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Involving EU Citizens Online
Case Study on Social Media Use of the European Commission

Submitted by:
Janna Boekema
Student number 1573470

Home university: Dr. Wim Vuijk
Host university: Dr. María Pilar Rodríguez

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I, Janna Boekema, hereby declare that this thesis, “Involving EU Citizens Online: Case Study on Social Media Use of the European Commission,” submitted as partial requirement for the MA Programme Euroculture, is my own original work and expressed in my own words. Any use made within it of works of other authors in any form (e.g. ideas, figures, texts, tables, etc.) are properly acknowledged in the text as well as in the List of References.

I hereby also acknowledge that I was informed about the regulations pertaining to the assessment of the MA thesis Euroculture and about the general completion rules for the Master of Arts Programme Euroculture.

Signed ....................................................................... Date
Preface

I am writing this preface on 30 June, 2013, 23.41. This is exact 19 minutes before the deadline of handing in my MA Thesis, totally in line with every other deadline I had in the last 8 years of University. Since the clock is ticking, I will keep it short.

For my master thesis, I wanted to combine my Bachelor Communication and Information Sciences with the Master Euroculture. In analysing the social media use of a supranational organization like the European Commission, I was able to use knowledge from both academic fields. The research turned out to be an interesting and challenging process, of which I spent several months in Bilbao, eating pinxtos and drinking cerveza.

My special thanks go to the social media team of the European Commission. Without allowing me to visit them in Brussels and providing me with all necessary information to perform this research, I could not have written this thesis. Furthermore, I would like to thank my supervisors, Richt Dijkstra, my mathematic brain, my two brothers for revising, and every other person that did not unfriend me on Facebook for being so stressed in the last two weeks.

Last but not least, I would like to thank Tessa van der Knijff, who is currently still adding page numbers to the final version of my thesis.
Summary

This thesis deals with the problem of distance between EU institutions and European citizens and the potential of social media to reconnect them. An extensive research on the social media performance of the European Commission resulted into a new analysis model that may be utilized to investigate social media use of governmental or supranational organisations.

With regards to the EU, many European citizens do not feel informed about European issues and do not understand the functioning and role of the European political system. European institutions have to work hard to keep citizens engaged with politics and public communication is of overall importance. Worldwide, the use of social media in the public sector has become a hot topic. Many governmental organizations have added social media networks to their communication channels. This thesis includes an explanatory single case study on social media use of the European Commission. It explores how the Commission utilizes social media networks in order to communicate about EU legislation, taking into account many factors that may influence the process. The methods include an interview and e-mail conversation with a social media officer of the DG COMM, a questionnaire filled out by some of the most active users of the Commission’s Facebook page and several discourse and conversation analysis models.

The data consists of 24 Facebook posts about EU legislation and 257 following comments. The Commission’s posts are found to serve three different communicative goals: 1) inform citizens about relevant legislation during all phases of the policy-making process (informative), 2) promote EU legislation (persuasive) and 3) stimulate political dialogue (motivational). To inform citizens, the Commission frequently posts messages about all aspects of the policy-making process. To promote legislation, persuasive language is used. About political dialogues is argued that, although European citizens share their political opinions in comments, real political discussions do not take place.

Social media are not the one solution for closing the gap between EU institutions and EU citizens, because they can only reach a small segment of society. However, social media can provide EU institutions with more interactive ways of communication. Although Facebook may not lead to high quality political discussions, with the start of live blogging tools and Twitter chats with EU Officials, the Commission is making great steps towards an optimal use of social media in order to involve citizens.
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Introduction

Over the last two decades, the European Union has been transformed. EU institutions have taken on a wide range of tasks and have become more and more influential in the everyday life of European citizens. Likewise, they are based in Brussels, which is beyond national borders for the majority of the people they affect. The institutions function at a distance, a distance that goes beyond the literal sense of the word. Many European citizens do not feel informed about European issues and do not understand the functioning and role of the European political system. Regarding this gap between the EU and EU citizens, European institutions have to work hard to keep citizens engaged in the process of policy-making. Keeping such a distributed and diverse European audience interested and involved in European politics, is very much a challenge for European institutions. In this regard, communication by EU institutions has become more and more two-directional in order to involve citizens more with policy-making.

New online media have extended the possibilities for interaction with citizens. Social media have changed the character of public communication, providing more two-directional ways of communication. The EU utilizes social media networks to reach out and connect to its citizens and stakeholders. Social media are defined by the Commission as online technologies and practices used to share opinions and information, promote discussion, and build relationships. They are considered to be of great value for the interaction and engagement of interested groups on EU-related themes and activities. The use of social media in the public sector has become a hot topic. Agencies and departments on all levels of government are adding Facebook, Twitter or YouTube to their communication channels. Governmental organizations aim to stimulate online political discussions. In this thesis, the social media use of the European Commission is analysed.

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The research question is as follows:

*In what way does the European Commission utilize social media networks in order to communicate with its online publics about EU legislation?*

To answer this question, social media networks are approached as valuable tools that offer the EU opportunities to interact with EU citizens. The most relevant literature is explored in the literature review. Section 1 explains the *European public sphere deficit*, a term that describes the main problem in this thesis: the distance between European institutions and European citizens. With regards to the stimulation of a European public sphere, an overall consensus exists on the importance of *civic participation*, which becomes clear in section 2. In section 3, different types and purposes of public communication are explored. The focus in this thesis is on public communication *about* EU legislation, that refers to legitimizing, reporting and explaining policies. It includes interacting with society in order to build support for legislation. With a stronger focus on interaction instead of informing, the EU aims to involve citizens with policy-making. Based on this information, section 4 narrows down on the more specific topic of this thesis: social media use by EU institutions. In this section, the role of the media is explored and most relevant studies on social media use in the public sector are discussed.

In the second part of this thesis, the case study about the European Commission is introduced. Various methods are combined to analyse the overall social media performance of the Commission, among which interviewing, conversation analysis and analysis by means of social media tools. Based on the Commission’s goals of communicating about EU legislation, its efforts on Facebook are analysed. 24 posts about EU legislation and 257 comments following on these posts are selected as data. In the conclusion is explained how messages about EU legislation are designed to serve informative, persuasive and motivational goals. The findings include an extensive analysis of the quality of political interactions. The case study has resulted into a model which can be used by governmental or supranational organizations to measure social media use. It takes into account the context, strategies and targets and may be used to analyse specific types of messages, for example those about legislation. Since social media use in the public sector is still upcoming, a model that links the organization’s targets to the online activity and political discussions has not been developed yet. This verifies the relevance of this case study research.
Part I. Theoretical Framework

1. Facing the Challenge: Reconnecting EU Institutions and EU Citizens

According to Eurobarometer opinion polls in recent years, many people say they know little about the EU and feel they have little say in its decision-making process. Furthermore, participation in European elections is significantly low compared to most national elections. Aside from that, there is a large category of citizens not interested at all in European politics. The distance between European institutions and EU citizens is described in many ways. This section deals with some of the main problems in the EU with a variation of terms such as Euroscepticism and European public sphere deficit.

1.1 The Gap

Related to the problematic distance between the EU and EU citizens, there is the issue of Euroscepticism: the opposition to the EU or the process of political European integration. A German news magazine recently published a list of politicians who are seriously jeopardizing the European project. Among others, some of the best known politicians are the Bavarian Finance Minister Markus Söder; Alexis Tspiras, who heads the left-wing Greek Syriza alliance; France’s Marine Le Pen, leader of the Front National far-right party; and Geert Wilders, head of the Dutch Party for Freedom. A tweet of Geert Wilders about EU pressure on Dutch cuts demonstrates how such politicians act in the media:

“Brussel can sink into the mire. Why is that annoying EU interfering with our affairs? Get rid of that elite society and let freedom return to the Netherlands.” (Translated from Dutch)
According to a news article in the Guardian on 24\textsuperscript{th} of April, Euroscepticism has recently spread across the continent like a virus. Data from Eurobarometer shows that trust in the European project has fallen even faster than growth rates. Due to the recent crisis, not only member states, but almost everyone in the EU seems to have lost faith in the project. The Guardian describes the situation as serious, but unfortunately not hopeless.

The hope is that as European growth picks up, Euroscepticism will weaken and eventually decline. But the collapse of trust in the EU runs deeper than that. Enthusiasm for the EU will not return unless the EU profoundly changes the way it deals with its member states and its citizens.\textsuperscript{11}

Although these news messages are random examples, communication about the EU has been far from positive, especially in recent times of crises. Due to growing uncertainty in the future of the EU, politicians and researchers have become more and more critical. In this regard, De Vreese shows that there is limited knowledge about the role of the media in support for European integration and even less about their influence on the emergence of Euroscepticism. Nevertheless, in his research, he demonstrates that the manner in which issues are communicated in news media can play a role in shaping and influencing attitudes towards European integration.\textsuperscript{12}

Clearly, not all media, politicians and EU citizens are skeptical about the European Union. Yet, the gap between the European Union and EU citizens is widely recognized.\textsuperscript{13}

This gap, not necessarily linked to Euroscepticism, is the main problem at stake in this research. The problem of distance between ruling institutions and the people involved was already described by Rousseau, back in 1762. Rousseau points out that there is an unbridgeable gap between politics and citizens. He argues that real sovereignty cannot be represented. It lays in the general will of citizens and an intermediate is not a possibility. Rousseau shows no believe in representative democracy in communities larger than those of, for example, his own city Geneva. Although he realizes that representation of legislative power becomes unavoidable in larger communities, he illustrates the corresponding problems for society. Rousseau’s theories have been interpreted in many ways. Some researchers see


\textsuperscript{12} Claes H. de Vreese, “A Spiral of Euroscepticism: The Media’s Fault?,” 271.

him as the forefather of direct democracy. Others point out how he doubted the power of representative democracy. Interesting for this research is that Rousseau, already in the 18th century, points out on the problematic distance between ruling institutions and citizens in large communities. The debate is on-going ever since. In the case of the European Union, the distance between the political and private sphere is large, which makes it even harder to have faith in the ruling institutions and to keep people engaged with politics.

Solutions for closing the ‘gap’ are proposed in all fields of literature. Before the focus is set on the potential opportunity for social media to reconnect the EU with its citizens, it is important to discuss the distance problem in the EU more extensively. In this section, it is described in terms of Habermas, as a European public sphere deficit.

1.2 Habermas’ Public Sphere

The concept of the ‘public sphere’ has been discussed by many scholars since it was first developed by Jürgen Habermas in 1962. Habermas explains the difference between two different spheres: 1) the political sphere of public authority and 2) the private sphere of civic society. His concept of the public sphere refers to the space between those two spheres. The concept is divided into three parts: the public space, the debate and the individual citizen. Habermas stresses the crucial role of the media in shaping and voicing the debate between political actors and citizens. Although the theory of the German philosopher focuses on a bourgeois public sphere that emerged from the 18th century, it nevertheless remains useful in the modern world with blurring state borders and the development of new media. Besides, the

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15 The liberal-representative and the deliberative-discursive model have contradictory definitions of the European public sphere deficit and provide different solutions. The scope of this paper does not allow an intensive comparison. Therefore, the given explanation includes elements from both models. For a clear overview see: Gerd G. Kopper and Tanja Leppik, “D 6: Theory Building “European Identity Building/European Public Sphere,” Adequate Information Management project, Erich-Brost-Institute, Centre of Advanced Study in International Journalism, October 2006, http://www.aim-project.net/uploads/media/D6_Theorie_Building.pdf (accessed 7 June 2013), 5.
theory proves its relevance again in recent debates on the emergence of a European public sphere. However, not much consensus has been reached regarding what an ideal public sphere should look like. Two theories have dominated the discourse: 1) the liberal-representative model and 2) the deliberate-discursive model.18

According to the liberal-representative model, a public sphere should create transparency and ensure mutual observation of government and governed citizens. Political parties and interest groups dominate the public debate and provide input for political decisions. The model acknowledges the influence of mass media in spreading information as well as offering opportunities to develop opinion.19 Important to note is that, according to this model, the mass media do not construct public opinion but rather offer ways in which opinions become visible. Furthermore, the model has a strong focus on elected representatives. Not the individual citizen, but the representatives are the actors in society that have to communicate their opinion and reflect on political procedures. Citizens should be informed about political actors, their actions and programs. Habermas does not agree with this strong focus on representatives in the public sphere, since he expects individual citizens to influence the political process in a direct way as well.20 Therefore, the deliberative-discursive model is considered more related to Habermas’ work. It does not merely focus on representatives, but involves all actors of civil society and includes individual citizens in the political sphere. Furthermore, it shows that the meaning of the public sphere is not only to create transparency, but also to initiate common learning processes in which the media play a vital role. An ideal public sphere in this regard results into a common opinion or consensus among the actors of civil society and individual citizens. The process and dialogue are based on mutual respect and the exchange of rational arguments.21

A third model exists, which is of particular interest in this research regarding the EU and the potential role of social media in promoting civic participation. According to this model, the media are constructors of the public sphere and public opinion. Apart from face-to-face areas where people interact and exchange views and information, the media provide the most influential source of ideas and input for political decisions. Since citizens are informed about the EU based on what they hear, see and read in the media, a close cooperation with the

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19 Ibid.
20 Tarta, “Clash of the European Public Spheres,” 2.
media is of major concern. Moreover, the media offer European institutions channels to involve the diverse audience of European citizens in decision-making processes.  

1.3 European Public Sphere Deficit

In translating the public sphere into a European context, again many models appear in the literature. The three actors involved in the case of the European Union are: EU institutions, European citizens and the media. The core of the European public sphere is the relation between the European institutions and European citizens. This relation is vital for the functioning of the European Union as a whole. Although the importance of linking EU institutions with European citizens is stressed, the literature provides different and contradictory conclusions regarding the existence of one common European public sphere or several public spheres on a European level. Taking different approaches into account that aim to translate the public sphere into a European context, the notion of a European public sphere deficit is defined according to Kopper and Leppik. According to them, the European \textit{public sphere deficit} refers to European citizens that are left insufficiently informed about European politics, while decision-making is more and more transferred to the EU level. For example, the coverage on European issues, actors and decisions remains limited, or European citizens are not aware of where they can obtain access to relevant information.

The EU also mentions the European public sphere in its official communication. According to the Commission, the public sphere within which political life takes place in Europe is still largely a national sphere. In case European issues appear on the agenda at all, citizens mostly still approach them from a national perspective. Although citizens have the right to elect members of the European Parliament, they often feel that, aside from that, they have little opportunity to make their voices heard on European issues. The Commission acknowledges that people feel remote from EU institutions and the EU decision-making process. This is considered problematic, because many of the policy decisions taken at a

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24 Tart, “Clash of the European Public Spheres,” 3.
26 Ibid.
\end{flushleft}
European level affect their daily life. There is a sense of alienation from ‘Brussels’. The Commission stresses the inadequate development of a ‘European public sphere’ as one of the main causes for disenchantment. Nevertheless, the Commission believes that a pan-European political culture – with pan-European political groups and foundations – is still developing. Europe needs to find its place in the existing national, regional and local ‘public spheres’ and the public discussion across Member States must be deepened.27

Up to now, the detachment of EU citizens is described as a European public sphere deficit. Yet, there are many related terms in the literature that describe the distance ‘problem’ between EU institutions and EU citizens. Namely, among others, the democratic deficit and the communication deficit.28 Regarding the democratic deficit, many researchers refer to the absence of direct democratic procedures to authorize EU power. Others stress that the EU is becoming increasingly influential, while not sufficiently responding to public preferences and scrutiny. Many authors also argue that citizens lack essential knowledge about the EU or that political issues are not sufficiently discussed in public. More related to the European public sphere is the suggestion that the authorization of EU power is not possible without a European demos or European identity.29 Those scholars believe that a European public sphere or a network of Europeanized, interrelated national public spheres is needed in order for the EU to achieve more democratic legitimation.30 Some studies mention a ‘communication deficit’, a term that deals less with the procedures of governing and more with the provision of information. The ‘communication deficit’ refers to the poor communicative quality of the EU. According to Martins, Lecheler and De Vreese, the EU faces some important challenges with regards to the provision of information.31 Those challenges are further elaborated in the next section.32

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28 The scope of this thesis does not allow a thorough elaboration on all terms that describe the distance between EU institutions and EU citizens. From a thorough examination of the literature, I concluded that the theory about the European public sphere is most related to and valuable for my topic. It covers most elements that play a role in the process, among which: EU institutions, EU citizens, the role of the media and public debate.
32 The term communication deficit seems is related to my topic. However, I do not believe that poor communication is the main cause of problems. True, communicating on an EU level is complex and problematic.
Most researchers agree over the existence of at least some kind of ‘European illness’. However, confusion exists about the meaning of the key concepts and on how the symptoms, causes and possible remedies look like.\textsuperscript{33} This is not surprising, since the case of the European Union is unique and complex. Similarly, European governance can hardly be compared to any other form of governance. Nevertheless, in the literature on the European public sphere, an overall consensus is found on the importance of civic participation. Engaging citizens is considered valuable to the efficiency and legitimacy of European governance.\textsuperscript{34} It is promoted as a way of governing that reconnects politics and citizens.\textsuperscript{35} Tarta also stresses the importance of participation of EU citizens to strengthen the relation between EU institutions and EU citizens. In her study on the appearance of a European public sphere in relation to new media, she argues that a European public sphere has to fulfil several functions.

One of these functions is transparency, in the sense that it should give visibility and voice to all individuals and social groups, enabling individuals and social groups to express their opinions. Then, a functional EU public sphere would legitimate the political institutions and decisions that are being taken for the public good of the Union. It would also validate opinions expressed by different societal actors through debate. It would also have a responsive function, as policy makers can encounter here the opinions of the citizens, and a participatory function – a space that encourages all actors to engage in public debate.\textsuperscript{36} Tarta’s model is all about engaging citizens in the entire process of policy-making. Hence, keeping such a distributed and diverse European audience interested and involved in European politics, is very much a challenge for European institutions.

\textsuperscript{33} Meyer, “Political Legitimacy and the Invisibility of Politics,” 618-619.
\textsuperscript{34} Magnette, “European Governance and Civic Participation: Beyond Elitist Citizenship?,” 149-150.
\textsuperscript{36} Tarta, “Clash of the European Public Spheres,” 3.
2. Civic Participation and the Role of Public Communication

In the previous section, the problem of distance in the European Union was described. Especially in the case of the EU, where the gap between institutions and citizens is considered much larger than in nation states, the European institutions need to work hard to keep European citizens engaged. In this section, the term civic participation is explored and the importance of public communication to engage citizens is stressed.

2.1 Civic Participation

Although earlier scholars describe the concept with different words, civic participation does not have one clear signification. Barnes and Kaase approach it as a dynamic concept and classify different levels of participation on a spectrum. On one side, there is the category of active citizens. Those are the citizens that vote, are informed about politics and discuss matters of concern. Also, active citizens get involved in political parties, trade unions, NGO’s and other civic associations. On the other side, there is the category of citizens that never vote. They neither read newspapers nor care about politics and public issues.37 The division that Barnes and Kaase make is very black and white and most citizens cannot be categorized into one of the two levels. Nevertheless, their approach is very suitable in this thesis for the following reason. There is a large category of citizens that simply try to understand public issues and only participate through conventional electoral events. This group can be placed in between the two ultimate levels of participation. It is even larger in the case of the EU, where the distance between EU institutions and EU citizens is significantly vast. In order to enhance a general level of consciousness and participation of individual citizens, supporting civic participation should include this category of citizens.38

In Congruente Overheidscommunicatie (Congruent Government Communication), Edelenbos and Monnikhof introduce another model of civic participation. Although the model is based on the Dutch government, it can be transferred to the context of the European Union. The model is a suitable addition to the view of Barnes and Kaase, because it includes the communicative role of the ruling institution. Rather than merely focusing on the role of citizens, Edelenbos and Monnikhof approach civic participation from the perspective of the

37 Magnette, “European Governance and Civic Participation,” 149.
38 Ibid.
Dutch government. They differentiate five levels of participation, based on the function that political actors and the government employ: 1. informing, 2. consulting, 3. advising, 4. coproducing and 5. (co)deciding. The higher the level, the more influence citizens gain with reference to their ruling institution.  

1. **Informing**  
Political actors and the government keep citizens informed about the decision-making process, although they are not expected to deliver input.

2. **Consulting**  
Political actors and the government secure the direction of the decision-making process. Although it is not binding, input of citizens is taken into account. Citizens are approached as partners in dialogue.

3. **Advising**  
Political actors and the government give citizens the opportunity to come up with problems and to formulate solutions, although final decisions may diverge from their input.

4. **Coproducing**  
Political actors, the government and stake-holders come together to set the agenda and search for solutions, a process that is binding for final decision-making.

5. **(Co)Deciding**  
Political actors and the government leave the responsibility for legislation and decision-making with citizens and stake-holders. The government performs the role of advisor.

