

# UNIVERSITY OF TWENTE.

Faculty of Behavioural, Management and Social Sciences  
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## **Citizens' knowledge about the EU-Spitzenkandidaten for the 2014 European elections**

Bachelor Thesis  
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### **Keywords**

Political knowledge, European elections, European Commission President, EU-Spitzenkandidaten, new media

### **Abstract**

The 2014 European elections introduced a new procedure of lead candidates for the post of the European Commission President. Newspapers have highlighted that the awareness of these so called EU-Spitzenkandidaten was low among European citizens. This thesis thus examines citizens' knowledge about the *EU-Spitzenkandidaten* for the 2014 European elections. A particular focus lies on the citizen's media usage. Therefore, the research question is to what extent the usage of established and new media sources influenced a voter's political knowledge about the 2014 EU-Spitzenkandidaten. The analysis shows that first and foremost reading newspapers influenced the voters' political knowledge about the candidates. The Internet on the other hand plays a weaker, less influential role, which is contrary to the expectations raised in the beginning.

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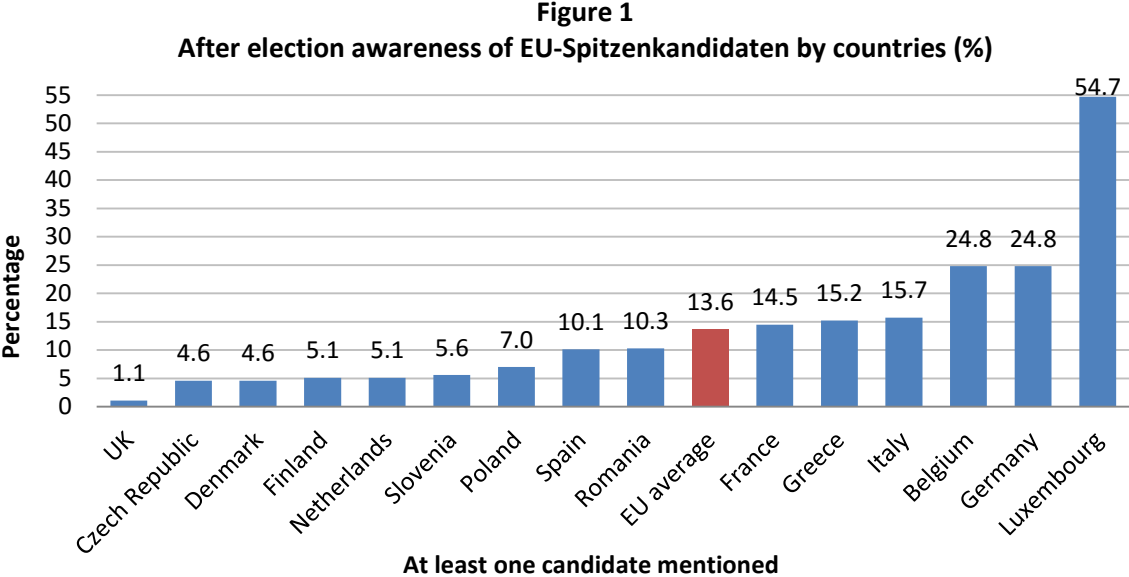
## List of Acronyms

App	Appendix
ALDE	Alliance of Liberals and Democrats for Europe
CAPI	Computer Assisted Personal Interview
ECR	European Conservatives and Reformists
EFDD	Europe of Freedom and Direct Democracy
EPP	European People's Party
EU	European Union
Greens/EFA	The Greens–European Free Alliance
GUE/NGL	European United Left–Nordic Green Left
MEP	Member of the European Parliament
MEPs	Members of the European Parliament
S&D	Progressive Alliance of Socialists and Democrats
TV	Television
UK	United Kingdom

# 1. Introduction

In 2014, for the first time in the history of the EU, the biggest European political parties nominated candidates for the post of the European Commission President. While the European Council had taken a critical position and announced to review the legality of the procedure, many scholars welcomed the new *EU-Spitzenkandidaten* (lead candidates) procedure as a big step towards legitimizing the European Union (EU) (Heidbreder & Auracher, 2015; Hobolt, 2014). However, as newspapers have highlighted before and immediately after the 2014 European elections, the newly introduced EU-Spitzenkandidaten have been unknown to most voters (AMR GmbH Dusseldorf, 2014; Barbière, 2014) This bachelor thesis therefore focuses on the phenomenon of low political knowledge about the EU-Spitzenkandidaten among European citizens by taking several individual characteristics as determinants of citizens’ knowledge into account.

An AMR election polling shortly after the elections showed that only 13.6 percent of the 12,132 respondents from 15 European countries were able to name at least one of the EU-Spitzenkandidaten (AMR GmbH Dusseldorf, 2014). A comparison between these 15 European countries however yields considerable differences between the countries as Figure 1 displays.



Source:(AMR GmbH Dusseldorf, 2014)

In the Czech Republic, Denmark, Finland and the Netherlands only around five percent of respondents were able to name at least one of the candidates when asked who had been nominated to replace José Manuel Barroso. Respondents from the origin countries of the EU-Spitzenkandidaten unsurprisingly scored higher than countries without a Spitzenkandidat. However, this cannot explain why Italians, Spaniards and Romanians were better at naming a nominated candidate than respondents from the Netherlands, the Czech Republic and the United Kingdom (UK). The country of origin does thus not explain why some citizens knew the candidates and some did not. Therefore the question arises which factors determine that some citizens are aware of the candidates and others are not. Investigating which factors influence voters’ political knowledge about the EU-Spitzenkandidaten will be at the heart of this bachelor thesis. Moreover, this is primarily a study at the individual level. A comparison between EU countries will thus not be performed.

The actual amount of knowledge citizens should possess has for centuries remained a controversial topic of discussion (Held, 2006). While some academic scholars have argued in favor of

an elite-based model of democracy in which an equitably informed citizenry is impossible and unnecessary, others have highlighted the importance of politically informed citizens (Delli Carpini & Keeter, 1997). An informed citizenry is considered to be one of the key requirements for a flourishing democracy which remains both; responsible and responsive (Delli Carpini & Keeter, 1997). The basis for such an informed citizenry is the ability, motivation and opportunity of citizens to access information. Political knowledge thus does not solely depend on an individual's characteristics such as his level of intelligence, but is shaped by individual and systemic forces (Delli Carpini & Keeter, 1997).

