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Social Network Sites and Political Participation:
Attributes of the European Union's Facebook Pages

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Abstract

The aim of this bachelor thesis was to find out to what extent the Facebook pages of the European Union's political institutions encourage political participation. In former research, the attributes of interactivity, political discussion, connecting and networking were found to have a positive impact on offline political participation. In this study, it was investigated to what extent the Facebook pages of the European Commission, the Council of the European Union and the European Parliament share these attributes that encourage political participation. Data was gathered by directly studying the institutions' Facebook pages. The Facebook pages were analyzed by means of a qualitative analysis and descriptive statistics. The results showed that the three investigated Facebook pages encourage political participation.

1. Introduction

'Social Network Sites' (SNS) are identified as efficient and effective tools to provide information to the citizenry because they provide numerous ways to communicate and enable fast as well as easy sharing and republication of information (Bertot, Jaeger & Grimes, 2010; Eyrich, Padman & Sweetser, 2008; Graham & Avery, 2013; Lievrouw & Livingstone, 2006). In the current study, SNS are defined "as web-based services that allow individuals to [1] construct a public or semi-public profile within a bounded system, [2] articulate a list of other users with whom they share a connection, and [3] view and traverse their list of connections and those made by others within the system" (Ellison, 2007, p. 211).

The backbone of SNS is the visible profile and the friends list while the most common SNS activity of users is to read and respond to messages, posts and comments and browse friends' profiles, official pages as well as message boards (Ellison, 2007; Subrahmanyam, Reich, Waechter & Espinoza, 2008). Thus, SNS are particularly used as a tool for activities going on between individuals, i.e. for interactivity and interpersonal communication with the social environment (Svensson, 2011).

Apart from the possibility to interact with other people, **p**ublic relations scholars point out that the interactive nature of SNS is also an advantage for private organizations and government institutions since interactivity is essential for organizations in developing relationships with their stakeholder group (Waters, Burnett, Lamm & Lucas, 2009). Other scholars state that the interactive feature of SNS is especially helpful for political institutions because it "provide[s] an opportunity to reach individuals less interested in politics" (Utz, 2009, p. 221).

It is also argued that interactivity is the most important criterion to distinguish SNS from old (mass) media and that "the notion of interactivity is often linked to the political ideal of active citizenship through the possibility for citizens to become active agents in the government" (Vesnic-Alujevic, 2012, p. 466). That is, citizens can directly engage in politics online via SNS and engagement is "not only desired but required for effective democracy and ultimately policy-making" (Lee, Loutas, Sánchez-Nielsen, Mogulkoc & Lacigova, 2011, p. 127). Therefore, SNS are beneficial for the European Union (EU) to connect it to the European citizenry and to reduce citizen's political apathy. In that sense, SNS can be helpful to integrate the European people in the political system of the EU and minimize the democratic deficit from which the EU suffers (Cini & Borragàn, 2010).

Furthermore, by attracting millions of users who integrate FB in their everyday life, SNS have a massive audience reach (Ellison, 2007; Graham & Avery, 2013; Griffith & Liyanage, 2008; Banday & Mattoo, 2013), which makes them "an interesting venue for marketing and political campaigns" (Utz, 2009, p. 221). Although "the recent popularity of [SNS] has attracted more and more older adult users" (Graham & Avery, 2013, p. 7), SNS are especially popular among the youth which is traditionally characterized by political disinterest (Conroy, Feezell & Guerrero, 2012; Graham & Avery, 2013; Park, Kee & Valenzuela, 2009). It is identified that "three-quarters of adult internet users under age 25 have social networking site profiles" (Graham & Avery, 2013, p. 7). In this respect, SNS are promising public relations tools for the EU to reach and mobilize the politically disinterested and inactive younger generation.

The most popular SNS is Facebook (FB) which was launched in 2004 (Ellison, 2007; Facebook Newsroom, 2015). In 2007 FB started to open its service for organizations and within two weeks over 4000 organizations joined the Social Network (Waters et al., 2009). As of late 2011 FB already was "the most visited website on the Internet [and] the most popular social networking site" (Conroy et al., 2012, p. 1537). Effective December 2014, FB counts 890 million daily users and has 1.39 billion monthly active users (Facebook Newsroom, 2015). FB's massive audience reach of nearly 1.4 billion users can be attributed most probably to the fact that a "valid e-mail address is the only requirement to join Facebook" (Cain, 2008, p. 2). One particularly popular function of FB is the 'groups' feature. Groups allow users to establish a private space within FB in which they can band together with other users, mostly on the backdrop of a particular topic or issue (Facebook Newsroom, 2015). Additionally, members of groups can easily chat and share files with other group members and organize events.

Conroy et al. (2012) found out that political FB groups increase offline political participation among their members, making groups the ideal tool to increase and strengthen the public's involvement in the development of the government - the fundamental principle of democratic rule.

Like most SNS, FB is especially popular among younger generations (Conroy et al., 2012) making it an auspicious platform to integrate the politically disinterested younger generation in the political process. The 2008 US election campaign ultimately established FB as an important and effective tool for politics as well as campaigning. Since then "Facebook seems to be a suitable Internet space for political engagement" (Vesnic-Alujevic, 2012, p. 469; Conroy et al., 2012).

Several EU bodies already use FB to communicate with citizens via public profiles (European Commission, 2015). In FB these public profiles of public persons (e.g. entertainers), private and civic organizations (e.g. companies and Non-governmental organizations) as well as government institutions are called 'pages'. Members of FB pages are called 'fans' and include all FB users who 'like' that page. To like a page, a user needs to click on a 'like' button which is positioned beneath the page's title. Once someone is a page's the person receives updates from that page and can comment on or share the updates, if the host of the page allows for these interactive features (Facebook Newsroom, 2015).

In contrast to Bertot et al. (2010) and Effing, Hillegersberg and Huibers (2011) who studied the effect of FB on political participation in national and local politics, this study focuses on the implications of FB for political participation in supranational politics. The aim is to find out whether FB pages of the EU have the potential to encourage political participation. In their research Conroy et al. (2012) found a positive effect of FB on offline political participation by studying political FB groups. To expand their study results, this study examines in how far political FB pages (as opposed to groups) encourage political participation. It cannot be claimed on the basis of this study that there is a causal relationship between FB pages - which share the attributes of a political FB group - and political participation because there are lurking variables which influence individual political participation. Yet, on the backdrop of the research by Conroy et al. (2012) it can be stated which SNS attributes encourage political participation. To find out if EU FB pages encourage political participation, the following research question (RQ) will be addressed:

> To what extent do the Facebook pages of the major European Union institutions share the attributes of a political Facebook group?

It is assumed that especially the European Parliament (EP) shares the characteristics of a political FB group because it is the institution that shall "connect the people to the political system" (Cini & Borragàn, 2010, p. 171). Moreover, the EP is "the only directly elected institution at EU level" (Cini & Borragàn, 2010, p. 380 f.). Consequently, the EP should be particularly interested in exploiting the features of SNS to integrate the citizens which it represents and on whose behalf it makes decisions in the democratic process. Therefore, it is expected that particularly the EP's FB page shares the attributes of a political FB group to encourage offline political participation among FB users.

The thesis is structured as follows: First, the existing theory and research of SNS is presented from which four sub-questions are developed that help to answer the main RQ.

Thereafter, it is outlined how the RQ is answered by means of the existing body of literature, qualitative data and descriptive statistics. The qualitative data from which conclusions are drawn is collected in March 2015 from the FB pages of the European Commission (Commission), the Council of the European Union (Council) and the EP.

The next chapter presents the results of the pages' qualitative analysis. Here, the findings for the FB pages of the Commission, the Council and the EP are presented and investigated. Each institution is examined separately in terms of the four sub-questions that are developed in the theory chapter and differences between the three pages are described.

The following chapter discusses the results on the backdrop of the theory that is presented in the second chapter. Here, the results are brought into context and it is analyzed what this implies with respect to the pages' potential to encourage political participation.

Finally, a conclusion of the findings is given, including the practical implications of the findings as well as suggestions for further research, followed by a list of references and the Appendix.

2. Theoretical Framework

This chapter is divided into two parts and outlines the theorization of the RQ. The first section of this chapter deals with Social Media and SNS from a public relations point of view. This section is subdivided into two further sections which elaborate on the concepts of dialogue and relationship building as well as transparency, respectively. Here, Graham and Avery's (2013) study of local governments' Social Media Use, Theunissen and Noordin's (2012) critical appraisal of dialogue in a public relations context, Bruning and Ledingham's (2000) research about organization-stakeholder relationships as well as the analysis from Bertot et al. (2012) of ICTs and transparency all provide particularly meaningful insights to understand these concepts.

The second section in this chapter investigates the research about SNS and political participation. In the course of this section, special emphasize is given to the research conducted by Conroy et al. (2012) and to a lesser degree also to the research of Park et al. (2009) because those are the theories which are used to answer the RQ. However, the findings of both Effing et al. (2011) and Gil de Zúniga, Jung and Valenzuela (2012) in their studies about Social Media and political participation are also useful to get a better understanding of the topic.

2.1. Social Network Sites and public relations

Public relations practitioners consider the use of Social Media, including SNS, as useful for organizations to communicate with the public in an open, fast and inexpensive way and to build relationships with the public (Bertot et al., 2012; Bruning & Ledingham, 2000; Gil de Zúniga et al., 2012; Graham & Avery, 2013;Theunissen & Noordin, 2012). In other words, SNS are found to be very beneficial for communication between an organization, whether private or public, and its stakeholder groups due to SNS' high "popularity, low cost, relative ease of use, and ability to reach large audiences" (Graham & Avery, 2013, p. 15).