Over the last decades, the focus in the Netherlands has become more and more directed to interactive legislation-making and an increasing engagement of citizens. With regards to the European Union, where the distance between governmental institutions and citizens is large, involving citizens in the policy-making process is an even bigger challenge. Engaging individual EU citizens with policy-making in ways that are described in level 4 and 5 seems very unlikely or even impossible. Giving them an advising role to the institutions (level 3), taking into account the problems and solutions they propose, however, sounds like a more realistic objective. Such dialogues can take place in both offline as well as online contexts. Online platforms, such as EU social media accounts, act as tools for the distribution

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40 Ibid.
41 Ibid.
of information and exchange of opinions, and may therefore contribute to this objective. When involving citizens in the policy-making procedures, social media can help to improve the communication deficit and promote a European public sphere.

Edelenbos and Monnikhof list four important motives for governmental institutions to aim for a higher level of civic participation. First, it may lead to greater democratic legitimacy, because citizens gain direct influence when the government listens to them. In this regard, the focus should be on the process of participating instead of the outcome of participation. Second, civic participation can have a positive effect on social cohesion of different groups in society and facilitates their interaction. Third, participation can lead to more qualitative and effective plans that come forth out of the decision-making process. Finally, civic participation should be promoted in order to bridge the gap between governmental institutions and citizens. Although civic participation seems to have only positive effects, some notes of caution need to be taken into account. Consulting citizens in the policy-making process may delay the it, so that it will cost more money. Furthermore, there is the danger of participation paradox. There is talk of a participation paradox when the group of active participants do not reflect society. The more active, outspoken citizens emerge frequently in public debate, although they are not representative for all citizens concerned. Such participation paradoxes may appear in voting, public debate, NGO’s, or other activities in any level of civic participation. Also, in the world of social media, a specific group of rather radical citizens may dominate the online political dialogue.

2.2 The Role of Public Communication

It has become clear that the participation of citizens is not confined to elections. Furthermore, different models exist that aim to describe the meaning and importance of civic participation. Citizens can take part in policy-making through interest groups and associations, but also through the many channels for direct political action that have become extensively available. Public institutions need to make an effort in order to engage their citizens into the decision-making process. It is through the participation of different ideas and opinions, that public

42 For instance, in his research on online political dialogue, Sunstein illustrates the dominating image of radical people, finding other radicals online, who become even more extreme in their positions when they interact. See: Jennifer Stromer-Galley and Anna M. Martinson, “Coherence in Political Computer-Mediated Communication: Analyzing Topic Relevance and Drift in Chat,” Discourse and Communication 3, no. 2 (2009): 196.
43 Siepel, Regtvoort, Morssinkhof and de Ruiter, Overheidscommunicatie, 62.
organizations can reach a consensus on policy decisions and can best represent the interests of their citizens. Undoubtedly, communication plays a fundamental role in the promotion of civic participation. It is seen as an essential mechanism for supporting democratic legitimacy. Furthermore, open communication is vital to a healthy democracy, because democracy can only flourish if citizens know what is going on, and if they are able to participate fully. Undoubtedly, it plays a crucial role in promoting civic participation and can, therefore, also contribute to the connection of EU institutions and EU citizens.  

Communication in and of public organizations is often referred to as public communication. Other terms in literature that describe communication taking place between ruling institutions and citizens are public diplomacy and public affairs. The terms mostly refer to nations, not taking into account supranational institutions. The most suitable term for the topic of this thesis is public communication. In its definition, public communication is not restricted to sovereign states and their governments, neither to a specific public. As a result, the term very well reflects the overall communication process between a unique political formation, the EU, and its citizens. According to Mancini, public communication refers to “the combination of communication strategies and activities directed to specific publics, either internal or external to the organization, aimed at providing information, raising awareness and influencing their attitudes or even behaviour towards specific issues and policies”. In this regard, a public is a set of conscious and aware people who are affected by the consequences of decisions or objectives done by an organization in which they do not take part. Based on Mancini’s general definition of public communication, EU public communication is defined as: EU communication strategies and activities directed to specific publics, aimed at providing information, raising awareness and influencing attitudes/behaviour towards EU affairs and policies. In the next section, the purposes and types of public communication for the EU are explored.

46 Public diplomacy was recently defined as ‘the set of actions conducted by governments with the purpose of influencing foreign publics’. Public affairs may denote public policy, public administration, lobbying or public relations. It entails the engagement in public dialogue of policy-making elites and civil society and/or the general public. See: Asimina Michailidou, “The Role of the Internet in the European Union’s Public Communication Strategy and the Emerging European Public Sphere,” Loughborough University, United Kingdom, 2006, https://dspace.lib.ac.uk/2134/3055 (accessed 7 June 2013), 33-40
3. Public Communication in the EU

Public communication has a broad definition. In this section, a distinction is made between the types of public communication. The case study in this thesis deals with EU public communication about legislation, a specific type that covers the data analysed in the case study, starting in section 5. First, different purposes of public communication are explored, which illustrate why public communication is so important for the European Union. At the end of this section, the challenges that the EU faces while providing information to its publics are discussed.

3.1 The Importance of EU Public Communication

Various researchers have listed the purposes of public communication. According to Mancini, public communication needs to fulfil some important tasks to improve the legitimacy of an organization. First of all, it improves the knowledge of citizens that is needed for electoral participation. Secondly, it helps citizens to understand and participate in public discourses and decision-making by providing them with information about issues at stakes, policy options, process and procedures and actors involved. Thirdly, public communication promotes political actors’ responsiveness by informing them about citizens’ preferences. Lastly, public communication includes justification and explanation about chosen policies and their main implications, which gives citizens the opportunity to evaluate the performance of political actors. This may alter their vote in the next electoral turn, thus “granting or punishing” candidates for the achieved results. Michailidou links the purposes of public communication to the EU. She mentions the main goals of EU public communication as follows: increasing people’s familiarity with the EU, increasing people’s appreciation of what the EU does, and engaging people with the EU and in the debate of EU affairs. As mentioned before, citizens’ participation in the public dialogue regarding EU issues and in the decision-making process is considered one of the key factors in addressing the EU’s democratic deficit.

Many researchers stress the significance of public information and communication and public debate in legitimating the EU. Public communication is seen as an important

49 Chiara Valentini and Giorgia Nesti, Public Communication in the European Union, 6-7.
51 Meyer, “Political Legitimacy and the Invisibility of Politics,” 622.
factor in influencing the political legitimacy of European governance. Especially in times of crisis, it is of fundamental importance to build up strong support at the citizens’ level. Partly, this should be done through the public communication of daily affairs.\textsuperscript{52} In the case of the complex community of the EU, open communication and the provision of information also forms an integral part of community-building. According to Hybam, community builders need to keep an open line of communications with their stakeholders and citizens, providing optimistic messages about progress and results. The publication of events, policy making and results, as well as the way of self-description, the positioning of issues and participants play an important role in keeping all actors involved.\textsuperscript{53} Establishing the public dialogue, with the feedback of EU citizens incorporated in the decision-making process, is what Michailidou calls the first step forward for the EU institutions towards democratic legitimation. It is the role that public communication should fulfil.\textsuperscript{54} In 2006, the EU made communication a policy in its own right in order to bridge the gap between the European Union and its citizens. In \textit{A White Paper on a European Communication Policy}, the Commission describes the objective of creating a European public space in which citizens can obtain information and express their opinions.\textsuperscript{55} The report stresses that communication has become too much of a ‘Brussels affair’. It focuses largely on explaining what the EU does, while not enough attention is paid to listening to people’s views. Consultation mechanisms are limited to specific policy initiatives and citizens often have the impression that their possibilities to take part in debate are limited. The Commission concludes that public communication in the EU has clearly not been sufficient to close the gap between EU institutions and EU citizens. Therefore, it proposes a fundamentally new approach, moving towards dialogue instead of one-directional communication. Citizens need to be placed back in the centre of communication. European people have the right to fair and full information about the European Union. Besides, they have to be convinced that they can trust the EU that their views and concerns are heard.\textsuperscript{56}

The communication approach that the EU adapted in 2006 is based on some important principles. The most important principles at the basis of the provision of information are the right to information and freedom of expression. They lay at the heart of

\textsuperscript{52} Meyer, “Political Legitimacy and the Invisibility of Politics,” 618.
\textsuperscript{54} Asimina Michailidou, “Democracy and New Media in the European Union,” 347-348.
\textsuperscript{56} Ibid.
democracy in Europe. References to these principles are included in the EU Treaty and in the European Charter of Fundamental Rights. Other important principles that play a role concerning communication are inclusiveness, diversity and participation. With regards to inclusiveness, information should be made widely available and in many different languages, through a wide range of channels, including the mass media and new technologies such as the Internet. Minorities, disabled citizens and other groups that might systematically be excluded from participation, need to be involved in the public sphere. Concerning diversity, European citizens come from widely diverse social and cultural backgrounds and hold a wide variety of political views. EU communication policy must respect the full range of views in the public debate. The last principle that the Commission mentions is participation. Citizens should have a right to express their views, to be heard and have the opportunity for dialogue with the decision-makers. At EU level, where there is an added risk that institutions are remote from the citizens, this principle is of particular importance.  

Thus, the EU acknowledges the vital importance of open communication in order to involve citizens in the decision-making process. In Governance, A White Paper, the Commission also reinforces the significance of civic participation by stressing openness and participation as two of the five principles that underline good governance. Concerning openness, the Commission stresses that all EU institutions and member states should actively communicate about EU performances and decisions in order to improve the confidence in the complex system. In this regard, the use of accessible and understandable language for the general public is of crucial importance. Concerning participation, the Commission states that the quality, relevance and effectiveness of EU policies depend on ensuring wide participation of citizens in all stages of the process, from conception to implementation. Democracy depends on people being able to take part in public debate. In order to do so, they must have easy access to reliable information on European issues and be able to analyse the policy process in its various stages. The European institutions and member states need to communicate actively with the general public on European issues. Major progress was made in 2001 with the adoption of new rules giving citizens greater access to Community

58 The other three principles that underlie good governance which are not discussed in this paper are accountability, effectiveness and coherence. See: European Commission, “Governance. A White Paper,” 10.
59 Ibid.
In addition, the communication policy in 2006 changed the approach of the EU towards the use of public communication. Another important development has been the informational website Europa.eu. It offers an interactive platform for information, feedback and debate, linking parallel networks across the Union. The website consists of basic information on the political system, publishes press releases on the latest EU news and offers links to websites of European institutions and agencies.

3.2 Four Types of EU Public Communication

Although the overall importance of public communication is stressed, its influence should not be overrated. Without doubt, the most effective instrument that EU institutions can use to influence the attitude of citizens remains legislation. In order to influence the behaviour of citizens, EU institutions can choose between two main instruments: the application of rules and legislation or the deployment of communication campaigns. If sole deployment of communication campaigns is useless, the EU needs to implement and enforce law in order to force citizens to change their behaviour. If legislation is the best instrument to change the behaviour of EU citizens, public communication nevertheless plays an important role. New rules may lead to resistance and the higher this resistance, the harder the enforcement of the rules needs to be. To prevent or take away such resistance, citizens should be fully informed about new legislations. By means of effective public communication, they can be made aware of all circumstances and underlying reasons concerning the rule or law at stake. Siepel, Regtvoort, Morssinkhof and De Ruiter use a four-folded model to describe the different types of communication tied to legislation. The first type, communication about legislation, refers to legitimizing, reporting and explaining policies. The second type, communication for legislation, means interacting with society in order to build support for legislation. The third type is communication in legislation. It is communication that is integrated in legislation in order to improve the functionality and purpose of public communication itself. Finally,

63 Ibid, 21.
communication as legislation, concerns the deployment of communication. The four types are illustrated in the following graphic.

The first and second types are most relevant for this research. For the purpose of this research, however, there is no need for distinguishing them. Communication about legislation in this thesis includes one-directional communication to report and explain policies, as well as interaction with society in order to build support for legislation. In the case study on the European Commission’s social media use, the Commission’s Facebook messages about EU legislation form the data for analysis.

3.3 Complexity of EU public communication

Especially in the EU, public communication needs to cover different dimensions of communication: towards, with and by different publics. Due to institutions that operate on local, national and supranational levels, the European Union has a large number and wide variety of publics among which journalists, citizens, civil society organizations, companies, civil servants, Member States’ governments and more. Although effective public communication may help solving the democratic or legitimacy deficit, communicating with all these different publics about European legislation is a challenging task. Yet, which features make EU public communication so complicated?

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64 Siepel, Regtvoort, Morssinkhof and de Ruiter, Congruente Overheidscommunicatie, 40.
65 Chiara Valentini and Giorgia Nesti, Public Communication in the European Union, 6-7.
The challenging character of EU public communication is very well shown by Martins, Lecheler and de Vreese, who investigate the communicative deficit of the EU. Drawing on interviews with both EU officials and Brussel-based correspondents, they argue that various EU institutions have specific communicative patterns. The most striking contrast is drawn between the ‘dullness’ of the EC and the more ‘media-friendly’ communication of the Parliament. The Council ‘as a whole’ is considered invisible in communication terms.\textsuperscript{66} In previous research on how the EU institutional structure influences EU Communication, Martins, Lecheler and de Vreese find some common ground. Based on consensus in the literature, they list three main challenges that the European Union faces. Although the researchers do not specify the communication channels that the EU utilizes for public communication, they indicate very well why publicly communicating about EU legislation and affairs is so complicated. The challenges apply for all attempts of the EU to involve citizens in policy-making and should therefore be taken into account while analysing EU public communication on social media.

1. \textit{Complex information}: One of the most widely recognized challenges to EU public communication lies in the overcomplicated nature and ‘dullness’ of EU politics, often translated into highly technical information in press materials.

2. \textit{Voluminous information}: Aside from the complexity of information, another major obstacle is the heavy flow of information from EU institutions. Rather than generating greater EU visibility or presence of the institutions in the news, this trend may decrease the newsworthiness of European daily politics instead.

3. \textit{Scattered information}: Another communication obstacle lies in the EU threefold institutional model. The main institutions of the EU are the Council of the EU (decision-making body which represents the member-states), the European Commission (collegial institution with right of initiative aimed at defending general EU interests), and the European Parliament (assembly of representatives elected by EU citizens). This structure has been problematic for provoking internal competition and a struggle for media attention. Wider coordination between services and institutions is considered to be crucial to improve public communication, as is recognized in EU official documents and various researches.\textsuperscript{67}

\textsuperscript{66} Martins, Lecheler and De Vreese, “Information Flow and Communication Deficit,” 316.
\textsuperscript{67} Ibid, 307-308.
4. Facing the Opportunity: Social Media in the Public Sector

In the previous section, it has become clear that communicating with different publics in the EU is complicated. Yet, the provision of information about politics by European institutions is of crucial importance. The EU makes use of a wide variety of media for public communication. Such media require different approaches and working procedures. As mentioned before, the aim of this study is to explore how the European Commission uses social media in order to communicate about EU legislation. Therefore, this section deals with the development of social media networks, their characteristics and the way they are and can be utilized in the public sector. In addition to the provision of information through more traditional ways, online media offer a new opportunity to actively involve citizens. Before this opportunity is discussed, the traditional role of the media for public institutions is explored.

4.1 The Role of Mass Media

It is undeniable that media can play a role in connecting governmental organizations to civic society.68 The traditional way of reaching citizens is through the mass media, e.g. radio, television, newspapers and magazines. Mass media concerns the distribution of information from a public relations source to large numbers of people. To understand how the media can be used to inform people and shape public opinion, Wilcox and Cameron describe four main theories about mass media effects in their book about public relations. Below, these theories are briefly discussed.69

1. Agenda-Setting Theory

According to the Agenda-Setting Theory, media contents set the agenda for public discussion through the selection of stories and headlines. They tell the public where to think about, but not necessarily what to think. Nevertheless, by setting the agenda, public opinion can be influenced.70

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70 Wilcox and Cameron, Public Relations, 219-221.
2. **Media-Dependency Theory**

Mass media can also have a more powerful effect on the formation of opinions and attitudes. This happens when they are more dependent on public relations sources. Then, public relations can shape the tone and content of stories. Especially when people do not have much information or attitude disposition regarding a political issue, mass media can play a role in telling them what to think. 71

3. **Framing Theory**

Traditionally, framing refers to the selection of facts, themes, treatments and words to ‘frame’ a story. Such framing impacts public understanding and therefore, as a consequence, also the development of policies. According to the framing theory, the framing of political issues by governmental institutions influences the way that the mass media communicates those issues to the public.

4. **Conflict Theory**

According to the Conflict Theory, mass media play a key role in the coverage of political conflict. On the one hand, the media have a tendency to present news as conflictual, since conflict is regarded as more newsworthy. On the other hand, reporting such conflict in the public space is seen as a constructive process that eventually builds towards consensus. In this way, the media prevent conflicts from escalating. According to the Conflict Theory, public relations need to be aware of this tendency of the media and take it into account when they work with them. 72

A fifth theory, that in fact does not receive a special paragraph in the book of Wilcox and Cameron, is the Hypodermic-needle Theory. It was developed in the 1930s, before much was known about the complex process of communication. According to this theory, people receive information directly, without any intervening variables. 73 Related to the hypodermic-needle theory are the term spin and spin doctors. In the 1980s, the meaning of spin was restricted to the unethical and misleading activities and tactics of the actors (spin-doctors) behind political campaigns. Since the mid-1990s, the term is more widely used to describe

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71 Wilcox and Cameron, *Public Relations*, 219-221.
72 Ibid, 223.
73 Ibid, 239.
any effort that is meant to put a positive angle on a specific issue.\textsuperscript{74} The needle theory and ideas about spin are interesting, because they show how the media is approached differently these days.

The five theories show how the influence of the media has changed in the last century. Moreover, media can be used as instruments for merely reporting what happens, up to the point of shaping opinion and attitudes. Overall, communication experts realize, more than in the 80s and 90s, that no message is received in a vacuum and that many factors (e.g. context, social structure, belief system) play a role in the processing of political messages. Furthermore, people receive countless competing and conflicting messages daily, especially on social media, which serves as proof for the idea that not all information is accepted so easily.\textsuperscript{75} Aside from that, these theories focus mainly on traditional media and one-directional communication aimed to influence citizens. Social media can change the character of public communication, making it more two-directional with a larger role for the receiver. This will become clear in the next section.

\section*{4.2 Social Media Networks}
Before social media are discussed in relation to public communication, the term \textit{social media} needs to be explained. Literally, social media combines two familiar words. \textit{Social} includes the ability of people to interact and influence each other, while \textit{media} contains channels such as newspapers, television and the Internet. According to Safko and Brake, social media refer to: “Activities, practices, and behaviours among people who gather online and share information, knowledge, and opinions using conversational media. Conversational media are Web-based applications that make it possible to create and easily transmit content in the form of words, pictures, videos and audios.”\textsuperscript{76} This definition shows how social media represent a collective and far-reaching concept that is all about socializing, facilitating conversations and engagement.\textsuperscript{77} The mainstream genre of social media is dominated by social networking websites. These social networking websites are also the networks that the EU mainly uses in order to communicate with EU citizens. Yet, other types of social media exist. These include

\begin{footnotes}
\item[75] Ibid, 239.
\item[76] Lon Safko, and David K. Brake, \textit{The Social Media Bible. Tactics, Tools and Strategies for Business Success} (Hoboken, New Jersey: John Wiley & Sons, 2009), 6.
\item[77] Ibid, 4-7.
\end{footnotes}
virtual worlds, but also online networks that represent offline organisations like sport clubs or university associations.⁷⁸

Since 1995, several social networking websites have introduced personal profile pages and friend connections, which has made the biggest players like Facebook reach millions of active members around the world. Social networking today is referred to as the fourth revolution that has fundamentally changed the communication landscape. It is constructed by social networking websites⁷⁹, such as Facebook, Twitter, MySpace and LinkedIn. Instead of the connection of webpages at the time of the rise of the Internet, social networking websites today represent the connection of people. Infiltrating social networks connect people in different contexts and provide platforms for associating, organizing and filtering. The fourth revolution moved the focus away from technology and towards people. Moreover, it blurs the lines between real and virtual life. For example, organizations like university associations have created online networks and many friendships and relations have emerged in an online context. More and more relationships are crossing from real life to social networking sites and vice versa.⁸⁰

The development of social media influences public communication in many ways. Tredinnick defines social networking sites as sites driven by user-participation and user-generated content. Social media provide many ways for users to become involved with organizations. Approaching it from the perspective of the organization at stake, Facebook and other social media applications offer the potential of interaction with key publics. Organizations start to listen to and learn from its audiences. The European Union, for example, uses social media tools to analyse political discussions on its Facebook page. If the findings about the opinions of citizens are interesting, they are reported to policy makers and may influence the policy making process.⁸¹ Due to their characteristics, social media can be used by organizations to develop strong relationships with stakeholders. Kent and Taylor

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⁷⁸ Safko and K. Brake. The Social Media Bible, 6.
⁸⁰ Shih, The Facebook Era, 11-20.
⁸¹ Social Media Officer in DG COMM, E-mail to Author, 24 June 2013, Brussels.
stress online relationship development and advocate strategic virtual communication strategies to cultivate those relationships.\(^2\)

### 4.3 Social Media and Public Communication

The Internet has dramatically changed the landscape of political communication.\(^3\) According to Wilcox and Cameron, the most striking changes have to do with the reach, lack of control and issue tracking. Although these changes are not formulated for social media specifically, they very well apply to them. First of all, the reach of social media is not restricted to borders, but is worldwide. A message intended for a small audience may reach millions of people. Secondly, the communication landscape has changed because traditional media gatekeepers have lost their power. The content of the Internet is, to a great extent, uncontrolled. Finally, social media have provided professional public relations with the opportunity to thoroughly monitor where people talk about. With a wide variety of tools, they can monitor the content of the internet and keep track of discussions on the issues at stake.\(^4\)

Wilcox and Cameron explain the most important changes for public institutions, but do not include how social media have changed the access to political information for citizens. Likewise, social media have expanded citizens’ access to information and the opportunity to voice their own opinions.\(^5\) Following recent crises in the government sectors, the public has called for increased openness and transparency from public organizations. Interactivity plays an important role in the development of relationships with stakeholders in an online context. It is an essential element of social media activity if organizations want to develop relationships with their stakeholders.\(^6\) Social media have characteristics that offer interesting elements for public administrations. Governmental institutions need to place citizens in a central position in order to set agendas and to inform them about public decisions at different levels of policy-making. Therefore, social media can offer powerful tools to enhance public

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\(^3\) Yushu Zhou and Bruce E. Pinkleton, “Modeling the Effects of Political Information Source Use and Online Expression on Young Adults’ Political Efficacy,” *Mass Communication and Society* 15, no. 6 (2012): 814.

