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Expanding Boundaries: "Gender Theory" and the Twitter (X) Debate on Gender-Sensitive Language Use in Slovenia

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Abstract

This study examines the transition of the "gender theory" discourse from the realm of political and activist circles to the general population, focusing on the 2018 Twitter (X) debate in Slovenia regarding the gender-sensitive language policy at the Faculty of Arts, University of Ljubljana. Through a mixed-methods approach combining social network analysis and linguostylistic and critical frame analyses, this paper explores the dynamics and implications of this discourse shift. Our analysis identifies distinct user communities with primarily right-leaning political affiliations, revealing how these groups navigate and emphasize various themes related to gender-sensitive language, often broadening the debate to include new topics. The concept of "gender theory" emerges as a pivotal element, serving as a unifying thread that transforms discussions into ideological battlegrounds, thereby creating an "echo chamber" effect that sidelines opposing viewpoints. The findings underscore the colonizing effect of the "gender theory" discourse, which not only diverts attention to new ideological issues but also has a de-democratizing impact by constraining the range of acceptable debate and excluding divergent perspectives. This paper corroborates the initial premise that the discourse on "gender theory" has evolved, acquiring a broader societal and ideological dimension that challenges the inclusivity of public debate.

Keywords: gender theory, gender ideology, gender-sensitive language, anti-gender mobilizations, Twitter, social network analysis

1 Introduction

In the past few years, we have witnessed a proliferation of anti-gender campaigns organized by neoconservative groups that place the concept of gender at the roots of their anti-feminist and anti-LGBT campaigns. While initially focused primarily on opposing marriage equality, anti-gender mobilizations in Slovenia now also target sexual and reproductive rights, sex education in schools, transgender rights, gender liberalism, knowledge production and similar issues (Kuhar & Paternotte, 2017; Graff & Korolczuk, 2022). These issues are grouped under the umbrella of "gender theory" or "gender ideology," serving as

rallying points for unifying diverse actors. The term "gender theory" functions as a "symbolic glue" (Kováts & Põim, 2015) that enables "discourse coalition" (Edenborg, 2023) and "opportunistic synergy" (Graff & Korolczuk, 2022) among diverse actors. It provides them with a mobilization tool to represent a wide range of social issues. In this sense, as Paternotte (2023) puts it, anti-gender mobilizations have evolved beyond the Catholic Church's control, their primary creator. Consequently, it is imperative to explore the diverse manifestations of gender ideology as a means of mobilization that transcends the initial boundaries of the anti-gender political agenda.

Slovenia serves as a compelling example of how "gender theory"[1] has gained widespread influence. Notably, Slovenia witnessed the culmination of this mobilization with legislative referenda in 2012 and 2015, resulting in the rejection of marriage equality. The early emergence of Slovenian mobilization in 2009 gave it a temporal advantage, allowing it to gain political experience, mobilize supporters, and achieve its first referendum victory ahead of similar mobilizations elsewhere. By utilizing enhanced tactics, building a robust support network, and establishing transnational connections, anti-gender actors solidified their position as significant political actors. While "gender theory" was not initially the central focus of their actions, the second referendum in 2015 provided an opportunity for anti-gender actors to legitimize it as a representation of their opposition to gender and reproductive rights, fundamentally shaping the public sphere (Kuhar, 2017, p. 224).

Both referenda were a major political victory for anti-gender actors in Slovenia, but the subsequent decision of the Constitutional Court in 2022, which legalized marriage equality and extended adoption rights to same-sex couples, undermined the efficacy of their efforts (Kuhar, 2023; Smrdelj & Pajnik, 2022). Nevertheless, it is important to note that the idea of "gender theory" has taken root, and its dissemination and use persist. The apocalyptic idea of a supposed plan for a cultural Marxist revolution to destroy masculinity, femininity, and family continues to take hold. Since 2015, "gender theory" has permeated the Slovenian public sphere and has become an unavoidable and accepted viewpoint in discussions on gender-related issues. Since 2015, there has scarcely been a public debate in Slovenia on sexual and reproductive rights in which "gender theory" as a discursive frame has not been one of the dominant viewpoints. This indicates a pervasive naturalization of "gender theory" in public debates on these matters.

In this article, we start from the premise that in recent years there has been a notable transition in the use of the "gender theory" framework from political and activist actors to the general population in Europe and beyond. "Gender theory" has evolved into a discursive framework for public deliberation, used not only among anti-gender activists, but also among the general public, media outlets, politicians, and other stakeholders (Paternotte, 2023).

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[1] Slovenian anti-gender actors use the term "gender theory" to encompass what is referred to as "gender ideology" in other countries. In either instance, the term is used as an "empty signifier" (Mayer & Sauer, 2017). In this text, we use both terms synonymously, as we simultaneously refer to the broader transnational context and the specific Slovenian context in which anti-gender actors, and correspondingly the general public, use the term "gender theory".

To test this claim in the context of Slovenia, we conduct quantitative and qualitative analyses of the 2018 Twitter (X)[2] debate surrounding the adoption of a gender-sensitive language decision by the Faculty of Arts, University of Ljubljana. The decision mandates the use of feminine grammatical gender to represent all genders in the internal regulations of the Faculty in the next three years, followed by the alternate use of masculine and feminine grammatical genders as neutral. Our study diverges from previous studies on anti-gender discourse by focusing on a case that was not the specific "target" of anti-gender actors in Slovenia. In contrast, this particular case, specifically chosen as it occurred three years after the introduction of "gender theory" into the Slovenian public sphere during the referendum campaign, aims to illustrate the transformation of the structure of public debates in Slovenia brought about by "gender theory." Notably, the decision of the Faculty of Arts sparked a scandal in Slovenia, fuelled partly by a misinterpretation that quickly propagated through mass and social media. This misinterpretation falsely claimed that male individuals would be addressed in the feminine form at the Faculty of Arts (Kuhar & Antić Gaber, 2022). Major mass media extensively reported on the decision, triggering a lively, albeit predominantly offensive, Twitter debate, which, we believe, was framed by the "argument" of "gender theory".

The Faculty's Senate's decision to incorporate the feminine grammatical gender as a neutral option in the internal regulations of the Faculty of Arts at the University of Ljubljana sparked a range of scholarly debates (Gorjanc & Stabej, 2019; Mikić & Kalin Golob, 2019; Šorli, 2019; Kuhar & Antić Gaber, 2022; Smolej, 2022), roundtable discussions (Gorjanc et al., 2019), and conferences. However, none of these scholarly activities have explored the debate surrounding gender-sensitive language use on Twitter through the lens of "gender theory."

While Twitter may not be the most popular social media platform in Slovenia,[3] its selection for our analysis was based on its strong focus on current political debates, a feature less pronounced on Facebook, which is generally used for maintaining social connections with individuals known offline. Additionally, Twitter's "architecture" allows for the observation of communication activities without the necessity of logging in or being directly connected to other users (Jesenšek et al., 2021; Verweij, 2012). This aspect, along with Twitter's emphasis on socio-political discussions, significantly influences public debate and mass media reporting (Moon & Hadley, 2014), making it an influential "agenda-setting" medium, despite having fewer users than Facebook or Instagram. Thus, our choice of the medium for this study was guided not by user numbers but by the platform's open "media logic" and its broader impact on the public sphere. Moreover, Instagram, with its focus on image-centric communication, was not considered suitable for our study, which concentrates on the linguistic aspects of the "gender theory" discourse. Last but not least,

[2] As this social medium was still known as Twitter at the time of the study, we will retain this naming throughout the article.