In the political realm, the term public relations is understood as "a management process by which an organization or individual uses purposeful communication for political purposes and seeks to influence, build and maintain beneficial relationships and reputations with its key publics" (Graham & Avery, 2013, p. 2). With regard to the EU's democratic deficit, it is important to have purposeful communication between the EU institutions and the EU citizens to educate the people about the EU. Increased transparency and more knowledge have a positive effect on the citizens' trust in and support of the EU. Trust and support in turn are a precondition for active citizenship (Cini & Borragàn, 2010). Put differently, SNS can be beneficial to tackle the democratic deficit by giving the EU a platform to provide information in an accessible way to the citizenry thereby increasing the trust and support through transparency and knowledge (Cini & Borragàn, 2010; Minsiters for eGovernment, 2009).

Relevant concepts in political public relations are dialogue and relationship management as well as transparency which will be introduced in the following section.

2.1.1 Dialogue and relationship management

When talking about dialogue, the definition of Theunissen and Noordin (2012), which is supported by Graham and Avery (2013), is particularly important. This definition of dialogue refers to a two-way communication style that places the stakeholders and the organization as equals thereby stressing the publics-organization relationship. Bruning and Ledingham (2000) add to this definition that a two-way symmetrical communication model in which the organization and the public communicate on an equal level is important in order to build mutually beneficial relationships. Theunissen and Noordin (2012) elaborate on Bruning and Ledingham's argument by noting that dialogue is necessary for the creation of relationships by contributing to the creation of knowledge and understanding among the involved parties.

Yet, although the management of mutually beneficial relationships between organization and publics via meaningful communication is perceived as important by Bruning and Ledingham (2000), Theunissen and Noordin (2012) point out that such communication bares risks because public relation practitioners are forced to give up some of their control what they usually seek to avoid. More specifically this means that "the participant in the dialogic encounter accepts that the outcome is not always predictable and that the precise outcome cannot always be achieved" (Theunissen & Noordin, 2012, p. 7). Thus, the outcome of a good and honest communication is unpredictable for the organization and can also result in disagreement and conflict with stakeholders as well as alienation of the stakeholders (Theunissen & Noordin, 2012).

Yet, Graham and Avery (2013) note that nowadays, people expect political organizations to enter into a dialogue with them, leaving behind the conception of the citizenry as information receivers and acknowledge citizens as political participants who actively contribute online to the development of the government. Eyrich et al. (2008) support Graham and Avery's (2013) argumentation and point out that Social Media are very useful to integrate citizens in the development of the government since they immensely simplify the provision and sharing of information among large audiences, allow organizations to engage with participants on an equal level, focus on the exchange of ideas and opinions and provide an environment which encourages users to speak honestly and directly in a cost-efficient way (Eyrich et al, 2008; Graham & Avery, 2013; Theunissen & Noordin, 2012). Consequently, the use of SNS for dialogue meets core democratic objectives through participatory posts and forums (Graham & Avery, 2013).

2.1.2 Transparency

Transparency is one of the major issues in the ongoing public relations debate about governments and SNS. Graham and Avery (2013, p. 5) define transparency "as the availability of information on matters of public concerns, the ability of citizens to participate in political decision making, and the accountability of government to public opinion". The authors (Graham & Avery, 2013) stress that the citizenry can develop a more precise and trustworthy impression of the

government's functions and activities which contributes to the public's ability to evaluate the performance of the government. This in turn makes the government more accountable to the public. In this context, the research of Bertot et al. (2010) about ICT's, transparency and e-Government is valuable since it points out that the availability of meaningful social and political information contributes to "the development of a participatory democracy" (Bertot et al., 2010, p. 371). That is, information are said to foster "participation in the democratic process, trust in government, prevention of corruption [and] informed decision making" (Bertot et al., 2010, p. 371). More specifically, it is noted that transparency has a positive effect on citizen's trust and is therefore identified "as a key part of democratic governance [which] serves to keep government honest" (Bertot et al., 2010, p. 372). As a means to provide information and increase transparency, SNS are beneficial, since they are generally accessible, cost effective and meet the public's demand for access to information in electronic form (Bertot et al., 2010; Graham & Avery, 2013). Bertot et al. (2012, p. 268) point out that Social Media for open government initiatives, for instance making government data publicly available, enables and facilitates transparency in an innovative way. This finding is supported by Gil de Zúniga et al. (2012) who argue that the use of Social Media for government transparency contributes to political participation. This is an important finding since political participation is necessary to overcome the EU's democratic deficit.

2.2 Social Networks Sites and political participation

Scholars are increasingly interested in the relationship between SNS and political participation. In the context of SNS, Gil de Zúniga et al. (2012) say that "political participation – both offline and online – refers to behavior seeking to influence government action and policymaking" (Gil de Zúniga et al., 2012, p. 320). More specifically, offline political participation includes, among other things, activities like attending public hearings, sending letters or speaking to public officials, participating in demonstrations and protests, voting as well as involvement in public interest groups, political clubs or parties (Gil de Zúniga et al., 2012, p. 323 f.).

In their study about the relationship between Social Media use for news and civic as well as political participation, Gil de Zúniga et al. (2012) found a positive association between FB - as a source of political information - and political participation. Their results show that "the extent to which respondents used social network sites to keep up with news about political news, public issues and information about their community [is] positively related to social capital" (Gil de Zúniga et al., 2012, p. 325). When considering their definition of social capital it becomes clear that SNS as an information source "facilitates associative behavior, fosters a strong civil society and makes political institutions and officials more responsive, all of which translates into a more effective political system" (Gil de Zúniga et al., 2012, p. 320). To put it more simple, they state that the "more people used SNS for news, the more they engaged in civic activities to cope with community issues" (Gil de

Zúniga et al., 2012, p. 325). Therefore, the results of their research are valuable with regard to the RQ because on the backdrop of their conclusion it can be assumed that the FB pages of the major EU institutions foster offline political participation, since their purpose is to provide information about European politics to their fans. Especially people with lower incomes and lower levels of education as well as non-whites tend to use SNS for news thereby signaling that SNS have "positive implications for a healthier democracy as usually unprivileged citizens tend to consume less news through more traditional venues online and off" (Gil de Zúniga et al., 2012, p. 328). Gil de Zúniga et al. (2012) thus conclude that "informational use of SNS [exerts] a significant and positive impact on individuals' activities aimed at engaging in civic and political action [and] SNS seem to provide adequate and relevant information to reinvigorate the democratic process" (Gil de Zúniga et al., 2012, p. 329).

In their study about parties' Social Media Presence and the effect on party members and volunteers, Effing et al. (2011) found out that "during the national elections (2010), politicians with higher Social Media engagement got relatively more votes within most political parties" (Effing et al., 2011, p. 25). A positive example of systematically complementing offline politics with politics on Social Media is the 2008 presidential campaign of Barrack Obama (Effing et al., 2011).

The field study of the Dutch elections by Effing et al. (2011) is particularly meaningful since the authors elaborate on the concept of 'e-participation'. E-participation is split into three stages namely (1) e-Enabling, (2) e-Engaging, and (3) e-Empowering. Here the first stage is characterized as "giving access and information to members, citizens or users" (Effing et al., 2011, p. 29), the second as giving users the possibility for interaction and dialogue with an organization, and the third is characterized by cooperation between the organization and users, members or citizens. Through the utilization of Social Media and e-participation "politicians and government could create opportunities for political participation: enabling, engaging and empowering followers for various benefits" (Effing et al., 2011, p. 30). However, although Graham and Avery (2013) generally agree with Effing et al. (2011), they point out that "the use of social media to promote e-participation with citizens is still underused" (Graham & Avery, 2013, p. 6).

'Crowdsourcing' is a second concept in the context of SNS and political participation which Effing et al. (2011) evaluate as very relevant in this context. The concept is defined by them as the involvement and empowerment of "citizens in campaigns and work of representatives and government" (Effing et al., 2011, p. 27). It is stated that governments need to shift their image of the citizen as an information receiver to an information contributor. However, it is also stated that there are so-called 'super contributors' defined as "a minor group of users [which] is responsible for almost all the contributions" (Effing et al., 2011, p. 27). These people are characterized as well educated, male and with a relatively high income as well as being of high age.

The research which is most relevant for this bachelor thesis is the one conducted by Conroy et al. (2012). In order to answer the RQ it is mainly referred to their investigation of college undergraduate students. In this study the three scholars argue that "Facebook and other SNS have

created new ways to bridge the gap between users through groundbreaking interactive technologies" (Conroy et al., 2012, p. 1544). With that in mind they studied to what extent members of political FB groups engage in offline politics. Political FB groups are defined "as any social connection shared by individuals, which can enable political discussion and interaction [whereas p]olitical engagement is defined here as offline conventional forms of political participation and political knowledge" (Conroy et al., 2012, p. 1535 f.).

It is further argued that those groups provide a common space where "[i]ndividuals who normally would not be connected on FB are networked together […] based on their shared interests" (Conroy et al., 2012, p. 1538). More specifically this means that political FB groups provide a platform for FB users where they "can meet others interested in a specific topic, disseminate information about that topic, and have public discussions relevant to that topic" (Conroy et al., 2012, p. 1538). They argue that group membership promotes trust, democratic values, and the development of important political skills. In that respect online political group participation fosters users' engagement to share their opinions. The results of Conroy's et al. (2012) research show that "[p]articipation in online political groups is strongly correlated with offline political participation" (Conroy et al., 2012, p. 1535). However, they also found out that political FB groups 'only' increase offline political participation among college students but not political knowledge which is "likely due to low quality online group discussion" (Conroy et al., 2012, p. 1535).

In their study four attributes of a political FB group were outlined. The first attribute is interactivity which spreads information within FB through 'liking' and 'sharing'. By liking and sharing something in FB, this content - including posts, pictures and videos - is presented to the FB friends of the person who liked or shared the publication and allows them to view the content firsthand. Commenting is another interactive feature allowing a user to attach a comment on a post as well as to attach a picture, video or link to an external web site.

The second attribute of a political FB group is political discussion. Here, people can engage in discussions about politics through the exchange of ideas, beliefs, attitudes and arguments on public message boards which are called timeline on FB. Conroy et al. (2012) argue that political discussions encourage learning and action and force participants of the discussion to consider and express the personal political viewpoint.

