

Social Media in/and the Politics of the European Union: Politico-Organizational Communication, Institutional Cultures and Self-inflicted Elitism

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Abstract

This paper looks at how social/online media – using the example of Twitter – are used in the politico-organizational communication of the European Union at a time when it faces multiple crises and is in acute need of effectively communicating its politics to the European demos. Proposing a critical discourse framework for the analysis of the politico-organizational use of Twitter, the paper shows that while, to some extent, bringing change or ‘modernization’ to EU political communication patterns, social/online media help in sustaining some of the deep-seated dispositions in EU communicative and organizational practices as well as political discourses. As deployed by the EU’s – and specifically the European Commission’s – spokesperson service, social/online help in solidifying some of the controversial patterns in EU political communication. They also bring in other, more contemporary, challenges as regards using Twitter and social media as parts of political and institutional/organizational communication.

Keywords: European Union, discourse, Twitter, politico-organizational communication, spokespeople, crisis

1. Introduction

This paper looks at how Twitter, a microblogging platform and social-medium most commonly used for purposes of contemporary political communication, is used in the context of the politics of the European Union (EU). The main interest of the paper is in the in-depth analysis of how social/online media – using the example of Twitter – are used as a tool for communication in/by political institutions of the EU. More specifically, the paper tackles such research questions as (a) whether Twitter can help in changing patterns of politico-organization communication in/of the EU and democratizing it and (b) whether social/online media in general bring any new quality to the often-criticised EU political communication.

Building on the above and looking specifically at the European Commission, i.e. the central executive branch of the EU governance system (see below), the paper hypothesizes that while, to some extent, bringing change or ‘modernization’ to EU political communication patterns, social/online media do, in fact, support sustaining, rather than eradicating, several of the deep-seated dispositions in EU communicative practices and political discourses. Hence, as this paper aims to show, social/online media do not constitute any significant break in EU communication policies and practices, despite often being presented as such.

On the contrary, as the paper shows, instead of bringing some new qualities, social media actually help in solidifying some, often controversial, patterns in EU political communication. This points to the enduring eminence of the so-called 'linearities of organizational practice' (Krzyżanowski 2011) or to the indeed peculiar 'autopoiesis' (Luhmann 1995; Muntigl, Weiss & Wodak 2000) of EU institutional organisms. Both the former and the latter remain, it seems, a driving force in EU political action and in communication thereof, arguably with the main interest being in preserving and sustaining EU institutions (and their logic, procedures, structures etc.), rather than changing them into political beings, as well as subsequently opening them up to the wider European citizenry.

The research presented here is part of a larger project that looks at how social/online media change patterns of 'political behaviour', including by means of interactions between politics and the neighbouring areas of journalism/media on the one hand, and political PR including spokesperson services on the other (see e.g. Olausson 2017). The focus is on exploring the elitism, exclusiveness and, indeed, often non-democratic character of communication taking place on social media as well as showcasing that Twitter, as used in the political and wider public realm, far too often follows the "few-to-many" logic of closed elite networks (Berglez 2016), rather than forging openness, interactivity and political engagement.

Hence, in general terms, the current research looks at the practices wherein what is widely seen as 'social media' is not actually used for purposes that are essentially 'social' (or sometimes not even 'political', see below). It focuses instead on wherever interactivity and social/online mediation are used for the purposes of gaining or sustaining political power, including via hegemonic discourses mediated through online contexts, as well as via elite networks and practices. Therefore, the analysis looks in detail at the discourse of spokespeople in the political-institutional context of the EU and treats the discursive practices of spokespeople in social media contexts as essentially politico-organizational, yet inherently hybrid in nature due to their targeting of both EU internal (i.e. institutional) actors and politicians, as well as looking at extra-EU actors including, very prominently, national politics in Europe, the (in most cases traditional) European mass media and, probably at least, self-mediated European publics.

The paper looks specifically at the social-media presence of the EU as 'created' by the European Commission's (EC) spokesperson service, i.e. the main part of the European Commission responsible for not only the shape but also the content of the EC and the wider EU social/online media presence. The paper offers a Critical Discourse Analysis of EU politico-organizational communication on Twitter by proposing a qualitative framework for Twitter (and other social media) analysis that relates interactive strategies to their discursive counterparts. It showcases a pathway of analysis which, on the one hand, explores how *social media behaviour* is indicative of different forms of political and otherwise understood networking, and is part of communicating the EU to its external environment. On the other hand, the focus on *social media discourse* allows an exploration of what kinds of key strategies are deployed in the EU's social media presence and how the use of those discursive strategies underlines some of the key tendencies indicated above (autopoiesis, closeness etc.), while pointing to processes of recontextualisation (Bernstein 1990; Krzyżanowski 2016) of discursive elements across spatial and temporal scales. Relating both the above levels/areas of analysis is vital for not only showing the actual form/content of EU

online and social media discourse, but also depicting how the relationship between 'Twitter behaviour' and 'Twitter discourse' is indicative of wider processes, e.g. the elitisation of EU communication in the process of building and sustaining networks with selected, in most cases elite, media, political actors and audiences.

2. The European Union, External Communication and Online/Social Media

Many classic works on the EU's external communication (see esp. Michailidou 2008) emphasise that the latter has traditionally been challenged by many shortcomings which, as such, questioned the de facto political character of the EU. Communication has surely never been at the forefront of EU interests and policies with the majority of the EU institutions – especially the intergovernmental Council of the EU, and to a lesser degree the EU's executive, i.e. the European Commission (EC) – traditionally operating a closed-door policy and contacting their external environment through official spokespeople. In this way, the EU has also, for a very long time, escaped the scholarly interest of (political) communication research, so there are very few examples either of the former within the EU institutional system (cf. also Schlesinger 1999 and 2003).