[3] According to the MEDIA+ survey by Valicon (2020), there were 198,000 Twitter users aged 16–74 in Slovenia in 2018, ranking it as the third most used social media platform after Facebook (940,500 users) and Instagram (397,000 users).

as we focus on the "gender theory" discourse, it is important to consider that Twitter is also favoured by anti-gender actors, who are known to effectively utilize digital tools to further their agendas (Kuhar & Pajnik, 2020; Popič & Gorjanc, 2022).

   With the aim of demonstrating how "gender theory" has flooded the 2018 Twitter debate on the gender-sensitive language decision implemented by the Faculty of Arts in Ljubljana, our article begins with an introduction to the theoretical framework and proceeds to outline the research questions, sample, and methodology. This is followed by the presentation and discussion of the results of the retweet network analysis, as well as linguostylistic and critical frame analyses of the most retweeted tweets.

2 "Gender Theory/Ideology" and Twitter: Studies and Concepts

Studies on Twitter and "gender theory/ideology" demonstrate a key role of social media in naturalizing and reproducing "gender theory" as a discursive frame in a wide array of critical political and social matters. In a study on Twitter in Spain, Puente et al. (2021) highlighted the role of "gender ideology", and more specifically the term "feminazi", in the articulation of a specific narrative of masculinity. Popič and Gorjanc (2022) examined Slovenian texts and media and pointed out Twitter's significance in maintaining anti-gender ideology. Ozuzden and Korkut (2020) found Twitter's facilitation of conservative, homophobic reactions in Turkey, rooted in "gender theory". Similarly, Wallaschek et al. (2022) examined gender equality debates on Twitter during International Women's Day 2021 in Germany, Italy, and Poland, revealing how actors opposing gender equality utilized gender ideology to undermine feminist causes. Martinsson and Ericson (2023) studied grassroots anti-gender mobilizations in Sweden during the pandemic and confirmed the relevance of Twitter in establishing anti-gender networks. Together, these studies provide valuable insights into the role of Twitter in shaping and perpetuating discourses surrounding "gender theory" and its impact on social and political contexts.

   Our study contributes to this body of literature with a Slovenian case study on gender-sensitive language debates on Twitter. However, to substantiate the theoretical underpinnings of the "colonizing" nature of "gender theory," it is essential to first consider a few central concepts regarding "gender theory" which account for its rapid dissemination across diverse domains and its transformative impact on the public sphere concerning gender and related issues.

   Firstly, the concept of the "symbolic glue" (Kováts & Põim, 2015) asserts that "gender theory" serves as a unifying force, bringing together actors who may not have previously collaborated or shared identical ideological perspectives on specific topics, yet find common ground through the "gender theory" discourse and rhetoric. Graff and Korolczuk (2022) call such collaborations and alliances "opportunistic synergy". The adoption of the anti-gender discourse is used as a means to bolster the popularity of these actors, rendering them the true defenders of the "common people" against the "corrupted elites".

   Secondly, the concept of the "empty signifier" (Mayer & Sauer, 2017) explains the effectiveness of "gender theory" by its ability to be filled with varied content due to its lack of specificity. The mobilizing effect is achieved by the "flexibility" of the meaning

of "gender theory" or "gender ideology", which can easily change according to the needs of a specific mobilization and the audience it addresses. In this sense, "gender theory" is highly adaptable and not constrained by any specific subject matter.

Lastly, the "ideological code" (Smith, 1999; Paternotte, 2023) sheds light on how frequent and spontaneous repetition of a particular signifier in the public sphere conceals its intellectual origins, elevating it to an unquestionable truth. Consequently, individuals adopt and propagate this signifier without necessarily being aware of its origin, further bolstering its legitimacy and perceived accuracy as a reflection of reality.

To demonstrate the "colonizing" nature of "gender theory" on Twitter, we also employ some of the network theory concepts that inform our analysis. Firstly, we employ the concept of "central users," which is based on the premise that not every user in an online debate possesses equal influence or visibility. While there are several ways to measure users' influence on Twitter, such as the number of followers, likes, or retweets, our study specifically focuses on retweets. We consider retweets as a key indicator of influence, as they represent the "measure" of prominence and visibility of certain posts within the Twitter debate (Jesenšek et al., 2021). Put differently, the frequency of retweets serves as a measure of the support for and interest in a user's content (Metaxas et al., 2021). Specifically, more retweets increase the visibility and distribution of a particular post in the online debate, resulting in its greater influence.

Employing "retweet" as a basic unit of measuring influence, we examine "centrality" by differentiating between the "in-degree" and "out-degree" measures of centrality. They are both crucial in studying directed graphs where edges have a clear direction from one node to another. Namely, the "in-degree" centrality measures the number of edges (retweets) originating from potentially different nodes (users) directed towards a node (user), indicating how frequently a user's posts are retweeted. Conversely, the "out-degree" centrality refers to the number of edges (retweets) originating from a specific node (user) and directed towards other nodes (users), showing how often a user retweets others. However, in this study, our focus is only on the "in-degree" centrality measure to identify "central users", as this measure indicates which users receive the most retweets and have the highest influence on the direction of the debate (Hansen et al., 2020a; Jesenšek et al., 2021). While identifying users' activity (the "out-degree" centrality measure) is also a valuable aspect of social network analysis, our study does not explore this aspect as we are interested in the impact and reach of posts, rather than users' activity.

Studying communication patterns in the digital media sphere is a crucial component of network theory (e.g. Arguedas et al., 2022; Kubin & von Sikorski, 2021; Van Bavel et al., 2021; Yarchi et al., 2021). For our study, the concept of "community" (Hansen et al., 2020b) is particularly important as it underlines how users engage with certain topics online. That is to say, interactions among users vary in frequency and content – some users communicate more frequently, while others do so less or not at all, and their opinions on issues may align or diverge. This variation allows for the algorithmic identification of communities, grouping users who interact more frequently into the same community (see the methodological part of our study). These are represented as clusters in network visualizations, where closer nodes (users) indicate more frequent communication. If network analysis uncovers distinct and fragmented communities, it enables further investigation into commu-

nication patterns and trends, for instance, the "echo chamber" effect (e.g. Arguedas et al., 2022) and "network polarization" (e.g. Kubin & von Sikorski, 2021; Van Bavel et al., 2021).

"Echo chambers" and "network polarization" are identified both visually and through content analysis of the users' posts. The "echo chambers" effect occurs when users within the same community consistently reinforce each other's viewpoints (e.g. Arguedas et al., 2022), a phenomenon often observed in the Twitter "retweets" that amplify messages within the same community (e.g. Smrdelj, 2024). Conversely, network polarization is observed when users across different communities engage in discussions from strongly opposing ideological viewpoints on a specific subject. It is evident through the segregation of communities in network visualizations and through the content analysis that reveals ideologically contrasting positions between these communities. It is important to point out that both communication patterns are understood in our study as a result of social media architecture, i.e. as a structural feature inherent in the logic of contemporary social media (e.g. Kubin & von Sikorski, 2021; Van Bavel et al., 2021).