Another attribute of political FB groups is the possibility to connect to other individuals through personal messages which foster communication and information exchange. In addition, one-on-one messages let individuals reflect on their own perspective and "become more informed and elaborate on their own opinions" (Conroy et al., 2012, p. 1536).

Fourth and lastly, the ability to network is named as an attribute of a political FB group, meaning that someone can include a person in the friends list. Through networking an individual can include persons with different backgrounds, attitudes, beliefs and mindset in the friends list thereby

establishing relationships with people who are also interested in a certain topic and disseminate information about that topic (Conroy et al., 2012).

With respect to the focus of this study, the presence of these attributes on either the Commission's, Council's or EP's FB presence can encourage political participation among visitors of the respective page by propagating information about EU issues through interactivity among FB users and by forcing visitors to consider their own views and those of others through political discussion.

Furthermore, through connecting and networking users are motivated to reflect on their own political viewpoint, become more informed about politics to have fruitful one-on-one conversations in that field via private messages as well as to develop a broader view of attitudes and ideas and an open mind set by including users with an interest for EU politics in the own friends list.

Former research conducted by Park et al. (2009) came to the same conclusion as Conroy et al. (2012) since they identified that FB groups are positively related to political participation. The authors (2009) state "that Facebook as an online tool plays a significant role in facilitating youth engagement in [offline] civic and political activities" (Park et al., 2009, p.733). In their research Park et al. (2009) study the relationship between FB groups and offline civic and political participation. They define FB groups as a "module that allows discussion forums and threads based on common interests and activities" (Park et al., 2009, p. 729). Their definition of offline political participation is in line with the definition of Gil de Zùniga et al. (2012) and includes such things as volunteering for charity, civic, and political groups and participating in election.

2.3 Concluding remarks

In this chapter an overview was given on the current debate about Social Media and SNS and their effect on political activity and democracy. It was outlined in particular what the impact of SNS is from a public relations view. In the context of a democratic society the scholars emphasize that specifically the concepts of dialogue and relationship management and transparency are most important when studying the effect of SNS on political participation. Dialogue fosters citizens' knowledge and understanding of the government as well as the exchange of ideas and opinions. Transparency in turn increases the accountability of the government and trust by the citizens.

In the second section of this chapter a closer look was taken on the research of Conroy et al. (2012) and Park et al. (2009) who independently from one another both found out that political group membership is positively correlated to offline political participation.

By examining in how far the FB pages of the Commission, the Council and the EP share the attributes of a political FB group it will be investigated to what extent the FB pages of the major EU institutions foster offline political participation. That is, the research question will be answered by checking if the Commission's, Council's and EP's FB pages share the defining attributes of a political FB group namely if they [1] enable interaction, [2] enable political discussion, [3] allow individuals to

connect to other individuals who are not friends yet share a political interest and [4] network individuals based on a shared interest.

Attributes of a Political Facebook Group and its Indicators

Attribute	Interactivity	Political discussion	Connection of individuals who are not friends	Networking of individuals based on interest for EU
Indicators of attribute	Like, share and comment function	Reply to a comment on a comment	Send personal message	Add individual to friends list

To this effect four sub-questions were developed that facilitate the answering of the main RQ. Each sub-question results from one of the four attributes of a political FB group. Therefore, the main and sub-questions read as follows:

Main question: To what extent do the Facebook pages of the major European Union institutions share the attributes of a political Facebook group?

Sub-question 1: To what extent do the Facebook pages of the major European Union institutions share the interactive attribute of a political Facebook group?

Sub-question 2: To what extent do the Facebook pages of the major European Union institutions enable political discussion?

Sub-question 3: Do the Facebook pages of the major European Union institutions provide the opportunity to connect to other users?

Sub-question 4: Do the Facebook pages of the major European Union institutions enable the networking of users?

The sub-questions are necessary to answer the main RQ since they help to uncover which of the four attributes are present on each of the FB pages under investigation. Studying the three FB pages on the backdrop of the sub-questions unfolds the presence of each of the four attributes separately. In that sense, the answers to the sub-questions do not only show to what extent the pages share the attributes of a political FB group. With reference to other scholars (Bertot et al., 2012; Conroy et al., 2012; Effing et al., 2011; Gil de Zúniga et al., 2012; Graham & Avery, 2013; Theunissen & Noordin, 2012; Utz, 2009), the answers to the sub-question also reveal what the strengths are of the studied FB pages concerning interactivity, transparency, public opinion as well as dialogue and eventually what their potential is to encourage political participation.

3. Methodology

In this Chapter, the methods of the current research are presented. First the chapter outlines why the cases of the Commission, the Council and the EP were selected. The first section also describes what the general approach is to study the selected FB pages, presents the unit of analysis, the unit of observation as well as the timeframe and justifies why this particular approach for studying the pages is used. In the next section of the chapter the operationalization and data collection method are introduced. Finally, the data analysis approach is described. Here, it is illustrated how the sub-questions and main RQ are answered to make a conclusion about the extent to which the EU FB pages encourage political participation.

3.1 Research Design

To find out whether the FB pages of the major EU institutions share the attributes of an online political group, three EU FB pages are investigated. The FB pages chosen are those of the Commission, the Council and the EP which are regarded as crucial because they are not only responsible for most of the 'day-to-day' decision-making in the EU but they are also the most prominent ones in the EU (Cini & Borragàn, 2010).

The Commission's FB page is investigated since the Commission is the key actor in EU policy making as it is "involved in the EU's policy process from start to finish" (Cini & Borragàn, 2010, p. 127). It is the institution which initiates and formulates policies, performs an agenda-setting role and plays an important role in the implementation process of EU policies. Hence, the Commission holds most of the decision-making power and it is worth investigating how transparent and accountable it represents itself and if its FB page encourages political participation in the EU.

The Council on the other hand is a key institution in EU politics because it represents the individual interests of the member states' national governments (Cini & Borragàn, 2010). In that regard, it should have an interest in EU citizens' support and political participation since the decisions it takes directly affect both the domestic politics of the EU member states as well as the EU citizenry.

Furthermore, as it is responsible for approving all of the Commission's legislative proposals it holds "extensive legislative and executive functions" (Cini & Borragàn, 2010, p. 142) and should be made accountable to the EU's public and seek to promote political participation among the citizens of the member states, i.e. the EU citizenry.

Lastly, the FB page of the EP is analyzed since it is "the only directly elected European institution" (Cini & Borragàn, 2010, p. 164). As a result, it is the EU body which represents the people and connects them to the political system. Among the most important functions, the EP can dismiss the Commission, monitors EU expenditure, can propose amendments to draft legislation and has to agree on enlargements of the EU (Cini & Borragàn, 2010). Moreover, the codecision procedure fully integrates the EP in the EU law-making process (Cini & Borragàn, 2010). Nevertheless, the EP's

powers are still limited in comparison to the Commission and the Council. This as well as the EP's lack of a clear profile and lack of public support by the EU citizens leads to "EP elections [which] are generally characterized by low turnouts" (Cini & Borragàn, 2010, p. 171). Therefore, it is worth to investigate the potential of the EP's FB page to encourage political participation.

The studies of both Conroy et al. (2012) and Park et al. (2009) bring proof that political FB groups increase its members' offline political participation. Considering that the attributes of political FB groups have been found successful in encouraging offline political participation, the dependent variable of this research is the degree to which the FB pages of the three major EU institutions motivate people's offline political participation. From this follows that the unit of analysis is the content of FB pages and the unit of observation are the FB pages of the Commission, the Council and the EP. The data is of qualitative nature since it is in text form and based on observations of the FB pages.

An issue of external validity is that this case study might be either illustrative of the institutions' FB pages or falsifiable by other EU FB pages. Hence, if one or all of the three institutions' FB pages share the attributes of political FB groups as defined by Conroy et al. (2012), then it cannot be generalized that other EU FB pages necessarily promote offline political participation. The completion of a survey by fans of the pages would allow for more reliable inferences about a relation between the FB pages and offline political participation. Yet, it would have been too extensive to get a sample considering that there is no access to a list of the institutions' FB page fans and that those who are active on FB (who possibly could have been contacted) tend to be politically active in the offline world more than other users anyway thereby biasing the results (Conroy et al, 2012; Effing et al., 2011).

Another consideration to study a potential relationship between FB pages of the EU and offline political participation was to use a qualitative content analysis (QCA). By using a QCA the written texts of the posts are coded and transformed into data from which inferences can be drawn (Zhang & Wildemuth, 2009). However, using this method to analyze FB pages allows to "assess the merits of knowledge acquisition through this medium" (Conroy et al., 2012, p. 1540) but it is not possible to gain insights about an influence of FB pages on offline political participation through QCA. That is why for this bachelor thesis it is made use of descriptive statistics and existing research from which inferences are drawn about EU FB pages and offline political participation.

3.2 Data collection method

For the purpose of finding out whether the Commission's, Council's and EP's FB pages encourage offline political participation, the pages are directly observed in order to find out whether each page meets the criteria of an online political group as defined by Conroy et al. (2012) or not.

When studying the three FB pages, the focus is on the timeline since it shows the amount of fans, i.e. shows the pages' direct audience reach, and is the primary, most common venue of communication, activity and discussion on FB (Conroy et al, 2012). Thus, the pages' timelines, including posts and visitors' comments, allow a systematic investigation of the pages' characteristics. Since not all posts can be investigated, posts of March 2015 are taken into account for the data collection because this time span provides sufficient and recent data to investigate the presence of the characteristics. Conroy et al. (2012, p. 1537) state that "most dialogue takes place on message boards and over the course of a few days". They add that a user "can post a comment on a message board and either never returns […] or returns several days later to continue the conversation" (Conroy et al., 2012, p. 1537). Hence, the time interval of one month is sufficient, considering that most public communication on FB takes place over the course of a few days. The month of March was chosen since it allows the gathering of current data.

In order to answer the first sub-question, it is examined whether at least one post on each institution's FB page was shared, liked or commented because liking, sharing and commenting indicate interactivity. It is looked at the Commission's, the Council's and the EP's FB pages separately. Every post in March and the corresponding comments section is inspected to check if there is interaction with the post. The data is entered into a table that reflects to what extent interactivity is present.