Also, although most of the European institutions have been around for several years, the majority of them have, until recently, looked only very reluctantly at the issue of external communication in general, and at communication between those institutions and the wider European public, media etc., in particular. This has been the case for, inter alia, the widely-debated EU 'organizational cultures' (Krzyżanowski 2011) which, as such, have extensively borrowed from other transnational (and in particular intergovernmental) milieus many of their organizational procedures. These included patterns and ways of shaping the institutions' internal and external communication and were, often not surprisingly, very often based on intra- and inter-institutional secrecy, rather than openness and transparency. It seems that, at a time when the EU was increasingly becoming a political supranational structure and required increased support and closer connections to the European citizenry (see, inter alia, Nicolaïdis 2010), its institutions hardly followed suit in opening up by means of (online) communication or strengthening a much needed coordinated inter-institutional communication policy (Krzyżanowski 2012).

Accordingly, while most of the EU institutions have developed their own spokesperson services – probably most elaborate in the case of the EC, as analysed below – all of those services were focused on 'informing about' the EU and its actions, rather than on 'communicating between' those institutions and the European public. That situation did not change, even during the initial crises of the EU institutions in the late 1990s (e.g. the 1999 crisis of the Santer Commission), when a drive towards political communication rather than just top-down information would certainly have helped in eradicating some of the then key criticisms of the EU system (Meyer 1999; Anderson & McLeod 2004; Schneeberger and Sarikakis, 2008).

A period of, unfortunately not enduring, change in EU external communication arrived in the early 2000s and was characterised by a profound institutional overhaul of, in particular, the EC (Anderson & McLeod 2004; Kassim 2008) and, later on, the development of an EU Communication Policy in the aftermath of the EU's so-called constitutional crisis in the years 2003–7 (see esp. Krzyżanowski 2012). Especially in the latter period, the EU turned

increasingly to new forms of communicating with its citizens and to some extent embraced the then available modi of online communication, including, most prominently, online fora (see Wodak and Wright 2006; Krzyżanowski & Oberhuber 2007). At this time, as part of its aforementioned policy, the EC also issued the famous document “Communicating about Europe via the Internet, Engaging the citizens” (European Commission 2007) which, albeit quite vaguely, pleaded that the EU must increase its use of online affordances to communicate with European citizens in a much more concise and efficient manner.

However, still before the arrival of social media as a widespread political communication tool (see above), the EU started to gradually retreat from its wider thinking about online (political) communication, especially following some of its failures in the period after the 2008 Economic Crisis. Eventually, with the 2010 changes to the EC set-up, the aforementioned EU Communication policy was largely abandoned (including the controversial removal of an EU Commissioner for Communication post) and returned de facto to the EC’s Directorate General Communication, i.e. predominantly the EC spokesperson service. Here, one could observe, in particular, a retreat to the classic approach to ‘information’, rather than political or other ‘communication’. However, as evidenced though the analysis presented below, some aspects of especially top-down political communication known from national politics (see above) – and in particular the formation of elitist networks between politicians, spokespeople and journalists – could also be clearly observed in the EU’s presence on social media which eventually developed in the second decade of the 2000s.

Yet, it would be a mistake to say that the European Union is not present in social and online media, especially as a topic of political debates. Research has shown, for example, that the move towards an online presence by the traditional mass media has accelerated many online debates about the EU (see esp. de Wilde, Michailidou & Trenz 2013; Michailidou, Trenz & de Wilde 2014; Barisione and Michailidou 2017), while at the same time often solidifying patterns of contestation of European ideas, as in national-political arenas. Work that has focused explicitly on social media and/or Twitter (see esp. Michailidou 2017) emphasizes this trend, yet it shows that while EU-related topics do occupy a significant chunk of online media debates at present, the EU as such is not a significant ‘influencer’ of EU-specific debates, contrary to national public spheres where European ideas are still nested and contested (see also Krzyżanowski, Triandafyllidou & Wodak, 2009). Thus, the EU clearly trails behind, especially those national politicians and journalists who set the tone in debates on European matters. In a similar vein, the character of social media discourse about the EU and European politics has clearly diversified. While it is often strictly induced by EU-related events (e.g. EP Elections), or policies and actions (e.g. with regard to the recent ‘Refugee Crisis’), there is very limited input into those debates from EU-institutional actors as such, and definitely almost none on Twitter and Facebook (Bosetta, Dutceac-Segesten and Trenz, 2017).

Of the EU institutions present on social/online media, probably the major one remains the European Parliament (EP), i.e. the only directly-elected EU institution, chosen every five years by means of universal suffrage across all EU member states. Existent scholarship has shown, for example, that EP candidates have extensively deployed social media in their pre-election campaigns for several years now (Rodríguez and Garmendia Madariaga 2016). Similarly, social media have been key in the peculiar process of the ‘permanent’ political campaigning of EP Members (Larsson 2015), indeed often in similar ways to the electoral

social-media use known from national contexts (esp. in the context of right-wing populist parties, see Krzyżanowski 2013). Other research has also shown that especially the coverage of EP elections in the national media (e.g. via televised debates and the like) has a direct influence on relevant political social media content as well as on the public's interest in the candidates, as expressed in interactions on, for example, Twitter (Nulty et al. 2016).

All of the above, however, point to the still isolated instances where the EU makes its way into social/online media reality. They show that the EU still does not have – or is not interested in – a strategy that, via its own communicative channels on social media, would allow either quantitative or qualitative increases in its presence in EU-related debates. Indeed, the above results from the EU's apparent lack of a clear understanding of its potential interlocutor 'publics' (Tarta 2017) that could effectively be reached, as well as engaged in debating, as well as improving European institutions and politics via social and online media channels.