By integrating insights from anti-gender studies and network theory, we examine and explore the "colonizing" nature, remarkable adaptability, and flexibility of "gender theory/ideology". As a mobilizing tool, it has absorbed various topics, frameworks, and narratives, which have contributed to its transnational nature; it is adaptable to different national, cultural, religious, and political contexts. Lacking internal coherence, it can be moulded by different actors to serve diverse political projects (Paternotte, 2023). Based on this premise, our main theoretical argument posits that "gender theory" as a discursive framework has significantly reshaped public debate surrounding gender and related topics, leveraging the support of mass media and effectively utilizing social media platforms. This has been achieved by appropriating the discourse of progressive social movements, strategically invoking concepts such as human rights and democracy. This appropriation poses a challenge, as it creates a facade that makes it more difficult to contest the underlying ideologies and actions associated with gender "theory" (Smrdelj et al., 2021). Consequently, the rhetoric and discourse surrounding "gender theory" play an active role in the contemporary processes of de-democratization (Lombardo et al., 2021). Their swift and effective dissemination in the public sphere reinforces the dominance of anti-gender voices while simultaneously contributing to polarization within the public sphere, in which dialogue is limited to *pro et contra* positions. This impedes reasoned debate on a range of important political and social issues, as an inclusive and nuanced debate is made impossible by the vociferous anti-gender usurpation of public discourse.

3 Data Collection Methods and Sample Selection

The quantitative part of our research focuses on the identification of distinct Twitter communities and their size in terms of users and retweets. We also identify the central users in each community. The qualitative part of the study focuses on the specific linguostylistic elements and frames that characterize the most retweeted tweets within aforementioned communities.

To carry out both parts of the study, we obtained data on January 19, 2023, utilizing the Twitter API Academic Access.[4] Our sample consists of all Slovenian Twitter posts between May 27, 2018, and October 30, 2018. The search terms used to identify Twitter posts within the specified timeframe were chosen through the following procedure. Firstly, we derived most of our search terms from the vocabulary related to the resolution adopted by the Faculty of Arts: "spol" (gender/sex), "moški spol" (male gender), "ženski slovnični spol" (feminine grammatical gender), "katerikoli spol" (any gender), "senat FF" (Senate of the FF[5]), "sklep senata FF" (Decision of the Senate of the FF), "sklep filofaksa" (Decision of the Filofaks[6]), "filofaks" (Filofaks), "vodstvo filozofske fakultete" (Leadership of the Faculty of Arts), "vodstvo FF" (Leadership of the FF), "Roman Kuhar" (Roman Kuhar[7]), and "dekan Kuhar" (Dean Kuhar). These terms are considered neutral, as they were used by different public actors irrespective of their stance on the proposal or political affiliation, as shown by existing research (Kuhar & Antić Gaber, 2021). Secondly, we included scholarly terminology from existing Slovenian research that specifically addressed the "linguistic" dimension associated with the Faculty of Arts measure (Šorli, 2019). In this instance, we selected the following search terms: "občutljiva raba jezika" (sensitive use of language), "generična raba" (generic use), and "nevtralen" (neutral). Similarly, as in the previous case, these three terms also have a neutral meaning. Thirdly, to ensure coverage of the "gender theory" discourse in the Twitter debate on gender sensitive language use, we also included less neutral and more "anti-gender" terms such as "teorija spola" (gender theory), "radikalni feminizem" (radical feminism), and "LGBT ideologija" (LGBT ideology). In the selection of these words, we aimed to encompass not only "neutral" and "scholarly" search terms but also the terms linked to the ideological discursive foundation of those opposing gender-sensitive language use. Finally, we searched for posts in Slovenian using listed keywords across all six grammatical cases. This approach aimed to capture the Slovenian debate, given that Slovenian users primarily communicate in their native language (Evkoski et al., 2021).

The onset of the heated public debate about the Senate's decision can be traced back to May 26, 2018, when the first newspaper article regarding the decision was published in the mass media (Ahačič, 2018). The debate continued fervently until the end of June, experienced a lull during the summer, and then remerged on October 23, 2018, when a roundtable discussion on gender-sensitive language in the internal regulations of the Faculty of Arts at the University of Ljubljana was organized. To ensure a comprehensive coverage of the debate, we sampled Twitter posts from May 27, 2018 (the day following the first newspaper article on the decision) until October 30, 2018, including the week following the roundtable. Graph 1 illustrates the fluctuating intensity of the debate, depicting the monthly numbers of tweets throughout the analysed period.

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[4] In obtaining the Twitter data, we collaborated with Uroš Godnov from the Institute for Data Quality (Slovenian: Inštitut za kakovost podatkov, d.o.o.).

[5] FF is the official abbreviation for the Faculty of Arts, University of Ljubljana.

[6] Popular unofficial name of the Faculty of Arts, University of Ljubljana.

[7] The name of the dean of the Faculty of Arts at the time of the adoption of the decision.
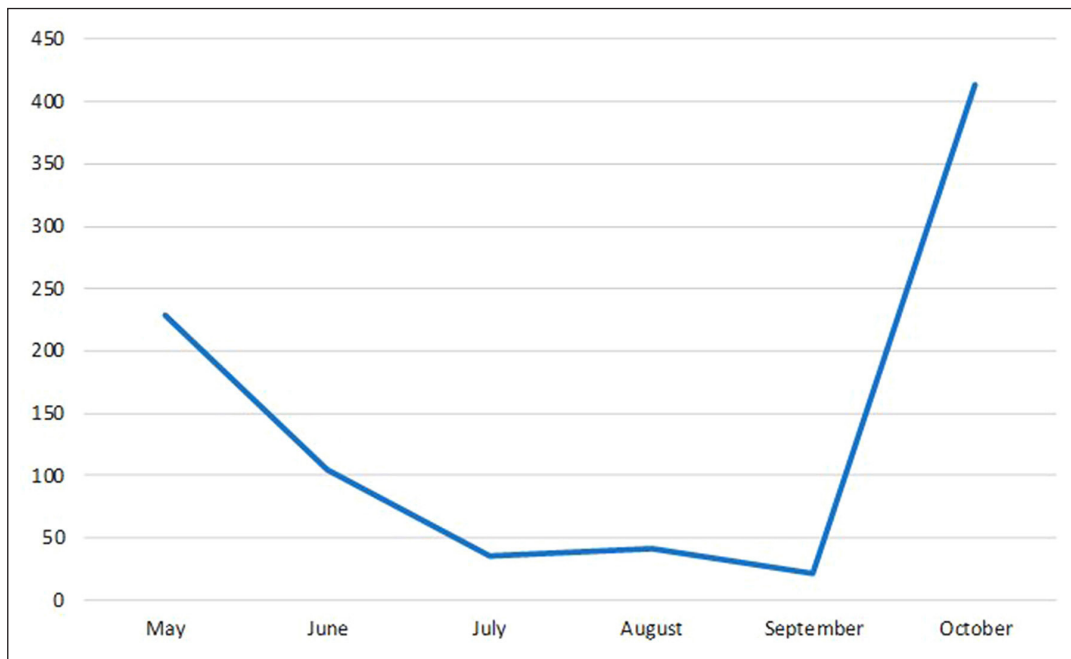
Graph 1 Number of Twitter Posts per Month

Source: Generated by the authors

The initial sample included 1,403 posts. After conducting data cleanup, all the posts that did not align with our research topic were removed, resulting in the deletion of 559 posts. Consequently, the refined sample comprised 844 posts generated by 364 users (Table 1). However, while our dataset may be smaller in comparison to some network analyses in Slovenia, such as the one by Jesenšek et al. (2021) in the study on the European Parliament elections or by Smrdelj (2024) in the study on the migrant "crisis", it is important to note that our sample effectively represents the "population", encompassing all Slovenian users and posts related to this topic in the specified time period. The reason for the comparatively smaller sample size compared to Twitter debates in analogue studies is that existing Twitter studies often focus on the topics that occupied a dominant position in the media agenda at a given time. On the other hand, our study intentionally focuses on the public issue that did not have a dominant media coverage. Since the issue of gender-sensitive language use was not a dominant topic on the media agenda at a given time (like elections, migrant "crisis" or marriage equality referendum if we focus on the topics that are related to the anti-gender agenda), it is critical for illustrating the "colonizing" nature of "gender theory" in the public sphere. Furthermore, as we explain in the following section, our study is mostly qualitative, focusing on the most retweeted tweets, while the quantitative dimension serves primarily as the foundation for selecting the most retweeted tweets.