The comments section of the posts is also looked at to examine if the pages foster political discussion. An indicator of political discussion is when a fan comments, another fan replies and the original or a third commentator replies again to that subsequent comment. To answer the second sub-question, all three pages are again observed individually. For each page, every post's comments section is investigated one by one. Through reading the individual comments it can be controlled if there is a political discussion by investigating if a comment prompts replies which refer to that comment. All posts are numbered and recorded in a table and if there is political discussion in the comments section of one of the posts it is noted in the table. As a result it can be seen in the table which post prompts a political discussion and how many political discussions are on each page in the given time interval. On the basis of the data it can be seen separately for every page to what extent the Commission's, the Council's and the EP's FB pages enable political discussion in order to answer the second sub-question.

To check for the third attribute of an online political group - the possibility to connect to individuals who are not friends yet share a common political interest – and answer the third sub-question, it is examined if it is possible to send a personal message to fans who comment on the page. Since personal profiles cannot be accessed, the institutions' FB pages are studied in detail to find out if private messages can be sent to other users directly via the Commission's, Council's and EP's FB page. For that reason the fans who commented on the posts on each page are inspected individually, in chronological order, to find out if one can connect with other users via an institution's FB page.

Finally, to examine if fans are networked based on a shared interest - which is defined as the inclusion of individuals in the own Social Network – it is investigated on each institution's FB page whether it is possible to add personally unknown individuals to the own FB friends list directly via the FB pages. Here, the Commission's, the Council's and the EP's FB pages are also studied individually.

Apart from the fact that other users' profile sites cannot be accessed from the Commission's, Council's or EP's FB page - since FB pages generally do not provide lists of fans or visitors - it is a defined attribute to directly network with others via the pages and not by a devious route via profile sites. Thus, on each FB page it is investigated whether visitors can directly send a friend request to other users via the institutions' FB pages or not. For each institution, a table is compiled in which it is noted whether it is possible to network with other individuals or not on the page.

3.3 Method of data analysis

The collected data is analyzed using descriptive statistics. The measurement of each attribute is dichotomous meaning that the attribute is either present or not (yes/no). As for attribute one and two, posts are numbered in ascending order starting with the first post in March 2015. Concerning the third (connect to individuals) and fourth attribute (networking of fans), users who comment are numbered whereby the person that comments first in March is number one and then every user who comments is assigned a number in ascending order. The first and second sub-questions are answered by assigning posts that are interactively used or that prompt political discussion a 1 or 0 depending on whether the attribute is observable or not. To answer the third sub-question, a 1 is assigned to a fan that can be sent a personal message and a 0 for fans that cannot be contacted personally. In other words, a fan who can be contacted personally is assigned a 1 for yes (he/she can be contacted) and 0 for no (cannot be contacted) if it is not possible to send personal messages. To answer the fourth sub-question, a 1 is assigned to every fan that can be sent a friend request and a 0 for fans that cannot be directly added to the friends list via the institutions' FB pages. The possibility to send a friend request indicates that other users who are not friends in the personal FB network can be included in the friends list. Vice versa, if fans cannot be sent a friend request, this indicates that the attribute of networking is absent on the respective FB page.

Contrary to interactivity and political discussion, which are also dichotomous but more important in the realm of online politics (Vesnic-Alujeciv, 2012; Utz, 2009; Waters et al., 2009), it is not apparent from the three FB pages how frequently the attributes of connecting and networking of individuals is used by the pages' visitors. Users might connect and network very often but it is not observable from the investigation of the page. Furthermore, in how far people connect and network with each other is not dependent on the institution's posts but on the contribution and personal settings of other users as well as the own willingness to do so. In contrast to interactivity and political discussion which are enabled through the institution's FB page settings and motivated by the quality

of the institutions' publications, i.e. posts, the extent of the third and fourth attribute are dependent on other users' comments and therefore out of the institutions' control. This means that if the feature to connect to other individuals is given by the setup of the Commission's, Council's and EP's pages, the decision to do so is determined by other fans' contributions on the page and not by contributions of the institutions. In addition, it is possible that the institutions allow visitors to connect and network with each other via their FB pages but that visitors have strict privacy or security settings for their profile sites which prevent other FB users from adding them to their friends list. Thus, maybe all three institutions fulfill the criteria of providing the option to connect and network with other fans on their page but users are unwilling to connect and network with other FB users regardless of the institutions' pages setup. Thus, in order to answer the third and fourth sub-question as many fans as needed are entered into the table to find out if it is possible to send a personal message and friend request. In case that there is not a single fan who can be sent a message or a friend request in the month of March, the third or fourth attribute respectively are regarded as absent. Contrary, the possibility to send a personal message and friend request to one FB user who comments in the time interval is sufficient to prove that the third and fourth characteristic, i.e. connecting and networking of individuals, are present.

3.4 Concluding remarks

To sum it up, it is looked for indicators of the interactivity, political discussion, connecting and networking attributes directly on the institutions' FB pages to answer each sub-question.

Especially posts and user comments are of interest because they reveal interactivity, political discussion and possibly unfold a means to connect to and network with other FB users.

For each institution the data is entered into two tables (see Appendix 3, 4) to examine to what extent the attributes are present on the Commission's, Council's and EP's FB pages. The first and second sub-question are answered with the data in the first table, which indicates whether the first and second attribute, interactivity and political discussion respectively, are present (yes/1) or not (no/0) and if yes, how often each attribute was observable in order to compare the Commission, Council and EP.

The second table helps to answer the third (connect to individuals who are not friends) and fourth sub-question (networking of fans) since the data in the table indicates whether a page provides the possibility to send other fans personal messages via the FB pages and whether the pages allow to add personally unknown fans to the own FB friends list directly via the institutions' FB pages. If each attribute was assigned with a 1 at least once, an institution's FB page shares all attributes of a political FB group and can be said to encourage political participation.

4. Results

In this chapter it is described to what extent each of the three examined FB page shares the attributes of a political FB group as represented by the data which was collected in the month of March. Firstly, I will go into the page of the Commission and present what was found in terms of the four sub-questions. Thereafter, I investigate the Council's FB page and finally the EP's FB page with regard to each sub-question. The chapter concludes by elaborating on the analysis of the FB pages thereby giving a general overview of what the analysis of the three FB pages connotes.

4.1 The European Commission's Facebook page

As of March 29th 2015 this page is liked by 435 656 people (see Appendix 1). Looking at the timeline unfolds that the Commission posts very frequently. On the 18th March, for instance, the Commission posted 4 times (post number 16 -19) in one day and on the 24th March there were six posts (post number 31 – 36) in one day. Although, the institution did not post daily in the given month (there were no posts on the 5th, 7th, 10th and 14th March) the Commission posted over 50 times in a period of 31 days.

With regard to the first and second attribute of political FB groups, namely interactivity and political discussion, the page fulfills both attributes. Especially the interactive feature is heavily used. Every post was liked and commented and all but 2 posts were also shared, as indicated by the second column of Table 1 (see Appendix 3). Generally the posts were liked to a greater extent than shared. The Commission's posts from March 1st, 8th, 11th, 23rd, 24th, 24th, 27th, 28th and 29th were liked the most with 1100, 465, 565, 917, 415, 338, 845, 529, 699 likes and 221, 171, 133, 277, 80, 86, 83, 228, 172 shares respectively (see below).

Date of Post	1st March	8th March	11th March	23rd March	24th March	24th March	27th March	28th March	29th March
Number of Likes	1100	465	565	917	415	338	845	529	699
Number of Shares	221	171	133	277	80	86	83	228	172

A post that was updated three times and showed pictures about the 'Investment Plan roadshow' prompted 917 likes and 277 shares. The first post in March, which asked users to identify a city (Prague) on the basis of a video showing a skyline, was shared 221 times and liked over 1100 times.

Political discussion is also present although to lesser extent than the interactive feature as indicated by the zeros in the third column of Table 1 (see Appendix 3). 18 of the Commission's 51 posts brought about a political discussion indicating that the second attribute of a political FB group is

present on the Commission's FB page. Some discussions took place over the course of three days (the post from March 11th resulted in a discussion that lasted until March 13th) and included 3 or more persons, other discussions were held over a time span of a few hours and included only two persons.

Regarding the third and fourth attribute, one sees on the basis of the second fan who commented that both attributes are given. When scrolling over that fan's name a window appears which shows two buttons that say 'Add Friend' and 'Message'. The first button (Add Friend) is for adding the person to the own friends list by sending a request to become friends on FB with that person. The second button (Message) is for sending personal messages to that person. Clicking on that button opens a window in which a message can be written and sent. Hence, the possibility to connect to individuals who are not friends yet share a common political interest (for the EU) is given on the Commission's FB page as is the possibility to include unknown people to the own friends list, i.e. network with users.

4.2 The Council of the European Union's Facebook page

The Council has 159 144 fans on FB as of March 29th 2015 (see Appendix 1). Moreover, with 34 posts in the month of March, the Council posts less frequently than the Commission. On the one hand, there are points of time when the Council did not post at all for several days, e.g. between the 19th and 23rd March. On the other hand, there are days when the Council posted numerous times in one day, for instance on 10th (three posts) and 17th March (four posts), indicated by post number 10 – 12 and post number 21 – 24 respectively in Table 2 (see Appendix 3). Nonetheless, the page is highly interactive since almost every post was liked, shared and commented on. In only three cases a post was just shared and liked but not commented on. However, some interactivity, either sharing, liking or commenting, was observable in all posts. 22 posts gained over 100 likes and 8 of these 22 posts were liked over 200 times (see below).

Date of Post	3rd March	8th March	10th March	17th March	19th March	23rd March	25th March	25th March	27th March
Number of Likes	216	439	262	193	227	268	884	262	280
Number of Shares	35	100	0	37	103	24	22	2	28

Two of the posts which got more than 200 likes stand out with the post about the international Women's Day on March 8th that prompted 439 likes and 100 shares as well as the post on March 25th about an airplane crash in France which resulted in 884 likes and 22 shares.