3. Twitter 'Behaviour', Twitter 'Discourse' and EU Spokespeople: Analysis

3.1. Design of the Study

The aim of the analysis below is to highlight similarities and differences between the Twitter practices of key members of the EC Spokesperson's service in the previous (2009–14) as well as the current (2015–19) term of the European Commission.

Explored here from the point of view of its social media presence, the EC Spokesperson's Service is an integral part of the European Commission's Directorate General for Communication (DG COMM), i.e. the section of the EC responsible for "informing and communicating about the policies of the European Union with the public at large".¹ Although the remit of the Spokesperson's Service is narrower than that of the entire DG COMM – boiling down to contacts and communication with the media – it is widely known that the Service is the central source of both information about EU actions and politics in a wider sense, and EU's own social media discourse about EU politics and policies.²

The aim of the analysis below is showcase key tendencies in the interactive and discursive behaviour of EC Spokespeople on Twitter, as well as to observe the dynamics of and change in their interactions/discourse. That dynamics are grasped over two sample periods of one

¹ See http://ec.europa.eu/dgs/communication/about/index_en.htm and https://ec.europa.eu/info/sites/info/files/organisation-chart-dg-comm_en_14.pdf, last accessed 28/12/2017.

² As such, the EC Spokesperson's Service is organised in a rather strict hierarchical way. It is headed by an EC Chief Spokesperson (who is also a Deputy Director General at the wider DG COMM), supported by two Deputy Chief Spokespersons as well as two Coordinating Spokespersons, including one with a remit for the Activities of the EC President. The aforementioned group of key spokespeople is then further supported by an array of Spokespersons specialising within specific policy areas of the EC and who, at the same time, work closely with the EU Commissioners in charge of those policy areas (for details, see: http://ec.europa.eu/dgs/communication/about/contact_us/ec_spokespersons/index_en.htm, last accessed 08/02/2017).

month each, observed in 2014 and 2015, in-between which the cohort of EC spokespeople underwent a very substantial change. Whereas in the period 2009–14 – covered by the 2014 analysis – members of the Service were still mainly recruited from among skilful and long-serving EC (and wider EU) officials (thus catering for a large degree of uniformity of experience and skills in the Service), as of 2015, the group became much more hybrid to then include not only EC/EU officials but also many former journalists who previously covered EU affairs across EU countries.

The above change might, on the one hand, be considered a case of professionalization of the service, especially since it follows the traditional pattern of media-to-spokespeople migration often encountered in political PR. On the other hand, however, it has certainly meant a change in and a break from many practices, perhaps especially as far as social media are concerned. For example, current members of the EC Spokesperson's Service widely use strongly personalised Twitter accounts (@NameSurname or similar, sometimes with the addition 'EC'), while in the previous EC term several key spokespeople used standardised institutional-like account names (esp. @ECSpokesNAME). This shows a tendency towards personalisation of the service as well as, very likely, also being a strategy whereby many new EC spokespeople – especially those recruited from outside EU institutions – could retain their 'previous' identities as well as contacts and networks and continue using them while working for the EC.

The analysis below covers interactions and discourse in the Twitter activity of five key spokespeople in the 2009–14 term of the European Commission (2014 analysis) and seven spokespeople in the 2015–19 term (2015 analysis). The analysis is performed on, in total, a data set of 519 tweets/retweets, of which 316 were posted in 2014, and 203 in 2015. The relatively small/medium size of the data set is intended to enable in-depth analysis along both the aforementioned interaction- and discourse-oriented lines. The difference in the numbers of accounts stems from the lower degree of Twitter activity in the latter period.

In both cases, the analysis follows a sample period of 30 days and covers the days 1–30 April of, respectively, 2014 and 2015. The aforementioned change in the EC term took place in autumn 2014, i.e. in-between the two periods of investigation. The selection of the month of April as a period of analysis was not arbitrary, as this is traditionally a month of moderate (i.e. relatively usual) Twitter activity which includes both increased periods (especially in some unexpected situations) as well as 'quieter' periods (esp. around the Easter break). Analysing tweets in April also allows diversity in tweets. Due to the EU Calendar – and several key dates/anniversaries in early May (May-Day celebrations and Anniversary of 2004 EU Enlargement on 1 May, Day of Europe on 9 May etc.), the month of April usually constitutes a run-up to many of those events and hence includes EU social media discourse that not only focuses on day-to-day activities and policy-related tweets, but also wider discourses about Europe, including its history, future, global role etc.

3.2. Pathways and Categories of Analysis

The analysis performed here falls into two areas (see Fig. 1). The first area of analysis looks at the *interactive strategies* deployed in social media communication by members of the EC Spokesperson's Service. Here, the main interest is in both de facto performed interactivity (especially by means of re-tweets, or RTs, from other accounts) but also in the intended

interactivity as displayed by both thematic mentions and interactions (by means of '#'-tagged hashtags as well as weblinks included in the tweets) and personal mentions and interactions (by means of account references @Name).

The aim of the first area of the analysis is to display the extent to which the analysed Twitter presence is in fact self-constructed – including by means of one’s own tweets, or Ts – by EU sources, or whether it relies on social media content produced by other actors, including those replicated by means of RTs from across non-EU (institutional) accounts. As far as the latter are concerned, the main interest is in the typology of sources and targets of interactions initiated on Twitter by members of the EC Spokesperson’s Service. The analysis here aims to assess to what extent the social media input that the spokespeople rely on comes from EU-internal or EU-external sources and, if so, whether any relevant tendencies or regularities (or lack thereof) in online interactive ‘behaviour’ can in fact be observed, especially as far as the variety of ‘externally’ oriented and politically-driven interactions is concerned.