Accessing information and gathering knowledge are closely connected to another trending topic of discussion: the usage of media. Various scholars have examined the effects of different types of media on the political involvement and political participation of its users. This thesis distinguishes between established media sources and new media sources. Television (TV), newspaper and radio are considered as established media sources, while new media refers to the Internet and all content related to it. Since the 1990s the use of the Internet has rapidly grown. By now, owning a smartphone, buying products online and using applications like Google Maps and Facebook have become commonplace. The actual mobilizing and socializing effects of the Internet should therefore not be disregarded. Although critics of new technologies believe that the Internet does not contribute to a smart society, online news consumption has been found to be positively related to political participation among young adults (Bakker & de Vreese, 2011; Quintelier & Vissers, 2008). The Internet has proven to be a vast pool of information, which is always up to date and available for everyone. Delli Carpini and Williams (2001) highlight that the original division of media sources into news, entertainment and sports does not apply for new media. Social media platforms such as Facebook, Twitter or YouTube could therefore have a similar mobilizing and informing potential as established news sources.

This bachelor thesis examines European citizens' knowledge about the EU-Spitzenkandidaten by taking media usage into account. The influencing effects of established news sources and new media sources on political knowledge about the EU-Spitzenkandidaten will be analyzed. Since political campaigning for the 2014 European elections was clearly visible on the Internet, the influencing effect of the Internet in general will be assessed as well. This will on the one hand contribute to the ongoing debate about the new Spitzenkandidaten procedure and on the other hand contribute to discussions about the informing potential of the Internet. The central question of this bachelor therefore reads as follows:

*To what extent did the usage of established and new media sources influence a voter's political knowledge about the 2014 EU-Spitzenkandidaten?*

The research will be guided by the following questions:

- 1) *Did the consumption of TV news contribute to gaining political knowledge about the 2014 EU-Spitzenkandidaten?*
- 2) *Did the consumption of newspaper news contribute to gaining political knowledge about the 2014 EU-Spitzenkandidaten?*
- 3) *Did the consumption of Internet news contribute to gaining political knowledge about the 2014 EU-Spitzenkandidaten?*

#### 4) *Did the general usage of the Internet contribute to gaining political knowledge about the 2014 EU-Spitzenkandidaten?*

This bachelor thesis is organized in the following way. The first chapter familiarizes the reader with the overall topic and purpose of the thesis. The second chapter provides background knowledge about the 2014 European elections, the EU-Spitzenkandidaten and the media attention the candidates received. The next chapter focuses on the theoretical framework and introduces four hypotheses. In the fourth chapter, the research methodology of the thesis is introduced to the reader. This includes the research design, the case selection, the operationalization of the main variables and the threats to the research. The then following analysis chapter tests the hypotheses and presents the research findings. In the discussion chapter, these findings are then used to support or reject the hypotheses and to answer the research questions. The concluding chapter summarizes the main findings and provides suggestions for future research.

## **2. Background**

This chapter will provide some detailed background knowledge about the 2014 European elections, the selection procedure of the Commission president and the actual media coverage of the EU-Spitzenkandidaten. The reader will additionally receive information about the EU-Spitzenkandidaten themselves.

### **2.1 Elections to the European Parliament in 2014**

Between the 22<sup>nd</sup> and 25<sup>th</sup> May 2014, citizens of the EU were encouraged to cast their vote for the 2014 European elections. Since the European Parliament is the only directly elected institution of the EU, the European elections are often considered as the main channel for European citizens to influence the political course of the EU through electing the Members of the European Parliament. Around 400 million citizens from 28 European member states were eligible to vote in the 2014 European elections. However, similar to the previous three European elections not even half of the eligible voters took that chance and voted. The turnout rate remained low with 42.5 percent for the 2014 elections in comparison to 43.0 percent in 2009 (Eurostat, 2014). Ironically, the slogan promoted by the European Parliament for the 2014 European elections was ‘this time it’s different’ (European Parliament News, 2014). Irrespective of the low turnout rate, the 2014 European elections clearly introduced something ‘different’. For the first time Spitzenkandidaten were introduced to the public.

As displayed in Table 1, the Spitzenkandidaten put forward by the five major European political parties for the 2014 European elections were José Bové, Jean-Claude Juncker, Ska Keller, Martin Schulz, Alexis Tsipras and Guy Verhofstadt.

**Table 1**  
**Overview of the 2014 EU-Spitzenkandidaten**

Candidate	Country of origin	European political party	Associated European political group
José Bové	France	European Greens	The Greens–European Free Alliance
Jean-Claude Juncker	Luxembourg	European People's Party	European People's Party
Ska Keller	Germany	European Greens	The Greens–European Free Alliance
Martin Schulz	Germany	Party of European Socialists	Progressive Alliance of Socialists and Democrats
Alexis Tsipras	Greece	European Left	European United Left–Nordic Green Left
Guy Verhofstadt	Belgium	The Alliance of European Liberals and Democrats	Alliance of Liberals and Democrats for Europe

Source: (Hobolt, 2014)

Prior to the 2014 European elections, José Bové was a candidate in the 2007 French presidential election. He has served as Member of the European Parliament (MEP) for the European Greens since 2009. Jean-Claude Juncker was Prime Minister of Luxembourg (1995-2013) and President of the Eurogroup (2005-2013). Ska Keller has served as MEP for the European Greens since 2009. Martin Schulz has served as MEP since 1994. He was the chair of the Progressive Alliance of Socialists and Democrats (S&D) group (2004-2012, 2014) and he has been the president of the European Parliament since 2012. Alexis Tsipras was elected to the Greek Parliament in 2009, where he was the leader of the left-wing Syriza party. Guy Verhofstadt was the Prime Minister of Belgium (1999-2008). He has served as MEP and chair of the Alliance of Liberals and Democrats for Europe (ALDE) group since 2009.

## 2.2 Appointment procedure of the European Commission President

The introduction of EU-Spitzenkandidaten did not occur out of the blue. There have been many discussions among scholars about the necessity to stronger involve the public by having an open contest for the post of the Commission president. While the Treaty of Lisbon 2007 Article 8A(3) states that "every citizen shall have the right to participate in the democratic life of the Union [and that] decisions shall be taken as openly and as closely as possible to the citizen", the EU remains a mystery to most European citizens. Whereas scholars such as Giandomenico Majone and Andrew Moravcsik have argued against the existence of a 'democratic deficit', Andreas Follesdal and Simon Hix have pointed at the need of a more transparent and more accessible European governance with an open contest for the office of the European Commission President (Follesdal & Hix, 2006). Hix has highlighted that the appointment process of the Commission President has always occurred behind closed doors despite the growing political battles for the office. He stated that the election procedure of the Commission President will never be a democratic process unless it will become publicly known what the candidate stands for, what he wants to pursue if elected and which governments or political parties stand behind him (Hix, 2008).