\(^4\) Wilcox and Cameron, *Public Relations*, 344.


participation, and to facilitate the establishment of relationships based on dialogue and interactions.\textsuperscript{87}

Facebook in particular, has immense potential for dialogic communication, as is argued by Sweetser and Lariscy in their research on candidates’ use of Facebook in election times.\textsuperscript{88} On Facebook, users can engage with each other as well as with the organization at stake on topics of mutual interest. Yet, not all research is positive about the use of social media to involve citizens with policy-making. Davis, for instance, is very critical on the quality of online political dialogue. “Online discussions more closely resemble the \textit{Jerry Springer Show} rather than National Public Radio or CNN. In political discussions, people often talk past one another when they are not verbally attacking each other.”\textsuperscript{89} In line with Davis, Sunstein illustrates the dominating image of radical people, finding other radicals online, who become even more extreme in their positions when they interact.\textsuperscript{90} Davis, Hill and Hughes, who analyse discourse on the online discussion network Usenet, suggest that political talk is often dominated by a vocal minority who is likely to be anti-government.\textsuperscript{91} More optimistic about online political dialogue are Kushin and Kitchener. Based on an in-depth discourse analysis of a political discussion on Facebook, they demonstrate how high quality political debate takes place between persons with different viewpoints.\textsuperscript{92} Although the dialogic potential of social media is recognized by various researchers, Sevick Bortree and Seltzer suggest that many organizations are not adequately utilizing their characteristics to generate dialogic communication. They find gaps between organizational relationship-building goals, implementation of online strategy, and actual dialogic engagement.\textsuperscript{93}

Undoubtedly, information and communication technologies have changed both the way the media is used as well as the way in which citizens are engaged at the policy-making level. Various new channels have been implemented to establish a more open way of

\textsuperscript{90} Stromer-Galley and Martinson, “Coherence in Political Computer-Mediated Communication,” 196.
\textsuperscript{91} Ibid, 196-197.
\textsuperscript{93} Sevick Bortree and Seltzer, “Dialogic Strategies and Outcomes,” 317.
communication with EU citizens.\textsuperscript{94} Deuze argues that social media have transformed the common cultural public sphere into a more \textit{networked}, highly heterogeneous and participatory cultural public sphere.\textsuperscript{95} As new technologies are becoming more and more integrated into citizens’ lives, the importance of online interaction is similarly increasing for governmental institutions. Researchers in the United States have studied governments’ experience in social media. They posit a growing connection between governments’ online presence and citizen engagement. To utilize this opportunity, they stress that governmental institutions should keep up with online and social media trend.\textsuperscript{96} A concept in the literature that deals with recent developments in this area is \textit{Government 2.0}. It is the hyped term for the use of social media in government and by its diverse stakeholders. It is a way of governance that transforms the way of interacting with citizens in a participatory, transparent and collaborative way.\textsuperscript{97}

In the past few years, professional use of social media in the public sector has become a hot topic. Moreover, social media networks have become valuable tools for public communication and debate, also for European institutions. Agencies and departments on all levels of government are adding social media networks like Facebook, Twitter and YouTube to their online communication channels.\textsuperscript{98} Martins, Lecheler and de Vreese, who studied the communication deficit of the European Union, argue that such non-official information channels are a key asset for communicating in Brussels.\textsuperscript{99} Clearly, social media cannot replace the existing traditional channels of communication with the EU’s stakeholders. Consequently, they cannot be approached as isolated channels on which EU public communication takes place. Yet, they do provide the EU with new tools for interaction with citizens.\textsuperscript{100} Social media have characteristics that offer interesting elements for public administrations. Governmental institutions need to place citizens in a central position in order to set agendas and to inform them about public decisions at different levels of policy-making. To summarize, social media are seen as convenient tools for the EU, in addition to other

\textsuperscript{94} Fodel and York, “Civic engagement in U.S. Federal Agencies,” 11-12.
\textsuperscript{96} Fodel and York, “Civic engagement in U.S. Federal Agencies,” 11-12.
\textsuperscript{97} Mergel, “Gov 2.0 Revisited,” 10.
\textsuperscript{98} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{99} Martins, Lecheler and De vreese, “Information Flow and Communication Deficit,” 316.
\textsuperscript{100} Mergel, “Gov 2.0 Revisited,” 10.
(traditional) media, which can be used to enhance public participation, and to facilitate the establishment of relationships based on dialogue and interactions.101

Tarta, who studies the appearance of a European public sphere in relation to new media, presents four main functions for the media. First, the media represent a platform for debate for both political actors and citizens. Secondly, the media perform as the main information source for citizens in European matters. Thirdly, the media are used to get a hold of public opinion and fourth, they promote feedback. This last function is also defined as output of the debate, which includes distributing and reflecting on ideas and opinions.102 The functions that Tarta mentions can very well apply for the role that social media play in the European Union. Her theory is a somewhat cautious, because it does not include the role of the media in persuading or even manipulating the public. True, social media are more interactive and know a larger role for the user compared to more traditional media. As a result, it is unlikely that real spin take place. Yet, as was shown by the theories about the effects of the mass media, the media can influence public opinion in many other ways. For example, the selection of stories and headlines, which results into agenda setting, already influences the attitudes and opinions of citizens.103 Although social media differ from traditional media, they may still be consciously applied for persuasive purposes. This is something that will become clear in the case study of this thesis in section 5.

The EU acknowledges the importance of its social media activity. A webpage on Europa.eu, “Use of Social Media in EU Communication,” explains how the Union utilises online platforms to reach out and connect to its citizens and stakeholders. Social media are defined as “online technologies and practices that are used to share opinions and information, promote discussion, and build relationships.” They are considered of great value for the interaction and engagement of interested groups on EU-related themes and activities. More and more EU citizens are active on these social networks that use a variety of formats, including text, pictures, audio and video.104 Another webpage on Europa.eu, “Connect with EU on Social Networks”, provides a list with links to the web pages of several EU offices, agencies and institutions on social media networks. Various European institutions and delegations of member states are active in the field of social media and many policies and

103 Wilcox and Cameron, Public Relations, 219-221.
104 European Commission, “Use of Social Media in EU Communication.”
projects are presented on social media networks like Facebook, Twitter, Flickr and Youtube.\textsuperscript{105}

This literature review functions as a basis for the case study that will be introduced in the next section. The potential value of social media for connecting large governmental or supranational institutions with the citizens they affect has been critically considered. In this part of the thesis, the specific case of the European Commission is analysed.

PART II Case Study

5. The Case: European Commission on Social Media

As was discussed in the literature review, the institutional settlement that governs the European Union is complex. This complexity in institutions influences the way the European Union communicates on different types of media. From now on, the focus is on the case study: social media deployment of the European Commission in particular. In this section, the choice for the European Commission is reasoned and its role in EU policy-making is explained. Then, the research methods are described. The aim of this section is to outline compatible and general information about the social media deployment of the Commission, taking into account its working procedures and strategies. In section 6, the focus is on Facebook in particular and in section 7, the data is analysed and results are highlighted.

5.1 EU Legislation and the Role of the European Commission

Three main institutions are involved in EU legislation: the European Commission, the European Parliament and the Council of the European Union and the European Commission. First of all, the European Commission consists of twenty-seven Commissioners, one from each member state. The Commission is the central institution for proposing legislation and taking care of member states compliance with that legislation. It has been given significant law-making procedures and is responsible for many of the executive tasks of the European Union. Secondly, the European Parliament represents EU citizens and is directly elected by them. The Parliament has the right to propose amendments and can, depending on the legislative procedure, veto proposals. In short, concerning legislation the Parliament has the role of debating and passing European laws, together with the Council of the European Union. The latter, also named the Council of Ministers, represents the

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108 European Union, Europa.eu, “EU Institutions and Other Bodies.”
109 Chalmers, Davies and Monti, European Union Law, 86.
governments of member states.\textsuperscript{111} It is composed of ministers from member states and its presidency rotates between the member states every six months.\textsuperscript{112} The Council of the European Union has the final power of decision over almost all EU law. This decision-making process on EU legislation happens by means of voting procedures, such as simple majority vote, voting by unanimity and the most common one: QMV voting. QMV voting is a weighted system of voting, under which member states are allocated a number of votes based on their population.\textsuperscript{113}

To summarize the process, the three EU institutions mentioned above are jointly responsible for policies and laws that apply throughout the EU. Although legislative procedures differ, in principle it works as follows: after the Commission has proposed new laws, the Parliament and Council have to adopt them. Then, when the new laws are adopted, the Commission has to ensure that they are properly applied and implemented by member states.\textsuperscript{114} Thus, concerning EU legislation, the European Commission has a vital role to play in different phases of the legislative process, which is why this institution is chosen for the case study in this thesis. It is important to note that although the Commission has responsibility for proposing initiatives in the policy process, it involves many other parties while doing so. Moreover, only few proposals are put forward by the Commission using its own initiative. Instead, the Commission acts as a gatekeeper, taking into account the suggestions of national governments, industries and NGOs.\textsuperscript{115} Furthermore, both the Council of Ministers as well as the European Parliament can request the Commission to submit proposals or to undertake studies.\textsuperscript{116} Concerning policy-making, the Commission has to cooperate and communicate with many actors in different phases of the process, which makes it an interesting institution to investigate. The next section deals with the working procedures.

The information is obtained in an interview with a social media officer of the DG COMM, on 18 February 2013 in Brussels.

\begin{flushleft}
\textsuperscript{111} European Union, Europa.eu, “EU Institutions and Other Bodies.”
\textsuperscript{112} Chalmers, Davies and Monti, \textit{European Union Law}, 52-53.
\textsuperscript{113} Ibid, 69-70.
\textsuperscript{114} European Union, Europa.eu, “EU Institutions and Other Bodies.”
\textsuperscript{115} Chalmers, Davies and Monti, \textit{European Union Law}, 61
\textsuperscript{116} Ibid, 68.
\end{flushleft}
5.2 Methodology

The research methods in this thesis can be classified under the heading of an explanatory case study. The single case at stake in this thesis is the Commission’s communication performance on social media. A case study research provides useful techniques to investigate organizational communication.\(^{117}\) Within the case study approach, the explanatory case study is a particular study in which certain behaviours are explained. Investigating a particular case in depth provides the opportunity to find out why a phenomenon is as it is. The knowledge that is gained provides an overview of all that is become known about the object. Furthermore, an explanatory case study can help to see something in its context, in order to find out which underlying factors play a role in the process.\(^{118}\) Typical for such a research is the aim to answer the general question: “What is going on here?” The research question formulated reflects this general purpose: In what way does the European Commission utilize social media networks in order to communicate with its online publics about EU legislation?\(^{119}\)

To answer this research question, different methods are undertaken, among which a personal interview, e-mail conversation, an online questionnaire and several conversation and discourse analysis techniques. For the description of the Commission’s social media working procedure, strategy and target groups, an Officer of the social media team of the Commission is interviewed. In addition to the interviews, official documentation of the Commission is consulted. The same applies for the description of specific goals that the Commission aims to achieve with communicating about EU legislation. Based on the goals of the Commission, the analysis in section 7 is divided into three parts: Areas and Phases, Persuasiveness of Messages and Political Dialogue. Each part has subsections that discuss the most relevant literature on the elements analysed and describe the model used to analyse the data. Also, at the end of each subsection, the results are given. Two different social media analysis tools were used to acquire specific information, namely Quintly.com and Truesocialmetrics.com. Every time these tools were applied, it is explicitly mentioned.\(^{120}\)


\(^{120}\) I checked many tools and consider Quintly and Truesocialmetrics most interesting for my research. Fortunately, both tools have provided me with a free advanced account in order to do research. For more
Overall, the role taken by the author to study this matter is perceived as participant-as-observer. Although the social media deployment of the European Commission is mostly described from an external perspective, support from inside the Commission is needed to acquire a complete picture. The interviewed Officer of the Commission’s social media team is aware of the fact that its performance on social media is analysed by the researcher. The author was given the opportunity to visit Brussels, and personally observe where and how the social media team works. Likewise, respondents of the questionnaire that was sent to users of the Commission’s Facebook page knew for what purpose they were asked their opinion. With regards to the discourse analysis of the data, the author adopts the role of complete observer. Until the data was downloaded, the participants of the study were unaware of the fact that their posts and comments were observed. In the conclusions, the criteria of trustworthiness are applied to the research.

5.3 Social Media Working Procedures
A key role in strategic planning and centralizing EU information is assigned to the Directorate General for Communication (DG Comm). The DG Comm is responsible for informing and communicating with the public at large about European policies. The DG Comm has three main goals:
1. To make EU citizens more aware of EU policies by explaining policies through media, other opinion leaders and the EU Representations.
2. To inform the Commission on trends in public opinion and in the media landscape and on political developments.
3. To develop for European citizens a sense of ownership of European integration and identity and to support their EU-wide civic participation.

The DG Comm is divided into different Units, among which the Unit ‘Europa site’. Under the heading of the DG Comm and Unit ‘Europa site’, operates the social media team of the European Commission. It has four members and is based in the official building of the DG

information see: Quintly, Professional Social Media Analytics for Facebook and Twitter, (http://www.quintly.com/) and TrueSocialMetrics, Inc., Social Media Analysis (http://www.socialmetrics.com).
121 Baxter and Babbie, The Basics of Communication Research, 308-309.
Comm in Brussels. The team is responsible for all social media activity on the Commission’s platforms.\textsuperscript{124}

On its website, the Commission distinguishes three purposes of social media. First, Communication on Political Priorities, is done on behalf of the Commission by a network of staff members, called the Social Media Network (SMN).\textsuperscript{125} Most Dictorate-Generals have one representative to the Social Media Network.\textsuperscript{126} The SMN coordinates on weekly editorial planning based on official announcements, press releases and statements scheduled by the Spokespersons' Service for the week ahead. The second purpose, Stakeholder and Campaign Communication, is conducted by the Dictorates-General (DG’s), in close cooperation with the SMN and the DG Comm. The practices vary from informing citizens, sharing experiences, promoting policies or campaigns and engaging with stakeholders. The third and last purpose refers to the use of social media by EU staff. In personal purposes staff members have to take into account specific codes and guidelines. For example, in case their profiles show that they work for the EU, they have to mention explicitly that their personal opinion and comments do not represent the official position of the Commission.\textsuperscript{127}

In practice, the Commission is active on Twitter, Facebook, Youtube and Google+ and currently experimenting with Storify, Pinterest and a live blogging tool called Scribbelive. The team also manages a digital communication blog, called Waltzing Matilda.\textsuperscript{128} Communicating with citizens on those different social media accounts is seen as a mix. With regards to these accounts, the social media team is dedicated to three main tasks:
1. Messaging and community management on the corporate social media platforms of the Commission
2. Monitoring and reporting
3. Training and advise\textsuperscript{129}

\textit{1. Messaging and Community Management}

Messaging and Community Management concerns corporate issues. It is essentially taking care of what is posted on social media accounts of the commission and what replies are given

\textsuperscript{124} Social Media Officer in DG COMM, Interview by Author, 18 February 2013, Brussels.
\textsuperscript{125} European Commission, “Use of Social Media in EU Communication.”
\textsuperscript{126} Social Media Officer in DG COMM, Interview by Author, 18 February 2013, Brussels.
\textsuperscript{127} European Commission, “Use of Social Media in EU Communication.”
\textsuperscript{129} Social Media Officer in DG COMM, Interview by Author, 18 February 2013, Brussels.
to fans. During weekly editorial meetings, the members of the team discuss the posts that are about to be distributed on the channel. Every Monday, the team members come together to decide on the social media agenda. Also attending are one representative of the web team as well as the head of the unit ‘Europa Site’. Every Friday, in advance of these meetings, the Spokespersons Service (SPP) sends a planning of events. The cooperation with the SPP is important, because the SPP consists of spokespersons, press contacts for Commissioners. The information coming from the SPP is translated into social media language, thinking about the interest of the audience. At the editorial meetings, the team determines the possible calendar. Which events are taking place this week? What will we post? How can we be active? During the editorial meetings, one person prepares and presents the planning. Once determined, the newsworthy events are shared with social media networks, who possibly further distribute them.¹³⁰ At the weekly meetings, the team also holds consultations about the format and illustrations that will be posted in addition to the messages. One of the team members has graphic design skills. He develops most visuals that are implemented in social media. For example, he established an info graphic to celebrate the number of 100,000 followers on Twitter.¹³¹

An important task concerning messaging and community management is maintaining the moderation policy. Critical comments about the European Union are accepted. However, comments that are discriminating (e.g. homophobic) are not. If comments are provoking or very off-topic, the social media team discusses the issue and if necessary, deletes the comment. Below an example of a comment that was recently deleted:

![Comment Example](image)

When a comment which is not spam is deleted, the team always posts an explanation of the removal:¹³²

European Commission: “We deleted an offensive comment. Our moderation policy is available @ https://www.facebook.com/EuropeanCommission/info”¹³³

¹³⁰ Social Media Officer in DG COMM, Interview by Author, 18 February 2013, Brussels.
¹³² Social Media Officer in DG COMM, E-mail to Author, 24 June 2013, Brussels.
¹³³ Social Media Officer in DG COMM, Interview by Author, 18 February 2013, Brussels.
2. Monitoring and Reporting

The monitoring and reporting tasks of the social media team have to do with listening rather than posting and interacting. It concerns the evaluation and reporting of events that are organized. Besides, the social media team uses tools to monitor social media conversations, both in assignments as well as in their own initiatives. An example of such a tool is Engagor, a platform for monitoring social media. The team makes reports of its observations in order to inform people higher in hierarchy who are concerned with the motion on social media. This way of reporting provides policy makers with expectations about the potential effects of their plans on their audience or stakeholders. Reporting the opinions and ideas of citizens on social media to policy-makers can have influence on the process.  

This can be shown with the recent developments around CETA (Canada Europe Trade Agreement). While the trading plans were being developed by the Trade Department of the European Commission, people were talking very negatively about the agreement on social media. Some believed that through CETA, ACTA (Anti-Counterfeiting Trade Agreement) would be brought into the backdoor as well. The social media team had to provide clarity on the issue by explaining that CETA and ACTA were not the same.