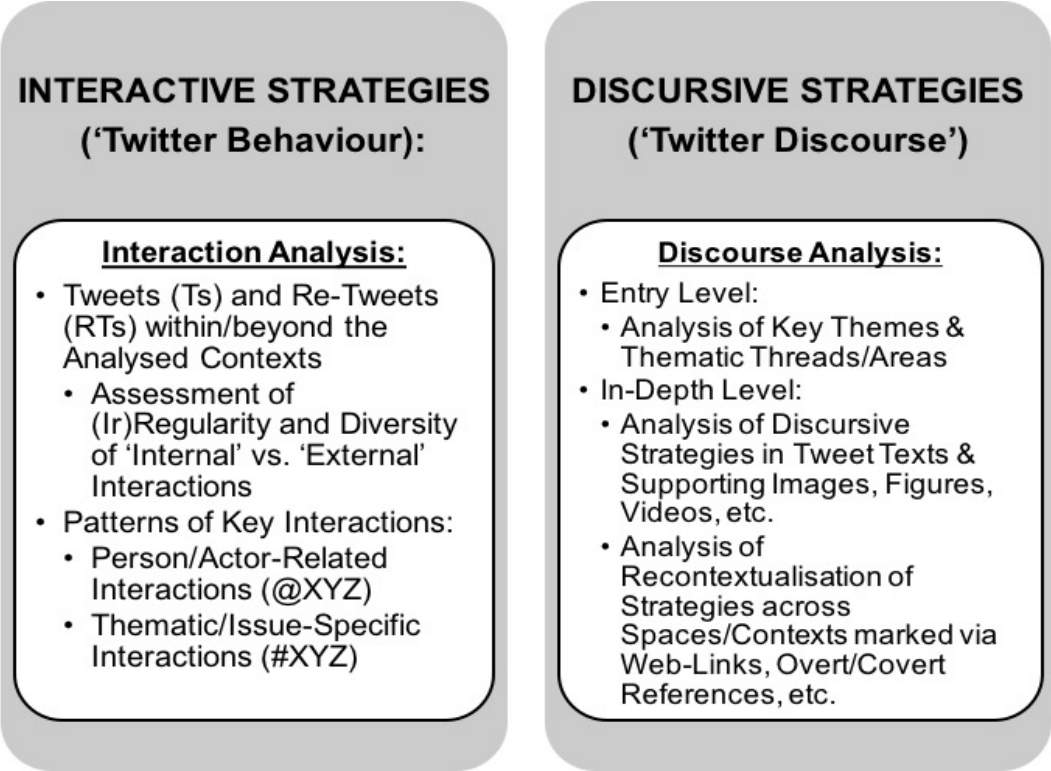


Figure 1:
*Critical Discourse Framework
 for the Analysis of Interactive vs Discursive Strategies on Twitter*

Meanwhile, the second area of analysis looks at *discursive strategies* and focuses explicitly on the Twitter discourse of key members of the EC Spokesperson’s Service. Here, the examination of discourse follows the usual two-level analysis as deployed in, in particular, the Discourse-Historical Analysis in Critical Discourse Studies (see esp. Krzyżanowski 2010). Hence, at first, the analysis focuses on general maps of themes (topics) in the analysed Twitter data and looks for the semantic meaning of Ts/RTs. It attempts to classify them as belonging to wider thematic areas/threads characteristic of the studied contexts (in the

current case, EU institutions as well as non-EU contexts). On the other hand, the more in-depth discourse analysis pertains to following the key arguments and strategies deployed in the Twitter discourse in a pragmatic way, often wholly relying on the semantic aspects indicated above. Here, the key interest is in following patterns of construction of one's own ideas as well as the purposeful/strategic *recontextualisation* (Bernstein 1990; Krzyżanowski 2016) of arguments and ideas from other discourses, be they originating within or outside EU institutions, and recontextualised both synchronically and diachronically.

Indeed, the recontextualising aspect lays the foundation of the second strand of the analysis. Here, drawing on existent literature and, in particular, on previous critical analyses of EU discourse, one can establish a set of prototypical tendencies that can then be tested to see if, and to what extent, they are present and deployed in the analysed Twitter material to hand. Among the key tendencies used as a point of reference, one should certainly mention, first and foremost: the ongoing struggle between political and democratic discussions about the EU on the one hand, and how it is economically-driven, up to neoliberal framing, on the other (Krzyżanowski 2016), the EU's ever-prevalent tendency to discursively revisit and reconstruct its own identity (and history) including while fostering one's self-perception as a global leader in policy and humanitarian actions (see Krzyżanowski 2015) or while arguing for the EU as the fulfilment of long-standing – and often pre-EU-institutional – visions of Europeanness (Krzyżanowski 2010).

3.3. *Analysis of Interactive Strategies*

An analysis of the EC Spokesperson's Service's interactive strategies on Twitter shows that within the two periods of investigation – i.e. throughout April 2014 and April 2015, respectively – there was a rather significant drop in the online activity of the analysed accounts. This, as indicated above, took place even despite the fact that the number of accounts covered by the analysis in the second period was much larger than in the first one.

While in April 2014 the overall number of analysed tweets and retweets (henceforth Ts and RTs) from the EC spokespeople accounts numbered 316, in 2015 the total was almost a third less and numbered, in total, 203 Ts/RTs. Despite that significant difference in the totals, the cumulative numbers of Ts and RTs, and the 'own' Ts to RTs ratio, remained largely the same in both of the analysed periods, while oscillating at approximately 60% of all posts (with 189 RTs or 59.8 % in 2014, and 125 RT posts or 61.5% in 2015).

In a similar vein, and again despite the significant cumulative differences in the total numbers of Ts and RTs, similar tendencies occurred in the level of interactivity assessed via the ratio of retweeting from 'own' EU-originating (institutional) accounts vs non-EU ones. The percentage of RTs from EU vs non-EU Twitter accounts clearly turned in favour of the former with, on average, approximately 75% of all RTs of the analysed accounts coming from EU sources (specifically: 138 RTs or 73% in 2014, and 97 RTs or 77% in 2015).