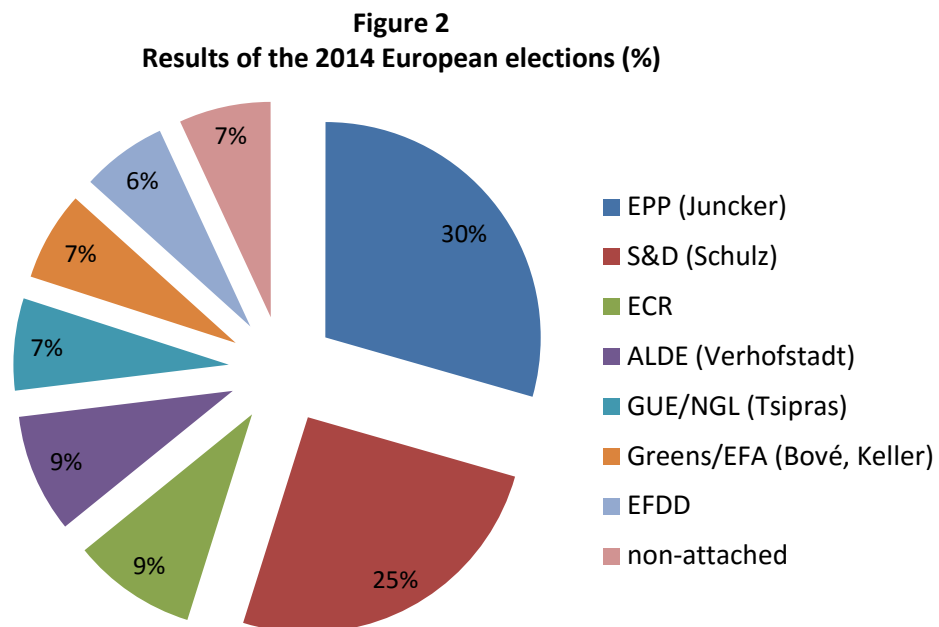
Until the Lisbon treaty entered into force in 2009, the President of the European Commission was nominated by the European Council, approved in a vote by the European Parliament and then appointed by the European Council. The Lisbon Treaty however introduced an important change and the European Council had to take the respective European elections into account when proposing a nominee for the office of the President of the European Commission.



*Taking into account the elections to the European Parliament and after having held the appropriate consultations, the European Council, acting by a qualified majority, shall propose to the European Parliament a candidate for President of the Commission. This candidate shall be elected by the European Parliament by a majority of its component members.*

- Article 17(7) TEU, emphases added in italics

This addition to the treaties enabled the major European political parties to nominate Spitzenkandidaten. The entire Spitzenkandidaten procedure was mainly pushed forward by the European Parliament which urged European political parties to nominate candidates already in 2012 (European Parliament, 2012). The actual nomination of candidates by the European political parties however occurred only a few months before the elections. The European Commission supported the procedure stating that “this should increase the legitimacy of the President of the Commission, the accountability of the Commission to the European Parliament and the European electorate and, more generally, increase the democratic legitimacy of the whole decision-making process in the Union” (European Commission, 2013a). Despite the fact that the treaty change does not state that the European Council has to nominate the winning Spitzenkandidat of the elections, the European Parliament and in particular the nominated candidates interpreted this as to be the unwritten rule (Fox, 2014). Honor Mahony, a reporter from the EUobserver has titled this entire EU-Spitzenkandidaten election scheme 'the Spitzenkandidaten coup' (Mahony, 2014). On 15<sup>th</sup> July 2014, the European Parliament elected Jean-Claude Juncker whose European People’s Party received most of the votes during the elections. Figure 2 shows the election results of each European party group.

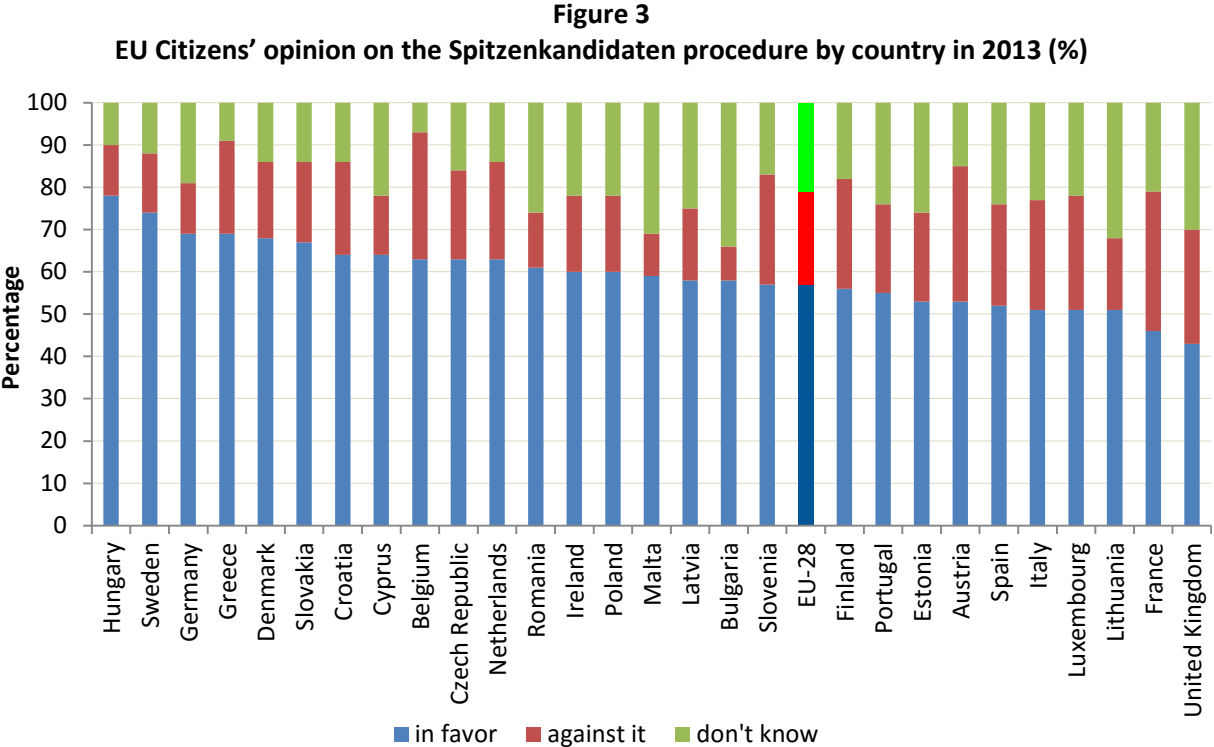


Source: (European Parliament, 2014)

### 2.3 Media presence of EU-Spitzenkandidaten

The EU-Spitzenkandidaten race did not interest and motivate many European citizens as some newspapers have highlighted before and also after the elections (Barbière, 2014; Delli Carpini & Keeter, 1997). It is however difficult to assess whether it was successful or not, since the EU-Spitzenkandidaten procedure can be considered still in its infancy. A Eurobarometer survey from

autumn 2013 showed support for the procedure among European citizens as displayed in Figure 3. Respondents were asked whether they are in favor of or against European political parties to nominate candidates for the post of the Commission President for the next European elections. 57 percent of EU citizens were in favor (blue) of the procedure, ranging from 78 percent in favor in Hungary to 43 percent in favor in the UK. Interestingly, the ‘don’t knows’ (green) are particularly high for this question with an EU average of 21 percent, ranging from 34 percent in Bulgaria to 7 percent in Belgium. These high ‘don’t know’ rates can to a certain extent be explained by the relative low awareness of the public about the actual meaning and possible implications of this new procedure at that time.