3. Training and advise (Social Media SOS)

One of the most important tasks of the social media team is the provision of information and guidelines concerning social media to the Unit Europa and other departments of the European Commission. Furthermore, the team answers questions by email or telephone from social media operators in various DGs. This part of the tasks of the social media team is also called the Social Media SOS. The social media team organises regular trainings and meetings for the Social Media Network, which consists of representatives of DG’s. Trainings deal with the use

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135 Social Media Officer in DG COMM, Interview by Author, 18 February 2013, Brussels.
136 ACTA, the Anti-Counterfeiting Trade Agreement is an agreement that targets the Internet and its users and that aims to create new global intellectual property (IP) enforcement standards. The agreement was criticized because it raised concerns for consumers’ privacy. Aside from that, it posed threats to digital innovation and the free flow of information on the Internet. In 2012, the agreement was rejected in Europe by a 92% majority of the European Parliament. For more information see: Rossini, Carolina, Maira Sutton and Gwen Hinze, “Anti-Counterfeiting Trade Agreement,” Electronic Frontier Foundation, Defending Your Rights in the Digital World, 2012, https://www.eff.org/issues/acta (accessed 17 May 2013).
137 Social Media Officer in DG COMM, Interview by Author.
of tools, messaging, creating and posting. Questions that come up are for example: who are the relevant stakeholders in our audience?\textsuperscript{138}

In addition to the cooperation with the Social Media Network, the European Commission works together with Representations of the Commission in different member states. These Representations are local offices of the European Commission, which form part of the DG Communication. Their aim is to localise messages and to communicate about priorities of local audiences. This process is both top down as well as bottom up. The Representations translate messages into the language and culture of the country where they are based. They are very important actors in the commission, for their closer link to EU citizens. The social media team coordinates the line that such Representations take on social media. Yet, the Representations are not only important concerning social media, but are an important link between the EU and EU citizens. An example is the Citizens Dialogue, a meeting with commissioners on the ground.\textsuperscript{139}

5.4 Social Media Strategy

For professional and governmental organizations it is important to determine the strategy of social media use, both before and while making use of social media applications. The social media strategy describes how and why an organization communicates in a particular online context. Defining and redefining this strategy facilitates coherent messaging and better results.\textsuperscript{140} Although for many agencies and organizations it has become mainstream practice to use social media applications in order to reach out to audiences, they all differ in strategy and targets.\textsuperscript{141} The perfect social media strategy does not exist. Besides, it needs to be open for change since online applications are dynamic and constantly developing. Furthermore, a social media strategy forms part of the overall communication strategy of the organization, which in turn is integrated in the organization strategy.\textsuperscript{142} Social media use should support the organization’s mission and overall communication strategy.\textsuperscript{143} To determine the social media strategies, you have to start by asking: who are the relevant stakeholders in our audience?

\textsuperscript{138} Social Media Officer in DG COMM, Interview by Author.

\textsuperscript{139} Ibid.


\textsuperscript{141} Ines Mergel, “Gov 2.0 Revisited,” 10.

\textsuperscript{142} Ketterij, “In 13 Stappen een Social Media Strategie.”

strategy of the European Commission, the division of Ines Mergel is utilized. Ines Mergel, assistant professor at Syracuse University, United States, has dedicated herself to the research field of social media applications in the public sector. She has interviewed new media directors in several federal agencies and departments in the United States to define different social media strategies. To almost all organizations applies that they aim to promote transparency, participation and collaboration. Based on her interviews, Mergel differentiates three types of social media use. Although every agency or organization deals with different goals and target groups, this division is helpful in determining the social media strategy of a particular organization.144

1. Push-strategy
In this strategy, the new medium is used as an extension of the existing Internet presence. It is a new tool to distribute existing messages like press releases or appearances of secretaries. For example, this strategy can result in un-moderated Twitter updates or Facebook accounts that are blocked for public comments.

2. Pull-strategy
In the pull strategy, social media applications are used to bring audiences back to an organization’s official website, where the news is aggregated. Yet, the organization aims to actively involve the audience on social media accounts. As a result, some degree of interaction takes place, such as commenting, re-tweeting, answering etc.

3. Networking strategy
In this strategy, the use of social media applications is highly interactive with a lot of back and forward between the organization and its public. The organization knows who they reach and who they want to reach. On the one hand, the organization controls the task of direct messaging to their audiences. On the other hand, it keeps its ears and eyes open on when relevant issues are being discussed. An organization that has such a strategy, uses social media tools to gain and share knowledge in order to optimize its efforts on social media accounts.

144 Mergel, “Gov 2.0 Revisited,” 10.
To achieve the best results on social media, Mergel points to the direction of the networking strategy as the most successful way to involve citizens.\textsuperscript{145} Based on the Commissions’ social media purposes and working procedures described in the previous section, the strategy of the Commission can be described as a networking strategy. On all accounts, the social media team frequently posts messages about European legislation and affairs and motivates citizens to respond. The team works with specific strategies for different social media accounts. For example on Facebook, the two most important goals are firstly, translating information about EU policies, events and affairs into social media friendly, easy-to-understand messages for citizens and secondly, to engage the audience. The social media team is aware of the interests of the target groups and adapts the content to each target group.\textsuperscript{146} Thus, instead of simply broadcasting messages to citizens, the Commission tries to understand the needs and questions that people have, what they really want to talk about, and responds to that.\textsuperscript{147} Furthermore, the team involves people in many ways, making use of the interactive aspects of social media. For instance, many Commissioners, Spokespersons, DGs and policy experts have participated in Twitter chats. Such chats have worked out well and have proved to be an effective way to engage directly with different audiences, journalists, bloggers, stakeholders, NGOs and citizens. According to the Commission’s social media team, such chats work as an excellent way to bridge the gap between the Commission and citizens, offering direct responses to concerns and making politics more personal by showing the people behind the institution.\textsuperscript{148}

Now that the social media strategy of the Commission is described, it is interesting to investigate whether this strategy becomes visible in the actual activity that the organization undertakes on social media. Are there any discrepancies between the chosen strategy and the actual activity online?

\textsuperscript{145} This does, however, not automatically mean that another strategy is less successful. Organizations deal with different targets and target groups and may therefore prioritize the use of various communication channels in a different way. Besides, not all organizations are privileged with social media specialists. An organization that deals with a lack of knowledge and manpower, may be best of defining a push- or pull-strategy to extend the existing presence on the internet to avoid spending too much time. Irrespective of the chosen strategy, thinking about the opportunities and challenges of a specific medium may already help an organization to reach better results. See: Mergel, “Gov 2.0 Revisited,” 10.

\textsuperscript{146} Social Media Officer in DG COMM, E-mail to Author, 24 June 2013, Brussels.


\textsuperscript{148} Social Media Officer in DG COMM, E-mail to Author, 24 June 2013, Brussels.
6. The European Commission on Facebook

In the previous section, some compatible information about the social media deployment of the Commission was given. The role of the European Commission in EU legislation-making was described and an overview of the social media working procedures and strategy was presented. This section deals with Facebook, which is the social media account of focus in this case study. First, the choice for Facebook is explained and the target groups of the Commission on Facebook are described. Since the communication about EU legislation is central for this case study, specific messages that deal with EU legislation need to be selected. This sample of data is explained in 6.3. Finally, in 6.4, the goals of the European Commission with regards to the distribution of such messages are put together. Those communicative goals form the structure for the analysis in the next section.

6.1 Choice for Facebook

As was described in the previous section, the Commission is active on Twitter, Facebook, Youtube and Google+ and experimenting with Storify, Pinterest and a live blogging tool called Scribble Live. This section explains the choice for Facebook as the main social media network analysed. The social media team of the Commission approaches communicating with citizens on different social media accounts as a mix and considers these accounts as very interconnected. For example, on the 6th of June, a press release was published about new measures against illicit Tobacco trade. The information in this press release was transformed to the characteristics of different social media accounts and distributed on Twitter, Facebook and Google+.

EU strategy to step up fight against illicit tobacco trade

Press release on Europa.eu (June 6, 2013)

149 Social Media Officer in DG COMM, Interview by Author.
European Commission

Openbaar gedeeld - 6 jun. 2013

Did you know that every year €10 billion is lost to the EU and its Member States due to cigarette smuggling?


Post on Google+ (June 6, 2013)\textsuperscript{151}

European Commission

June 6

Did you know that every year €10 billion is lost to the EU and its Member States due to cigarette smuggling?


Post on Facebook (June 6, 2013)\textsuperscript{152}

European Commission

@EU_Commission

6 juni

#EU strategy to step up fight against illicit #tobacco trade ow.ly/Lori

Post on Twitter (June 6, 2013)\textsuperscript{153}


This case study investigates three months of social media use: the period between February and April 2013. The following graph, downloaded with social media tool TrueSocialMetrics, provides an interesting comparison of the activity of different accounts. It concerns all posts on social media accounts of the European Commission in the selected time period.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Twitter</th>
<th>Facebook Page</th>
<th>Google+</th>
<th>YouTube</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>#Posts</td>
<td>925</td>
<td>154</td>
<td>173</td>
<td>20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>#Comments</td>
<td>850</td>
<td>2960</td>
<td>1490</td>
<td>66</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>#Reshares</td>
<td>10847</td>
<td>18711</td>
<td>1025</td>
<td>127</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>#Favorites</td>
<td>2168</td>
<td>30608</td>
<td>3633</td>
<td>126</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

1. **Conversation rate**
   Comments per post
   - Twitter: 0.92
   - Facebook Page: 19.22
   - Google+: 8.61
   - YouTube: 3.30

2. **Amplification rate**
   Re-shares per post
   - Twitter: 11.71
   - Facebook Page: 121.50
   - Google+: 5.92
   - YouTube: 6.35

3. **Applause rate**
   Favorites per post
   - Twitter: 2.34
   - Facebook Page: 198.75
   - Google+: 21.00
   - YouTube: 6.30

The first three rows show hard data on the amount of posts, comments, shares and favourites. This information illustrates how often the Commission posts messages on different accounts. For Facebook counts that the Commission has done 154 posts. 2960 Comments have followed on these posts and the posts have been shared 18711 times. Furthermore, in the selected period, the posts by the European Commission were liked by 30.608 people. The information in the last three rows, showing the conversation, amplification and applause rate, is more interesting and says something about what happens with the information. These rates illustrate how many times a post is liked or shared on average or how many comments a post

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receives on average.\textsuperscript{155} The numbers can be interpreted as follows. Looking at the data of Facebook, the posts of the Commission receive 19.22 comments on average. Furthermore, they are shared by 121.50 people on average. Aside from that, they receive 198.75 likes on average. These numbers show that Facebook is the most interactive social media account of the European Commission. The analysis in this case study is not restricted to the messages of the Commission, but also focuses on how receivers of these messages act on this information. For instance, how do they interact with the Commission and with each other? Since Facebook is the medium on which most interaction takes place, it is also the most interesting medium to analyse in this case study. Besides, the social media team stresses the importance of engaging citizens on Facebook, for example by increasing the engagement rate (gaining likes, shares and comments).\textsuperscript{156}

Although the interconnectedness of different social media accounts has to be taken into account, from now on the focus will be on Facebook only. On the Commissions’ About Page on Facebook, the social media team included some general information about the EU. The Commissions’ role in EU legislation making is explained. Furthermore, the social media team mentions to be very happy with all political views represented on the page. It also explains the moderation policy, in that it cannot accept comments which are either offensive in themselves or clearly offensive to other users. The About page also contains the contact details of the social media team. In the next subsection, the selection of data is explained.

\textbf{6.2 Sample of Data}

The sample of data in this case study contains the Commission’s posts about EU legislation in February, March and April 2013. Based on personal observations of social media accounts of the Commission and interviews with the social media team of the Commission, it can be concluded that communication about EU legislation is a crucial element of its social media activity. In section 3, public communication about legislation was described as a type of public communication that informs citizens about (a new) law and/or that promotes it. In words of the European Commission it is ‘the promotion of policies and campaigns’\textsuperscript{157}. Such


\textsuperscript{156} Social Media Officer in DG COMM, E-mail to Author, 24 June 2013, Brussels.

\textsuperscript{157} European Commission, “Use of Social Media in EU Communication.”
communication about EU legislation is the type of public communication that is central for the analysis in this case study. To investigate how the Commission communicates about EU legislation, such messages about EU law and rules need to be collected.

For the selection of posts about EU legislation, some criteria were taken into account. If a post was selected, the EU law or rule mentioned in the post needed to be the main topic of the post. This means that when a post primarily deals with another topic, although it briefly mentions some type of legislation, it was not collected. Furthermore, a selected post does not necessarily contain the name of a specific law or rule at stake. This is important because several messages about EU legislation deal with a particular law, but do not mention that law explicitly. For these posts counts that when the information about legislation can be traced back to a press release or another official page of the Commission, the post was still selected. The graph below shows all activity on the Commission’s Facebook page in the period between February and April 2013. It contains only posts of the European Commission, because users are not allowed to post themselves.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Month</th>
<th>#Posts</th>
<th>#Posts about EU Legislation</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>February</td>
<td>52</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>March</td>
<td>48</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>April</td>
<td>54</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td><strong>154</strong></td>
<td><strong>24</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

In the period of three months, the Commission distributed 154 posts. A total of 24 posts had EU legislation as their main topic. This selection can be easily traced back in the Excel document (sheet ‘All Posts’), where all 154 posts are documented and the ones about EU legislation have a yellow background colour.

The analysis in this case study does not only focus on the initial messages of the Commission, but also on online discussions and illustrations. The 154 posts of the Commission resulted in 257 comments of both users and the Commission itself. In addition to the posts, all comments were aggregated and documented in Excel (sheet ‘Political Dialogue’). Accompanying illustrations can also be found in the Excel document (sheet
‘Illustrations’). The document contains all dates on which data is downloaded. In this way, the data is traceable to its initial source.\(^\text{158}\)

6.3 Target Groups

For a successful design of the content of a particular social media account, it is important to take into account the Commission’s audience.\(^\text{159}\) Both online and offline, an organization can only partly be held responsible for what the audience looks like. Many factors play a role in who are interested in the organization and who want to be active in an online context.

A way to determine the Facebook audience of the Commission is by looking at facts about the fans, people who have liked the page. Facebook insights provide such measurements on a page's performance and can provide an overview of demographic data about the audience. Based on information people enter in their profile, data about gender, age, countries and cities can be accessed.\(^\text{160}\) Consequently, facts about fans indicate up to some point what kind of people have interest in the European Commission. On the one hand, fans are the people that most likely view the content of the account, already because they receive updates in their newsfeed. A great advantage of social media networks is that they may also distribute information to their friends and other networks. On the other hand, being a fan does not automatically mean that someone is interested in the content, interacts with the organization or distributes messages. The Commission may reach more, less or different people than the fans who automatically receive updates in their newsfeed. Irrespective of what the Facebook target groups of the Commission look like, most important remains what the public wants to hear and also what they do with the information on the Commission’s Facebook account.\(^\text{161}\)

On the 21th of February, 2012, the Commission launched its Facebook page. Today, it has reached a number of 127.371 fans.\(^\text{162}\) Based on statistics on Facebook Insight and by observing the type of users who interact most on posts published, the audience on Facebook can be described as mainly young people, students, organizations and campaigns. Most fans are under the age of 35 and have a general interest in EU related topics. The audience is

\(^{158}\) Baxter and Babbie, The Basics of Communication Research, 298.

\(^{159}\) Ines Mergel, “11 Social Media Tips for the Public Sector.”


\(^{161}\) Mergel, “Gov 2.0 Revisited,” 10.

equally divided in gender. Furthermore, most fans are from the European Union and chose English as their standard language. Predominantly, they come from countries like Italy, Belgium, Portugal, Greece, Germany and France. Not very surprising is that a lot of fans have Brussels as their home city.\footnote{Facebook Insights, Seen by Author, (Snapshot Taken on 24 June 2013).}

According to Lambrecht, fans and active social media users do not necessarily represent the whole society, but are important because they are representatives of certain communities and those communities can in turn have a wider impact. Using one central Facebook for the European Commission makes it complicated to communicate on the specific concerns and needs of citizens living in particular Member States. For example, people in France are not very interested in an EU initiative happening in Slovenia. It’s a massive cliché, but content is king. Messages and information are carefully tailored to the needs of the audience.\footnote{Lambrecht, “The Local Conversational Model,” 6 June 2013.} The content of the Commission’s page might not be interesting to everyone. The adapted approach is therefore: making it really interesting for some people, and targeting them. This type of impact is qualitative rather than quantitative, but most valuable for the people the Commission is reaching.\footnote{Social Media Officer in DG COMM, E-mail to Author, 24 June 2013, Brussels.} Because it is so complicated to make the content interesting for everyone, the European Union is increasingly becoming active in local social media communication. More and more Commission’s Representations and European Parliament Information Offices are trying to learn from and engage with national social media. The aim is to provide people in different countries and communities information on EU issues that matter to them, provided in their own language. The project is proving to be a really exciting initiative, with great community managers working together to reach out to citizens.\footnote{Lambrecht, “The Local Conversational Model,” 6 June 2013.}

Now the Commission’s target groups on Facebook have been described, it is time to focus on the goals of communicating about EU legislation on Facebook. Simultaneously, these goals outline the structure of the analysis in section 7.

**6.4 Commissions’ Goals of Communicating about EU Legislation**

In the previous sections, it has become clear that communication on EU legislation is an important aspect of the Commission’s social media activity. Now the data of analysis is

\footnote{Facebook Insights, Seen by Author, (Snapshot Taken on 24 June 2013).}
selected, the goals that the European Commission has with distributing messages about EU legislation on Facebook need to be described. These goals are described as intended communicative effects, according to the model of Lenz and Pander Maat.

In their article *Functional Analysis for Document Design*, Lentz and Pander Maat describe how the communicative purpose of discourse can be analysed. The intended communicative effect of a particular text can vary from cognitive change to change in behaviour. For discourse analysis, cognitive change remains the most important effect to investigate, because it is the only effect on which the author of a text has some kind of influence. In order to achieve a change in behaviour, many other factors play a role, which cannot easily be influenced by the organization. Thus, in analysing a specific text, the focus should be on the cognitive result of the intended communicative effect.

In order to describe the intended effect correctly, an organization has to think like the mind of the reader and the reader should be made subject of the description sentence. For example, if the EU wants to convince EU citizens to vote, the intended effect could be: *EU citizens are willing to vote.* Lentz and Pander Maat distinguish 6 different kinds of communicative effects:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Label</th>
<th>Intended cognitive effect</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Informative</td>
<td>Factual knowledge (knowing that...)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Supporting assessment</td>
<td>Knowledge needed to make an assessment (being able to decide)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Instructive</td>
<td>Knowledge about actions (knowing what to do and how)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Persuasive</td>
<td>Attitudes (believing that..., evaluating x as...)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Motivational</td>
<td>Intentions (intend to, be willing to...)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Affective</td>
<td>Feelings (for example, feeling concerned, amused, offended)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

It is important to note that most texts are multifunctional. Their communicative effects are often related to each other and may form part of a functional hierarchy. Based on interviews with the manager of the social media team of the Commission and information on

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168 Ibid, 389.
Europa.eu, the main goals of the Commission are described. Overall, Facebook messages about EU legislation are developed to achieve three main communicative goals: informative, persuasive and motivational.

1. Informative

The first goal of the Commission is informative. With regards to Facebook, the social media team has some essential targets. One of these targets is providing information to citizens about EU policies, events and affairs in social media friendly, easy-to-understand messages. In line with the general goals of Facebook activity of the Commission, posts about EU legislation are aimed to inform citizens.  

170 This is also made clear on Europa.eu, where one of the main purposes for the Commission (and the EU in general) is communication on political priorities. The aim is to consistently and coherently distribute the information from official announcements, press releases and statements on social media. Most announcements and press releases are about the policy-making process or important events that take place in European politics.  

171 Thus, in addition to other social media accounts, Facebook is used to inform EU citizens about the policy-making process. The online publics of the Commission need to get familiar with EU law and understand why it exists. Most desirable, they are informed about the process during different phases, from development to adaptation of new legislation. The informative goal of the Commission can be related to the first type of communication tied to legislation: Communication about legislation (see section 3.2). Informing citizens about legislation serves to legitimize, report and explain policies.  

2. Persuasive

With regards to public communication about EU legislation, a difference can be made between informative and persuasive public communication. This distinction can be traced back to the intention of the sender. In case the EU provides information on a particular rule or law, without any intention to influence the conclusion that citizens draw from that information, public communication has an informative character. In most cases, however, the

170 Social Media Officer in DG COMM, E-mail to Author, 24 June 2013, Brussels.
171 European Commission, “Use of Social Media in EU Communication.”
173 Siepel, Regtvoort, Morssinkhof and de Ruiter, Congruente Overheidscommunicatie, 40.
EU intents to influence or change the attitude of citizens concerning this rule or law. Then, public communication becomes persuasive. On Europa.eu, different purposes of stakeholder and campaign communication are described. Aside from informing citizens, the Commission mentions the promotion of policies and campaigns. The word promotion shows how this purpose goes beyond its informative goal. If we speak of promoting, communication becomes persuasive in a way that citizens have to be convinced about the existence or benefit of EU laws. In other words, the Commission aims to influence the opinions and beliefs of the public. This goal can be related to the second type of communication tied to legislation, *communication for legislation* (see section 3.2). Besides informing the public, the messages that contain information about EU legislation also serve to build support for such legislation and the organization in general.