Table 1 Analysis Sample

Data	No.
Posts	844
Tweets	399
Retweets	445
Faculty Senate Decision Retweets	177
Other retweets	268
Users	364
Users who retweeted and were retweeted by	255

Source: Generated by the authors

4 Methodological Approach: Utilising Social Network Analysis, Linguostylistic Analysis, and CFA

To construct and analyse the retweet network, we employed social network analysis methods, allowing us to ascertain the central users within the network, identify the communication relations among them, and examine the content of these relations (Ferra & Nguyen, 2017; Hansen et al., 2020b). Following Al-Rawi (2019), Jesenšek et al. (2021) and Smrdelj (2024), we created a retweet network, which is expounded upon in the subsequent section alongside our analysis findings.

In addition to the social network analysis, we employed a linguostylistic analysis (Jeffries & McIntyre, 2018) and a CFA (Verloo, 2005). By merging quantitative (social network analysis) and qualitative (linguostylistic analysis, CFA) methodologies, we gain a multifaceted perspective on network characteristics, facilitating a deeper understanding of our data.

Linguostylistic analysis involves the examination of the linguistic aspects pertaining to the construction of meanings within a given topic and it enables to "approach the explicitly persuasive aspects of style as linguistic phenomena" (Jeffries & McIntyre, 2018, p. 8). This approach focuses on linguistic choices and attitudes in the formation of beliefs and presupposes that every lexical item evokes a frame. "Linguistically induced evocation of frames in political thought not only guides our comprehension of issues at given moment but, furthermore, strengthens those frames in our minds" (Wehling, 2020, pp. 138–139). Linguostylistics studies phenomena concerning the systemic aspect and use of language, and analyses the use of linguistic means in texts and their systemic characteristics (Čechová et al., 2008, pp. 44–51). When analysing the language of (social) media texts, the aims of the examination are diverse, ranging from identifying linguistic changes, development, general use and the emergence of new words to studying how topical themes are articulated by a given medium to inform and influence the public. The first aspect points

to the influence of media language on the use and codification of the standard language, and the second one accounts for the selection of linguistic means as a tool of influence and valuation (Kalin Golob & Grizold, 2017). This study addresses this second aspect and seeks to determine how the users reacted to a delicate issue to influence the general public.

On the other hand, the CFA (Verloo, 2005) adopts a discursive approach to explore the underlying norms, beliefs, and perceptions conveyed in the texts. This method operates on the assumption that each text consists of one or more frames that are characterized by specific markers (Dombos et al., 2012). These markers serve as responses to "sensitization questions" (Verloo & Lombardo, 2007, p. 35), which assist in identifying various aspects of the text, such as the definition of the problem (i.e. diagnosis), proposed solutions (i.e. prognosis), the actors responsible for the problem (i.e. active actor), and those affected by it (i.e. passive actor).

We treated each tweet as a problem statement, potentially encompassing both a problem definition and an implicit solution. Such a statement may also involve identifying the actor(s) causing the problem and the actor(s) victimized by it. These components serve as markers upon which frames are constructed. Alongside the four dimensions mentioned earlier (problem definition, solution given, active actor, passive actor), we also examined the underlying norms expressed in each tweet. This refers to the position from which a particular statement is made, reflecting normative viewpoints. Based on these five dimensions, we constructed frames, which Verloo defines as "organizing principles that transform fragmented or incidental information into a structured and meaningful problem, implicitly or explicitly incorporating a solution" (Verloo, 2005, p. 20). Therefore, frames represent the explanatory or cognitive structures utilized by individuals to interpret, shape, and possibly reinforce a specific social reality.

Combining CFA and linguostylistic analysis enabled us not only to uncover the underlying socio-political perspectives and ideological stances embedded in the discourse, but also to understand how language is used to evoke emotions and engage the audience. Employing both methodological approaches, we managed to shed light on the broader social and cultural context as well as on the specific rhetorical devices, linguistic patterns, and communicative strategies employed by influential users to capture attention and shape public opinion.

The subsequent analysis is structured into two sections. The first section entails the quantitative findings derived from the retweet network construction. The second section delves into the most retweeted tweets, providing insights into their linguostylistic features and the underlying discursive frames.

5 Analysis Results

5.1 Retweet Network Creation and Visualization

To create a retweet network, we built a directed, non-weighted graph between the Twitter users who retweeted each other. The direction indicates information flow. The retweet network was built utilising the following stages. Firstly, in R software (version 4.2.2.), we selected all the users involved in generating retweets, including those who authored the retweeted posts and those who retweeted them. This process yielded 255 users, who generated 455 retweets, which signified the relations between users. Subsequently, we imported the data into Gephi (version 0.9.2.),[8] which provided 394 "unique edges" (Hansen et al., 2020b) between users. A "unique edge" signifies a relationship between two users, regardless of the number of the retweets exchanged between them. For instance, if user A retweeted user B's posts five times, we have five retweets (and hence, five relations) between them, but only one "unique edge". Thus, the initial count of "455" represents the total number of relations corresponding to the overall number of retweets, whereas the count of "394" represents the "unique edges" that served as the foundation for generating the network visualization in Gephi.

Following the identification of the "unique edges" between users, distinct communities within the retweet network were detected using the Louvain algorithm. This algorithm relies on the identification of shared communication patterns among network users to delineate communities (Blondel et al., 2008). The algorithm identified 24 distinct communities within the network. To streamline our analysis, we focused on the seven largest communities, collectively encompassing 76 per cent of all users within the retweet network. The primary reason for excluding some communities from the analysis was their relatively small user base and lower activity level. Unlike the seven largest communities, these smaller groups had fewer posts and significantly less engagement, as evidenced by a lower number of retweets. This limited engagement meant they did not significantly contribute to the broader debate, leading to their omission from our consideration. Detailed characteristics of each community in the retweet network are presented in Table 2.

We selected the number of users as a starting point for determining the size of each community (Table 2, second column). Additionally, the third column of the table specifies the count of the retweets generated by users in a particular community, whereas the fourth column provides an overview of the number of the "unique edges" connecting them. Moreover, the final two columns in Table 2 present summaries of the key framings (CFA) and key linguostylistic strategies. Since the same linguostylistic strategies appear more or less frequently in all communities, they are not categorized by individual community in the last column but are applicable to all communities.

The retweet network of the seven largest communities was visualized using Gephi (Figure 1). The network visualization consists of 195 nodes (users) and 346 "unique edges".

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[8] During our work with Gephi, we collaborated with Luka Jesenšek, whose expertise greatly contributed to visualizing the retweet network and identifying communities using the Louvain algorithm.

