveEU #VoteLeave #Brexit #StrongerIn #InOrOut". This tweet was shared 66 times and received 49 likes, and five comments and is an example of the tweets that are in favor of Brexit and try to reach out to as many users as possible before the referendum takes place. Even though I argued that the tweets did not contain dehumanizing language and tendencies of Hamelink's (2011, p. 29) definition of the accusation in a mirror phase, the tweet [p]leas, be aware of the menace of more and more #Rapefugees if #Brexit would be smashed! #VoteLeave Maischberger #Rotterdam #paedofilia" clearly shows dehumanizing language toward the refugees that came with the migrant crisis in 2015.

The outcome of the EU referendum was in favor of Brexit, for which reason The United Kingdom is to leave the European Union, even though prominent political leaders advised against it (Asthana, Quinn, & Mason, 2016). I argue that the spiral of conflict escalation showed a tendency toward the outcome that the citizens of the United Kingdom wished to

leave the EU because the analysis of the 222 tweets that represent the British citizens showed a tendency of tweets in favor of the British withdrawal from the European Union.

Conclusion

The purpose of this study was to determine which discourses were used on mainstream media and in particular the British newspaper The Guardian and the micro-blogging and social network Twitter. Furthermore, this study aimed to answer the question of how the EU referendum, whether the United Kingdom should remain in the European Union or leave, could end up with a vote to leave the EU. In order to answer this, I decided to use Hamelink's spiral of conflict escalation to determine if the discourses that I found in the process of Fairclough s (2010, p. 94) three-dimensional framework of analysis could have triggered the four different stages of the spiral of conflict escalation.

Against my expectations that the EU referendum and its outcome would have been the result of the migration crisis that arose in the European Union in 2015, the results of the critical discourse analysis showed that the migration crisis has only been a cumulative factor in the spiral of conflict escalation. Moreover, the migration crisis was used by e.g. the UKIP leader Nigel Farage to strengthen the campaign in favor of a Brexit. Whereas the analysis of the Bloomberg speech showed that the main factors, which formed the basis of Cameron's decision to call for a referendum that should decide whether the UK should remain in the European Union or not, were the lack of trust of the EU citizens toward the institutions of the European Union and the eurozone crisis.

However, even though the results of the three-dimensional framework of analysis of the tweets, newspaper articles and the Bloomberg speech add up to a complete spiral of conflict escalation, the results were limited.

The results were limited due to both spacial and temporally limitations connected to this study. Compared to the study conducted by the researcher Al-Rawi (2018, p. 4), who analyzed in total over 8 million tweets using a specific tool Boston University-Twitter Collection and Analysis Toolkit" (Borra & Riedler, 2014; Groshek, 2014, as cited in Al-Rawi, 2018, p. 4), the main limitation of this study is its relatively small number of analyzed tweets. The results aimed to display why the British citizens decided to vote in favor of a British withdrawal from the European Union. Furthermore, the filters that I set in order to collect the tweets as the basis of this paper limited the outcome of this study further because of the chosen hashtag that allowed me to display all tweets that were connected to the hashtag #Brexit.

However, the hashtag #Brexit was not the only hashtag that was used by Twitter users to display if their attitude is in favor of Brexit or against a withdrawal from the EU. Other hashtags were e.g. #VoteLeave, #StrongerIn or #StrongerOut. The reason I decided only to use the hashtag #Brexit was that this hashtag would allow me to get a variety of different

tweets on the topic Brexit. Moreover, it would allow me to get tweets regardless of the user's attitude toward the EU referendum and further, the elimination of the other hashtags limited the total number of tweets, which was necessary because of the temporally and spacial limitations of the study, this article is based on.

The filter that determined the time frame in which the tweets occurred limited the number of tweets so that it was possible to retrieve valuable results without interfering with those spacial and temporally limitations mentioned. However, the limitation of the time frame does also result in a less accurate picture of how Twitter users who represent the British citizens reacted to the political leaders like the former British Prime Minister David Cameron or Nigel Farage and were manipulated by them to vote in a specific way.

The second main limitation of this study is the total number of analyzed newspaper articles compared to Al-Rawi s (2018, p. 4) study, which contained an analysis of in total 158 news items published by 23 US and British news outlets, this study is based on 15 newspaper articles and the Bloomberg speech.

Due to the limits of this paper, the three-dimensional framework of analysis only includes 15 newspaper articles and the Bloomberg speech. The fewer number of newspaper articles compared to Al-Rawi s study limits the accuracy of the background information that were needed to set the results of the analyses of the tweets, newspaper articles, and the Bloomberg speech into Hamelink's spiral of conflict escalation, which leads to the third main limitation of this study.

Because Hamelink's spiral of conflict escalation is meant to be a tool to visually highlight the process of conflict escalation of conflicts that result in war or confrontations that involve the killing of another human being, I had to modify the third and fourth stage of the spiral of conflict escalation. The modification was needed so that it fits the situation of a political referendum, which might lead to a different result than one would get by using the original definitions of the third and fourth stage in the spiral of conflict escalation.

Even though the results of this papers study might not be completely accurate due to the limitations mentioned earlier, the results show a clear tendency towards how mainstream media like news stories on TV and in newspaper articles influenced the people. Moreover, the results show how they tend to articulate their opinions about specific topics on social media and in this study, in particular, Twitter.

Based on my results of the three-dimensional framework of analysis by Fairclough and the readings on previous studies, I would suggest that future research focusses on the user's behavior and in particular the user's language on social media especially before elections, when both social media and mainstream media play a crucial role in the exertion of influence.

As an example, I would suggest to examine the discussions that arose on Twitter in Germany (Beuth, 2019) before the European Parlament voted in favor of the EU s new copyright directive" (Browne, 2018), which could pave the way to internet censorship" (BBC News, 2019). The participants in the discussion about the new copyright directive were not only users of the social media platform but also politicians that were directly involved in the process of creating the new law (Beuth, 2019). I suggest this topic as one example of possible future research as it would allow researchers to examine the language that is used by politicians who try to influence and persuade other users and potential voters to back up their political attitudes. Particularly interesting in the example mentioned above is the use of hashtags and how one can create a trending hashtag like the hashtag #niemehrcdu (translation: #nomorecdu), which jumped on the third place of trending hashtags in Germany (Böhm, 2019). Further, I would argue that the research on the creation of a trending hashtag should be of particular interest. Trending hashtags are hashtags that are created individually for every user and are based on an algorithm that amongst others uses the numbers how often one hashtag or a related hashtag regarding the same topic is used by other users (Twitter, Inc., n.d.b). The definition of trending hashtags illustrates how important the creation of a right hashtag that potentially will be used by thousands other users can be especially in political campaigns since topics that are discussed by thousands of people can influence voters based on the topic.

Summarized, this study can be seen as a part of a field of studies which focus on the influence that social media have on our lives and especially our democracies. The recent years have shown that social media and the information that is spread across various social media platforms have influenced the democratic processes like the EU referendum that resulted in the British withdrawal from the European Union in 2016 or the presidential elections in the US in 2016. However, this study compared to other studies takes into account that fake news exist and instead of analyzing them separately within the context of the news coverage on Brexit, the study acknowledges fake news as part of the spiral of escalation that led people voting in favor of the British withdrawal from the European Union.

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