3. Motivational

As was mentioned in the description of the informative goal, the social media team has some essential targets with regards to Facebook use. Aside from informing EU citizens and promoting policies, the Commission aims to motivate citizens to participate on the Facebook page. Since the focus in this thesis is on the interactional opportunities that social media accounts can offer to an organization, this purpose deserves primary focus in the case study performed in the next section. The Commission uses social media to reach out and connect with citizens and stakeholders. Information and opinions can be shared, discussion can take place and relationships can be built. In other words, the Commission aims to realize the important scope that social media have for interaction and engagement with interested groups on EU-related themes and activities. For the Commission, the importance of such political dialogue on its Facebook account is obvious. In many ways, the team aims to develop a sort of content that generates conversation. Starting and joining conversations are top priorities of social media use by the Commission, not just for people to talk to the institutions, but also to instigate debates and conversations with each other about EU issues. Lambrecht, Project Officer in a Joint Commission-Parliament Social Media Project, stresses the fact that social

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177 Social Media Officer in DG COMM, E-mail to Author, 24 June 2013, Brussels.
178 European Commission, “Use of Social Media in EU Communication.”
179 Social Media Officer in DG COMM, E-mail to Author, 24 June 2013, Brussels.
media provide the Commission with a platform to respond to what people are saying, to answer questions, to provide additional information and to talk directly with people about issues that come up. With the start of more local social media accounts of EU institutions, this interaction inclines towards collaboration. According to Lambrecht, opening up to the audience means caring about them, and respecting their opinion. Collaboration envisages co-creation of content and sharing images, all the way up to user-generated campaigns.180

Thus, the motivational goal refers to how the EU aims to trigger citizens to do something with the information available to them. The Commission aims to activate citizens and engage them with policy-making. Making use of the potential of social media to interact leads to a transformation of one-directional sender-based communication into two-directional communication with a stronger focus on the receiver. In its white paper in 2006, the Commission illustrates how it increasingly moves its focus away from one-directional communication, and towards the stimulation of dialogue.181 A positive result of these attempts would be that EU citizens take part in online political discussions and that these discussions are relevant for the issue at stake. In the moderation policy on its Facebook page, the Commission encourages the audience to post comments that stick to the subject of the status update. The Commission hopes for comments that contribute to relevant political discussions.182 By means of interacting, the Commission aims to engage citizens and to build support for legislation and the EU in general. Therefore, the motivational goal can be related to communication for legislation, the second type of communication tied to legislation.183

On the next page, the three communicative goals discussed are listed in a scheme. Based on the model of Lentz and Pander Maat, they are linked to their intended cognitive effect.

183 Siepel, Regtvoort, Morssinkhof and de Ruiter, Congruente Overheidscommunicatie, 40.
Commissions’ Goals of Communicating about EU Legislation

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Communicative Goal</th>
<th>Explanation Goal</th>
<th>Intended Cognitive Effect</th>
<th>Part of Analysis</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Informative</td>
<td>European Commission informs EU citizens frequently about EU law in different areas and phases of the policy-making process.</td>
<td>EU citizens know that (new) EU law exists and understand the policy-making process.</td>
<td>I. Areas and Phases</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Persuasive</td>
<td>European Commission promotes EU law and builds support for policy-making.</td>
<td>EU citizens believe that the (future) existence of EU law is important.</td>
<td>II. Persuasiveness of Messages</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Motivational</td>
<td>European Commission stimulates relevant and positive online political dialogue.</td>
<td>EU citizens are willing to participate in political discussions online. They deliver positive contributions that are relevant to the topic.</td>
<td>III. Political Dialogue</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The last column in the scheme refers to the part of analysis that deals with that specific goal.

All three parts include several elements of analysis with a reflection on the literature, the model used for analysing and a paragraph with results.
7. Posts and Dialogues about EU legislation on Facebook

In the last section, the Commissions’ main goals of communicating about EU legislation were mentioned. In order to investigate how the Commission aims to achieve these goals and to what extent political interactions are observable on Facebook, various research methods are required. In part I, Areas and Phases, the general setting of the Commission’s Facebook page is explored in order to find out in what way the Commission informs EU citizens about EU law. In part II, Persuasiveness of Messages, all Facebook messages on EU legislation are analysed in depth concerning the appearance of specific techniques that may be used to increase their persuasiveness. In part III, Political Dialogue, the focus is on online dialogues that follow the messages analysed in part II.

7.1 Part I Areas and Phases
   A. The Issues Dimension
   B. The Procedural Dimension
   C. The Accountability Dimension

7.2 Part II Persuasiveness of Messages
   D. Catching Attention with Illustrations
   E. Catching Attention with Questions
   F. Personally Addressing the Reader
   G. Utilizing the Self-Reference Strategy

7.3 Part III Political Dialogue
   H. Commissions’ Participation in Interactions
   I. Turn-Taking in Interactions
   J. Relevance and Coherence of Comments
   K. Overall Tone of Interactions
   L. Who Participates and Why?
7.1. Part I Areas and Phases

As was described in the first section, the first communicative goal of the Commission is informing EU citizens. Facebook is used to inform EU citizens about the complete policy-making process. To discover how the Commission uses Facebook for this purpose, the activity on the webpage is explored.

As was outlined in the sample of data, 24 out of 154 posts of the Commission in the time span of three months have EU legislation as their main topic. An important question arises: where does the information in these messages come from? All messages link to webpages with more information, or contain a link to online PDF documents about the law or rule at stake. Some of the messages also link to video’s on Youtube or other social media networks. This shows how these social media networks and information pages of the Commission are interconnected. Almost all information originates from press releases and FAQs on Europa.eu, the official website of the European Union. It provides general information on how the EU works, releases the latest EU news and events and links to EU information on other websites of EU institutions and agencies. As was described in the working procedures of the social media team, this information is translated to different social media accounts. Therefore, the fact that all posts of the Commission link to other information pages is not surprising.

In this section, the content of the Commission’s posts is analysed with the model of Meyer. Meyer stresses that political communication should help to increase citizens’ influence on decision-making and to hold political actors accountable for their actions, also in between electoral procedures. Already before decisions are made, issues under deliberation need to be made visible. The Commission confirms Meyers’ belief that effective communication leads to more confidence in the end result and in the institutions that deliver policies. An inclusive approach of governments when developing and implementing EU policies increases the level of participation, which will lead to more confidence in institutions and policies. Informing citizens means informing them during all phases of the decision-making process. Such an open line of communication can contribute to the legitimacy of governance. To summarize Meyer, EU public communication needs to cover the full process

184 European Union, “About EUROPA.”
of what is being discussed, when it is discussed and by who. Thus, three dimensions of the political process need to be communicated: the issues dimension, the procedural dimension and the accountability dimension.\textsuperscript{187} Below, these dimensions are explained. The informative character of the Commission’s messages about EU legislation is analysed based on the presence of all three dimensions of the political process.

A. The Issues Dimension

According to Meyer, the issues dimension refers to the issues that are being discussed by policy-makers. What is about to be decided? Extensive information about the issues at stake is needed for public debate to take place. Besides, it facilitates feedback of the public into decision-making.\textsuperscript{188} In this case study, the issues being discussed are approached as 1) areas of policies and 2) types of legislation. First, the areas of policies of all Facebook messages about EU legislation were described in a few words. Afterwards, the types of legislation were listed. In EU law, five types of legislative acts exist: Regulations, Directives, Decisions, Recommendations and Opinions. The first three types are binding. Regulations are directly applicable in a way that they automatically form part of the domestic legal order of each member state. Directives are also binding, but need further transposition. They give a deadline by which member states must transpose its obligations into national law, leaving the choice of form and methods to them. Decisions are also binding, but can be addressed to specific member states or even private parties.\textsuperscript{189} Aside from binding legislative acts, the EU also adapts soft law, mainly Recommendations and Opinions. They serve as rules of conducts, without binding force, but with practical effects.\textsuperscript{190} The categorization of type of legislation in the data is as follows:

1) Recommendation
2) Opinion
3) Decision
4) Directive
5) Regulation

\textsuperscript{187} Meyer, “Political Legitimacy and the Invisibility of Politics,” 622-623.
\textsuperscript{188} Ibid, 622.
\textsuperscript{189} Chalmers, Davies and Monti, European Union Law, 98-99.
\textsuperscript{190} Ibid, 101.
A. Result

Areas of Policies

Many different policy areas were discussed in the Commission’s posts. Below the list is shown of all policy areas that were discussed on Facebook in the period from February until April.

- 2014 European Parliament Elections
- air passenger rights
- animal testing for cosmetics
- anti money laundering
- bee protection
- consumer product safety
- data protection (3x)
- environmental performance of products and organisations
- EU Border check procedures for third country nationals
- firearm trafficking
- fisheries
- food marketing fraud
- gender inequality
- passenger rights
- provision of water and sanitation
- security of network and information systems
- social security rights
- tax on financial transactions
- use and acceptance of public documents
- workers rights to free movement
- youth unemployment (2x)

Since most of the posts are based on press releases on Europa.eu, the affairs at stake on Europa.eu automatically influence what is published on Facebook as well. Moreover, the posts deal with a recent development that can be traced back to a press release about that development. Topics are discussed in weekly editorial meetings. The team aims to balance posts while embracing real time news and other content relevant for the reader. Twitter is mostly used to introduce new press releases and real-time updates, but also on Facebook such information is distributed. A phenomenon that influences the social media team’s selection of topics, is its use of thematic weeks, happening in the framework of the European Year of the Citizens. Since January 2013, the European Commission runs series of thematic weeks

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191 Social Media Officer in DG COMM, E-mail to Author, 24 June 2013, Brussels.
with a focus on specific themes, such as EU citizenship, road safety, passengers' rights and toy safety. For instance, these thematic weeks explain why in the beginning of March, three similar posts dealt with data protection. In addition, the Commission launched a campaign on International Women’s day, the beginning of a thematic week on gender equality, in which many posts followed about this topic. The thematic weeks help to give some structure to the selection of topics, but are also introduced to engage citizens. For example, during the thematic week on gender equality, citizens were asked to e-mail a photo in which they showed zero tolerance to female genital mutilation. Each time a picture was posted, the organization or person in it was tagged, which led to more engagement and likes. Eventually, the post against female genital mutilation was shared and liked many times and therefore became the most successful post on the Commission’s page ever.

Types of Legislation

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Legislation type</th>
<th>Posts</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Recommendation</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Directive</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Directive 5) Regulation</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Regulation</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Citizens Initiative</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The graph above shows the different legislation types. Of all 24 posts, 9 posts were about Regulations and 4 about Directives. Another 5 dealt with both. This is not surprising, since Regulations and Directions are binding legislation types, directly applicable to member states. It is very important to inform citizens about such measures and developments. Furthermore, 5 posts were about Recommendations. No Opinions and Decisions were mentioned. One post was about a European Citizen Initiative. The European citizens' Initiative is an initiative that

193 Social Media Officer in DG COMM, E-mail to Author, 24 June 2013, Brussels.
allows one million EU citizens to participate directly in the development of EU policies, by calling on the European Commission to make a legislative proposal. The post could not be categorized as a type of legislation, because no proposal had been done yet. What can be concluded from the data in this graph is that legislation types that are most binding and have the most influence on EU citizens, and they are are also the main legislation types that are communicated by the Commission.

B. The Procedural Dimension

Communicating decision-making procedures helps to make politics visible and accessible. The procedural dimension refers to the phase of procedures. At what stage of the decision process are the issues under discussion? For example, is this when a new proposal is done, or when a new law is adapted? As was described in the theoretical framework, political actors can chose to keep citizens only informed about the results of policy-making. Then, the procedures are communicated at the end phase of the process and citizens are not expected to deliver input. Yet, they can also be involved in the beginning of the process. If that happens, they can be approached as partners in dialogue. This is the case when the EU involves them already in an early phase (for example during agenda-setting) to search for possible solutions together.

B. Result

About the procedural dimension, the following can be concluded. For 18 out of 24 posts counts that the post itself contains information about the phase of procedure, which is a score of 75%. For all other posts, this information was easily obtained on the information pages they link to. 16 out of 24 posts contain information about recent proposals. Almost all of them are about new legislation, while some contain proposals that aim to reform existing laws. Two posts inform the public about already existing legislation that is not object to change. One included information about a Regulation that was recently rejected by the Parliament. Based on the data is found that information about EU legislation is mostly distributed on Facebook short after the Commission has done a new proposal. In other words, the Commission mainly

195 Siepel, Regtvoort, Morssinkhof and de Ruiter, Congruente Overheidscommunicatie, 61.
involves citizens with politics when new proposals are made. As was explained in the working procedure, the input that citizens deliver to online conversations is also taken into account by policy-makers. It is, however, doubtful how much impact they can really have.

C. The Accountability Dimension
Finally, the accountability dimension refers to a description of the actors who are responsible for a taken decision or implemented policy. Thus, it is important to communicate which actors play a role in developing and deciding about the EU legislation that is at stake.

C. Result
16 out of 24 posts include information about the actors involved. Thus, in two-third of the posts, the actors involved are mentioned explicitly. As was mentioned in the issues dimension, a majority of the posts is about new proposals. According to the normal process of legislation making, the Commission is the institution that adopts new proposals. In its messages, the role of the Commission is frequently made clear in an explicit way: “We adopted a new proposal”, or “The Commission proposes new measures…” In a few of these posts, the message also contains information about the next steps to be taken.

7.2 PART II Persuasiveness of Messages
Now the informative character of the Commission’s activity has been analyzed, this section deals with the contents of posts. To what extent the target group of a particular message is interested and willing to read this message, depends almost entirely on the reader and the context of communication. If the Commission succeeds in making the reader pay attention to the message, still no success is guaranteed. Many factors have influence on the process of persuasion. For example, the public needs to be both motivated and capable to assimilate the information it reads.

The characteristics of a message may play a role in the process of persuasion. However, their impact remains limited. Nevertheless, during the development of messages, an organization like the European Commission makes choices about how they want to approach the public. Perhaps not always intentional, different styles in messages may influence

197 Hoeken, Hornikx and Hustinx, Overtuigende Teksten: Onderzoek en Ontwerp, 89.
persuasion of the public. This part of the analysis explores how the social media team develops messages about EU legislation. Are their patterns to be discovered or does the Commission act rather randomly? Different techniques can be used in order to make messages more persuasive. For the analysis in this part of the case study, a selection is made of the most common ones. In the literature about persuasiveness of discourse, consensus exists about the influence of attention. Attention is considered to be a necessary, however, not sufficient condition for a message to be effective. In part D and E of this analysis, two techniques are discussed that may stimulate the public to pay attention to a message: 1) seductive illustrations and 2) questions. In part F, the way the reader is addressed in the posts is investigated. Finally, in part G is investigated whether the posts include self-reference strategy.

D. Catching Attention with Illustrations

On Facebook, the most eye-catching element that an organization can use to grab attention is the use of illustrations or videos. Therefore, it is noteworthy to explore how the Commission utilizes the possibility of adding them to posts on EU legislation. The main focus is on how these pictures are linked to the information in the message.

The theoretical basis for approaching images as modes of persuasion can be traced back to Aristotelian rhetoric. Since this rhetoric was developed in classic times, it deals with verbal imagery. It is, nevertheless, a theory that is often quoted in research about the power of images. According to Aristotle, a speaker's ability can use verbal imagery to stimulate emotion in his audience and to foster an impression of credibility with them. This, in addition to evidence and logic, forms an extremely important persuasive element. Ever since Aristotle came up with his rhetorical theory, research has been done on the persuasiveness of imagery. In the last decades, with the arrival of new media, new views on the topic have arisen. According to Pieters and Wedel, who investigate the attractiveness of different elements in advertising, the illustration has the biggest influence on catching attention. Harp and Mayer stress the usage of seductive illustrations, interesting but irrelevant

198 Ibid, 23.
199 Ibid, 98.
illustrations that are added to a text to catch the attention of the reader. Levin calls them *decorative illustrations*. He refers to illustrations that are interesting but do not add value to the pedagogic purpose of the text. They rather serve an affective or motivational purpose, that is: increasing the reader's interest in the text. Other research has shown that illustrations that deal with some specific topics are interesting for everyone. These topics respond to the emotions of the public. They strengthen the relationship between the individual and the information, which makes a message more interesting. Moreover, they are of direct interest to the wealth and survival of the individual. Topics that absolutely catch attention are: sex, death, violence, and great deals of money.

Although some consensus exists about the influence of images on the persuasiveness of texts, it is important to note that their effects are hard to measure and may remain limited. Aside from that, there is the danger of overuse. Especially in the digital world, the target group of a message has to deal with an overload of illustrations and photos. This may lead to what Venders calls the ‘disease of images’, the problem where you have too many images around so that you finally don’t see anything anymore. In other words, the persuasiveness of digital images may be limited, paradoxically, by their own power and ubiquity. Perhaps, the biggest limit to the rhetorical power of graphics, even on pages where their density is not a problem, is that they can distract the reader from the actual information. Thus, based on the literature discussed above, the use of digital illustrations may either pull the user to read the additional information or distract the user from this information. Although no consensus exists in literature about the power of digital images, on Facebook it seems impossible not to use them. Unless the user is actively looking for information, your Facebook post is very likely to disappear in the great density of Facebook updates. Therefore, in the friskily world of Facebook, the use of seductive illustrations may help the Commission to pull attention of a wider public, and to make it at least see the message.

In order to investigate how illustrations are linked to the actual information in the

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202 Seductive details can also be textual; they are then called seductive text. In this section, however, the focus is on illustrations. For more information about seductive text, see: Shannon F. Harp and Richard E. Mayer, “The Role of Interest in Learning From Scientific Text and Illustrations: On the Distinction Between Emotional Interest and Cognitive Interest,” *Journal of Educational Psychology* 89, no. 1 (1997): 92.

203 Ibid, 95.


206 Ibid, 134

207 Ibid, 132.
message, the images (and some videos) are analyzed according to the model of LaGrandeur. LaGrandeur investigates the persuasiveness of digital messages according to the classical principles of rhetoric’s. In Aristotle's rhetorical theory, the elements of proof are ethos (ethical proof), pathos (emotional proof), and logos (logical proof). Two of these principles are included in this analysis: logos and pathos. Images as logos serve as rational proof. For example, they may consist of charts and graphs to reinforce the information in the message. Images as logos may also contain a comparison (of data) and thus, of rational judgment. On the web, digital graphics are occasionally used to replace written text. Thus, to summarize, images as logos mostly serve an informative purpose. Images as pathos, on the other hand, trigger the emotion of the public. In other words, they appeal to the receiver's sense of compassion. Images as pathos can be images that deal with topics like dying animal species, deforestation, the shrinking of glaciers, and so on. They are often metaphorical. In a way, images are most powerful as a means of emotional appeal, which is why metaphorical images are considered so persuasive. It is important to note that, in a way, all images trigger some kind of emotion.

For the categorization in this part of the analysis, when illustrations are not considered informative, as logos, they are categorized as images as pathos. The categories are as follows:

0) without image(s)/video(s)
1) image(s)/video(s) as logos
2) image(s)/video(s) as pathos

D. Result

Of a total of 24 posts, 2 contain a video and the other 22 an illustration. The question of this part of the analysis was whether these images and videos serve functional or rather seductive purposes.

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208 Ibid, 124-125.
209 Ethos (ethical proof) does not form part of this analysis. LaGrandeur applies the model on advertisements and also tests the credibility of the company. Since the aim of this analysis is to investigate the persuasiveness of posts, only logos (logical proof) and pathos (emotional proof) are included. This division is considered sufficient to investigate whether illustrations serve a functional goal (logos) or are more used in order to catch attention (pathos).
211 Ibid, 125.
In the table above is shown how 19 illustrations are categorized as pathos. The social media team makes use of very attractive illustrations, mostly photos. The majority of the illustrations is somehow related to the legislation at stake, but presents it in a very positive appealing way. For example, the three posts about data protection are accompanied with different comics that deal with the danger of the Internet. Furthermore, several metaphors are used. The post about animal testing for cosmetics contains a very cute bunny. It may trigger the receiver’s emotion and appeal to a sense of compassion.212

![Post about data protection](image1)

![Post about animal testing for cosmetics](image2)

Furthermore, 5 illustrations have been classified as logos, of which 2 videos. One of the videos is a visual representation of the social security rights of EU citizens and the other is an explanation of the Youth Guarantee. Both videos do not primarily aim to catch attention of the receiver, but aim to inform the receiver about EU legislative procedures. The three illustrations that were classified as logos contain information about the law or issue at stake, in addition to the post itself. One of the illustrations classified as logos is the following.

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212 Ibid, 125.
213 European Commission (Excel: Illustration of Post 1 on 1 February 2013).
Post about gender (in)equality\textsuperscript{215}

This illustration accompanies a post about gender inequality. Aside from demonstrating the topic in visuals, it shows contact information for people that feel discriminated because of their gender.