Table 2 Retweet Network Communities

Communities	Users	Retweets	Unique edges	Key Framings (CFA)	Key Linguostylistic Strategies
Community 1 (Education Guardians)	47	98	92	Educational indoctrination threat frame	Standard language; sub-standard as a tool of valuation Non-specialized use of terms with a pejorative connotation Use of metaphors and irony Use of neologisms The exclamation mark for emotionally charged sentences to express indignation Use of slogans in English language Use of puns Use of defamations Use of hate speech
Community 2 (Tradition Defenders)	43	108	76	Traditional gender norms restoration frame	
Community 3 (Dean's Critics)	30	71	61	Dean-centric "gender theory" frame	
Community 4 (Cultural Marxism Challengers)	28	51	45	Cultural Marxism frame	
Community 5 (Linguistic Purists)	18	29	21	Linguistic intrusion of the "gender theory" frame	
Community 6 (Satire Supporters)	16	21	36	Satirical critique of the "gender theory" frame	
Community 7 (Satire Supporters)	13	14	15		
Community 8–24	60	53	48	/	/
Sum	255	445	394	/	/

Source: Generated by the authors

In Figure 1, the distinct communities within the retweet network are represented by numbers and corresponding colours: Community 1 (purple), Community 2 (green), Community 3 (blue), Community 4 (black), Community 5 (orange), Community 6 (pink), and Community 7 (green-blue). Notably, the users who engaged in more frequent communication are positioned in closer proximity to one another, whereas users with less frequent communication are situated at greater distances from each other within the visualization. Our quantitative analysis has identified distinct communities within the retweet network. However, retweet network visualization alone cannot sufficiently reveal specific communication patterns, such as the "echo chamber" effect or network "polarization" among users. To ascertain this, we integrate the findings from network visualization with outcomes from the CFA and linguostylistic analysis, detailed in the subsequent section.
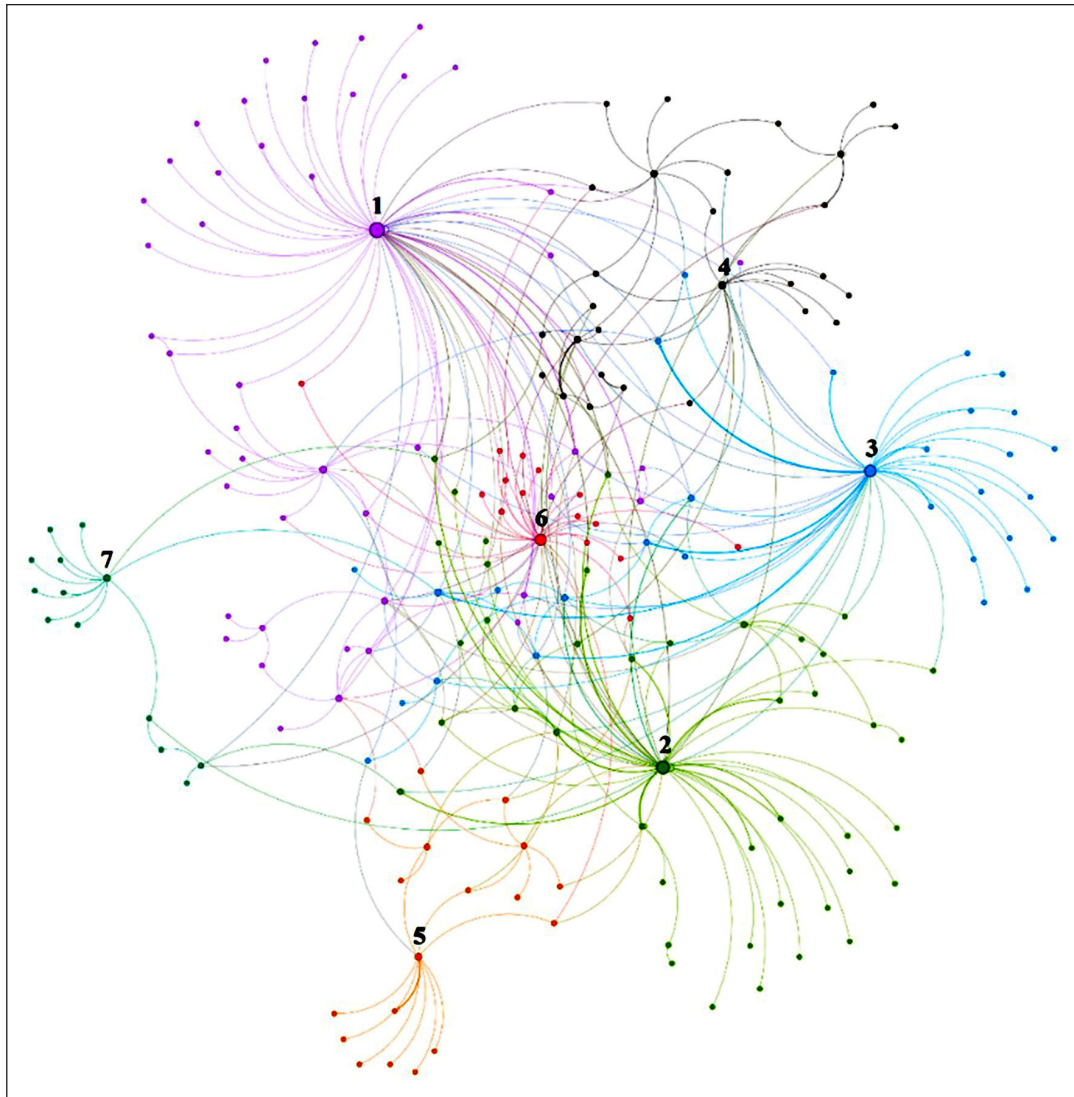
Figure 1 Visualization of the seven largest retweet network communities

Source: Generated by the authors

Expanding on the "central users" concept introduced in the second section, we determined central users by analysing the number of retweets they received from other users ("in-degree" centrality) and simultaneously their "unique edges", as detailed in Table 3. To provide an in-depth understanding of the network's characteristics, we introduced two additional attributes for each user: "category" and "political affiliation". Under "category," we assigned a specific status to each user (e.g. media, politician). For users whose identity was unknown, we categorized them as either "publicly unknown user" or "anonymous user."

This classification was based on their profile information: users with a first and last name and/or a personal profile photo, yet not publicly recognizable, were labelled as "publicly unknown." Conversely, those with a pseudonym and no personal photo were classified as "anonymous users." Moreover, regarding the "political affiliation", it should be noted that all the posts by central users in the sample align with right-wing political ideology. There-fore, it can be asserted that a network with a right-leaning political orientation dominates the discussion. However, in Table 3's last column, we only identified the political affilia-tions of publicly known users with known right-wing affiliations. We have not determined the affiliations of publicly unknown or anonymous users due to the inability to ascertain their personal ideological and political orientations.

Table 3 Central Users

Communities	Central Users	Retweets	Unique Edges	Category	Political Affiliation
Community 1 (Education Guardians)	@Nova24TV	72	59	Media	Right-wing
	@VsenoviceInfo	15	15	Media	Right-wing
	@Max970	7	7	Publicly Unknown User	/
	@PetraCernetic	4	4	Publicly Unknown User	/
	@Miran7777	3	3	Anonymous User	/
	@BenjaminNatanja	1	1	Anonymous User	/
	@MareAndi	1	1	Publicly Unknown User	/
	@MStrovs	1	1	Politician	Right-wing
	@Margu501	1	1	Publicly Unknown User	/
	Sum	105	92	/	/
Community 2 (Tradition Defenders)	@Anti_MigrantSLO	57	42	Media	Right-wing
	@Missspela	10	10	Publicly Unknown User	/
	@SnsStranka	11	6	Political Party	Right-wing
	@ifi_genija	7	6	Publicly Unknown User	/
	@SSN_pr	6	5	Political Party	Right-wing
	@BozoPredalic	2	2	Politician	Right-wing
	@MervicVanda	1	1	Publicly Unknown User	/
	@AnaKlaraT	1	1	Publicly Unknown User	/
	@Diphenbachia	1	1	Anonymous User	/
	@MarijaSoba	1	1	Publicly Unknown User	/
	@KerMiNiVseeno	1	1	Anonymous User	/
	Sum	98	76	/	/