The Council's FB page also has the attribute of political discussion but it is present to a lesser extent than on the Commission's and EP's FB page. Three posts on the Council's page resulted in a

discussion among fans. Theoretically, each post allows for comments and replies but in reality the posts lead to less political discussion than the posts of the other two institutions under investigation.

On March 3rd, 4 parties were involved in the discussion about the use of English language on the Council's FB page including a contribution to the discussion by the Council. Three individuals took part in the discussion on March 10th about the English language skills of a Ukrainian politician discussing with the US American President and the discussion about a European Council summit on March 19th included 2 persons.

The Council's FB page also has the third as well as the fourth attribute of a political FB group. When pointing at the name of the person who commented first in the month of March, a window pops up showing the buttons 'Add Friend' and 'Message' indicating that one has the possibility to either send a friend request to that person or to send a personal message. Therefore, the Council's FB page shares the third and fourth attribute of a political FB group as indicated by the possibilities to send individuals who are not friends yet share a common political interest a personal message and to include other FB users in the own friends list based on a shared interest for the EU respectively.

4.3 The European Parliament's Facebook page

Now the third and last FB page is examined, namely the EP's FB page. Having a look at the FB page (see Appendix 1), it is observable that it has substantially more fans than both the Commission's and the Council's FB pages. With 1 621 452 likes as of March 29th 2015, the EP's FB page has more fans than the Commission's and the Council's FB pages combined. Hence, the EP's FB page has a large audience reach. Compared to the Commission which posted 51 times in the given time interval, the EP has 3 posts less with its 48 posts in March. As in the case of both the Commission's and the Council's FB page, the EP's page is also highly interactively used, as the second column of Table 3 (see Appendix 3) shows. The posts on the page are liked, shared and commented more often in comparison to the other two pages but the interactivity attribute is strongly present on all three pages. Nevertheless, the posts leading to 1606, 25920, 1538, 615, 1057, 1241, 1005, 673, 903, 663, 4374, 938 and 1622 likes as well as 453, 5429, 148, 287, 65, 204, 490, 189, 305, 103, 504, 384 and 157 shares respectively show that the page has a vast audience reach since all these posts are spread in FB also to people who do not visit the page themselves.

Date of Post	2nd March	4th March	4th March	9th March	14th March	16th March	27th March	28th March	31st March
Number of Likes	1606	25920	1538	1057	1241	1005	4374	938	1622
Number of Shares	453	5429	148	65	204	490	504	384	157

Especially the post on March 4th which prompted 25920 likes and 5429 shares implies that the EP's FB page is used interactively to a very great extent. If one leaves this outlier post aside, there are still 13 posts which were liked over 600 times of which 8 were liked over 1000 times (see above).

The attribute of political discussion is substantially more present on the EP's page than on the Commission's and the Council's FB pages. The number of comments was substantially higher on the EP's page than on the pages of the other two institutions. In only six cases, posts by the EP did not lead to a political discussion as indicated by the zeros in the third column in case of post number 7, 9, 10, 30, 33 and 39 in Table 3 (see Appendix 3). That is, on the EP's FB page 42 of the 48 posts in the month of March resulted in a political discussion. Discussions on the EP's page included longer replies and involved more people than the other two FB pages (see Appendix 2). Single posts also resulted in several discussions among fans. Yet, not only did the number of discussions differ from the Commission's and Council's page but also the amount of people taking part in it. There were discussions spanning over a period of 2 days (e.g. on March 4th) including more than 10 persons. In addition, the EP was involved in numerous discussions, thereby directly communicating and discussing with people to clarify and underline arguments or to answer questions first hand.

When investigating the EP's page to check for the third and fourth attribute, the presence is not as obvious as on the pages of the Commission and the Council. Scrolling over the pages' first two commentators only gives the possibility to network with these users but not the possibility to connect to them, i.e. to send them a personal message. Contrary, the third and fourth users that commented on the first post can only be sent personal messages but cannot be added to the friends list. Although the possibility to send user one and two a friend request and user three and four a personal message indicates that attribute three and four are present, a window providing both possibilities for *one* fan appeared only when scrolling over the name of the fifth fan who commented (see Appendix 4). Nevertheless, the investigation brought proof that it is possible to connect to individuals who are not friends yet share a common political interest for the EU and to network with other FB users based on a shared interest for the EU.

Attributes of EU institution's Facebook pages in comparison

	Institution			Total
Type of Data	European Commission	Council of the European Union	European Parliament	All Three FB pages
Number of Posts	51	34	48	133
Number of Posts with Interactions	51	34	48	133

Number of Posts with Political Discussions	18	3	42	63
Connecting Possibility	YES	YES	YES	YES
Networking Possibility	YES	YES	YES	YES

4.4 Concluding remarks

In 133 cases - out of the 133 examined posts - the posts were liked, shared or commented on and mostly all of it. Since posts on the Commission's, Council's and EP's FB page were liked, shared and commented, it can be claimed that there is much interactivity on these EU FB pages. Many users included links to external pages in their comments. Oftentimes, these links lead to internet pages containing videos (see Appendix 2) which show, for instance, interviews with EU officials, speeches of politicians or animated graphics. Pictures were also included in many cases, showing persons, things or situations that are related to the issue under discussion. This high amount of interactivity was observed on all of the three FB pages.

The interactive feature of sharing and liking was used even more often than sharing files or pictures and attaching links to external web-pages to the comments. Through liking and sharing of posts, EU issues are spread on a big scale within FB - also to users who otherwise would not have been exposed to an issue or information (Conroy et al., 2012). The possibility to like the page was utilized hundredfold and some posts were even liked thousandfold. Consequently, the interactivity attribute is the feature that is made most use of and is present in all posts under investigation.

Whereas in 42 instances out of 48 posts, the EP's posts resulted in discussions among fans, in the case of the Commission at least 18 of the 51 posts resulted in discussions which is still substantially less than on the EP's FB page but relatively more than on the Council's FB page with 3out of 34 posts prompting a discussion. To sum it up, 79 out of the 133 investigated posts on the three pages encouraged users to engage in a discussion.

Furthermore, the data shows that it is possible to connect directly with other users via the Commission's, Council's and EP's FB pages. Finally, the possibility to network with other people based on an interest for the EU is given as well.

As expected, the EP - being the only directly elected EU body - uses the possibility of its FB page to connect to people to a greater extent than the other two institutions. Interactivity and political discussion were observed to a great extent implying that the EP's FB page fosters dialogue and transparency relatively more than the Commission's or the Council's FB pages.

5. Discussion

Based on the results of the previous chapter it can be said that the FB pages of the Commission, the Council and the EP share the attributes of a political FB group. In this chapter, the findings will be discussed in theoretical terms. With reference to the theories that were elaborated on in the second chapter, the data will be brought into context. That is, it will be investigated what the findings imply considering the research of other scholars and how the pages can encourage offline political participation among FB users and what this means for the EU's democratic deficit.

First the chapter elaborates on the pages' attributes followed by a discussion of the pages' audience reach.

Thereafter, the issue of transparency is discussed continued by a section about political discussion on the three FB pages.

Before a summary of this chapter is given, the FB pages of the Commission, the Council and the EP are investigated with regard to the concept of dialogue.

5.1 Attributes of EU Facebook pages and political participation

With regard to the first sub-question it can be argued on the basis of the analysis that the first attribute of a political FB page, that is enabling interaction, is present on the FB pages of the Commission, the Council and the EP, to a great extent. The massive interactivity indicates the pages' potential to confront FB users who are less interested in politics with EU political issues and make the citizenry active agents in the European government (Utz, 2009; Vesnic-Alujevic, 2012). To put it differently, the high amount of interactivity indicates that although a fan "does not necessarily have to be interested in politics [the three FB pages] may push an individual to interact and learn about politics" (Conroy et al., 2012, p. 1538) thereby encouraging offline political participation among FB users (Gil de Zúniga et al., 2012).

Concerning, the second sub-question – to what extent do the FB pages of the major EU institutions enable political discussion – the picture looks entirely different. The Council's FB page falls short of expectations. Only 3 out of 34 posts on the Council's FB page encouraged a discussion among visitors of the page. The findings imply that in fact, the possibility to have a discussion on the Council's FB page is present but the feature is used considerably less on the Council's than on both the Commission's and EP's FB pages. However, by meeting the criteria of enabling political discussion, it can be argued that FB users are given the possibility to use the FB pages of the Commission, Council and EP as platforms to "have public discussions relevant to [the EU] topic" (Conroy et al., 2012, p. 1538) and in the case of the EP did so to a great extent. That is, the pages of the three major institutions of the EU provide a platform to discuss EU issues, get a deeper understanding of EU politics and eventually motivate political participation (Conroy et al., 2012).

Regarding the question whether the FB pages of three big institutions of the EU provide the opportunity to connect to other users, it can be argued on the basis of the analysis that the attribute of connecting to other fans is given. As a result, just like with political FB groups, the Commission's, Council's and EP's FB pages allow users "to directly converse with each other over one-on-one private messages, which signifies the powerful potential of [them] to facilitate political communication" (Conroy et al., 2012, p. 1538). One-on-one political communication in turn benefits the exchange of political ideas and opinions between users in a direct and honest way thereby promoting democratic principles and thus offline political participation (Eyrich et al., 2008; Graham & Avery, 2013; Theunissen & Noordin, 2012).

Consistent with political FB groups, the FB pages under investigation "are unique in the sense that they have a powerful networking ability" (Conroy et al., 2012, p. 1538). Due to the opportunity to send other users friend requests, the FB pages of the Commission, Council and EP allow the networking of people on the basis of an interest for EU politics. By including individuals with different backgrounds, attitudes and beliefs in the own network, visitors of the three FB pages are able to establish relationships with others who are also interested in EU politics, discuss with them one-on-one and disseminate information about EU issues which encourages active citizenship, i.e. political participation (Conroy et al., 2012).