Source: (European Commission, 2013b)

To further mobilize and inform citizens, the Spitzenkandidaten promoted the procedure prior to the elections. They visited many countries throughout the EU. Schulz spent 38 days in 20 different countries whereas Juncker visited 17 countries in 34 days (Schmitt, Hobolt, & Popa, 2015). In addition to city visits, the EU-Spitzenkandidaten used tools such as television debates and social media. The official ‘Eurovision Debate’ between the EU-Spitzenkandidaten which took place one week before the elections and which was broadcasted in all EU member states reached only a small number of citizens. Most public channels did not trust the debate to yield good results and moved the debate to smaller channels (Broadcasters EUROVISION Presidential Debate, n.d.). In Germany, only 0,5 percent of the total audience watched the debate on the smaller channel Phoenix (Kyburz, 2014). The official Twitter hashtag of the Eurovision debate ‘#TellEUROPE’ however created a big echo on Twitter and related social networks. 112,595 Tweets used the official hashtag to talk about the debate which equaled 607.6 Tweets per minute (Dinter & Weissenbach, 2015). This already shows that the 2014 European elections made great use of social media platforms such as Twitter, YouTube and Facebook. Martin Schulz, Guy Verhofstadt, Ska Keller and José Bové, thus four out of six EU-Spitzenkandidaten, were among the Top 10 most active and follower-gaining Members of the European Parliament (MEPs) on

Twitter (Obholzer, 2015). The candidates used social media to inform their voters about their political programs and priorities, but also to connect with the voter, inviting them to ask questions and responding to these questions. Figure 4 shows two pre-election Tweets from Jean-Claude Juncker and Martin Schulz on Twitter which illustrate the use of Twitter for campaigning purposes.

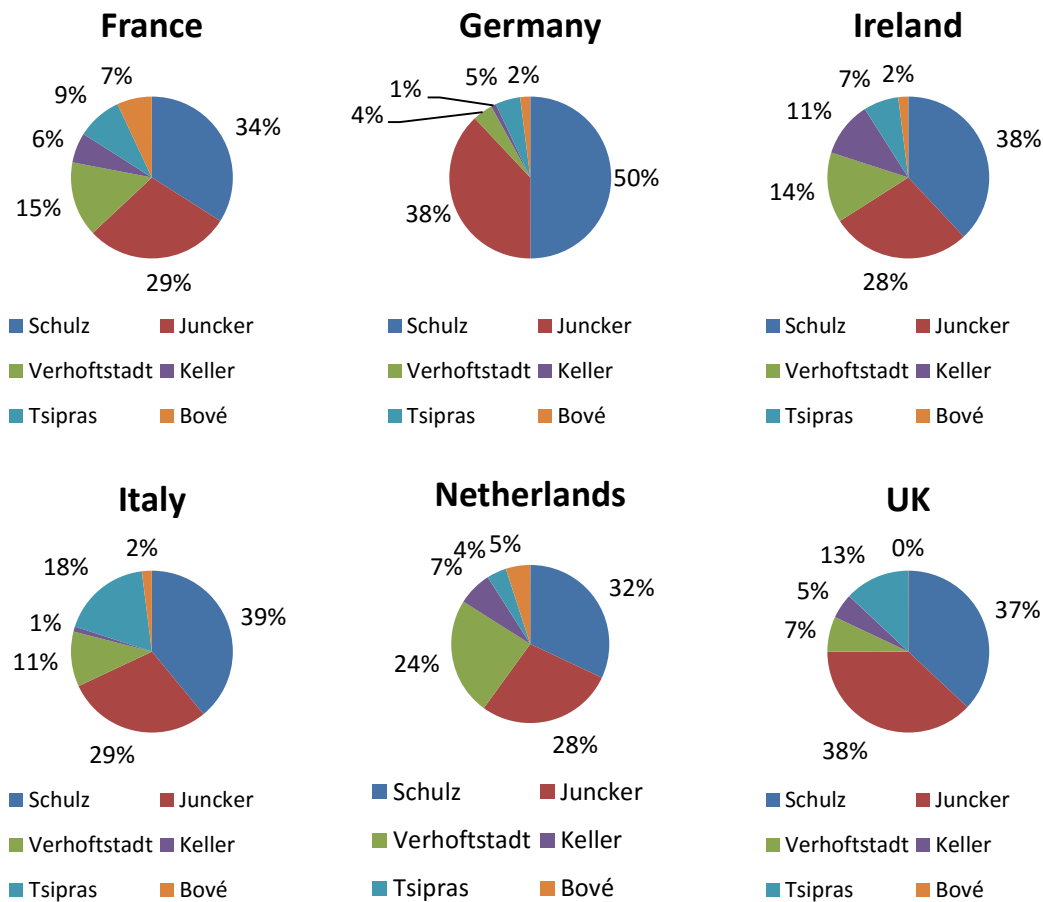
**Figure 4**  
**Pre-election Tweets from Juncker and Schulz on Twitter**



Source: (Twitter.com Retrieved May 30, 2015)

Despite their efforts to inform the voters and promote their individual stances, not all six candidates received a similar media attention. In an interview with EurActiv, Julian Priestly, a special adviser to Martin Schulz' 2014 campaign, and Nereo Peñalver García, an EU official, both argued that the Spitzenkandidaten procedure faced skepticism by the media (Vincenti, 2015). Newspapers did report about the candidates but the focus of newspapers remained on national topics (Niedermayer, 2014). While the European Parliament's pan-European campaign tried to reach all member states, the individual impact of the Spitzenkandidaten in each EU member state was determined by the will of national parties to include the candidates in their national campaigns (Hobolt, 2014). Gattermann (2015) has examined the national media coverage which the EU-Spitzenkandidaten received before the 2014 European elections in France, Germany, Ireland, Italy, the Netherlands and the UK. She notes that all candidates except José Bové received more media attention the closer the elections approached. Gattermann attributes this to Bové's non-participation of TV debates. Schulz and Juncker received the most attention overall, whereas Keller and Bové received the least. Bové received most media attention in his home country France. This was not the case for Ska Keller. She received only one percent of the combined media attention of all candidates in her home country Germany. Schulz however, also originating from Germany received 50 percent in Germany as Figure 5 illustrates.