Based on the data in this case study, it can be concluded that the social media team mainly uses illustrations to attract the readers, rather than to provide them with rational proof. As such, this result is not surprising. Especially in the world of social media, attention is scarce, because users are overwhelmed by an excessive amount of updates and messages. In order to encourage the public to read the posts that the European Commission publishes about EU legislation, at least their attention needs to be caught and secured.\textsuperscript{216}

E. Catching Attention with Questions

By means of a quick view on the data, it becomes clear that the Commission frequently utilizes questions in its Facebook messages. Clearly, the aim is not to get those questions answered. Then, what is the underlying reason for posing them?

The term \textit{question} may be used to refer to a particular kind of sentences, characterized by word order, intonation, question mark, the occurrence of interrogative pronouns. In conversation-analysis the term question refers to the speech act that is typically performed in uttering interrogative sentences: a request to an addressee to provide the

\footnotesize
\textsuperscript{216} Hoeken, Hornikx and Hustinx, \textit{Overtuigende Teksten: Onderzoek en Ontwerp}, 62
requester with certain information. Thus, by means of asking questions, the can trigger citizens to interact. Different types of questions do more than just ask; they request and deliver information and focus and suggest answers. By influencing answers, questions change what is understood by the receiver. They may be used this way to put specific words in answerers’ mouths, because they suggest and limit responses. Most research on the persuasiveness of questions refers to the influence of a specific type of question: the rhetorical one. Rhetorical questions are not real questions; they do not require an answer. Different definitions exist on the meaning of rhetorical questions. In his research on the use of rhetorical questions in advertising, Howard defined the rhetorical question as follows: “a question which, in itself, suggests a certain response.” In other words, the answer of the question is already implicit in the question. Typical examples of rhetorical questions are: “Isn’t it true that …?” or “Don’t you agree that …?” On the one hand, non-rhetorical questions can, for example, serve to organize information or initiate a new topic (e.g., “What is …?”). They may also inquire the concern of problems, needs or desires of the reader (e.g., “Want to be your own boss?”). In the literature it does not become clear how different types of questions influence the process of persuasion. Yet, different research resulted into the following conclusions. Unlike statements, questions may stimulate the reader to consider the arguments and to give their opinion. In many persuasive texts, organizations utilize questions in this way. They are used to stimulate a readers’ motivation to critically process the information in a text.

One thing that is argued in the literature is that questions have the attractive effect of catching attention. In this part of the analysis, the data is explored on the use and positioning of questions in Facebook messages about EU legislation. For the purpose of this part of the analysis, to find out whether questions are used to attract and stimulate the receiver of a message to keep reading, no distinction is made between rhetorical and non-rhetorical

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220 Ibid, 404.
221 Ibid, 404.
222 Hoeken, Hornikx and Hustinx, Overtuigende Teksten: Onderzoek en Ontwerp, 106.
questions. The position of the question does matter. According to Howard, the positioning of the question makes a difference for how the information is processed. His theory is mainly based on the use of rhetorical questions. If a rhetorical question is positioned in advance of the arguments, readers are more likely to base their opinion on their personal knowledge and belief. Yet, if a rhetorical question is placed behind the arguments, readers take into account what they just read in answering the question. The safest way of positioning questions is then behind the main information of the text. This may, however, undermine their effect of catching attention and motivating the public to read the rest of the message. The messages are categorized as follows:

0) without question(s)
1) with question(s); not in the beginning
2) with question(s); in the beginning

E. Result
All posts have been checked on the appearance of questions, of which the result is shown in the table below.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Questions</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>0</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td><strong>24</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

12 out of 24 posts of the Commission enclose one or several questions. For most of the posts (10 out of 12) these questions are placed in the beginning of the message. For example, questions that come up through the data are: “Who will benefit?”224, “Will the EU define minimum standards or level of security?”225 and “Which country is responsible for your healthcare and where should you claim unemployment benefit if you lose your job?”226 In line with how Howard describes it, most questions serve to organize information or to initiate a

224 European Commission (Excel: Post 6 on 7 February 2013).
225 Ibid.
226 European Commission (Excel: Post 20 on 6 April 2013).
new topic.\textsuperscript{227} This can explain why they are placed in the beginning of the message. Very clear examples of questions that initiate a topic are: “What are 'Smart borders' and why do we need them?”\textsuperscript{228} or “Horse meat scandal: How to prevent fraud and preserve consumer confidence?”\textsuperscript{229} Aside from organizing information, those questions simultaneously function to make the situation one of relevance for the reader. One of the messages about data protection is an interesting example, because it almost only contains questions:

“What happens if your data gets stolen? Who can you trust? What are the changes with the new regulations? Why is it important? Find out this and more in our brochure!”\textsuperscript{230} By means of these questions, the reader is stimulated to think about the topic and to link the message to personal experience and knowledge. The questions serve to motivate the reader to gain more information.

Utilizing questions is a technique that is used by the social media team in 50% of the data analysed. Based on their position and content can be concluded that these questions serve to catch attention and to motivate the public to read the rest of the message and respond.\textsuperscript{231}

\section*{F. Addressing the Reader}

Different styles of addressing the reader may have influence on the persuasiveness of a particular message. In this case study, two styles are analysed. First, the reader of a message can be addressed with the use of the English pronoun ‘you’\textsuperscript{232} and secondly, the reader of a messages can be addressed by the use of the English pronoun ‘we’.

By means of ‘You’

The use of ‘you’, instead of the more impersonal ‘they’, is considered to be an expression of direct address, because the receiver of a message is set forth expressly in the message. Various researchers have investigated in what way this form of direct addressing can determine the persuasiveness of a particular text. It is often recommended in case the sender

\textsuperscript{227} Howard, “The Positioning of Rhetorical and Non-Rhetorical Questions,” 404.
\textsuperscript{228} European Commission (Excel: Post 12 on 28 February 2013).
\textsuperscript{229} European Commission (Excel: Post 11 on 19 February 2013).
\textsuperscript{230} European Commission (Excel: Post 3 on 3 February 2013).
\textsuperscript{231} That questions have such effect was shown by several researchers, among whom Howard, Burnkant and Unnava. See: Hoeken, Hornikx and Hustinx, Overtuigende Teksten: Onderzoek en Ontwerp, 107.
\textsuperscript{232} In many languages, there are more pronouns that personally address the public. For example in Dutch, a sender of a message can choose between different pronouns; the colloquial ‘jij’ or the more formal ‘u’. In English, this distinction does not exist and if the reader is addressed in a direct way, the used pronoun is ‘you’.
aims to involve the reader more with the information in the message. Moreover, direct addressing is believed to make a message more attractive, direct, concrete and exciting. However, to what extent the reader appreciates it is doubtful. Although not much empirical evidence is given about the impact of direct addressing, Hoeken, Hornikx and Hustinx conclude that it may make the public feel more personally involved with the information.

By means of the inclusive ‘We’

Another personal way of addressing the reader is by means of the pronoun ‘we’. Dieltjens and Heynderickx research the appearance of the personal pronoun ‘we’ in political communication. They distinguish three different uses of ‘we’: the inclusive ‘we’, the exclusive ‘we’, and the ambiguous ‘we’. These uses are often put forward as communication strategies that influence sender-receiver relations. For the European Commission, that aims to connect with its citizens and wants to involve them in policy-making, such communicative strategies may help to achieve this closer link with EU citizens. When the exclusive ‘we’ is used, the receiver is not part of the intended group, while the inclusive ‘we’ refers to both sender and receiver as members of the same group. If the use of ‘we’ is ambiguous, the relation between the sender and receiver remains vague. For the purpose of this analysis, only the use of the inclusive ‘we’ is relevant. Through personally involving the reader by means of the pronoun ‘we’, the relationship between a sender and receiver can be strengthened. For presenting policies, this strategy forms a suitable alternative for the "I'm-telling-you" way of informing citizens. It serves to include readers who have little or nothing to do with creating those policies. According to Brown and Levinson, an action is less threatening if there is some ‘common ground’. Thus, the use of inclusive ‘we’ does not only involve the reader, but may also strengthen the relationship between ruling institutions and citizens.

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237 Ibid, 7.
238 Ibid, 21.
239 Ibid, 13.
It is interesting to investigate in what way the European Commission addresses its public on its Facebook account. A balance needs to be found between the institutional language in which legislation is usually explained and the more informal and personal language that is usually chosen in order to involve or persuade the reader. Based on the discussed literature on the methods of addressing the reader, the data is classified in three categories:

0) reader is not personally addressed
1) reader is addressed by means of the pronoun ‘you’
2) reader is addressed by means of the inclusive pronoun ‘we’
3) pronouns ‘you’ and ‘we’ are both used to address the reader

**F. Result**

In the table below is illustrated in what way the social media team addresses the reader.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Addressing the reader</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>0</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td><strong>24</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

In 13 of the 24 posts, the reader is personally addressed, either by means of the pronoun ‘you’, ‘we’ or both. For the other 11 posts the reader is not personally addressed with the information in the message. The information is presented more generally and impersonal. The inclusive ‘we’ is used in two posts. A clear example can be found in the post about anti money laundering:

"Dirty money has no place in our economy, whether it comes from drug deals, the illegal guns trade or trafficking in human beings. We must make sure that organised crime cannot launder its funds through the banking system or the gambling sector…”

In most posts that personally address the reader, the pronoun ‘you’ is used to involve the reader. An example of the use of the pronoun ‘you’ is the following sentence from a post about gender inequality: “If you think you have been discriminated, you have the right to take

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240 European Commission (Excel: Post 4 on 5 February 2013).
What is remarkable is that the pronoun ‘you’ mostly occurs in questions. For instance, the following questions about workers’ right to free movement within the EU are personally addressing the reader “Are you living and working in another EU Member State? Have you encountered any obstacle?”

Summarizing the results, it can be argued that the social media team addresses the reader personally in more than halve of all posts. Writing this way, the receiver of a message is set forth expressly in the message. According to the literature, this may help to create posts that are more attractive, direct, concrete and exciting. In the case of the EU, where the distance between institutions and citizens is large, this technique may also serve to actively involve the reader with the information.

G. Self-reference Strategy

Self-referencing is the processing of information by relating it to the self-structure or aspects of it. The self is a complex, highly organized memory structure. It can be activated more easily when the words or phrases that are processed are similar to those words or phrases and structures in memory. In other words, the self-reference strategy stimulates the public to activate their personal experience. On the one hand, expressions have a high level of a high level of self-reference if they trigger mental simulation, such as: “Imagine that …”, “You may remember that …”, or “You know that …”. On the other hand, expressions with a low level of self-reference includes clauses such as “By all accounts …”, Research shows…”, etc. This strategy may ensure that the content of the message is assimilated better and quicker. If the sender is successful in adapting the self-reference strategy, there is a better chance that the receiver interprets the arguments in the message more critically. This triggers a more central processing of the information which, in the end, may result in that the receiver is more convinced about the content of the message.

It seems a challenge for the European Commission to link European affairs to the personal experience of EU citizens. Therefore, it

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241 European Comission (Excel: Post 14 on 7 March 2013).
242 European Comission (Excel: Post 23 on 26 April 2013).
246 Dieltjens and Priscilla Heynderickx, “The Indefinite ‘We’”, 11.
is interesting to investigate whether the self-reference strategy appears in its Facebook messages on EU legislation.

All posts are divided into two categories:

0) without self-reference strategy
1) with self-reference strategy

**G. Result**

All posts are reviewed on the usage of the self-reference strategy. The result is visible in the table below.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Self-reference</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>0</td>
<td>17</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td><strong>24</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

In 7 of the 24 posts the social media team makes use of the self-reference strategy. In those messages, the information about EU legislation is presented in a way that the reader can relate it to his or her personal situation. A very clear example of such a post is the following post about air passenger rights. It starts with the following sentence: “We all hate being stranded at the airport. It's bad enough when you're travelling for work, but when it's holiday time, it can turn into a nightmare.” This information is used to make the Regulation about air passenger rights interesting and relevant for the reader. In other words, the self-reference strategy in this post stimulates the public to activate their personal experience.

**7.3 PART III Political Dialogues**

As was explained in the literature review, the Commission increasingly moves its communication focus away from one-directional communication, and towards the stimulation of dialogue. Social media have the potential to realize such dialogues. The Commission argues that they have an important scope for interaction and engagement with interested

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248 European Commission (Excel: Post 18 on 13 March 2013).
249 Ibid, 110.
groups on EU-related themes and activities. The importance of political dialogue on the Facebook account of the European Commission is stressed by the social media team. Political discussions are most valuable when comments are serious and relevant to the issue at stake. Engaging citizens is an obvious target for the Commission. Besides, political discussions with a positive tone may contribute to the promotion of a particular law. In this section, the quality of political dialogue is investigated.

In section 6.1, some conclusions were given about the interaction that occurs on different social media accounts of the Commission. Social media analysing tools can provide quantitative data about the number of likes, shares and comments. The tool TrueSocialMetrics, Inc. is used to analyse all Facebook activity of the European Commission between 1 February and 30 April. In the selected period of three months, the Commission had done 154 posts. 2960 Comments had followed on these posts and the posts had been shared 18711 times. Finally, the posts by the European Commission had been liked by 30.600 people. Aside from this information, TrueSocialMetrics provides rates, which represent how many times a post is liked or shared on average or how many comments a post receives on average. These rates and a more extensive analysis of the data can be found in Appendix 1. The data that such tools provide is interesting, but cannot give the information acquired to analyse the quality of political dialogues. What is most interesting for this study, is to investigate the content of online dialogues. Are EU citizens interacting on Facebook in a way that is convenient for the European Commission? Do real political discussions take place? Giving an answer to this question requires more qualitative analysis methods. In the next part of the analysis, the comments are studied into depth. The quality of dialogues is measured in five steps.

**H. Commissions’ Participation in Interactions**

Kent and Taylor, who investigate dialogic communication online, define dialogue as “any negotiated exchange of ideas and opinions”. They argue that it represents efforts by organizations to engage in an honest, open, and ethically based give and take. This definition shows how an organization itself has a remarkably significant role in facilitating
online political dialogue. Bortree and Seltzer stress the importance of organization responsiveness in promoting political dialogue. They argue that an organization should take the first step to stimulate dialogic engagement. Aside from frequently posting Facebook updates with news and other relevant information, the organization should take part in online discussions as well. In this regard, an important distinction is made between organization responsiveness (comments by the organization) and user responsiveness (comments by the user). In other words, the Commission should aim for a high level of organizational responsiveness. This triggers users of the network to participate in available dialogic circles as well.\textsuperscript{255} It becomes interesting to investigate in what way the European Commission itself participates in the political dialogues about EU legislation. For some of the comments the reply is not from the European Commission, but from another European institution that is active on Facebook. Those comments are also classified as organizational responsiveness.

\textbf{H. Result}

This part of the analysis aims to demonstrate to what extent the European Commission participates in online discussions on its own Facebook page. The following table shows the results.

\begin{center}
\begin{tabular}{|c|c|}
\hline
\textbf{User responsiveness} & \textbf{Comments} \\
\hline
by user & 250 \\
by EU institution & 7 \\
\hline
\textbf{Total} & 257 \\
\hline
\end{tabular}
\end{center}

What can be interpreted from this table is that 2.7\% of all comments is done by the European Commission or another organization related to the EU. 4 comments were from the European Commission itself. The other 3 were done by the Committee of Petitions of the European Parliament, the Facebook page ‘Debating Europe’ and the European Food Information Council. Respectively, the first two institutions invite people to start a petition and to participate in a debate. The latter, the European Food Information Council, provides them with a link to an article about the topic.

Of the comments of the European Commission, one adds extra information to the initial message by posting a link to a press release on Europa.eu. Another post explains that a comment was deleted by referring to the moderation policy:

\textsuperscript{255} Ibid, 318-319.
The other two posts of the Commission directly respond to a comment of one of the participants. For example, the next comment that follows on a post about animal testing on 11 March, explains information that was requested by two users.

“European Commission Hi @Alexander Kolev and @Chris Davies - since 2004 there has been a ban on testing cosmetics made in the EU on animals, and since 2009 there has been a ban on testing ingredients. This new ban now prohibits any cosmetic product made anywhere in the world that is tested on animals from being marketed in the EU. Thanks for your questions!”

The percentage of 2.7% of all comments done by the European Commission does not seem very high. Yet, no norm exists about which percentage of organizational responsiveness is convenient. Clearly, this is hard to say. What is eye-catching in the data, however, is that there are many more questions posed by Facebook users, that do not get answered by the European Commission. An example of such a question is the one about anti-money laundering: “What’s the definition of dirty money..? And what’s the definition of organized crime..? Especially in relation to banking systems..” Another example is a question about air passenger rights: “When will the EU countries and European Parliament react on this proposal?” Both questions were never answered, neither by a EU institution or another user.

Referring to the Commission’s goal of involving citizens and promoting online dialogue, the social media team could consider becoming more active in the discussions. According to the Bortree and Seltzer, this may trigger the users of the page to participate more in available dialogs as well. A start may be the responding to more questions that were asked. What is also striking, are the many comments that are attacking the EU. Some of them contain arguments that are not based on facts and that may easily be rejected by the Commission. Although in these posts users do not always ask the Commission for an explanation, the social media team could consider responding anyway. The question is, does it want to respond on those negative comments? And what effect does that have? Above all,
the team should act carefully, bearing in mind that the user might aim for some kind of cat-
and-mouse game.

I. Turn-Taking in Interactions

In order to investigate how citizens interact with the European Commission and each other, the interactions following the Commission’s posts are analysed. In this section, the focus is on turn-taking. Do citizens address each other or the Commission in interactions or are their contributions rather isolated comments? The aim of this part of the analysis is to describe how participants take turns in order to provide some conclusions about the characteristics of political interactions. The turn-taking system of Sacks, based on face-to-face conversation, consists of the rules and procedures participants of conversations use to exchange turns. Turns are constructed out of *unit-types* that consist of a complete sentence, a clause, a phrase, or a single word. At the end of a *possibly complete unit type*, turn transition becomes relevant. At the *transition-relevance place*, turn transition can take place in three ways:

1. **Current speaker selects next**
   A current speaker may nominate the next speaker (e.g. by asking a question or addressing another speaker).

2. **Next speaker self-selects**
   If the next speaker is not nominated, self-selection may take place.

3. **Current speaker continues**
   If no new speaker is nominated and self-selection does not take place, the current speaker may continue.

In face-to-face conversations, especially of more than two people, turns can take place simultaneously and overlap may occur at *transition-relevance places*. In this regard, Garcia and Jacobs show some important differences with quasi-synchronous Computer Mediated Conversations (CMC). Most interesting is that they argue that overlap and simultaneous

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263 Quasi-synchronous conversations have elements of both synchronous conversations like face-to-face and entirely asynchronous conversations like e-mail. Like chat, quasi-synchronous messages become available
talk is impossible in such online conversations. In oral conversations, speakers can stop their turn at any moment. For instance on Facebook, this is not possible because an entire message is posted by pressing enter. Moreover, participants cannot control the exact placement of comments, because others may interfere in the meantime. Therefore, turn taking and placement of messages relative to other posted messages are likely to differ from that in face-to-face conversations.

Thus, according to Garcia and Jacobs, the characteristics of the online medium affect the process of turn-taking. Both current speaker selects next, as well as current speaker continues become more complicated, because another participant may post a message before the potential speaker gets the chance. Self selection, however, remains a very common type of turn taking in CMC. Markman, who investigates conversations in computer chat-based virtual meetings, concludes that any speaker self-selects occurs most in chat conversations.

Based on the literature about turn-taking in CMC, it is interesting to investigate in which way turn-taking takes place in online conversations following posts about EU legislation. Rather than providing quantitative evidence, the aim is to describe how participants take turns in order to provide some conclusions about the characteristic of political discussions.

I. Result

From the data can be concluded that self-selection is the most common type of turn-taking. Participants do not respond to each other very often, but if they do, they mostly self-select as the next speaker. A clear example of this structure is the conversation that follows on post 15. Almost all commenters self-select to respond on the information in the initial post. Below, the first 3 comments are listed to illustrate this.

Post 15: “Full EU ban on animal testing for cosmetics enters into force. As of today, cosmetics tested on animals cannot be marketed any more in the European Union.

synchronously to all participants, however, they differ from chat because the message production process is only available to the person composing the message. See: Cora Garcia and Baker Jacobs, “The Eyes of the Beholder,” 399.

264 Ibid,” 346.

265 Ibid, 355.

Aside from self-selection, in some conversations the next speaker is selected by the current speaker. This happens in two ways: without nomination or with nomination by tagging or using the @. An example without nomination is the following comment: “Alexander Kolev: How about produced in the EU and marketed around the world?” Since the initial information is provided by the Commission it is quite obvious that this speaker also wants the Commission to respond to his question, although he does not nominate the Commission explicitly. An example of nomination with @ is the post from Mike Moeller to the Commission: “@European Commission, is the idea of European-wide candidates for Parliament up for discussion?” Citizens not only select the Commission as the next speaker, but also each other, in the following comment with the @: “Никола Милосављевић: “@John, what does EU have to do with Gaza?”