5.2 The EU's Facebook pages and political participation

The data analysis reveals that there is variation among the FB pages with regard to the size of their audience. There is a significant gap in the audience reach between the Commission's page, the Council's page and the EP's page. Especially, the EP's page stands in stark contrast to the other two FB pages with over one and half million (1 621 452) fans compared to 435 656 fans of the Commission's FB page and 159 144 fans of the Council's FB presence. The EP's FB page, therefore, can be considered as exploiting the possibilities of FB to accumulate social capital the most. With an audience reach of its FB page of more than 1.6 million users, the EP makes itself accountable to a large amount of people. This in turn results in a more effective political system thereby diminishing the EU's democratic deficit (Gil de Zúniga et al., 2012).

In addition, through its FB page's popularity the EP has the ability to directly motivate a great amount of people to engage in civic activities and participate politically (Gil de Zúniga et al., 2012). Encouraging a large audience to participate actively in EU politics is of course a huge benefit. Yet, this does not necessarily result in a higher turnout of EP elections which is one of the key issues in the EU's democratic deficit. However, based on the results in combination with the argument put forward by Gil de Zúniga et al. (2012) it can be claimed that the EP's FB page – and to a lesser degree also the Commission's FB page - with its massive audience reach mobilizes a large amount of the social capital that is inherent in FB. On the backdrop of the pages' themes, namely EU politics, it can be

argued that the pages motivate "behavior that is oriented toward the public good, either at the community or the political level" (Gil de Zúniga et al., 2012, p. 320).

Despite their smaller audience, the Commission's and Council's FB pages encourage political activity through the interactivity on the institution's FB pages. The pages' content is spread to FB users who are not visiting the institution's FB pages themselves via friends in the network who like or share content of one of the pages. In other words, the FB pages of the Commission and Council can also reach a vast amount of people – though not to the same extent as the EP - because FB facilitates the "circulation of information to reach broader audiences" (Eyrich et al., 2008, p. 412) through commenting, sharing and liking.

5.3 Transparency and the EU's Facebook pages

The results unfold the amount of posts on the Commission's, Council's and EP's FB pages (in March 2015) and show that the institutions' communication via FB is very frequent and up-to-date which indicates how serious the institutions take FB as a communication tool.

Again the Council performs poorer than the Commission and EP but with 34 posts in one month it still posts regularly. The amount of posts in the specified time interval suggests that the Commission and the EP as well as the Council – though the latter to a lesser degree – incorporate FB in their communication strategies with the public. By using FB as an integral part of the communication approach, the institutions develop open and honest relationships with the public (Theunissen & Noordin, 2012). This in turn challenges the EU's democratic deficit by increasing European citizens' trust in the major governing institutions of the EU (Cini & Borragà, 2012).

Apart from the different amount of posts published by each institution, the quality of the comments and discussions of fans on the pages differed to a considerable degree. In contrast to the Commission's and the EP's FB pages, users on the Council's page did not add much new information to a post or discussion.

Furthermore, the arguments put forward by users who commented on the Council's page are not founded on or backed by reliable sources. In other words, the discussions on the Council's page are rather emotional, opinionated and lack a certain degree of quality (see Appendix 2). Even without a QCA, it became clear that the few discussions on this FB page are neither well-articulated nor information rich. With regard to Conroy et al. (2012) it can be argued that particularly the comments and discussions on the FB page of the Council are "not enlightening and therefore educational" (Conroy et al., 2012, p. 1544). The analysis of the other two institutions' pages reveals that the quality of discussions is better than on the Council's FB page (see Appendix 2). Although the discussions on the Commission's and EP's FB pages are rather passionate as well they are more informed than on the Council's FB page. Often times people include links to external pages in their comments (see Appendix 2) which provide explanations or statistics that support their opinion or argument. As a

result, the impression of the quality of comments and discussions on the Commission's and EP's FB pages is not in line with the findings of Conroy et al. (2012) about members' posts in political FB groups namely that "the information content and quality […] were found to be very poor, generally lacking support for their claims, incoherent, or simply opinionated" (Conroy et al., 2012, p. 1544). Therefore, their result that political knowledge is not increased through membership in a political FB group (Conroy et al., 2012) seems to be valid for visitors of the Council's FB page but not for visitors of the Commission's and EP's FB pages.

Moreover, on the basis of the analysis it can be argued contrary to Conroy et al. (2012) that the information on the institutions' FB pages are valuable and educating because the discussions refer to the institutions' posts which are both information rich as well as from reliable sources - namely the institutions themselves. In addition, by answering 'personally'(see Appendix 2), all institutions added a considerably more informed contribution with well articulated arguments to a discussion. Contrary to the line of reasoning of Conroy et al. (2012), the analysis suggests that political knowledge about the EU increases by visiting the Commission's, Council's or EP's FB page due to the posts' quality and the personal contribution to discussions by the institutions.

On top of that, the posts and replies of all three institutions provide valuable information about EU structures and operations in an open and honest way, e.g. by disclosing how decisions are taken and which decisions are taken by whom. Open government information about the EU on the institutions' FB pages do not only enhance transparency but also relationships between politicians and citizens because the latter are able to explore and track government activities and those of government officials (Bertot et al., 2012). The FB pages of the Commission, the Council and the EP each represent a platform with "the potential to create open, transparent, efficient, effective and user-centered ICT-enabled services" (Bertot et al., 2012, p. 268). Citizen-centered government on the other hand effectively encourages the key democratic principle of active citizen-participation (Bertot et al., 2012). Put differently, the open, frequent and reliable provision of information by the Commission, Council and EP make the EU more transparent and in that sense, as Gil de Zúniga et al. (2012) point out, address its democratic deficit because transparency encourages individuals' political participation. Following the line of reasoning of Bertot et al. (2012), which is in line with the argument put forward by Gil de Zúniga et al. (2012), the FB pages of the Commission, Council and EP support a participatory democracy in the EU due to the provision of meaningful information about the EU.

5.4 Political discussion on the EU's Facebook pages

It was identified that the EP's FB page encourages FB users substantially more to discuss EU politics than the FB pages of the other two institutions. This is an important finding because specifically "interpersonal processes, such as discussion, are central to learning and action, perhaps licensing the positive effects on civic engagement and participation" (Conroy et al., 2012, p. 1536).

Conroy et al. (2012, p. 1536) add that "[d]iscussion is thought to be integral to feelings of efficacy among citizens, leading to higher rates of political activity". From those arguments it can be claimed that the EP's FB page has a greater impact on offline political participation than the FB pages of the Commission or the Council because of the greater amount of political discussion on the EP's FB page.

However, other scholars (Bertot et al., 2012; Graham & Avery, 2013; Utz, 2009) underline the specific relevance of the interactivity attribute which is shared by all three FB pages to a great extent. The emphasis on interactivity relativizes the assumption that due to its higher occurrence of political discussion the EP's FB page has a greater influence on offline political participation than the Commission's and Council's pages. Graham and Avery (2013, p. 2), for instance, stress the importance of interactivity due to its potential to create "new methods for democratic participation".

Bertot et al. agree with that argument and add that interactivity increases and improves "access to government information to the public" (Bertot et al., 2012, p. 87). The authors (Bertot et al., 2012) also say that interactivity is beneficial for information sharing and individual participation. Utz (2009) adds in this respect that interactivity makes the flow of political information more efficient.

Having these arguments in mind, it is inconclusive that the EP's FB page has a greater impact on offline political participation due to the pages greater extent of political discussion as put forward by Conroy et al. (2012). The cited scholars (Bertot et al., 2012; Graham & Avery, 2013; Utz, 2009) take the view that interactivity is equally if not more important than political discussion to increase political participation. With that said, it can be expected that the EP's FB page does not have a greater influence on FB users' offline political participation since interactivity was observed to a great extent on all three FB pages.

In addition, Effing et al. (2011, p. 27) point out that the politically active users of SNS are often "only a minor group of users [which] is responsible for all the contributions". These so called super contributors, it is contended, are often times people that are politically active offline anyway meaning that more discussion on the EP's page may be the product of people who participate in politics in any case. Put differently, if the politically active people online are the same people as the people who are politically active offline, it follows that the amount of discussions does not encourage political participation offline because the people in question are politically engaged offline regardless of their political participation online. Hence, although there is more political discussion on the FB page of the EP which increases political activity offline as argued by Conroy et al. (2012), the arguments put forward by Bertot et al. (2012), Effing et al. (2011), Graham and Avery (2013) as well as Utz (2009) suggest that the EP's page does not have a greater potential to encourage offline political participation in comparison to the Commission's and Council's FB pages. Therefore, it is argued that a greater amount of political discussion on the EP's FB page does not encourage political participation among FB users to a greater extent than the FB pages of the Commission or the Council.

5.5 Dialogue on the EU's Facebook pages

The analysis shows that the Commission, the Council and the EP are using their FB pages to communicate directly with FB users. In their posts the institutions address their fans, e.g. through such questions as "What is your opinion/experience?" This shows that they acknowledge the fans not merely as information receivers but as information contributors. They fulfill the citizens' expectations for dialogue and signal that they "shift their view of citizens from mainly consumers to active participants by allowing citizens to contribute online to the development of governments" (Graham & Avery, 2013, p. 4). Considering the definition by Theunissen and Noordin (2012) that dialogue is a two-way communication mode, it can be argued that the Commission, Council and the EP enter into a dialogue with the citizens. This two-way symmetrical communication fosters discussion, dialogue and discourse (Theunissen & Noordin, 2012). With such a two-way symmetrical model of communication, including dialogic and participatory posts and discussions, the institutions meet core democratic objectives (Graham & Avery, 2013). Therefore, it can be argued with reference to Graham and Avery (2013) that through the dialogic exchange of information and ideas, the institutions' FB pages can help to overcome the EU's democratic deficit by "support[ing] democratic and participatory engagement" (Graham & Avery, 2013, p. 15).