**Figure 5**  
**EU-Spitzenkandidaten media visibility by country (%)**



Source: (Gattermann, 2015)

### 3. Theoretical framework

This chapter will provide an overview of the theoretical framework which forms the basis of the analysis of this thesis. The concept of political knowledge will be introduced in general, followed by an elaboration of political knowledge about the EU-Spitzenkandidaten. Next, the rise of new media and the usage of the Internet for campaigning purposes will be described. In the final part of this chapter, additional factors which need to be controlled for in the analysis will be introduced. The theoretical framework leads to four hypotheses which will be tested in the analysis.

#### 3.1 Political knowledge as basis for an engaged citizenry

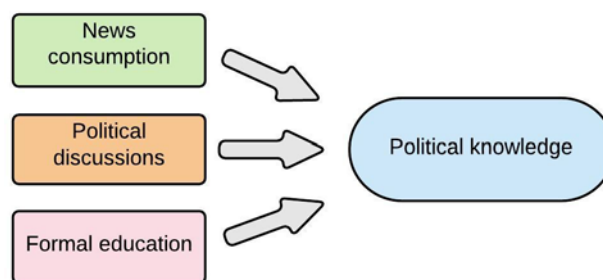
Political knowledge is essential for citizens in order to participate effectively in civic life (Delli Carpini & Keeter, 1997). Even voting in an election, which could be considered the simplest form of civic engagement, requires some form of prior knowledge in order to be meaningful for the vote. While a profound citizenship demands more from citizens than just knowing facts and figures, political knowledge could be considered as the basis of such civic virtue while political information is its central resource (Delli Carpini & Keeter, 1997). Delli Carpini and Keeter (1997, p. 10) define political knowledge as “the range of factual information about politics that is stored in long-term memory”. They further define three areas of which citizens should have knowledge within the so called ‘game of politics’;

- the rules of the games (key institutions of governance and elections),
- the substance of the games (the major issues of ongoing political debates) and
- the players of the game (public official, key candidates and political parties).

Knowledge about the key leaders and political parties of a political system are important elements of a citizen's political knowledge, according to this theory. The EU-Spitzenkandidaten can be considered to be such major political players. Knowing them, and particularly their campaign pledges and performances are therefore crucial in the light of elections. The actual value of knowledge is however relative and situational, in other words depending on the context (Delli Carpini & Keeter, 1997). The more knowledge a person possesses in a certain field the better, but the particular type of knowledge is also of importance. Knowing how many MEPs are elected to the European Parliament will for instance not help in determining for whom to vote in upcoming European elections. Knowing what each candidate stands for and which party supports which candidate will be of greater use. This theory therefore investigates to what extent citizens are able to correctly identify not only the EU-Spitzenkandidaten but also their affiliated European or national party.

According to Kenski and Stroud (2006) political knowledge can be gained through formal education, through political discussions with others and through the consumption of news media. These three channels, which are illustrated in Figure 6, are of particular interest for citizens to receive general political information. 'Formal education' is most likely the first source of political knowledge, as students learn about historical events and more current political topics in school. 'Political discussions' refers to the information input an individual receives when discussing political topics with others, for example with family members, friends, colleagues or acquaintances. 'Consumption of news media' as third channels refers to the information input an individual receives when reading or hearing news, for example on the radio, on TV, in newspapers or online. While formal education normally stops when leaving school or university, discussions with others and news consumption stay vibrant channels for political knowledge throughout an individual's entire life.

**Figure 6**  
**Sources of political knowledge**

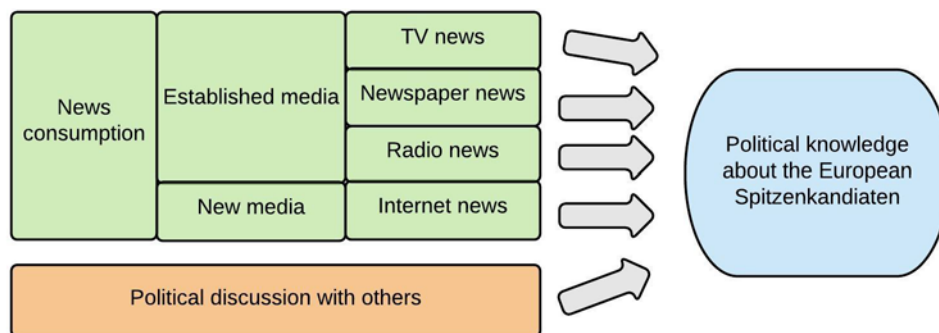


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Nowadays, political candidates make use of various campaign strategies and marketing tools. Internet campaigns have become the norm and websites offering political information have increased (Kenski & Stroud, 2006). Such specific knowledge about political candidates is thus not gained by an individual in school. This knowledge can only be gained through input from various news sources such as TV news, printed news, online news and radio news, which report about upcoming elections and inform about political candidates. It is therefore important to focus on these media channels in order to understand where citizens derive their political knowledge from and which factors influence this knowledge.

Political conversations with other individuals about upcoming elections are a second, possible source. The impact of political discussions with others on the political knowledge about the candidates will be excluded from the analysis, since the focus of this bachelor thesis lies on political knowledge and media use. Figure 7 illustrates the sources of EU-Spitzenkandidaten knowledge. The radio as information source will be excluded from the analysis as well since the data used in this thesis does not provide for it. This could lead to an omitted variable bias, but including additional data would exceed the scope of this bachelor thesis. Additionally, since 21<sup>st</sup> century campaigning has occurred mainly through the other channels (TV, newspaper and Internet) and the radio is above all an entertainment source, this is not expected to interfere with the analysis.