In only a few conversations, the current speaker continues, mostly because he or she forgot to say something. In Post 15 shown above, Ivan Vuglar continues as following in post 4: “I guess that animals like the little rabbit in the picture have more "human" rights than unborn human babies ....” Although his comments were not sequenced together, this is an example of current speaker continues, because Vuglar resumes his turn in comment 2.

That self-selection occurs mostly in the data is not surprising and can be explained by both the context of the conversation as well as the characteristics of the medium. Participants of the conversation are triggered by the Commission to respond on what they read. Furthermore, they are not restricted in time to post comments and cannot overlap in their contributions. The finding that most speakers self-select corresponds with the conclusions of Markman, who proves that any speaker self-selects is the default in chat conversations.


Comment 1. Sorin Simion: “it's about time”
Comment 2. Ivan Vuglar: “Have you banned the use of HUMAN FETUS TISSUE in cosmetics and food yet ?? .... or is that politically incorrect ? ....”
Comment 3. Roberto Damonte: “finalmente!!!!!!”

267 European Commission (Excel: Post 15 on 11 March 2013, Comments 1-3).
268 Alexander Kolev (Excel: Post 15 on 11 March 2013, Comment 5).
269 Mike Moeller (Excel: Post 7 on 7 February 2013, Comment 15).
270 Никола Милосављевић (Excel: Post 24 on 29 April 2013, Comment 7).
271 Ivan Vuglar (Excel: Post 15 on 11 March 2013, Comment 4).
Another way to describe this process of interaction in words of turn-taking is that the European Commission, as the current speaker, selects anyone as the next speaker. Although the Commission does not nominate next speakers by tagging them or addressing them by name, as was shown in part F of the analysis, many posts are personally addressed to the reader by means of ‘you’ or ‘we’ or consist of questions that may stimulate the reader to respond.

Based on this analysis of turn-taking can be concluded that most interaction takes place between the Commission, that provides information, and citizens, who respond to this information. There is not a lot of back and forward, the Commission posts an initial message and selects all speakers in general to respond. Then, citizens self-select to comment on the information. Only occasionally, the Commission responds again to what is said or asked by citizens. In addition to the interaction between the Commission and citizens, in a few conversations participants interact with each other. In these conversations, mostly random people self-select as the next speaker.

**J. Relevance and Coherence of Comments**

As was mentioned before, the European Commission is interested in the opinion of EU citizens about the EU law at stake and encourages the audience to post comments that stick to the subject of the initial post. The Commission hopes for comments that contribute to relevant political discussions.\(^{273}\) In the literature exists a common conception that political talk online is of overall poor quality. According to Herring, this poor quality has a lot to do with the incoherent character of commenting. Multiple people talk simultaneously. Furthermore, messages often lack developed arguments due to their short characteristics. As a result, related messages may not be placed together or are not related to each other at all.\(^{274}\)

In this section is investigated to what extent comments on the Commission’s Facebook page are relevant to the initial topic of the initial post and secondly, how they linguistically relate to this initial topic and each other. Thus, the aim is to find out if political discussions that take place are relevant and coherent.

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\(^{273}\) European Commission, “About.”

Relevance of Comments
In order to see whether comments are about the legislation at stake, the model of Stromer-Galley en Martinson is used. They distinguish two different types of topics in CMC: pre-established topics of the initial message (structuring topics) and new topics that are introduced during the interaction (interactional topics). The structuring topic is most relevant because the European Commission aims to initiate discussions about EU legislation mentioned in its own message. Stromer-Galley en Martinson analyze the coherence of online political discussions by investigating how different messages relate to the structuring topic. According to them, CMC that contain many comments that wander off of the structuring topic may easily drive away people who came to the discussion space to chat on the promised topic. They may also lose focus since they are no longer on the ‘relevant’ topic (the structuring topic) and break down. Based on this model can be concluded that an increasing number of comments on topic positively influences the coherence and therefore the quality of political discussion.

Coherence of Comments
After analysing the relevance of comments to the legislation at stake, it is interesting to investigate the coherence of these conversations more in depth. By means of literature about sequential coherence, a comment’s linguistic relation to the main topic and other comments can be investigated. Sequential coherence is coherence based on adjacency pairs. Adjacency pairs are pairs of utterances in which the first utterance creates the expectation that a specific type of second utterance will be produced by the next speaker. Examples of such pairs include questions and answers, requests with grants or denials and invitations with acceptances or declinations. An essential feature of adjacency pairs is that a specific second part is preferred. For example, when the first utterance is a request, acceptance rather than declination is the preferred second utterance. Furthermore, when the first utterance is a statement, participants of conversations have a preference for agreement as the second utterance.

Spoken conversations usually exist of a high degree of adjacency pairs. In CMC, sequential coherence is more rare. Davis and Brewer argue that electronic discourse can change or rearrange the sequential order of adjacency pairs. When adjacency is disrupted, 

277 Ibid, 340.
users may experience difficulty in tracking sequential exchanges, and interaction becomes fragmented as a result. According to Herring, two utterances in CMC that form an adjacency pair are often not placed together.\textsuperscript{278} In this regard, Garcia and Jacobs argue that question–answer pairs that appear in CMC are not necessarily adjacency pairs. Their relation may be coincidental due to the turn-exchange system of the CMC at stake. They use the term \textit{phantom adjacency pairs} to refer to pairs of utterances that look like adjacency pairs.\textsuperscript{279} In terms of sequential coherence, Herring describes this problem as \textit{disrupted turn adjacency}. It is caused by the fact that messages are posted in the order received by the system, without regard for what they are responding to. Thus, in online conversations, responses are often more separated from the turns they are responding to and topics tend to shift quicker than in oral conversations.\textsuperscript{280}

Based on the literature on topic organization and adjacency pairs in (political) interactions online, the data is analysed as follows. First, the relevance of comments is investigated. A comment on topic is a comment that deals with the structuring topic, the legislation at stake or the wider policy area. When it is unclear if a comment is about the structuring topic, it is placed in the same category as comments that are not on topic. This is the case, for example, when the comment is written in another language, or when the comment only contains a link to another webpage. Other comments are hard to classify because it is not clear to which post of comment they refer. All comments are classified into the following two categories:\textsuperscript{281}

0) Not classifiable/not on topic
1) On topic

When the relevance of topics is determined, the data is qualitatively analyzed on the occurrence of adjacency pairs, taken into account that two utterances that belong together may not appear together.

\textsuperscript{278} Herring, "Interactional Coherence in CMC."
\textsuperscript{279} Cora Garcia and Baker Jacobs, “The Eyes of the Beholder,” 354.
\textsuperscript{280} Herring, "Interactional Coherence in CMC."
\textsuperscript{281} Classifying the comments into two categories is sufficient for the purpose in this part of the analysis since the comments of interest are those about the topic, rather than comments that deal with another issue.
J. Result

Relevance of Comments

Based on the analysis of the topic in all 257 comments, the following findings can be presented about the relevance of comments.

| Comments on topic |  
|-------------------|---
| 0                 | 75 |
| 1                 | 182|
| **Total**         | **257** |

Of all comments, 182 are about the EU legislation at stake or the wider area of policy (70.8%). Regularly, users respond to the initial message; occasionally they react on each other. This result also means that 75 out of 257 comments (almost 29.2%) are about something else. Discussions that contain many off-topic comments may easily loose focus of users that intended to join in the conversation.\footnote{Stromer-Galley and Martinson, “Coherence in Political Computer-Mediated Communication,” 198.} The most common examples of off-topic comments are attacks on the EU, such as the following reaction on the Commission’s post about youth unemployment: “You're all UNELECTED - without a legal mandate from the peoples of europe!! ....... you're all criminals working for the banksters ......”\footnote{Ivan Vuglar (Excel: Post 7 on 7 February 2013, Comment 12).} Also, in many off-topic comments, users initiate new interactional topics of relevance to them. Below two examples of comments that serve this purpose:

“The EU can overturn a UK Court decision to deport a known terrorist but THIS is happening in Romania and they can't do a thing about it: This is a van in Romania, run by the dog-catchers that makes dogs 'disappear'. We have heard that there is a small town near the Black Sea, called Mangalia town. The mayor wants all dogs dead, dog catchers ramble the streets with unauthorised cars killing the strays, they found dogs in sacks, they were dead and skinned, the dog skins are sent to a factory. SHAME ON YOU ROMANIA AND SHAME ON YOU EU”\footnote{Linda Seaton (Excel: Post 15 on 11 March 2013, Comment 23).}
“The European Commission must protect Palestinians in Gaza City, rather than protect bees”\textsuperscript{285}

In these messages, the Facebook user initiates another topic that has nothing to do with the structuring topic of the initial post (animal testing for cosmetics). Furthermore, a small selection of comments has nothing at all to do with the European Union. Some can be considered SPAM. Or the user is not aware of sending the post, or the user sends it on purpose to promote a certain issue or product. That citizens fail to stick to the structuring topic and initiate a new interactional topic can be easily explained by the fact that users are not allowed to post messages on the Facebook account of the Commission. If they want to discuss an issue of interest to them with the Commission or with other (European) citizens, they are confined to commenting.

Coherence of Comments

Based on the analysis of the data on sequential coherence, the following important conclusions can be drawn about adjacency pairs in conversations on the Commission’s Facebook page. The two most common types of adjacency pairs that occur in the data are question-answer and statement-statement/evaluation. As was also stressed in the literature, most of them are not placed together. In the section about turn-taking became clear that most interaction takes place between the Commission and citizens rather than among citizens. Question-answer pairs occur when participants ask a question (first utterance) and the Commission responds (second utterance). The question-answer pairs do not occur reversely, because the Commission’s comments never include questions. Yet, its initial post does include questions, which are occasionally answered by one of the commenters. Below, an example of comments that form a successful question-answer pair is highlighted. The Commission posts one comment with two answers to questions about EU ban on animal testing.

Comment 5. “how about produced in the EU and marketed around the world?”\textsuperscript{286}

Comment 10. “So the cosmetics themselves can now no longer be tested on animals. What about the ingredients?”\textsuperscript{287}

\textsuperscript{285} Bahaa Mahmoud Baha Mahmoud (Excel: Post 24 on 29 April 2013, Comment 1).
\textsuperscript{286} Alexander Kolev (Excel: Post 15 on 11 March 2013, Comment 5).
\textsuperscript{287} Chris Davies (Excel: Post 15 on 11 March 2013, Comment 10).
Comment 11. “Hi @Alexander Kolev and @Chris Davies - since 2004 there has been a ban on testing cosmetics made in the EU on animals, and since 2009 there has been a ban on testing ingredients. This new ban now prohibits any cosmetic product made anywhere in the world that is tested on animals from being marketed in the EU. Thanks for your questions!”

In several conversations, citizens ask a question to the Commission that does not get any response. In other words, the preferred second utterance fails to happen. The three questions below did not get answered.

“When will the EU countries and European Parliament react on this proposal?”

“What about being denied boarding for no reason?”

“@European Commission, is the idea of European-wide candidates for Parliament up for discussion?”

It is noticeable the social media team could have provided these citizens with an answer. In subsection H on the Commission’s responsiveness was already stressed that the team could consider participating more in conversations. A final remark about question-answer pairs is that they almost never occur between citizens. In addition to the question-answer pair, another common adjacency pair occurring in the data is the statement-statement/evaluation. The initial post of the Commission includes a statement and participants of the conversation respond to it with another statement or evaluation. Preference for agreement in this regard means that the preferred second utterance is an agreement on, or positive evaluation of the statement in the first utterance. An example of such a successful adjacency pair forms the Commission’s post about new rules for cyber security with the following comment: “I ACCEPT, EU Cybersecurity to protect open internet and online freedom.”

If the Commission’s initial post is defined as the first utterance of an adjacency pair, that means that any participant’s comment can become the second utterance of that pair. Since the Commission is interested in the opinion of citizens and wants them to participate in political discussions, not preferred second utterances are 1) comments that do not relate to the topic, 2) comments that include very negative evaluations or 3) no comments at all (silence). On the contrary, preferred second utterances are comments of citizens that are 1) relevant to

288 European Commission (Excel: Post 15 on 11 March 2013, Comment 11).
289 Vlucht_Vertraagd.nl (Excel: Post 18 on 13 March 2013, Comment 8).
290 Viviana Geana (Excel: Post 18 on 13 March 2013, Comment 1).
291 Mike Moeller (Excel: Post 7 on 7 February 2013, Comment 15).
292 Paulo Sergio Visser (Excel: Post 6 on 7 February 2013, Comment 1).
the topic and 2) include a positive evaluation of the statement of the Commission. In the next section, 182 comments that are considered relevant are analyzed. Do initiating utterances by the Commission get the preferred response?

K. Overall Tone of Interactions
As was explained in the working procedures, the social media team works with a moderation policy in order to delete provoking messages that go against human rights or personally attack others. Assuring that people respect the moderation policy is one of the team’s most important and challenging tasks. Having such a policy, however, does not mean that critical comments about the European Union or European affairs are not accepted.\textsuperscript{293} As a result, the tone of dialogues on the Facebook page of the European Commission is not always positive. As is described in terms of adjacency pairs in the previous section, preferred second utterances are comments of citizens that are 1) relevant to the topic and 2) include a positive evaluation of the story or statement of the Commission. Argued is that 182 out of 257 comments are relevant to the topic (70.8%). In this section, these posts are divided into positive comments (preferred second utterances) and negative comments (not preferred second utterances).

Classifying comments into positive and negative is not easy. Before classification can be done, relevant literature on how people use language to evaluate is discussed. Murakami and Raymond develop a very extensive model in order to classify positions in online debates. They divide participant’s positions into support or oppose for the main idea or topic in online debates. They show how supporting and opposing remarks are made by directly replying to the main issue, or indirectly to other remarks (expressing local agreement or disagreement). According to the researchers, this is what makes the task of identifying users’ general positions difficult.\textsuperscript{294} The model of Murakami and Raymond goes beyond the purpose of the analysis. Since the aim is to investigate the overall tone of discussions on the Facebook page of the European Commission, a less extensive model to classify comments is sufficient. Kushin and Kitchener also divide their comments in categories of support and opposition. In their exploration of political discussions on Facebook, they analyse 176 comments about U.S. legislation on the use of torture in questioning suspected terrorist. The comments were

\textsuperscript{293} Social Media Officer in DG COMM, Interview by Author, 18 February 2013, Brussels.
divided into three categories: support, opposition and neutral. Although they use computer-mediated techniques to code and count, the researchers personally classify the comments. According to Kushin and Kitchener, this was not difficult, because generally comments were obviously in opposition or support, never mixed. 295 Murakami and Raymond find that only some comments can easily be classified as supportive or opposing, because they contain explicit language such as: “I agree…” or “That is a good idea”. Not all comments include such explicit expressions of attitude, which makes it difficult to identify each person’s attitude. For example, commenters may spend more time presenting evidence in support of their positions (or attacking the evidence presented by others) than directly stating their attitudes. These expressions need to be taken into account. 296

People use language in many ways to show their opinion and to evaluate certain issues. Above all, it is important to show what is being evaluated in a specific comment. Someone expresses his attitude or emotions, but also (implicitly) describes the events or states of affair to which this evaluation applies. Bax calls these objects of evaluation the evaluate. 297

In the previous section, 182 comments were considered to deal with the EU legislation or wider policy area at stake. For these on-topic comments can therefore be assumed that they evaluate the EU legislation described by the Commission. In this section has become clear that various models have been developed to classify evaluative comments. In order to analyse the overall tone of comments on the Commission’s Facebook page, the approach of Kushin and Kitchener is utilized. Two types of comments are identified:

0) negative comments
1) positive comments

To avoid difficulties placing the comments, the two categories are defined precisely. Positive comments are comments that support the political dialogue. Thus, comments that are desirable by the European Commission. They are not necessarily positive, but contain a relevant opinion about the legislation at stake. If participants are negative about the legislation or the topic, their comments may still be positive for the overall goal of the political interaction, for example because they contain interesting arguments, sincere questions,

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295 Kushin and Kitchener, “Getting Political on Social Network Sites.”
296 Murakami and Raymond, “Support or Oppose?,” 872-873.
recommendations or are honestly represent a particular point of view. The category of negative comments includes comments that include extreme negative positions, without real argumentation, disrespect towards the EU or other users. In such comments, for instance, the topic in the post of the Commission is only used as an inducement for attacking the EU in general. In addition, comments that show a very high level of distrust and disbelief towards the EU are also classified as negative comments.

K. Result

As was described in previous subsections, of all 257 comments, 182 comments refer to the legislation that is at stake in the initial post of the European Commission. The following graph illustrates the combination of those results with the conclusions about the overall tone of dialogue.

As is visible in this graph, 154 comments about the topic are classified as positive comments. The other 28 comments are classified as negative comments. This means that of all 182 relevant comments, 84.6% is positive and 10.9% is negative about EU legislation. Below, some short messages that are classified as positive are mentioned:

“I ACCEPT, EU Cybersecurity to protect open internet and online freedom”\textsuperscript{298}

“Don't just write about it, do the reforms on CFP please, and asap!!!”\textsuperscript{299}

\textsuperscript{298} Paulo Sergio Visser (Excel: Post 6 on 7 February 2013, Comment 1).
\textsuperscript{299} Christos Mouzeviris (Excel: Post 5 on 6 February 2013, Comment 4).
“Following at least once the italian example about controls of products?!?”

“This are excellent wise mesures! Food security is essential for the lives of all EU members! I am a vegetarian but this mafia chain of companies register in of-shores are a manace to us all. Corruption is the cause of this problems and all economic and financial problems. Eradication of corruption must become top priority for EU!”

“i think you never can be sure when you load up your Data's in 'clouds' or whatever!! As written here - you can never be sure where your Data is stored or who can access on it!”

These posts are not equally positive, but can be seen as positive contributions to the political conversation. Although they vary in form, style, and length, the user adds value to the conversation and his or her comments are evaluated as desirable or supportive. What can be interpreted from these figures is that most comments that deal with the content of the initial post are serious contributions to the political dialogue with an overall positive tone. Combining these findings with the results of the previous section, some interesting conclusions can be drawn. First, most comments that diverge from the structuring topic in the initial post of the Commission introduce a new conversational topic or contain an irrelevant attack on the EU. Second, most comments related to the topic of the initial Commission’s post are positive contributions to the political dialogue.

L. Who Participates and Why?
Based on previous sections can be concluded that clearly not all comments are in support of the European Union. Related to this outcome, other questions arise. Firstly, who are the people that respond most on the Facebook page? Is it true that they are most active not in favour of the European Union? That would then be in line with the theory of Davis and Hill and Hughes, who suggest that political talk online is often dominated by a vocal minority who is likely to be anti-government.

Secondly, how do they evaluate the activity of the Commission on Facebook? Do they believe that the Commission informs them sufficiently about EU legislation? To acquire this information, a short questionnaire was sent in a private Facebook message to the 134 most active users of the Commission’s Facebook in the last five

300 Federica Polythene Pam (Excel: Post 11 on 19 February 2013, Comment 1).
301 Victor S. Popaliciu (Excel: Post 11 on 19 February 2013, Comment 3).
302 Thomas Langhoff (Excel: Post 1 on 1 February 2013, Comment 1).
months (see Appendix 2). The findings are very interesting for illustrating their reasons for participating, as well as for showing how they evaluate the Facebook page of the Commission. It is, however, important to note that they are based on the reactions of only 13 respondents and are therefore not representative for all active users.

L. Result
First of all, most respondents are between 18 and 34 years old. They have various occupations. Three of them are professionally involved with the European Union, for example as European Project Consultant. Some of the respondents do community work. 5 respondents select “positive” and 2 “very positive” to describe their general opinion about the EU. 4 are neutral, 1 respondent did not answer the question and 1 has a negative general opinion about the EU. The respondent’s average interest in the EU lays somewhere between moderately interested and very interested (3.46 on scale 1-5).

The respondents have various reasons for visiting and participating on the Facebook page of the Commission. For example, they need information for their profession (community workers, passenger right organization, manager of Sales Online Shop) or are just curious about developments in EU politics. Several respondents stress that they visit the page for expressing their ideas and sharing their opinion by commenting on issues. The respondents were also asked to evaluate the way the Commission utilizes Facebook in order to inform them about EU legislation. The answers are really positive, as is shown in the graph below.