Furthermore, it was also observed on the FB pages that users commented and returned to the page later to answer a reply to their original comment or to comment to a newly published post by one of the institutions. This regular return of users indicates that the promotion of dialogue and conversation on the FB pages helps the institutions to "continuously maintain ties to key publics" (Theunissen & Noordin, 2012, p. 6). On the backdrop of Theunissen and Noordin's (2012) theory it can be contended that ties, i.e. a relationship, between the EU institutions and the European citizenry contributes to the creation of knowledge and mutual understanding which in turn reinforces the inclusion of the citizens in the development of a democratic European society.

Lastly, by entering into a dialogue with fans on an equal basis via their FB pages, the Commission, Council and EP use FB to reinforce the democratic principle of unmediated communication between the government and the citizenry. The analysis shows that the Commission and Council as well as the EP directly engage in discussions with users (see Appendix 2) where the latter can speak directly and honestly to government officials and get the feeling of having a say in European politics through direct replies by the EU institutions. Graham and Avery (2013, p. 5) state in this regard that such honest and purposeful communication between a government and its citizens "derives from the principles of democracy". Put simply, dialogue between the European public and EU institutions on their FB pages is democratic as such and implies that the EU institutions' act in accordance with democratic principles via FB thereby using the platform in a way that might help to overcome the EU's democratic deficit.

5.6 Concluding remarks

In this Chapter the investigated FB pages' attributes were brought into context and generated numerous insights.

Firstly, it was outlined that the FB pages of the Commission, the Council and the EP share all the attributes of a political FB group thereby encouraging offline political participation and potentially help to overcome the EU's democratic deficit. Interaction is helpful to spread EU issues within FB and pushes individuals to learn about EU politics. Political discussion helps users to get a better understanding of EU politics. Connecting of fans fosters the direct and honest exchange of political ideas and opinions among users and promotes democratic principles and offline political participation (Graham & Avery., 2013; Eyrich et al, 2008; Theunissen & Noordin, 2012). Networking allows visitors of the EU institutions' FB pages to establish relationships with people who are interested in EU politics, discuss and disseminate information with them on a regular basis which encourages political participation (Conroy et al., 2012).

Secondly, it was shown, that the FB pages of the Commission, the Council and the EP are an integral part of the institutions' communication strategy. This fosters the development of open and honest relationships with the public and makes the EU transparent and accessible for the European public (Theunissen & Noordin, 2012). In addition, dialogic exchange on an equal basis between the EU and the European public, i.e. between ruler and ruled, represents the principles of democracy itself (Graham & Avery, 2013) and is eventually supportive in overcoming the EU's democratic deficit.

Thirdly, the institutions' FB pages - particularly the EP's page - with their massive audience reach have the potential to diminish the EU's democratic deficit by holding the Commission, Council and EP accountable to millions of people within FB. Moreover, users are able to explore and track activities of the EU and its officials. The frequent provision of meaningful information about the EU encourages political participation and addresses the EU's democratic deficit (Gil de Zúniga et al., 2012). Despite the fewer fans, the Commission and Council have a considerable, indirect audience reach within FB through the interactivity on their FB pages.

Furthermore, it was illustrated that the greater amount of political discussion on the EP's FB page does not encourage political participation to a greater extent compared to the FB pages of the Commission or Council.

Fifthly, the discussion revealed that the Commission, Council and EP use their FB pages to enter into a dialogue with the people.

Finally, it was reasoned, contrary to the argumentation of Conroy et al. (2012) concerning political FB groups, that the EU FB pages under investigation contribute to FB users' knowledge about EU issues due to the institutions' informed posts and direct participation in discussions with users.

6. Conclusion

This section answers the main RQ. Generally, it can be said that the FB pages of all three major EU institutions share the attributes of an online political group and thus encourage offline political participation. Yet, the extent to which the FB pages share the attributes differs among the Commission, the Council and the EP.

In the following, the pages' attributes are summed up which is followed by answering the main RQ. Lastly, the implications of the findings are outlined with respect to offline political participation and it is evaluated what this means for the EU and its democratic deficit.

Based on the amount and content of the posts as well as their interactivity, it is safe to say that the FB pages of the major EU institutions "create awareness around political issues" (Conroy et al., 2012, p. 1543). Due to the great extent of interactivity even FB users who are not fans of the EU FB pages themselves are exposed to the EU institutions' posts via FB friends who like and share the posts of the Commission, Council and EP. The FB pages' interactive attribute can encourage political participation not only among visitors of the EU FB pages but even among those FB users who are not visiting the pages themselves. Consequently, apart from directly motivating fans of the EU FB pages to participate politically through posts, interactivity makes other FB users aware of EU issues which fosters both learning about the EU and support for the European project and eventually encourages political participation (Cini & Borragàn, 2010).

With regard to political discussion the analysis showed that the FB pages of the Commission, the Council and the EP can be characterized as platforms to have discussions and communicative exchange around issues of the EU. In that sense the EU FB pages inform and motivate for political participation (Conroy et al., 2012).

Furthermore, connecting to other users via private messages is possible on the FB pages of the three institutions under investigation as is the possibility to network with individuals based on a shared interest for EU politics. Connecting and networking allows individuals to meet others and broaden the own political knowledge, fosters open mindedness and thus encourages political participation (Conroy et al., 2012).

To sum it up: The FB pages of the Commission, the Council and the EP have the attributes of an online political group as defined by Conroy et al. (2012). Each page [1] enables interaction, [2] enables political discussion, [3] allows individuals to connect to other individuals who are not friends yet share a political interest and [4] networks individuals based on a shared interest for the EU. As a result, it can be argued that the institutions' FB pages encourage participation in politics among FB users. In other words, it can be concluded that - just as political FB groups – the FB pages of the Commission, the Council and the EP foster political action among visitors of the sites and "encourage offline political participation" (Conroy et al., 2012, p. 1542).

Apart from the comments and discussions of users, the content of the institutions' posts provide a wealth of information. Thus, the FB pages of the three institutions under investigation "create awareness around political issues" (Conroy et al., 2012, p. 1543). It is therefore argued, that the FB pages of the Commission, the Council and the EP are not only beneficial platforms to efficiently "deliver government information to citizens and other groups of "users" [and to] improve flows of information" (Chadwick & May, 2003, p. 272) thereby increasing the EU government's openness, transparency and accountability (Bertot et al., 2010). The improved, i.e. fast, direct, easy-to-use and relatively inexpensive, availability of first-hand information about the EU– regarded as a key factor to a democratic EU government – also affects the public's trust in the EU and results in a participatory European democratic society (Bertot et al., 2010). Citizens engagement in EU politics, however, is not restricted to electing the EP, whilst this is a desirable outcome, but includes all kinds of political activities like joining political clubs and parties, supporting civic organizations or expressing frustration about the government and policies through demonstrations and protests (Gil de Zúniga et al., 2012).

However, it was also revealed that in contrast to interactivity, the possibility to have political discussions on the FB pages is not fully exploited by the Commission and the Council. Following the argumentation of Conroy et al. (2012) this shortcoming of political discussion might compromise the pages' potential to encourage offline political participation. Since the majority of posts are in English language some users may feel uncomfortable to comment and take part in political discussion. This assumption is supported by comments in the given time interval in which people disdainfully made a point about the language skills of persons in videos or about other users who commented in English.

Another indicator that users might be reluctant to participate in English discussions is a comment from a German who asked why all posts are in English and gladly acknowledged that the Council responded to his comment in his mother tongue, German (see Appendix 2). Although it is obvious that English language makes a post's content understandable to a broader audience, the inclusion of more users in a political discussion can possibly be influenced in a positive way by still posting in English but inviting people who do not feel confident in the English language to comment in their mother tongue, thereby even increasing the EU FB pages' potential to increase offline political participation.

Aside from the fact that the FB pages of the three institutions combined already have more than 2 million fans, the Commission, Council and EP might consider to promote their FB pages outside of FB to increase the audience reach. Since 890 million people use FB on a daily basis (Facebook Newsroom, 2015) the institutions could maximize their FB pages' potential to encourage offline political participation by addressing even more FB users.

It is noteworthy that users need to be able to navigate through the technology to make SNS effective tools for transparency. Given technology literacy, i.e. "the ability to understand and use technologies" (Bertot et al., 2010, p. 268), the use of SNS by governments makes " government

initiatives and activities more open and accessible [by] informing, educating, and reporting about government activities, policies, and community issues" (Graham & Avery, 2013, p. 15). In practical terms this means, that the EU should promote computer literacy among EU citizens to safeguard that the citizenry as a whole and not only well educated and relatively wealthy people with the means – to own a computer and have an internet connection – and skills to navigate through SNS have access to websites such as FB.

Taken all together, this study implies that the major EU institution's FB pages have a positive influence on FB users' offline political participation due to the FB pages' politically encouraging attributes. Since the FB pages of the Commission, Council and EP are platforms which encourage offline political participation it can be assumed that they potentially diminish the EU's democratic deficit because active citizenship in politics is the founding principle of a healthy democracy. However, no claim about a causal relationship between EU FB pages and the EU's democratic deficit can be made on the basis of the data that was collected here. Besides its democratic deficit, this study implies that the EU can use FB as a tool to encourage political participation among the European citizenry and should also use other SNS that share the specific features of political discussion, connecting, networking and especially interactivity in order to encourage political participation of the citizenry.

Future research could extend this study in terms of empirical evidence by conducting a research with original data, e.g. through surveying fans of the pages. Considering that the four attributes which the three investigated FB pages were tested for, were found to increase political participation among American college students, original survey data could unfold whether Europeans are also encouraged by other SNS attributes to participate in politics. Additionally, original survey data can show if the four attributes also encourage political participation among other demographic groups. This study is also limited in terms of its generalizability since only three EU FB pages could be studied. That is, subsequent studies should aim to include more EU FB pages and examine to what extent other EU agencies' and bodies' FB pages have such attributes and potentially encourage political participation. The use of surveys could bring empirical evidence that there is a direct relationship between EU FB pages and offline political participation, e.g. higher turnout rates in EP Elections.