Table 3 *(continued)*

Communities	Central Users	Retweets	Unique Edges	Category	Political Affiliation
Community 3 (Dean's Critics)	@RomanVodeb	50	40	Self-proclaimed psycho-analyst	Right-wing
	@DarinkaVrabi	6	6	Publicly Unknown User	/
	@petra_jansa	5	5	Journalist	Right-wing
	@JureUmnik	5	5	Publicly Unknown User	/
	@mojcav1	3	3	Publicly Unknown User	/
	@twiitiztok	2	2	Publicly Unknown User	/
	Sum	71	61	/	/
Community 4 (Cultural Marxism Challengers)	@BernardBrscic	16	16	Politician	Right-wing
	@Muhabc1	11	11	Publicly Unknown User	/
	@RadioOgnjisce	8	6	Media	Right-wing
	@Tomltoml	6	5	Anonymous user	/
	@ATBeatris	4	3	Publicly Unknown User	/
	@krtmen	3	3	Anonymous user	/
	@ZigaTurk	1	1	Politician	Right-wing
	Sum	49	45	/	/
Community 5 (Linguistic Purists)	@PlusPortal	13	11	Media	Right-wing
	@Alex_Zamuda	6	6	Politician	Right-wing
	@cnfrmstA	4	4	Anonymous user	/
	Sum	23	21	/	/
Community 6 (Satire Supporters)	@Casnik	36	36	Media	Right-wing
	Sum	36	36	/	/
Community 7 (Satire Supporters)	@Peterstrovs	11	11	Publicly Unknown User	/
	@SamoGlavan	2	2	Musician	Right-wing
	@Ajitamxy	1	1	Publicly Unknown User	/
	@Demokracija1	1	1	Media	Right-wing
	Sum	15	15	/	/
	Total Sum	397	346		

Source: Generated by the authors

All seven communities were dominated by right-wing central users. Community 1 represents *Nova24TV*'s network, which is a leading right-wing TV station in Slovenia. The primary central user in Community 2 is an anonymous user whose username indicates their opposition to immigration. Moreover, the profile of the extra-parliamentary, right-wing, Eurosceptic, populist SNP (Slovenian National Party) can be identified among the prominent users in this community. Community 3 revolves around the controversial psychoanalyst Roman Vodeb, who promotes "gender theory" and other exclusionary views under the guise of psychoanalytic science. Community 4 centres on the far-right politician Bernard Brščič, the leader of the extra-parliamentary Homeland League, who is known for his inflammatory attitudes regarding social minorities. Community 5 consists of the conservative online news portal *Portal Plus*. Similarly, Community 6 revolves around the conservative online news portal Časnik. Finally, Community 7 was formed around Peter Štrovs. Among the central users in Community 7 is the right-leaning weekly *Demokracija*, which publishes Štrovs' blog posts.

5.2 Linguostylistic Analysis and CFA of the Most Retweeted Tweets

Through network visualization, we can gain insight into the prevailing communication patterns among users. However, to discern the distinctive characteristics and thematic aspects of the discussions within each community, we also conducted a detailed linguostylistic analysis and CFA of the most retweeted tweets within them. Since all seven communities use similar linguistic strategies, the linguostylistic analysis was conducted at the level of all seven communities (the features are listed in Table 2), while the CFA was conducted separately for each community.

5.2.1 Linguostylistic analysis

A linguostylistic analysis has revealed that most of the tweets were written in a standard language, with non-standard language appearing as a stylistically marked category, playing the role of evaluating persons or actions, often with a derogatory connotation. In some examples, it also takes on an ironic tone. However, the replies to the most retweeted tweets exhibit less adherence to standard language, incorporating dialectal variations, vulgarity, and even expressions of hostility.

A number of notable categories of lexemes appear in the most retweeted tweets. Among them, appellations that function as pseudo-terms stand out, such as "gender theory", "radical feminism", "feminist ideology", "cultural Marxism", and "ideological activism". The non-specialized nature of these terms is evident in the fact that they have a pejorative connotation, which becomes apparent in the context. In all seven communities, the core phrases that describe the Faculty's action are theory/gender ideology, LGBT agenda/propaganda, LGBT-feminist ideology, and leftist/(cultural) Marxist ideology.

Another category of lexemes consists of adjectives like "sick" and "perverted," as well as adjectives that are predominantly emotionally tainted with a derogatory connotation.

Among them are adjectives such as "*gay* dean", "*misguided* 'gender theory'", "*forced use* of new pronouns", "*effeminate* generation", "*stupid* idea", "*confused* fairy", and "*leftist-faggot* delusions".

The tweets also include stylistically marked colloquial and expressive verbs and nouns with derogatory and potentially offensive connotations, as well as expressive designations, such as "delusions", "charlatans" "invaders", "faggotism", "foolish women", "rags", "primitives in power", "globalist", "freemason", and "gravedigger of manliness".

Along with the aforementioned noticeable lexemes, punctuation – specifically the exclamation mark – is a linguistic choice that significantly frames the tweets in our analysis. The exclamation mark, according to the Slovenian spelling convention, ends emotionally charged sentences. In analysed tweets it is used to express indignation ("*They want to create a generation of effeminate men through 'gender theory'!'; "An attack by a perverted and degenerate leftist ideology on the Slovenian language and normality!*"), underlines individual claims ("*LGBT-feminist ideology has no place in educational institutions!"; "No one will ever again enter the curricula of faculties with these leftist-feminist delusions!*") or stands at the end of explicit appeals ("*Defend the family!"; "He should be fired, and not only from the dean's post, from the Faculty!*").

In an emotionally and stylistically marked usage in analysed tweets, the question mark is often used to end rhetorical questions ("*Are we just going to let them raise our children like this?*") or to emphasize wonder ("*Is she the only one at the Department of Slovene studies?*").

Ultimately, the linguostylistic analysis revealed that the phrases utilized in the tweets exhibit a negative connotation or prominently feature crass and vulgar expressions (e.g. "devil's noose", "kicking in the dark", "pussy smoke"). Furthermore, the employment of metaphors within these tweets often deteriorates into unsuccessful or incomprehensible catachresis. Ironically, the writers defend the authentic, "real Slovenian" while using a slogan in the English language taken from an online collection of photographs ("Defend the nuclear family"). The selection of marked expressions – words with expressive value, ambiguous linguistic meanings, punctuation, and metaphors along with the style of the entire posts – plays a crucial role in assessing their influence function, namely, the persuasiveness of the linguistic means (Fairclough, 1994, p. 119).

5.2.2 CFA

In the quantitative phase of our analysis, we identified seven distinct user communities. A critical examination of the discourse frames utilized within these communities revealed the presence of two interconnected levels that characterize each community's discourse. The first level can be referred to as the "root" or "foundation," which remains consistent across all the identified groups. The second level represents the "stem" or substantive manifestation specific to each group's discursive framework.

In our analysis, all the tweets share a common underlying theme of "gender theory" as the foundational concept upon which each tweet is constructed. It is important to note that "gender theory" serves as the contextual backdrop for our analysis, as the keyword itself guides our investigation. However, we aim to emphasize the contextual manifestation or discursive frames stemming from this shared foundation.

The most retweeted tweets in Community 1 are characterized and framed by the perceived threat of an ideology infiltrating the education system, targeting and allegedly indoctrinating innocent children. This discursive frame highlights the concerns surrounding the introduction of such an ideology into schools.