![Graph showing evaluation of the Commission's Facebook page](image)

![Legend for the graph](image)

These users were selected with Truesocialmetrics. The tool provides information on the interactivity on a Facebook page, among which a list with people that have replied frequently on posts of the Commission. See: TrueSocialMetrics, Inc., Social Media Analysis, http://www.socialmetrics.com (downloaded on 11 June 2013).
As final remarks, one respondent points out that the Commission should also communicate negative messages and another believes it should provide information in more languages than English. There is also one respondent who describes the Facebook page as a good initiative. Another thinks that online chat with EU officials is brilliant. Overall can be argued that most users participate because they have a general interest in European politics. Most of them are positive about the EU and the way the Commission communicates on Facebook. Since the majority of the people who responded are not anti-government, this result is in opposition to what Davis and Hill and Hughes found. Another interesting finding is that several respondents mention how the Commission should connect more with communities and may consider developing different profiles for different target groups (e.g.: professionals, children, youngsters). These ideas are currently made into practice by the Commission by increasing its efforts in local social media communication. The aim is to provide people in different countries and communities information on EU issues that matter to them, provided in their own language.


Conclusion and Discussion

Social media are evaluated as potential tools to reconnect European citizens with European institutions. In the introduction, the following research question is formulated: In what way does the European Commission utilize social media networks in order to communicate with its online publics about EU legislation?

This thesis consists of an explanatory single case study, utilizing various methods to answer the research question. The study resulted into a far-reaching analysis model, which is used to measure the Commission’s performance on social media. The analysis model is presented in the graph below. In order to make transferability of the model to other contexts possible, all 6 steps are thoroughly described. First, the general procedure is explained. Then, the findings concerning the case of the Commission are given. In step 6, the social media performance of the organization are linked back to its initial goal. Simultaneously, this reflection forms the answer to the research question central in this thesis.

Analysis model to investigate social media performance of governmental and/or supranational organizations
Step 1. Description of the Context of the Organization

Social media performance cannot be approached as an isolated project. The context in which an organization operates is fundamental for analysing any type of (public) communication. In this step, it is important to describe the relation between an organization and its society. Furthermore, the organization’s approach to public communication should be taken into account. Which difficulties are faced?

*Case of the European Commission:* In the case of the EU, there is a problematic distance between EU institutions and EU citizens. It is described as a public sphere deficit, referring to citizens that are left insufficiently informed about European politics, while decision-making is more and more transferred to the EU. This situation makes involving citizens with policy-making and successful public communication a challenge. To close the communicative gap, the Commission aims to involve citizens by using more two-directional ways to interact with them. It realizes new opportunities that social media have to offer.

Step 2. Overview of Social Media Activity

Now the overall context of the organization’s public communication is described, it is important to give an overview of the current social media activity. The overview should include a description of social media strategies, target groups and working procedures. Furthermore, it is important to note which accounts are used and how they are connected to each other. From this step on, researchers that operate externally will need additional information from inside the organization.

*Case of the European Commission:* A social media officer in the DG Comm is interviewed and approached by e-mail to provide all necessary information. In the case of the Commission, a social media team of four members is responsible for all content on social media platforms. Aside from taking care of the content on accounts like Facebook, Twitter and Google+, the team is dedicated to report what is being discussed and gives training and advise to other EU institutions. Although accounts are interconnected, strategies, target groups and targets vary. On Facebook, the audience predominantly includes EU citizens, of whom most are under 35 with a general interest in EU related topics. Students, organizations and campaigns are active on the Facebook page. The team generates content that is most interesting for this audience. According to the Commission, of crucial importance for all accounts is the target of stimulating political dialogue.
Step 3. Data Selection for Content Analysis

As is explained in Step 2, strategy, targets and target groups may vary for different types of messages on different social media accounts. For the actual analysis in step 5, it is important to pick one account on social media and focus on a specific type of message. Once the data is selected, it should be documented offline to assure that all findings can be traced back to their initial sources. Some social media tools provide very useful applications to collect data and convert it to Excel.  

Case of the European Commission: For the case of the Commission, the data concerns 24 posts and 257 following comments on Facebook (posted in February, March and April 2013) that specifically deal with (new) EU legislation.

Step 4. Communicative Goals

Once the data is selected, the communicative goals of the selected messages need to be determined. This can be done by means of findings from earlier steps and additional information achieved by interviews and e-mail conversations.

Case of the European Commission: In the case of the Commission, three specific communicative goals are described for messages about EU legislation on Facebook. The Commission aims to 1, inform citizens about relevant legislation during all phases of the policy-making process (informative goal) 2, promote EU legislation (persuasive goal) and 3, stimulate online political dialogue (motivational goal). Especially the latter is an obvious goal for the Commission, not restricted to only those messages about legislation on Facebook, but with regards to all social media accounts and types of messages.

307 For this purpose, the tools Truesocialmetrics and Quintly were used.
Step 5. Analysis

In this step, the communicative goals are translated into a model to analyse the data, which becomes clear in the schedule below.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Communicative Goal</th>
<th>Part of Analysis</th>
<th>Elements of Analysis</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Informative</td>
<td>I. Areas and Phases</td>
<td>A. The Issues Dimension</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>B. The Procedural Dimension</td>
</tr>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>C. The Accountability Dimension</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Persuasive</td>
<td>II. Persuasiveness of</td>
<td>D. Catching Attention with Illustrations</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Messages</td>
<td>E. Catching Attention with Questions</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>F. Personally Addressing the Reader</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>G. Utilizing the Self-Reference Strategy</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Motivational</td>
<td>III. Political Dialogue</td>
<td>H. Organization’s Participation in Interactions</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>I. Turn-taking in Interactions</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>J. Relevance and Coherence of Comments</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>K. Overall Tone of Interactions</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>L. Who Participates and Why?</td>
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</table>

Each part of the analysis consists of specific elements, relevant literature and a research method and results. Occasionally, social media analysing tools can be used to collect or analyse data. For a detailed description of all methods proposed, see the full analysis in section 7.

Case of the European Commission: In case the communicative goals of another organization are similar to those of the Commission, the selected elements in this case study can be utilized to investigate its performance on social media.  

Part I. Areas and Phases

In this first part, the issues, procedural and accountability dimension are analysed. In short, the three dimensions help to analyse which areas of policies and types of legislation are communicated by the organization (A), whether communication about legislation covers the entire process of policy-making (B) and whether messages include information about the political actors responsible (C).

Case of the European Commission: In order to inform citizens, the Commission communicates frequently about legislation in a wide variety of policy areas. Most posts are

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308 If the goals do not correspond, it is important to search for other suitable literature. In this regard, many journals as well as social media blogs provide interesting models.
about proposals for new binding types of legislation, Regulations and Directives. In almost all cases, the Commission recently did a proposal and is waiting for response of other EU institutions.

Part II. Persuasiveness of Messages
In the second part of this analysis is investigated into what extent an organization utilizes techniques in its posts that may facilitate the promotion of policies. Four elements are selected that may influence the process of persuasion. Does the organization catch attention of the reader with illustrations (D) and questions (E)? Do political messages personally address the reader (F) and utilizing the self-reference strategy (G)?

Case of the European Commission: From the data in this case study can be concluded that the Commission utilizes several techniques that may result into more persuasive messages. Both questions and illustrations are used to attract Facebook users to read posts. In more than half of all posts, the Commission addresses the reader personally, mostly by means of the pronoun ‘you’. Self-reference, a strategy that can make politics more personal by stimulating the public to activate its personal experience, is used in almost one-third of the posts. Based on these findings one may conclude that the Commission’s goal to promote policies becomes visible in the content of its post. This may facilitate the promotion of policies and may also lead to more online engagement of citizens.

Part III. Quality of Political Dialogue
In this part, the quality of online political dialogues is analysed in five steps. All 257 comments are studied on four different elements (H-L). First, the contribution of the organization itself is analysed (H). The findings of the second element (I) should highlight how turn-transition takes place in order to explain the process of interaction among citizens and between the EU and its citizens. The third element deals with the relevance and coherence of comments (J). As a fourth element, the overall tones of interactions is investigated (K). Elements H-L result in percentages, which can be interpreted according to the literature. For a complete view on how political dialogue takes place, the most active users of the social media
account need to be approached (L).\textsuperscript{309} Those users can explain best their attitude towards the organization and reasons for participating.

*Case of the European Commission:* Based on the analysis of the interactions on the Commission’s Facebook page, the following can be concluded. The Commission does not respond very often on citizen’s questions and could consider increasing its own contribution to conversations. Participants mostly respond to the initial post of the Commission by self-selecting as the next speaker. This can also be explained as that the European Commission, as the current speaker, selects anyone as the next speaker. 70\% of comments is about the legislation of comments and can thus be classified as relevant to the discussion. The overall tone of these on-topic comments is positive; the majority is considered to add value to the political dialogue. Of the nearly 30\% of comments that diverge from the topic in the initial post of the Commission, most introduce a new topic or contain an attack on the EU. Taking sequential coherence into account, question-answer and statement-statement/evaluation are the two most common types of adjacency pairs occurring in the data. On the occasion interaction takes place, this occurs mostly between the Commission and citizens rather than among citizens. In line with existing literature, most of the utterances are not placed together. When the Commission’s initial post is defined as the first utterance of an adjacency pair, this means that any participant’s comment can become the (successful) second utterance of that pair. In addition to the analysis of comments, a questionnaire was filled out by 13 of the most active Facebook users of the Commission. Most eye-catching findings are that most of them have a general interest in European politics. Furthermore, the respondents are rather positive about the EU and the way the Commission communicates on Facebook. Several respondents stress the importance of involving communities on social media, while the Commission recently launched a project that targets local audiences (see subsection 6.3).\textsuperscript{310}

**Step 6. Reflection**

To complete the circle of analysis, the results of the analysis in Step 5 need to be linked back to the initial communicative goals. This aim of this last step is to help an organization finding the gaps between the communicative goals determined in Step 4 and the social media performance as it currently is. Based on the findings of this analysis model, an organization

\textsuperscript{309} They can be selected by means of social media tools, for instance with TrueSocialMetrics, Inc.

\textsuperscript{310} Lambrecht, “The Local Conversational Model,” 6 June 2013.
may choose a different social media strategy or generate and test various contents of messages. The altered social media activity can become a new input of the model, in case the model is applied repeatedly. It is important to note that the communication landscape is always changing. Therefore, performance on social media should be approached as a dynamic process, open to improvements.

**Case of the European Commission:** The following concluding remarks can be drawn about the way the Commission utilizes social media networks in order to communicate about EU legislation with its online publics. This reflection simultaneously forms the answer to the central research question. Throughout this thesis, it became clear that the Commission aims to use social media to involve citizens with politics. Interaction is key. Concerning communication about EU legislation, three different targets determine the process of communication. First, the Commission aims to inform citizens about relevant legislation during all phases of the policy-making process (informative goal). Secondly, it wants to promote EU legislation (persuasive goal). Thirdly, it aims to stimulate online political dialogue (motivational goal).

Concerning the first two goals is found that the Commission makes great efforts informing citizens about all aspects of the policy-making process. Frequently, messages are posted about EU legislation and the information is presented in a personal and attractive way. Several techniques are used that may stimulate persuasiveness, and therefore facilitate the promotion of such legislation. The personal and activating way of providing information may also trigger citizens to respond. Based on the comments of the most active users on the Facebook page is also argued that the audience is quite satisfied with the Commission’s performance.

With regards to the central focus on online interactions and the fact that the Commission describes social media as potential tools to reconnect European citizens with European institutions, the third (motivational) goal of the Commission is the most important one. The Commission aims to stimulate relevant and positive political discussions. About Facebook conversations is found that most interaction takes place between the Commission and citizens. Occasionally, citizens interact with each other. In most conversations, there is not a lot of back and forward.
Based on these findings, two important conclusions can be drawn about online interactions on the Commission’s Facebook page.

1) European citizen’s share their opinions, also about the legislation at stake. Most comments deal with the topic and the majority of these comments contribute positively to the conversation.

2) Real political dialogue is not occurring. Participants do not frequently react on each other, neither does the Commission respond to participants very often. Most comments are about the legislation at stake, however, they are isolated comments rather than real contributions to a dialogue.

**Trustworthiness**

According to Babbie and Baxter, the trustworthiness of qualitative research can be assessed by applying the criteria of credibility, dependability, confirmability and transferability.

With regards to credibility, it is important to note that the overall aim of this case study is to gain reason explanations, or understanding, rather than evidence on causal relationships. The results honestly represent the people and communication studied.\(^\text{311}\) As said before, some of the information is obtained in interviews and e-mail conversations with an officer of the Commission’s social media team. Before the final thesis was uploaded, all information was feedback to the Commission for reviewing. In some cases, sections had to be rewritten. Overall, close cooperation with the social media helped to assure the credibility of the research.

With regards to dependability, it is important to take into account that interpretations of the findings are subjective, which is typical for a case study in general. Furthermore, the reality need to be approached as constantly changing and developing.\(^\text{312}\) The dependability of the research is guaranteed in the best possible way, by ensuring that all steps of the analysis process are visible and traceable.

To guarantee the confirmability of this research, the data analysed (posts, comments, illustrations) is downloaded from the internet and placed in an Excel document. All observations, interpretations and conclusions are easily traceable to their initial sources, either


\(^{312}\) Ibid.
the content of a Commission’s social media account or the content of an e-mail message.\textsuperscript{313}

Qualitative researchers seek in-depth understanding rather than generalized claims. Therefore, validity is substituted with the criterion of transferability. The researcher needs to provide a detailed description of the case study performed.\textsuperscript{314} The main findings of this thesis are briefly linked to the broader problem at stake in this thesis: the problematic distance between the EU and EU citizens. The purpose of this research, however, is not to generalize the findings to other supranational organisations or to the European Union as a whole. Instead, if the detailed findings of the case study are useful for other researchers, they can be applied to another context. The case study contains sufficient details to offer this possibility of transfer.

**Limitations**

The model proposed may serve to investigate social media use of another governmental or supranational organisation. Social media use in the public sector is still upcoming and no such model has been developed yet, which verifies its relevance. Yet, some important weaknesses of the research have to be taken into account. Although general strategies and working procedures were described, the actual analysis is based on only a small fragment of all Commission’s activity on Facebook, 24 posts and 257 comments. A larger selection of data is needed to provide solid conclusions about all social media activity of the Commission. Concerning the analysis of Facebook interactions, another important phenomena needs to be mentioned. The moderation policy, the Commission frequently deletes comment that are considered offensive or SPAM. An example of such a comment is given in the working procedures. Yet, the fact that not all comments that formed part of the interactions have been analysed, may have biased the results. Finally, in case the model is transferred to another context, it can only be applied to analyse messages that serve informing, persuasive or motivational goals.

\textsuperscript{314} Ibid.
Discussion: Can Social Media Reconnect the EU with EU citizens?

What do these findings say about the broader problem at stake; the problematic distance between the EU and citizens? Clearly, social media are not the one solution to close this gap as they can only reach a small segment of society. They can, however, be utilized by EU institutions to communicate with citizens in more interactive ways. On the one hand, researchers show the great potential of social media in order to engage citizens and stimulate dialogue. On the other hand, a common conception exists that political discussions are qualitatively poor. Sunstein, for instance, illustrates the dominating image of radical people, who become very extreme in their positions when they interact.315 More optimistic are Kushin and Kitchener, who believe that high quality political debate between people with different opinions does take place.316 The conclusions drawn in this thesis lay in between. In opposition to Sunstein’s view is found that the overall tone of conversations on the Commission’s page is positive. Yet, coherent political discussions are not occurring. This has a lot to do with the characteristics of Computer Mediated Discussions, which is also shown by Herring. According to her, poor quality of online interactions has a lot to do with the medium and the incoherent character of commenting. Multiple people talk simultaneously. Furthermore, messages often lack developed arguments due to their short characteristics. As a result, related messages may not be placed together or are not related to each other at all.317 Thus, real political discussions with a lot of back and forward are unlikely to occur on platforms like Facebook. In addition to Facebook, there are social media on which the Commission can engage citizens and stimulate political dialogue. With the start of Twitter chats with EU Officials and live blogging tools, it is making great steps.

316 Kushin and Kitchener, “Getting Political on Social Network Sites: Exploring Online Political Discourse on Facebook.”
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Appendices

Appendix 1. Quantitative Analysis of Activity on the Commissions’ Facebook Page
Appendix 2. Online Questionnaire
   A. Facebook Message to Participants on the Commission’s Facebook page
   B. Questionnaire on Monkeysurvey.com
      (http://www.surveymonkey.com/s/VF2JZ3P)
Appendix 1. Quantitative Analysis of Activity on Commissions’ Facebook Page

The tool TrueSocialMetrics, Inc. is used to analyse all Facebook activity on the account of the European Commission between 1 February and 30 April. The data in this appendix is provided to give a general overview of the activity on the Commissions’ Facebook page. To analyse the quality of interaction, however, other methods were used (see 7.3).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>#Posts</th>
<th>154</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>#Comments</td>
<td>2960</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>#Fleshares</td>
<td>18711</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>#Favorites</td>
<td>30608</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

In the selected period of three months, the Commission has done 154 posts. 2960 Comments have followed on these posts and the posts have been shared 18711 times. Finally, the posts by the European Commission have been liked by 30,600 people. Aside from this information, social media tools provide rates, which represent how many times a post is liked or shared on average or how many comments a post gets on average.319

Following the schedule above, the posts of the Commission receive 19.22 comments on average. Furthermore, they are shared by 121.50 people on average. Aside from that, they get 198.75 likes on average. Another way of analysing the activity that follows on posts is by

319 TrueSocialMetrics, “How to Interpret Results.”
looking at a combination of activity: likes, shares and comments. The following graphic can very well demonstrate the interaction that each post receives.  

On the vertical axis, the count of comments is listed. The horizontal axis shows the period between the 1st of February and the 30th of April. Every circle represents a post of the European Commission. The bigger the circle, the more often the message has been shared. Furthermore, the colour highlights how many people liked a particular message. The red circle at the top, for instance, represents a message of the Commission that has repeatedly been post. It is about the brutal practice of female genital mutilation. Every year, millions of women and girls in the EU and around the world are subjected to such mutilation. This post got the highest score on all: comments, shares and likes (122, 629 and 1309). Apparently, this post is interesting for many users of the Commissions Facebook page.

Limitations

Important to note is that the analysis of online interaction by means of a quantitative social media tool has some important limitations. This is why in this thesis, more qualitative methods were applied to investigate online dialogue. The first limitation is that no selection can be made in messages; the tools can only be used to analyse an entire period. Secondly, the tools are restricted to numbers and initial posts of the organization at stake. They do not offer a function to download and analyse comments. Thirdly, they provide information that is hard to compare. True, messages can be compared to each other in order to see what

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322 Although I checked many social media analysis tools on the internet and could not find such a tool, they may obviously exist anyway.
information is interesting for the reader. But there is no norm; what does it say to have 850 comments on 950 posts? The rates that were listed above are more interesting. The conversation rate, amplification rate and applause rate may be useful to check different campaigns or to compare an organization's social media activity to the activity of similar brands. The fourth and most lively limitation of the use of such social media tools is that those numbers do not say much about the reasons why people like, comment or share a specific content.
Appendix 2. Online Questionnaire

A. Facebook Message to Participants on the Commission’s Facebook page

Dear sir/madam,

My name is Janna Boekema and I would like to ask you a favour. For my Master Thesis, part of the Erasmus Master ‘Euroculture’, I am analysing the content of online discussions on the Facebook page of the European Commission. For this purpose, I would like to ask the opinion of people that have participated in such discussions.

I saw that in the last few months you have commented (at least once) on posts by the European Commission. I am sorry for contacting you so directly, but it would be very helpful for me if you could answer 10 short questions about your personal reasons for participating on the page. Furthermore, I am interested in how you would evaluate the way the European Commission utilizes Facebook.

Would you be so kind to fill in my online survey? I did not develop it on behalf of the Commission, but on my own initiative and for the only purpose of writing my Master Thesis. Filling in the questions will take at most 5 minutes and you can do it anonymously. You can find the survey on http://www.surveymonkey.com/s/VF2JZ3P

Thank you for your time and consideration. If you have any questions, feel free to contact me. Hoping for your positive response.

Kind regards,

Janna Boekema
B. Questionnaire on Monkeysurvey.com
(http://www.surveymonkey.com/s/VF2JZ3P)

### European Commission on Facebook

1. What is your age?
   - [ ] 18 to 24
   - [ ] 25 to 34
   - [ ] 35 to 44
   - [ ] 45 to 54
   - [ ] 55 to 64
   - [ ] 65 to 74
   - [ ] 75 or older

2. What is your occupation?
   

3. Are you professionally involved with the European Union?
   - [ ] NO
   - [ ] YES
   - [ ] If yes, in what way?
     

4. How would you describe your general opinion about the European Union?
   

5. How interested are you in European politics?
   

6. What are your reasons for visiting the Facebook page of the European Commission?
   

7. What are your reasons for participating (liking/sharing/commenting) on the Facebook page of the European Commission?
   

8. How would you evaluate the way that the Commission utilizes Facebook to inform you about EU legislation?
   

9. Do you believe that the European Commission can improve its efforts on Facebook? If yes; how?
   

10. Is there anything else you would like to say about the Facebook page of the European Commission?
    