**Figure 7**  
**Sources of EU-Spitzenkandidaten knowledge**



Created by the author

On the basis of this theoretical input, three hypotheses can be derived which read as follows:

*H<sub>1</sub> = Individuals who often consume news on TV are more likely to have political knowledge about the EU-Spitzenkandidaten than individuals who do not often consume news on TV.*

*H<sub>2</sub> = Individuals who often consume news through newspapers are more likely to have political knowledge about the EU-Spitzenkandidaten than individuals who do not often consume news through newspapers.*

*H<sub>3</sub> = Individuals who often consume news online are more likely to have political knowledge about the EU-Spitzenkandidaten than individuals who do not often consume news online.*

### 3.2 Political knowledge and new media

The media as fourth pillar of democracy next to the legislative, executive and judiciary play an important role in informing the citizens by providing processed political content. However, since the media landscape is changing, citizens do not only receive their political input through printed newspapers anymore. Over the past century the so called 'new media' have experienced a remarkable uptrend. The term new media has developed into a popular catchphrase which includes media that are related to the Internet. According to Lev Manovich, a new media theorist, new media include "graphics, moving images, sounds, shapes, spaces and text [...] [that have] become computable" (Manovich, 2001, p. 44). More specifically, new media objects are composed of a digital code, whether they were artificially created on a computer or converted from old, analog media (Manovich, 2001). This connection to the Internet offers new possibilities to its users by enabling them

to interact with the media objects. New media communication allows the user not only to be a viewer or follower of media content, but even to become a co-author. The creation of an individual 'online path' throughout the Internet with the constant possibility of interaction with others is certainly one of the most valuable features of the Internet. While the citizens of the EU go 'online', the media environment is becoming more blurred. Delli Carpini and Williams (2001) argue that the original division of the media environment into news, entertainment and sports is no longer applicable - especially for the new media environment. "These changes have dramatically increased the amount and range of information that is readily available, the speed with which it becomes available, and the opportunities for mass communications" (Delli Carpini & Williams, 2001, p. 166). The Internet thus plays a major role for informing, mobilizing and connecting voters.

Knowledge about the EU-Spitzenkandidaten is mainly available on the Internet through social media platforms, news channels and online newspapers. As described in the background, the Spitzenkandidaten made great use of social media. While the TV Eurovision debate received rather moderate attention with low audience numbers, the reactions on Twitter were much bigger. These findings suggest that the Internet influences citizens' political knowledge about the EU-Spitzenkandidaten. Individuals that are not online cannot be reached by modern campaigns such as the 2014 European elections since campaigning highly occurs through various platforms on the Internet. In line with this, it can be assumed that an offline citizen is also an uninformed citizen, whereas an online citizen is an informed citizen. This leads to the following hypothesis:

*H<sub>4</sub> = Individuals who often use the Internet are more likely to have political knowledge about the EU-Spitzenkandidaten than individuals who do not often use the Internet.*

Previous research has shown no or only weak causal relation between the duration of Internet use and political participation. Bakker and de Vreese (2011) conclude that duration, as actual number of hours an individual spends on the Internet, is not of importance, while the specific type of activity proves to be positively associated. Even if Bakker and de Vreese focused on political participation as key concept and not political knowledge, it can be assumed that this applies to the closely linked concept of political knowledge as well. The duration of Internet use will thus be excluded from this analysis.

### **3.3 Ability, motivation and opportunity to access information**

As already mentioned in the beginning, political knowledge does not solely depend on an individual's intelligence, but is determined by systemic and individual forces. Delli Carpini and Keeter (1997) argue that political knowledge as such is not a trait but rather a resource. They highlight that political knowledge depends on the ability, motivation and opportunity of each individual citizen to actually access information. When applying this to the case of political knowledge about the EU-Spitzenkandidaten, in particular 'education' seems important. The education could influence an individual's ability to use and understand political information. This factor will be included in the analysis to test third-variable interference. In addition to education, 'age' will be included as additional control variable. Since not all age groups use the presented media channels to the same extent, it will be interesting to look at the differences between them. Age and education could both have an effect on the relationships between the above hypothesized media consumption variables and political knowledge.

## 4. Research methodology

This chapter will familiarize the reader with the research methods applied to answer the research question of this bachelor thesis. The research design, data collection, case selection and operationalization of variables will be introduced. Possible threats to the design will be discussed at the end.

### 4.1 Research design and data collection

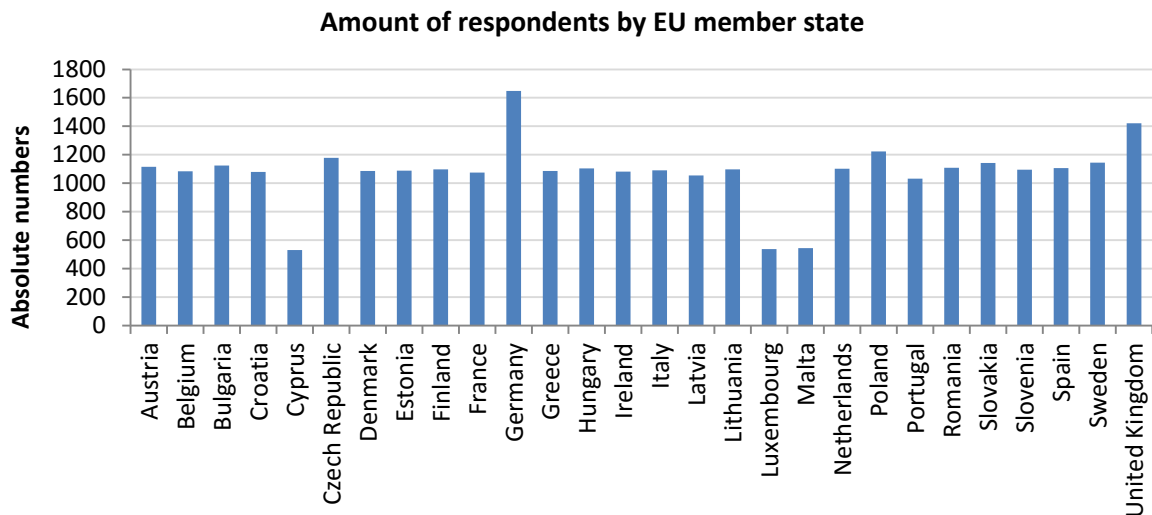
This study uses a quantitative cross-sectional design to draw conclusions about EU citizens' political knowledge and their news consumption habits and respective characteristics. The relationships between EU citizens' political knowledge about the EU-Spitzenkandidaten and the later listed variables will be assessed by creating cross tables in SPSS and measuring the correlation coefficients via Spearman's rho in SPSS. In order to use the selected variables in the analysis, they will be recoded at first. The study uses the data set version 1.0.0 of the European Election Study 2014 Voter Study (EES 2014 Voter Study) which can be found online on GESIS under the study number ZA5160. The basis of the dataset is a voter study which was carried out after the European Elections between 30.05.2014 and 27.06.2014. The survey includes respondents of the national and residential population of citizens of all EU member states eligible to vote in the European elections that have a sufficient command of the respective language to answer the survey. In all EU member states the voting age for European elections is 18, except for Austria where the age to be eligible to vote is 16. The survey was randomly sampled (multistage level) and the interviews were conducted using computer-assisted personal interviewing (CAPI). The questionnaire of the survey was identical in all EU member states, except for minor differences created by differences in the language and country-specific details such as the names of political parties. The EES 2014 Voter Study is a post-electoral survey which contains questions about the preferences and attitudes of voters in the following key areas: elections, mass political behavior and opinions, international politics, government organization, information society and mass media, religion and values, economic systems and economic development. The EES 2014 Voter Study additionally includes questions about the effects of the economic crisis and one question about the EU-Spitzenkandidaten that ran for the office of the European Commission President asking respondents to identify the affiliated European or national political party of each candidate.