> *Hungary finally bans the misguided gender theory at postgraduate level – brought there by the globalist Soros! (@Nova24TV)*

> *Gay dean of the Faculty of Arts bans male gender, psychoanalyst Vodeb critical of him: "LG-BT-feminist ideology has no place in educational institutions!" (@Nova24TV)*

Frames in Community 2 emerge from a patriarchal standpoint that calls for the restoration of traditional gender norms and relations, presenting it as the normative and desirable state of affairs.

> *Well done Hungarians! One of the few healthy nations in Europe. We in the SNS are also strongly against gender theory. Men and women should have equal rights, but should not be equal! (@Sns-Stranka)*

> *Let us defend our women! This is what feminism should fight for. Not for a ban on showing pretty girls during football matches. Radical feminism is a disease. (@Anti_MigrantSLO)*

The most retweeted tweets in Community 3 focus specifically on the situation at the Faculty of Arts, where the discursive frame revolves around arguments *ad personam*, positioning the Dean of the Faculty as the central agent of "gender theory". Within this frame, "gender theory" is portrayed through an emphasis on the Dean's personality characteristics, including alleged psychological traumas from childhood and his sexual orientation.

> *Now the young men, driven by their testosterone, who have "sperm splashing out of their ears" should banish Dean Roman Kuhar – the gravedigger of manliness at the Faculty of Arts. (@RomanVodeb)*

> *Kuhar is a latent militant gay who has ideologically and in line with the regime incorporated himself into the education system. Every gay man is created in a difficult primary environment/family, perhaps with a background of sexual abuse. A deficit in moral reasoning (Superego) is inevitable. (@RomanVodeb)*

Community 4 is characterized by political allusions that revolve around the ideological polarization between the left and the right. Specifically, it portrays "gender theory" as an offspring of left-wing woke individuals. Moreover, historical references are made to assert the presence of political continuity supposedly personified by contemporary Marxists. Termed as cultural Marxists, these individuals, following the failure of the political revolution, allegedly aspire to initiate a new cultural revolution with the objective of dismantling the gender binary and traditional family structures. Debates within this frame then expand to the "eternal themes" of Slovenian political space such as the existence of a deep state, supposedly represented by former communists seeking to perpetuate the exploitation of the nation. Some of these narrative frames are also echoed by Catholic and right-wing media Twitter accounts, which constitute an integral part of the fourth cluster.

When you look at your crotch in the toilet, you know that there are only 2 possible sexes. Unless you're a cultural Marxist and you're wondering whether there are 59 or just 58. (@BernardBrscic)

Thought of the day:

We only have two types of leftists.

1. Leftists for personal gain #thieves, i.e. leftist criminals

2. Ideological leftists, who are mentally ill and should be sent to psychiatric hospitals. Poor things believe they have 70 genders. (@tomltoml)

The family is the fundamental unit of society, which cultural Marxists want to break up by any means necessary. They do this through LGBT propaganda, radical feminism and gender theory. Let us not allow them to destroy us. DEFEND FAMILY! (@Anti_MigrantSLO)

Community 5 adopts a specific discursive context centred on the discussion of language, linguistic norms, and rules. Here, "gender theory" enters the discourse through its intervention in language, particularly as it pertains to the actions taken at the Faculty of Arts. In this context, "gender theory" is framed as an intrusion into the domain of language, disrupting the otherwise value-neutral field of linguistics.

Transgender at "Filofaks": Female student Janez Novak, you failed the exam given by female professor Božo Repe!9! (…) "The introduction of the feminine grammatical gender for all genders has an exclusionary effect." (@PlusPortal)

It is neither about expertise nor common sense. The humanities are first and foremost an attitude towards the world and history. And this attitude absolutely excludes the ideological engineering of language. That is why every good humanist – like Ahačič – knows instinctively that such measures are incompatible with the spirit of Filofaks. (@cnfrmstA)

Communities 6 and 7 consist of tweets that also appeared in the other communities. In Community 7, the distinctive element is the employment of humour and exaggeration to mock and undermine the legitimacy of "gender theory". These tweets attempt to highlight what they perceive as the absurdity of "gender theory", employing satirical elements to challenge its validity. The overall pattern observed across the tweets is based on the premise that "gender theory" exists, has a clearly defined nature, and operates according to the principles of conspiracy theories.

A woman from Bohinj comes to Filofaks and says: "Oi! I wanna enrol, I'm gonna study, I'm gonna be a student, I'm gonna eat using vouchers".

Officer stares ahead for a few minutes, then performs a sepuku (@peterstrovs)10

Our use of genders in also unknown in English. Student is student, he or she or it. Maybe they are preparing to study in foreign languages, habibi. (@DarkoErmenc)

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9 Both names in the tweet (Janez Novak and Božo Repe) are male names.

10 The humour of this tweet is very culturally conditioned. Bohinj is a Slovenian area where some women in the local dialect still use the masculine grammatical form for themselves, not the feminine. The original tweet: "pride Bohinjka na Filofaks, pa reče: 'žijo, se bi vpisu, bom študiru, bom študent, bom jedu na bone' *referentka nekaj minut zabodeno strmi predse, nato izvede sepuku*".

In our sample of the most retweeted tweets across all seven communities, we identified ten issues or problem statements that could be categorized into four groups. The first group consists of problem definitions based on the understanding of "gender theory" as a kind of conspiracy theory, which can result in the feminization of men, the endangerment of "our women", or even in the extension of rights to new groups, including paedophiles and zoophiles.

The second group of problems is related to political tensions between the left and the right. The left, which supports LGBT and feminism, is defined as a problem, along with Islam and similar "dangers", resulting from what is referred to on Twitter as "leftist-faggot delusions" or "degenerate leftism".

The third set of problems is related to the relationship between freedom of speech and hate speech. The Twitter community argues that their freedom of speech is violated due to the persecution of their views on gender and that expressing the truth is now considered hate speech.

The final set of problems was specifically related to the intervention in the Slovenian language described above. This is believed to have led to the destruction of the Slovenian language and "ideological language engineering".

Closely associated with problem definitions are the so-called active actors, those who contribute to the identified problems. Three groups of active actors were identified across all seven communities.

The first group of defined problems is linked to the LGBT community and radical feminists as active actors. George Soros is explicitly named as the one who allegedly provides financial support for the development of "gender theory".

Actors from the second group are primarily defined by political tensions between the left and the right in Slovenia, including the ongoing debate about the legacy of Marxism and the role of different groups that fought in World War II. The actors causing the identified problems, therefore, include the "left government", also referred to as the "primitives in power", the second group consists of "cultural Marxists", and the third group includes the "descendants of partisans", who supposedly not only fought against Germany during World War II but also carried out a political revolution, enabling the victory of the communists.

The third group of active actors is closely linked to the events at the Faculty of Arts. The leadership of the Faculty of Arts is highlighted as a problem, specifically its dean, with a publicly known same-sex orientation.

 Among the passive actors in all seven communities, i.e. those who are the victims of the identified problems, men (and their masculinity), women, family, school, and society in general are mentioned. Specifically related to the story from the Faculty of Arts, the Slovenian language and the employees of the Faculty who must adhere to new grammatical rules are identified as victims.

The analysed statements in the tweets contain fewer solutions than problems. Most of the tweets define the problem but do not offer explicit solutions, although the solution is implicitly contained in the problem definition, which simply suggests that the problem can be solved by "eliminating the problem". For example, radical feminism, as an identified problem, can only be solved by "eliminating, abolishing" radical feminism. Similarly, the

prohibition of "gender theory", especially in schools, is often suggested as a solution to the identified problems. The second group of solutions relates to calls for the protection of the family, traditional values, and morality. The final group of solutions specifically relates to the decision adopted at the Faculty of Arts, where the rejection of that decision and the correction of the mistake made are seen as the solution.