A more qualitative look at the sources of RTs and of the wider interactive strategies in the EU spokespeople discourse reveals tendencies of both continuity and change (see Table 1). The continuity aspect is particularly visible within EU-internal sources, which practically did not change between the two focal periods of investigation. Accordingly, the main RT sources were the Twitter accounts of other EU (EC) Spokespeople and EU politicians, of whom the

key ones were European Commission members (whose accounts, by the way, are often managed by the spokesperson responsible for particular Commissioners and portfolios). Other internal accounts included, very prominently, other European Commission Directorates General (DGs) which were the source of RTs especially whenever specific policies or areas of activity within the remit of those DGs were highlighted in debates. In a similar way, the accounts of specific European Commission Field Offices (present in each of the EU member states) were also used as sources of RTs. From other EU – but non-EC – sources, EU Spokespeople RTs mainly originated within the European Parliament (and specifically the accounts of its members, or MEPs), as well as within EU Agencies’ accounts. Some RTs were, finally, also taken from generic institutional accounts (such as @EU, @EU_Commission), which are, however, run by the very same spokesperson that initiated the RTs.

RT Sources	2014	2015
EU-Internal Sources	EC Spokespeople EU Politicians (esp. EC members) EC DGs & Services Field Offices & Reps EP Members EU Agencies Generic Profiles (@EU, @EU_Commission)	EC Spokespeople EU Politicians (esp. EC members) EC DGs & Services Field Offices & Reps EU Agencies EP Members Generic Profiles (@EU_Commission)
EU-External Sources	Journalists (esp ex. national media) EU Member-state Politicians Pro-EU Think Tanks & NGOs (e.g. Euractiv) Political Parties	Ext. Organisations (e.g. EBF, German Marshall Fund) Econ. Consultancies Journalists EU-Member-State Politicians Non-EU Politicians

*Table 1:
Outline of Sources for Retweets within the Analysed EU Spokespeople Accounts
(April 2014 & 2015)*

Unlike EU-internal sources which remained largely the same within both of the periods of investigation, a rather significant change occurred in the array of external source accounts of EU Spokespeople’s retweets. And so, in 2014, the main external sources were those of journalists, especially those known for their pro-EU opinions and working for large media organisations in key EU countries. Similarly, EU national media (e.g. @LesEchos or @LeFigaro in France) were still the main RT sources for EU spokespeople in 2014. The above were followed by the accounts of EU-friendly think tanks and NGOs or their representatives/leaders (e.g. @EurActiv), as well as by political parties in EU member states (e.g. @partisocialiste in France).

In 2015, on the other hand, the array of source accounts for the retweets of EU Spokespeople changed rather significantly. The main source, unlike the previous period of

investigation, was now various international organizations (EBF, German Marshall Fund or the like), as well as economic consultancies. This shows that with the arrival of several former journalists as EU spokespeople in 2015, their 'use' for other journalists and media as sources significantly decreased, as well as giving more voice to non-EU institutional bodies. Indeed, journalists, who only came after the above as key RT sources, were only followed by EU member-state and third-country politicians' accounts (e.g. the Ukrainian President @poroshenko) as well as by the accounts of EU officials and politicians including, very prominently, Euro-Parliamentarians.

3.4. Analysis of Key Discursive Strategies

An initial, theme-oriented look at EC Spokespeople discourse confirms that some rather significant changes occurred between the 2014 and 2015 periods of investigation, including the related change in the set-up of the spokespeople cohort. By the same token, it should be noticed that, although quantitatively 'smaller' than its 2014 counterpart, the 2015 discourse was much richer in terms of the variety of topics and issues debated on Twitter by EC Spokespeople (see Table 2)

In 2014, with the still strictly EU-internal set-up of key EU Spokespeople personnel, the thematic focus of Twitter discourse remained very strongly EU-internally-oriented. It focused on imminent EU-specific events including, most prominently, the 2014 European Parliament elections (eventually held 22–25 May 2014), as well as on one symbolic event for the 10th anniversary of the 2004 EU Enlargement (on 1 May). The event-specific discourse in 2014 also revolved around events related to the then ongoing actions between Euro-group and Greece aiming to end the latter's economic and fiscal crisis, then seen as gravely endangering the stability of the European Monetary Union.

In fact, the Euro-group and Greece theme remained the only one of the EU-internally-oriented ones that became equally evident in the 2015 discourse where, however, the latter clearly started to give way to representations of events and EU activities related to the then dominating EU-wide 'Refugee Crisis' (named throughout most of the EU Twitter discourse the 'Migration' crisis). Unlike the 2014 discourse, the 2015 one also included EU-policy-oriented debates: on matters such as the EU Capital Markets Union (clearly foregrounded by the then EU Commissioner for Financial Stability, Financial Services and Capital Markets Union, Jonathan Hill, see below) and those related to EU antitrust and competition policies and actions, and especially the 'Google' Anti-Trust Case driven by Margrethe Vestager (EU Commissioner for Competition) and announced in mid-April 2015.

As far as EU-externally focused topics were concerned, in 2014, those were very limited and only focused on the then ongoing Ukraine Crisis in a rather strictly event-oriented manner. In fact, the Ukraine Crisis remained prominent in the EU-external discourse in 2015 as well, though in a strictly event-related manner, and it gave way to tweets concerning the Nepal Earthquake that took place on 25 April. Unlike in 2014, when there were no externally-oriented policy-specific tweets, in 2015 there was already an ongoing, policy-driven discussion of the aforementioned EU Migration crisis. Here, however, the topic was perceived from the point of view of non-EU actors and members. Of these, special attention was paid to African countries and regional alliances – e.g. the African Union – which also drove a separate topic focusing more closely on EU-Africa relations and related policies.