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8. Appendix

8.1 Appendix 1: The Facebook Pages of the Major European Union Institutions

8.2 Appendix 2: Example of Political Discussions on the Facebook Pages of the Major European Institutions

Like · Comment · Share · 👍 203 💬 10 ↪ 87

👍 203 people like this.   Most Relevant ▾

↪ 87 shares

Write a comment...

Jaka▨▨▨▨ Does anyone care about boys and men at all? Enough of this radical feminism. And I don't care if you agree with me or not, but feminism movement has only one goal in mind, complete discrimination of men. As a man you may not disagree with women, doubt, say or think against women. No, because women are only victims and men are only perpetrators. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=y5OdQGbVNa4

The Effects of Feminism on MEN

YOUTUBE.COM

Like · Reply · 👍 2 · 2 March at 23:28

Frida▨▨▨▨ Haha omg you really don't know ANYTHING about feminism ><
Like · 👍 1 · 3 March at 09:30

Jaka▨▨▨▨ Frida, no it is just te oposit...most of women don't know anything about feminism, and this video is just one of the examples what feminism is all about. Wake up!
Like · 3 March at 18:58

Nana▨▨▨▨ they don't care even for these women and girls :((just endless perorations for decades...
Like · 5 March at 16:00

Write a reply...

Like · Comment · Share · 👍 216 💬 10 ↪ 35

👍 216 people like this.

Most Relevant ▾

↪ 35 shares

Write a comment...

Karl ▮▮▮▮▮▮▮▮▮▮ Warum ist immer alles auf Englisch??
Like · Reply · 3 March at 17:45

> **Dominik** ▮▮▮▮ Weil alle Europäische leute verstehen es.
> Like · 4 March at 17:16 · Edited

> **Karl** ▮▮▮▮▮▮▮▮ Tja 🙂
> Like · 3 March at 23:45

> **Lara** ▮▮▮▮ Because not everybody speaks German
> Like · 4 March at 08:34

> **Karl** ▮▮▮▮▮▮▮▮ Not everyone speaks Engllish neither
> Like · 👍 1 · 4 March at 08:53

> **Council of the European Union** ✔ Hallo Karl Sebastian Handke ,
> vielen Dank für Ihre Nachricht. Aus Kapazitätsgründen können wir
> zurzeit nur englische Beiträge auf unserer Seite posten. Wir
> versuchen aber, Fragen stets in der Sprache zu beantworten, in der
> sie gestellt wurden. Und wir hoffen, auf unserer Seite bald auch
> Inhalte in anderen Sprachen anbieten zu können.
> Like · 👍 1 · 4 March at 13:01

> **Karl** ▮▮▮▮▮▮▮▮ So Sie können auf Deutsch posten da.
> Like · 4 March at 13:12

> Write a reply...

Like · Comment · Share · 👍 764 💬 44 ➔ 364

👍 Parlamento Europeu - Gabinete em Portugal, Platforma Obywatelska RP - Polska, Mazowsze, Warszawa, Bielany and 762 others like this.

Top Comments ▾

➔ 364 shares

Write a comment...

Sergio■■■■ Dear EP, he talked about "fiscal claims" of authorities against his hospital. It's blackmail. Let's ban these authorities from EU and sanction individuals who steal the money of the prize from the hospital.
Like · Reply · 👍 11 · 27 March at 18:46

Elie■■■■■■■■■■■■■ I agree with you.
Like · 27 March at 22:18

Igomokelo■■■■■■This is it ! Ban them from everywhere; even in their own country.
Like · 👍 1 · Yesterday at 03:21

Sylvie■■■■■■■■■■■■ Well said!
Like · 👍 1 · Yesterday at 06:16

Anne-Lise■■■■■Agree that EP is not the best forum for that topic. When you think of the fraud and exploitation that may members are famous for. Besides very low taxes, if any at all. Trust me, I am a former Council official
Like · Yesterday at 09:37

Simonetta ■■■■@anne-lise■■■■ The fact that we are reading this post and watching this interview is proof that the ep is a good forum for raising awareness of the issue. As a former council official you should defend the eu's efforts rather than bash them - the media already does that wonderfully, and not always accurately.
Like · 👍 1 · Yesterday at 10:51

Write a reply...

8.3 Appendix 3: Interactivity and Political Discussion on the Facebook Pages of the Major European Institutions

Table 1: Interactivity and Political Discussion on the Facebook Page of the European Commission

Number of Post in the Month of March (Date of Publication)	Presence of Attribute (1 = Yes, attribute present; 0 = No, attribute not present)	
	Interactivity	Political Discussion
1 (1st March)	1	0
2 (2nd March)	1	1
3 (3rd March)	1	1
4 (3rd March)	1	0

5 (4th March)	1	1
6 (6th March)	1	0
7 (8th March)	1	1
8 (9th March)	1	1
9 (11th March)	1	1
10 (12th March)	1	0
11 (13th March)	1	0
12 (15th March)	1	1
13 (16th March)	1	0
14 (16th March)	1	1
15 (17th March)	1	0
16 (18th March)	1	1
17 (18th March)	1	0
18 (18th March)	1	1
19 (18th March)	1	1
20 (19th March)	1	0
21 (19th March)	1	0
22 (20th March)	1	0
23 (20th March)	1	1
24 (21st March)	1	0
25 (21st March)	1	1
26 (22nd March)	1	0
27 (22nd March)	1	0
28 (23rd March)	1	0
29 (23rd March)	1	0
30 (23rd March)	1	1
31 (24th March)	1	0
32 (24th March)	1	1
33 (24th March)	1	0
34 (24th March)	1	0
35 (24th March)	1	0
36 (24th March)	1	0
37 (25th March)	1	0
38 (25th March)	1	0
39 (25th March)	1	0
40 (26th March)	1	1

Number of Post in the Month of March (Date of Publication)	Interactivity	Political Discussion
41 (26th March)	1	0
42 (27th March)	1	0
43 (28th March)	1	0
44 (28th March)	1	0
45 (29th March)	1	0
46 (29th March)	1	0
47 (30th March)	1	1
48 (30th March)	1	1
49 (31st March)	1	0
50 (31st March)	1	0
51 (31st March)	1	0

Table 2: Interactivity and Political Discussion on the Facebook Page of

the Council of the European Union

Number of Post in the Month of March (Date of Publication)	Presence of Attribute (1 = Yes, attribute present; 0 = No, attribute not present)	
	Interactivity	Political Discussion
1 (2nd March)	1	0
2 (2nd March)	1	0
3 (3rd March)	1	1
4 (5th March)	1	0
5 (6th March)	1	0
6 (6th March)	1	0
7 (8th March)	1	0
8 (9th March)	1	0
9 (9th March)	1	0
10 (10th March)	1	0
11 (10th March)	1	1
12 (10th March)	1	0
13 (11th March)	1	0
14 (12th March)	1	0
15 (12th March)	1	0
16 (13th March)	1	0
17 (13th March)	1	0
18 (16th March)	1	0
19 (16th March)	1	0

20 (16th March)	1	0
21 (17th March)	1	0
22 (17th March)	1	0
23 (17th March)	1	0
24 (17th March)	1	0
25 (18th March)	1	0
26 (19th March)	1	1
27 (23rd March)	1	0
28 (25th March)	1	0
29 (25th March)	1	0
30 (26th March)	1	0
31 (27th March)	1	0
32 (28th March)	1	0
33 (30th March	1	0
34 (31st March)	1	0

Table 3: Interactivity and Political Discussion on the Facebook Page of the European Parliament

Number of Post in the Month of March (Date of Publication)	Presence of Attribute (1 = Yes, attribute present; 0 = No, attribute not present)	
	Interactivity	Political Discussion
1 (2nd March)	1	1
2 (3rd March)	1	1
3 (4th March)	1	1
4 (4th March)	1	1
5 (5th March)	1	1
6 (5th March)	1	1
7 (6th March)	1	0
8 (6th March)	1	1
9 (6th March)	1	0
10 (9th March)	1	0
11 (13th March)	1	1
12 (13th March)	1	1
13 (13th March)	1	1
14 (14th March)	1	1
15 (14th March)	1	1
16 (15th March)	1	1

17 (16th March)	1	1
18 (18th March)	1	1
19 (19th March)	1	1
20 (20th March)	1	1
21 (20th March)	1	1
22 (21st March)	1	1
23 (21st March)	1	1
24 (22nd March)	1	1
25 (22nd March)	1	1
26 (23rd March)	1	1
27 (23rd March)	1	1
28 (24th March)	1	1
29 (24th March)	1	1
30 (24th March)	1	0
31 (24th March)	1	1
32 (25th March)	1	1
33 (25th March	1	0
34 (25th March)	1	1
35 (26th March)	1	1
36 (26th March)	1	1
37 (26th March)	1	1
38 (27th March)	1	1
39 (27th March)	1	0
40 (27th March)	1	1
41 (28th March)	1	1
42 (28th March)	1	1
43 (29th March)	1	1
44 (29th March)	1	1
45 (30th March)	1	1
46 (30th March)	1	1
47 (31st March)	1	1
48 (31st March)	1	1

8.4 Appendix 4: Connecting and Networking on the EU institution's Facebook Pages

Table 4: Third and Fourth Attribute: European Commission

Number of Comment in the Month of March (Date of Publication)	Presence of Attribute (1 = Yes, attribute is present; 0 = No, attribute not present)	
	Connection of Fans	Networking of Fans
1 (1st March)	0	0
2 (1st March)	1	1

Table 5: Third and Fourth Attribute: Council of the European Union

Number of Comment in the Month of March (Date of Publication)	Presence of Attribute (1 = Yes, attribute is present; 0 = No, attribute not present)	
	Connection of Fans	Networking of Fans
1 (2nd March)	1	1

Table 6: Third and Fourth Attribute: European Parliament

Number of Comment in the Month of March (Date of Publication)	Presence of Attribute (1 = Yes, attribute is present; 0 = No, attribute not present)	
	Connection of Fans	Networking of Fans
1 (2nd March)	0	1
2 (2nd March)	0	1
3 (2nd March)	1	0
4 (2nd March)	1	0
5 (2nd March)	1	1