6 Discussion: Ideological Homogenization as a Consequence of "Gender Theory" Domination

Our findings provide empirical evidence supporting the analytical validity of the existing explanations of the characteristics and dynamics of "gender theory" and its role in public debates, but also point to the colonizing nature of "gender theory", which moves away from its original thematization to new topics; by applying this flammable discursive framework, it is possible to transform nearly any topic into a first-class political ideological issue that divides the public.

Drawing upon the concept of the "symbolic glue" (Kováts & Pōim, 2015), it has become evident that "gender theory" in Twitter debates functions as a unifying force, bringing together disparate actors who engage in separate debates in their respective communities, each with distinct thematic emphases, but with shared reference to "gender theory". This shows how "gender theory" facilitates discursive cohesion among right-wing media, politicians, publicly known Slovenian right-wing figures (e.g. psychoanalysts), and, notably, numerous anonymous or publicly unknown users.

The inherent emptiness and malleability of "gender theory" as an "empty signifier" (Mayer & Sauer, 2017) in Twitter debates is observed in the fact that the identified communities introduced numerous new issues to the debate while discussing gender-sensitive language. This was made possible by the "glue" of the emptiness of the signifier "gender theory". Specifically, our CFA shows that the communities focused on topics such as the integration of "gender theory" into the education system (Community 1), the defence of patriarchal roles (Community 2), the exposure of the dean's homosexuality and allegations of childhood abuse (Community 3), the infiltration of "cultural Marxism" in educational institutions (Community 4), and the interpretation of the measure as an act of language destruction (Community 5).

The linguostylistic analysis also provides evidence supporting the understanding of "gender theory" as an "empty signifier". This is exemplified by the identification of the conceptual opposition of "illness" vs. "health" in the most retweeted tweets. Within this framing, "gender theory" is represented as an "illness", while "normalcy" is associated with "health". Deviations from established grammatical norms are depicted as diseased and perverse, implying that society itself is afflicted by this condition, which is attributed to various elements such as radical feminism, the LGBT agenda, and cultural Marxism. The metaphorical use of "gender theory" demonstrates its emptiness, as it can encompass anything – in this instance, the contrast between "illness" and "health".

The concept of the "ideological code" (Smith, 1999; Paternotte, 2023) becomes relevant when considering central users who adopt and propagate a signifier, unaware of its origin,

thereby enhancing its legitimacy and perceived accuracy in reflecting reality. In addition to right-wing media and politicians, active participation is observed from anonymous users who embrace the conceptual framework of "gender theory" as an unquestionable foundation for addressing gender-related issues. This empirical observation also aligns with Paternotte's (2023) assumption that the control over "gender theory" has shifted away from its original creators, as it has now become widely disseminated among the general public.

Our empirical findings also demonstrate the role of "gender theory" in de-democratization (Lombardo et al., 2021) by limiting the boundaries of legitimate debate to the frame of "gender theory/ideology", marginalizing and excluding "alternative" viewpoints and impeding democratic and pluralistic exchanges. Our analysis reveals the significant absence of any voices capable of offering alternative perspectives or framing the focal issue beyond the confines of "gender theory". This indicates that the right-leaning network has effectively instrumentalized the Twitter debate, surpassing the *pro et contra* ideological polarization structure characterized by opposing viewpoints. Despite the identification of distinct communities, they ultimately stem from the same political network, creating an "echo chamber" where users through retweeting repeat ideologically similar posts, resulting in the marginalization and exclusion of alternative perspectives on the subject matter.

Put differently, we observe a departure from network "polarization", which typically characterizes Twitter debates of this nature. Instead, our analysis reveals prevailing ideological homogenization across various communities. This phenomenon can be attributed to the colonizing nature of "gender theory", which effectively restricts the space for the emergence of alternative viewpoints on a topic. Additionally, this trend may be attributed to the observed lower activity levels of left-leaning users on Twitter in Slovenia, which could be a result of the highly organized right-leaning political networks. Supporting this observation, Amon Prodnik (2016) highlights the existence of organized social media training within right-wing groups, a phenomenon that has not been similarly documented or reported for the left in Slovenia.

How "gender theory" contributes to de-democratization processes is also evident in the case of Community 3, employing psychoanalytic language to oppose the Faculty's decision. Under the guise of scientific discourse, it sought to delegitimize the Faculty's actions by pathologizing the dean, highlighting his homosexuality as the reason for the adoption of gender-sensitive measures and making allegations that he was abused sexually as a child. These attempts to frame disagreement as a personality pathology expose a troubling aspect of "gender theory" where seemingly rational (pseudo-psychoanalytic) discourse is employed to conceal malicious intentions.

Our study has limitations that should be considered when interpreting the findings. Firstly, our Twitter data collection was retrospective, covering a period in 2018 and collected in January 2023. Given the discontinuation of the Twitter API used, replicating this dataset is no longer feasible. Moreover, the dynamic nature of online digital environments implies that data collection at different times might yield varying results, even if the API were accessible.[11] Methodologically, our approach includes the use of the Louvain algo-

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[11] The authors of this article maintain a database that is available to interested researchers, facilitating further study in this framework.

rithm for community detection, initially developed for undirected graphs, whereas our analysis involved a directed graph. Despite this, we selected the Louvain approach because of its success in some prior studies (Jesenšek et al. 2021; Smrdelj 2024) and Gephi version 0.9.2's capacity to handle directed and undirected graphs selected at initialization. However, using alternative algorithms or multiple applications of the Louvain algorithm could yield different outcomes. Nevertheless, the community structures we identified accurately reflect collaborations observed in the broader public. Lastly, our dataset covers the entire target population but is relatively small, limiting the generalizability of our findings to broader online digital publics.

7 Conclusion

In our study, we examined the Twitter discussion in Slovenia sparked by the decision of the Faculty of Arts, University of Ljubljana, to use gender-sensitive language in their internal regulation documents. Despite all the negative reactions, the Faculty has upheld the Senate's decision. Six years have passed since the resolution's adoption at the time of writing this text, and the Faculty continues to exercise this practice without reporting any issues regarding the comprehension of texts due to such language usage.

In our analysis of the Twitter responses to this decision, we identified distinct user communities that varied in size and retweeting activity. These communities were predominantly affiliated with right-leaning political networks. Through the linguostylistic analysis and CFA of the most retweeted tweets, we observed that the communities exhibited different thematic emphases regarding gender-sensitive language use and brought new topics into the discussion, but all these debates shared a common reference. which was the discursive concept of "gender theory".

To gain a more comprehensive understanding of the Twitter debate, future research should consider conducting longitudinal analyses and investigating the relationship between the actors involved in previous campaigns against equality and those adopting "gender theory". This would provide insights into coalition-building strategies and the persistence of "gender theory" in shaping public debates. However, future research should not only focus on longitudinal analysis, but it should also include advanced linguostylistic analysis. This includes the categorization of key words and phrases in the discourse and the mapping of these elements in the seven communities involved in the debate. Such an approach will allow a quantitative assessment of linguistic preferences and terminologies within each community and show how language reflects group ideologies and dynamics. In addition, analysing the most active users ("out-degree" centrality) will shed light on user engagement and the role individuals play in influencing the debate. Last but not least, a closer look at the edges' weight can provide a more comprehensive view of how discussions on "gender theory" evolve and spread over time.

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