Themes (Types of Threads)	2014	2015
EU-Internal (Event-related)	EP Elections 2014 10 years of 2004 EU Enlargement Euro-group & Greece	EU Migration 'Crisis' Euro-group & Greece
EU-Internal (Policy-related)	N/A	Capital Markets Union Google & Competition
EU-External (Event-related)	Ukraine Crisis	Ukraine Crisis Nepal Earthquake
EU-External (Policy-related)	N/A	European Migration 'Crisis' EU-Africa Relations

Table 2:
Key Hash-Tagged Themes of the Analysed 2014 and 2015 EC Spokespeople Discourse

A more in-depth look at selected discursive strategies deployed in the EC spokespeople discourse in 2014 and 2015 shows, just like above, little continuity and a rather clear tendency to change.

In the 2014 discourse, the *strategy of personalisation/familiarisation* was dominant. It was deployed to give some familiarity and a less official tone to discourses about EU politics, especially at a time when the entire cohort of EC spokespeople was still recruited from among long-standing EU officials and functionaries. This strategy was, on the one hand, deployed to express various affinities and similarities in viewpoints. This was particularly visible in the RTs from media organizations which were retweeted along often nationally specific lines (with the German member of the spokesperson's service retweeting @spiegelonline, the French one @Le_Figaro or the Polish one @gazeta_wyborcza etc.).

On the other hand, this *strategy of personalisation/familiarisation* was chiefly used to create commonality with the Twitter 'audience', especially by presenting EU officials (incl. Commissioners and Spokespeople) not only from the point of view of their official roles and activities, but also as those who are close to EU demos, as people who not only work but also make jokes, have a social life etc.

One of (many) examples of when such a strategy was deployed was in early April 2014, when the then EU Commissioner for Home Affairs, Cecilia Malmström, sent a tweet 'thanking' the press service for the so-called Brussels Press Review, i.e. an annual social event for journalists and the EU (it usually includes many sketches about EU politics mainly prepared by journalists and spokespeople). In a thread initiated by the Commissioner's account @MalmstromEU (see Example 1), a spokesperson – in this case @OliverBaillyEU –

joined in to share his experiences and initiated a very peculiar exchange which, later on, was also joined by other Commission officials (in this case, @trishbrussels). In the exchange, in which replies across accounts were used, it was seen that spokespeople were not only 'relaying' messages but were also close to and very familiar with EU politicians and officials, as well as sharing not only their professional interests but also private/social views.

Example 1:

@MalmstromEU, 05/04/2014

Great Brussel press revue this year! Thanks for a good show with many laughs

@TeresaKuchler

@OliverBaillyEU, 05/04/2014:

@MalmstromEU *My favourite was certainly "10 years a slave"*

05/04/14

@OliverBaillyEU – RT from @MalmstromEU, 05/04/2014:

"@OlivierBaillyEU:@MalmstromEU My favourite was certainly "10 years a slave" :-)"Mine too!

@trishbrussels – Reply to @MalmstromEU, 05/04/2014

@MalmstromEU @OlivierBaillyEU *Lisbon Treaty goes to the repair shop was a piece of brilliance too.*

Another strategy salient in the 2014 EC Spokespeople discourse was that of *thematic demarcation/colonisation*. It mainly boiled down to EC spokespeople (over)using various hashtags to show that EU policy is not limited to a few areas but has some wide and very significant meanings. Indeed, the use of many hashtags by the EC spokespeople seems too generic, yet it helped the officials to create an image of the EU as highly relevant not only for selected foci/issues but also for wider (tagged) spaces, events etc. One example of the deployment of this strategy was in an RT by one of the spokespeople (@PiaAhrenkilde) from the account of the then EC Commissioner for Transport (@SimKallas, see Example 2). In the RT, practically only hashtags and other non-tagged keywords were used to demarcate/colonise as many areas/topics/spaces as possible, and thus emphasise the salience of EU policies on all those areas.

Example 2:

@PiaAhrenkilde – RT from @SiimKallasEU, 15/04/2014

MEPs vote 4 #safer, #greener #lorries, cutting fuel costs, emissions and road deaths.

#EUtransport #cyclists <http://t.co/Ro1x2S53xB>

Further to the above, the *strategy of thematic demarcation/colonisation* was also used extensively in EC spokespeople discourse to describe historical events, rather than only present actions/policies, as seen above. Interestingly, the thematic demarcation/colonisation of history extended well beyond the EU's lifespan and even embraced events such as, for example, the Prague Spring (see Example 3). This shows that the EU history-oriented discourse – indeed very strongly revived in 2014, i.e. at the time of the 10th anniversary of the 'historical' EU 2004 Enlargement – was constructed by EC spokespeople in a way that represented the EU as, in fact, extending beyond its institutional spatio-temporal range, as well as presenting the EU as a fulfilment of many civil ideas across Europe in the post-war period.

Example 3:

@ECspokesCezary, 29/04/2014

A. #Dubček Europe is a living organism linked together through common history and destiny and hopes for freedom and better living conditions

Further to such 'quote'-based Tweets, the history-oriented discourse also included many RTs from media organisations (e.g. @spiegelonline) and this helped to create a positive image of the EU as successful, or even 'triumphant', in its policies and actions.³

Of the aforementioned 2014 strategies, the key – and only – one that continued in the 2015 discourse was the *strategy of personalisation/familiarisation*. However, in the 2015 discourse, that strategy was no longer aiming, as before, to create an image of closeness or familiarity of EU officials and politicians – including spokespeople – to the European demos. On the contrary, it was now been transformed into a rather clearly elite-driven strategy of political communication and was chiefly deployed to create and mediate the political image of key EU figures such as, very prominently, the EU Commissioners. The latter used both their own Twitter accounts (as was the case with the French commissioner @pierremoscovici in Example 4, below; NB: note the very strong personalisation via use of I/my and other personal pronouns) and the channels of EC Spokespeople (in this case, @vannsamock) who, via their RTs, provided further dissemination of the Commissioners' politically self-centred communication. Interestingly, even if thematically operating within discourse on international affairs (e.g. the Greek Crisis), this strategy was mainly deployed to address the national audiences of countries from where the commissioners were recruited, along with the national media in those countries (in Example 4, below, French and French-language media like @RFI or @ARTEfr).