### 4.2 Case selection

The EES 2014 Voter Study contains a sample of 30,064 respondents from all 28 EU member states eligible to vote in the EU elections. Figure 8 displays the distribution of respondents among the EU member states in total numbers. Except for Cyprus, Malta and Luxembourg where the numbers of respondents roughly added up to 500, approximately 1,100 respondents per country were interviewed. In Germany and the UK more respondents were interviewed to enhance comparability and better distinguish between East and West Germany and between Northern Ireland and the rest of the UK. This study does not select specific countries, but makes use of the entire sample. Since the sample does not include any countries other than EU member states, no countries need to be disregarded. In order to draw conclusions about political knowledge of EU citizens, all respondents are included in the analysis, whether they voted in the past elections or not. 57.3 percent of all respondents in the data set voted in the 2014 European elections, whereas 42.5 percent of respondents did not vote. 0.2 percent of respondents answered they do not know anymore.

**Figure 8**





Source: (EES 2014 Voter Study data set)

### 4.3 Operationalization of the variables

This sub-section operationalizes the main variables used in this thesis. Whereas the original data set contains 376 variables, only some of those variables are needed for the analysis. In order to receive meaningful output, the variables need to be recoded in the same direction and missing values need to be defined.

#### 4.3.1 Dependent variable

The dependent variable is 'Political knowledge about the EU-Spitzenkandidaten'. It will be referred to as 'Knowledge about the candidates' in the analysis section to simplify matters. The basis for the variable are the survey questions QPP24\_1, QPP24\_2 and QPP24\_3 in which respondents were asked to identify the European party group or the respective national party of Juncker (1), Schulz (2) and Verhofstadt (3)<sup>1</sup>. Four party groups and the related national parties were offered as answers to the respondents. For each correct answer, the respondent receives a "1", each incorrect answer or 'don't know' is recoded as "0". Other values such as 'refusal' and 'system missing' are excluded from the analysis. The three recoded questions and their values are then added together and combined into one new variable which is named 'Political knowledge about the EU-Spitzenkandidaten'. The new ordinal variable has the values "know zero", "know one", "know two" and "know three" of the indicated candidates.

#### 4.3.2 Independent variables

The independent variables can be divided into two groups: media consumption variables and socio-demographic variables. For all independent variables, the respondents that were not able to answer a question resulting in a 'don't know' classification are excluded. The percentage of excluded cases for each independent variable therefore ranges between zero and 1.5 percent of the entire sample, except for the variable education, where 7.0 percent of cases need to be excluded.

#### Media consumption variables

<sup>1</sup> The other three candidates, Bové, Keller and Verhofstadt are not included in the survey. They can thus not be included in the statistical analysis part.

The group of media consumption variables contains variables that are linked to the different media consumption habits of respondents. The first variable, **news consumption via TV**, is based on QP9\_1. The second variable, **news consumption via newspapers**, is based on QP9\_3, whereas the third variable, **news consumption via Internet**, is taken from QP9\_2. The respondents were asked how frequently they follow the news on the three media sources TV, Internet and newspapers. All three variables have an ordinal measure ranging from 0 ('never'), 1 ('less than once a month'), 2 ('once a month'), 3 ('once a week'), 4 ('several times a week') to 5 ('everyday, almost every day').

The next variable, **Internet use**, is a combination of question D62\_1, D62\_2 and D62\_3. Respondents were supposed to indicate how frequently they use the Internet at home (1), at their work (2) or somewhere else (3). The combination of all three variables accounts for the overall Internet use. Each variable is first recoded in the same direction. The variables are then added together, forming a newly constructed variable indicating the overall Internet use. The new values, which due to the addition of the variables range from 0 to 15, are then grouped in steps of four to rank from 0 ('never/seldom'), 1 ('sometimes'), 2 ('often') to 3 ('almost every day/every day').

#### Socio-demographic variables

There are two socio-demographic variables which will be used in the analysis section, in addition to the media consumption variables. The first variable is **age**, which is based on question D11. The individual ages of the respondents range from 16 to 99. However, to better assess the influence of different age stages on the political knowledge, the respondents are sorted into three age groups. The recoded variable forms an ordinal measure ranking from 1 ('16-29'), 2 ('30-64') to 3 ('65+'). The three groups are supposed to resemble young, middle-aged and elderly people.

The second socio-demographic variable, **education**, is based on question D8. Respondents were asked how old they were when they stopped full-time education. The data set provides five groupings. Respondents from the first group who answered that they were still studying or answered they did not know are excluded from the analysis since their ages could vary across all groups. The remaining four groups ('no full-time education', '15-', '16-19' and '20+') are recoded to form an ordinal measure. 'No full-time education' and '15-' are merged into the category 'lower education', while '16-19' will be referred to as 'secondary education' and '20+' will be referred to as 'higher education'. These labels will function as indicators for the level of education for each respondent.

#### 4.4 Threats to the research

Cross-sectional studies are usually carried out at one moment of time only, creating a 'one shot' image of the observed population. Due to the fact that observations are not collected at multiple points of time, time order can become a problem. Cross-sectional designs are therefore not used to make causal inferences, but rather to measure correlation and association between variables. In line with this, this thesis will not try to establish and/or measure causal relations, but will focus on correlation between variables only. The interference of a third variable can additionally influence the outcomes. Too many control variables can lead to multicollinearity, while excluding important variables can lead to an omitted-variable bias. This study uses the two variables age and education to minimize this possible problem. The data set used provides only one question regarding knowledge about the Spitzenkandidaten. It would be better if the data set provided several indicators measuring political knowledge about the Spitzenkandidaten. Several indicators or items could have been used to create a scale. But since the data set includes a broad compilation of topics, this is not the case. A last threat to the research design could be the question wording or order of items in the questionnaire. The

Spitzenkandidaten question however does not include negative or biased terms. It is a straight forward, simple question aiming at knowledge which does not involve personal feelings or personal attitudes. This is therefore not considered a threat. The placement of the Spitzenkandidaten question in the questionnaire, rather late in the survey, could however influence the outcome. Respondents might have been tired of the questionnaire and therefore simply answered 'don't know' when asked this question. This cannot be ruled out and is therefore a possible threat.

## **5. Data analysis**

This section will familiarize the reader with the data analysis and empirical findings of this bachelor thesis. The analysis will at first focus on political knowledge about the Spitzenkandidaten in general by looking at the overall percentage scores among respondents. This is followed by a statistical description of the media consumption variables. The following section shows cross tables and Spearman's rho correlation coefficients to measure the relationships between political knowledge about the candidates and the four media consumption variables. The last part of the analysis then focuses on the interference of possible third variables.