Example 4:

@vanessamock - RT from @pierremoscovici, 12/04/15

Mes réponses dans l'émission @CarrefourEurope à écouter tout de suite sur @RFI
<http://m.rfi.fr>

@vanessamock - RT from @pierremoscovici, 12/04/15

L'Europe n'est pas faite pour punir, mais pour convaincre les pays d'avancer. Je veux une Europe des réussites @CarrefourEurope @RFI

@vanessamock - RT from @pierremoscovici, 28/04/15

La @EU_Commission est là pour aider la #Grèce et les Grecs. Il n'y a pas de temps à perdre @ARTEfr @ARTEjournal

@vanessamock - RT from @pierremoscovici, 29/04/15

The recovery in #Europe – the way forward: my introductory remarks today at the @gmfus in #Washington #GMFEurope <http://bit.ly/1CPRu7M>

Further to the above, the 2015 EC spokespeople discourse was also strongly characterised by frequent use of the discursive strategy of *constructing the EU as an international leader*. As part of this strategy, tweets – along with many other genres of both online and offline politico-organizational communication – were deployed to create an image of the EU as a responsible international actor, and indeed a leader of international activities in humanitarianism and other areas. This image was particularly desirable at a time when the

³ See <http://www.spiegel.de/forum/wirtschaft/zehn-jahre-eu-osterweiterung-der-triumph-des-sanften-imperiums-thread-125127-1.html> of 30/04/2014 (last accessed 30/11/2017).

EU's reaction to variety crises and events of a short-term (e.g. earthquakes and other disasters) and long-term (e.g. European Migration/Refugee Crisis) nature was in focus (see Example 5). It constitutes a recontextualisation of a classic trait in EU identity that shows the EU as a global leader, whether in humanitarian or other types of 'response' to international and global crises.

Example 5:

@Marg_Schinas, 19/04/15

@EU_Commission statement on tragic developments in the Mediterranean. A joint responsibility of EU MS & Institutions http://europa.eu/rapid/pressrelease_STATEMENT-15-4800_en.htm

@Mina_Andreeva, 26/04/15

#NepalEarthquake: EU mobilises all emergency response means <http://europa.eu/!yw67Ny>

However, the problem with the above strategy was that, as such, it was part of presenting a general, or macro-level, voice of the EC (incl. via the Head and Deputy Head of the Spokesperson service, as above). At the same time, individual EU Commissioners – and their relevant Spokespeople – continued their communication on their portfolio/policy-specific topics and issues. This often led to rather unfortunate – and highly insensitive – coincidences whereby tweets about important human and natural disasters were immediately followed, in sequence, by those, for example, related to economic policy (such as the Capital Markets Union promoted by the then EU Commissioner Jonathan Hill, see Tables 3 & 4). This proved to be not only politically and image-wise insensitive but tortured the cliché that, no matter what the topic, the EU's economic – and indeed neoliberal – considerations tend to resurface across the board and at the least desirable times.

Date	Account	RT/Source Account	Tweet
19/04/2015	@NatashaBertaud		@EU_Commission statement on #Mediterranean tragedy: @JunckerEU @TimmermansEU @Avramopoulos @FedericaMog http://europa.eu/rapid/press-release_STATEMENT-15-4800_en.htm ...
19/04/2015	@Mina_Andreeva	@EU_Commission	Deeply chagrined by the tragic developments in the #Mediterranean today, but also over the past days&weeks. Statement http://europa.eu/!pG97FU
19/04/2015	@MargSchinas		@EU_Commission statement on tragic developments in the Mediterranean. A joint responsibility of EU MS & Institutions http://europa.eu/rapid/press-release_STATEMENT-15-4800_en.htm ...
19/04/2015	@NatashaBertaud	@JunckerEU	The @EU_Commission is deeply chagrined by the tragic developments in

			<i>the Mediterranean. Our actions must be bold http://europa.eu/rapid/press-release_STATEMENT-15-4800_en.htm ...</i>
19/04/2015	@NatashaBertaud		<i>Statement by Commissioner @Avramopoulos and Spanish Minister of the Interior, Jorge Fernández Díaz http://europa.eu/rapid/press-release_STATEMENT-15-4801_en.htm ...</i>
19/04/2015	@vanessamock	@EU_Commission	<i>Live chat w/ @JHillEU on #CapitalMarketsUnion Monday 20/4 15.30CET Get alerted when it starts: http://ow.ly/LKo0l</i>
19/04/2015	@vanessamock	@JHillEU	<i>#CapitalMarketsUnion: breaking down barriers to completing the single market. Full speech #newsmaker @reuters http://europa.eu/rapid/press-release_SPEECH-15-4796_en.htm ...</i>

Table 3: Immediate Sequence of EC Spokespeople Tweets about the Mediterranean Migrant Boat Tragedy / Capital Markets Union, 19/04/2015

Date	Account	RT/Source Account	Tweet
25/04/2015	@MargSchinas		<i>Statement on the #earthquake in #Asia. @FedericaMog @StylianidesEU @MimicaEU http://europa.eu/rapid/press-release_STATEMENT-15-4857_en.htm ...</i>
26/04/2015	@Mina_Andreeva		<i>#NepalEarthquake: EU mobilises all emergency response means http://europa.eu/lyw67Ny</i>
27/04/2015	@vanessamock	@JHillEU	<i>#CapitalMarketsUnion can play pivotal role in boosting financial integration & in enhancing financial stability @EU_Commission</i>
27/04/2015	@vanessamock	@JHillEU	<i>By helping to create a more diversified & resilient European financial system, we can reinforce financial stability @EU_Finance</i>
27/04/2015	@vanessamock	@JHillEU	<i>Read my full speech at joint @EU_Commission & @ecb conference http://europa.eu/rapid/press-release_SPEECH-15-4861_en.htm ...</i>
27/04/2015	@vanessamock	@EU_Finance	<i>Follow our joint conference with @ecb live here: http://ow.ly/M9yFH . Now keynote address by @JHillEU</i>

Table 4: Immediate Sequence of EC Spokespeople Tweets
about the Nepal Earthquake and Capital Markets Union, 25–27/04/2015

4. Conclusion

The above analysis indicates that the EU strives to be present on Twitter in a variety of ways and that EC Spokespeople are the main driving force behind creating as well as sustaining the EU's social media profile. As the analysis shows, this presence boils down to a variety of topics and issues and aims to foster an overall image of the EU as not only a good and skilful communicator but also as a responsible, international actor. It also promotes – albeit with often mixed results – an image of EU officials and politicians as familiar with and close to the European demos, and thereby aims to foster an image of the EU as an open, democratic, politico-institutional actor.

However, as the analysis also explicitly shows, EU social/online media communication, as exemplified by EC spokespeople's use of Twitter, suffers from two types of challenges. On the one hand, as shown by both the interactive and the discourse-oriented analyses above, despite using 'new' channels such as Twitter, the EU still largely replicates many facets of its previous (or pre-social-media) politico-organizational communication. This boils down to re-using some of the key discursive traits of, *inter alia*, speaking about the EU as an international leader/actor or viewing it as a fulfilment of Europe's history (see Krzyżanowski 2010, 2015), treating the EU as a new kind of normative or soft power (Diez 2005; Manners and Diez 2007) or foregrounding economic (neoliberal) ideas over social and political considerations (Krzyżanowski 2016).

By the same token, even while on Twitter, EU communication seems very elitist and largely *autopoietic* (Luhmann 1995; Muntigl, Weiss and Wodak 2000; Krzyżanowski 2010). It hence remains rather strictly closed within the EU politico-institutional realm (be it of the EC as such or of other EU institutions), with the main 'external' input being drawn from wider elite networks of, in particular, national European media and journalists (and only to a limited extent including the pan-European non-governmental sector, though strictly limited to EU-friendly organizations, see above). This, as has been indicated above, comes on top of the still evident lack of desire to connect to the wider European citizenry (esp. by means of social media interactions which clearly create such an opportunity) and with the clear intention of operating with elite networks that help to sustain the ongoing autopoiesis, rather than seek effective democratisation of EU politico-organizational communication.

On the other hand, while still sustaining the said problematic deep-seated dispositions of its communication and discourse, the use of Twitter by the EU – in our case especially the EC – falls prey to challenges of using social/online media as elements of organizational as well as political communication. The widely deployed and, as evidenced, gradually transforming personalisation/familiarisation strategy is a good example here. It shows how the use of social media gradually contributes to the replacement of collective (organizational as well as wider democratic) concerns via the very strong individualisation of communication (Bennett and Entman 1999), as also seen in the wider field of mediated 'digital' politics (Vaccari 2013). In this context, the very strong focus on the construction of individual political personas (such as mediatisation-savvy EU Commissioners) – and indeed their own images, careers and interests – replaces the otherwise desired construction of familiarity with (EU) politics as part

of familiarising the wider public with not only the ‘frontstage’ but also the ‘backstage’ of everyday politics (Wodak 2009). To be sure, this comes alongside other typical tendencies in the public/political use of social media, such as those whereby highly performative and superfluous ‘few to many’ communication (Berglez 2016) prevails, thus ignoring communication for political or democratic meanings and instead forging self-presentation as well as the self-preservation of elite-driven networks.

By the same token, as indicated above, the Twitter-based communication of the EU also tends to be, just like in many other political contexts, very accidental and often cuts across a largely desired coordinated approach which would allow politico-institutional actors such as the EU to speak in one, strong and largely coordinated voice that would be both recognisable to and resonant with the wider European public (Krzyżanowski and Oberhuber 2007). Instead of that, as shown, the EC spokespeople discourse remains largely uncoordinated and often creates the image of being a demand-driven jack of all trades trying to colonise as many topics and have a say on as many events as possible.

The above points to the fact that, even if modernised somewhat by the use of Twitter and other social/online media, EU politico-organizational communication still falls short of playing a vital role in effectively politicizing EU institutions. Even if it is deploying social/online media, the EU is still not fully able to open its key institutions up to the wider EU public and, by breaking out from elite networks, to forge a public dialogue and increase the EU’s political legitimacy through an array of communicative practices that would help to decrease Eurosceptic moods and attitudes. This, it is claimed, would be of direct relevance to effectively communicating how the EU responds to current developments including how, as a politico-institutional organism, it faces multiple crises and challenges, including the recent fierce wave of right-wing populism and Euroscepticism (incl. in the context of Brexit) that undermines the very foundations of the EU-ropean project (Wodak and Krzyżanowski 2017). The EU’s political and institutional communication must hence become less accidental and more coordinated, reflexive and strategic – all in order to be able to prove the salience of European politics for Europe’s society as well as to thereby emphasise the EU’s role as one of the key guardians of European liberal democracy.

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