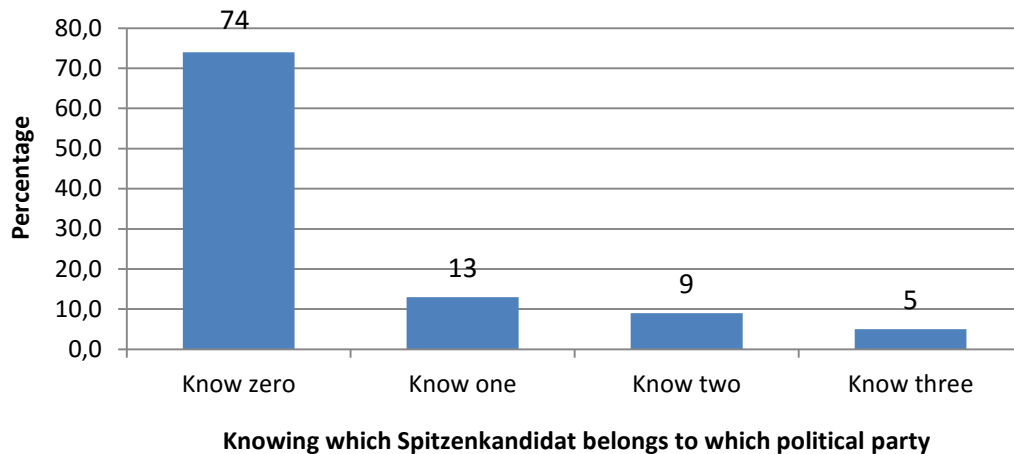
### **5.1 Political knowledge about the EU-Spitzenkandidaten**

As Figure 10 shows, 74 percent of all respondents were not able to identify any of the national or European political parties of the EU-Spitzenkandidaten. 13 percent were able to match at least one candidate correctly to his national or European party, whereas 9 percent were able to identify two candidates and their parties. However, only 5 percent of all respondents were able to identify all three candidates and their respective political parties. This means that from a sample of 30,064 respondents, only 1,379 people were able to match correctly all three of the prompted candidates for one of the most powerful political posts in Europe to their political parties. When combined, these numbers lead to an average of 0.45 correctly identified Spitzenkandidaten per respondent<sup>2</sup>.

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<sup>2</sup> Totals may not always equal the sum of 100% due to rounding. This applies for all following figures and tables of this thesis.

**Figure 10**  
**Knowledge about EU-Spitzenkandidaten among all respondents (%)**



Source: (EES 2014 Voter Study data set)

## 5.2 Political knowledge and media consumption

Table 2 presents the sample sizes, minimums, maximums and standard deviations of the dependent variable, political knowledge about the EU-Spitzenkandidaten, and the main independent media consumption variables, news consumption via TV, news consumption via newspapers, news consumption via Internet and Internet use. The variables are of an ordinal nature which means that they have categories that can be put in order, yet do not have equally spaced differences between the categories.

**Table 2**  
**Descriptive statistics of the media consumption variables**

Variables	n	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Standard deviation
Knowledge about EU-Spitzenkandidaten	30064	0	3	.45	.84
News consumption via TV	30002	0	5	4.2	1.4
News consumption via newspapers	29911	0	5	2.6	2.0
News consumption via Internet	29850	0	5	2.2	2.2
Internet use	30064	0	3	1.2	1.0

Source: (EES 2014 Voter Study data set)

Table 3 displays knowledge about the EU-Spitzenkandidaten by news consumption via TV. The table shows a regular pattern, which indicates that the more frequently respondents watched news on TV, the better they were able to identify the correct candidate and his affiliated party. 10% of those who never watch TV news were able to identify one candidate correctly. This number however increases to 14%, the more frequently TV news are watched. Knowing two candidates shows the same trend. 5% of those who never watch TV news were able to identify two candidates, which increases up to 11% the more often TV news are consumed. The pattern is less visible for knowing three candidates, which could be caused by the rounded off percentages, but here too the numbers increase the more often TV news are consumed. The high percentage of respondents who were not able to identify any

candidates is striking to the eye. Still, this number decreases from 83% to 70%, the more often TV news are watched.

**Table 3**  
**Knowledge about EU-Spitzenkandidaten by news consumption via TV**

		News consumption via TV						
		Never	Less than once a month	Once a month	Once a week	Several times a week	Every Day	Total
<b>Knowledge about the candidates</b>	Know zero	83%	83%	82%	80%	76%	70%	74%
	Know one	10%	10%	11%	11%	12%	14%	13%
	Know two	5%	5%	5%	6%	7%	11%	9%
	Know three	3%	2%	2%	4%	4%	5%	5%
	Total	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%
	n	1507	1312	437	1881	6300	18565	30002

Source: (EES 2014 Voter Study data)

Table 4 displays knowledge about EU-Spitzenkandidaten by news consumption via newspapers. This table shows a similar but much stronger trend in comparison to Table 3. It shows that reading newspapers goes hand in hand with knowledge about the candidates and their affiliated parties. Knowing one candidate increased from 9% (never) to 13% (once a week) to 17% (every day), the more frequently respondents consumed news via newspapers. Knowing two and knowing three candidates show the same pattern. Here the numbers increase from 5% to 7% to 16% (know two candidates) and from 2% to 4% to 8% (know three candidates). The reverse trend can be seen for those people who were not able to identify any of the candidates correctly. Their numbers decrease from 85% (never) to 77% (once a week) to 59% (every day). This shows that the more frequently respondents read news in newspapers, the better they were able to identify the candidates correctly. The table shows one irregularity to the otherwise clear pattern. The percentage for knowing two candidates first increases from 5% (never) to 6% (less than once a month) but then decreases to 5% (once a month) before it increases again to 7% (once a week), 10% (several times a week) and 16% (every day).

**Table 4**  
**Knowledge about EU-Spitzenkandidaten by news consumption via newspapers**

		News consumption via newspapers						
		Never	Less than once a month	Once a month	Once a week	Several times a week	Every day	Total
<b>Knowledge about the candidates</b>	Know zero	85%	80%	81%	77%	70%	59%	74%
	Know one	9%	11%	11%	13%	15%	17%	13%
	Know two	5%	6%	5%	7%	10%	16%	9%
	Know three	2%	3%	3%	4%	5%	8%	5%
	Total	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%
	n	7883	4187	1238	3780	4583	8240	29911

Source: (EES 2014 Voter Study data set)

Table 5 displays knowledge about the EU-Spitzenkandidaten by news consumption via Internet. The distribution of percentages is similar to the distribution observed in Table 3. The percentages in each category of knowledge about the candidates increase the more frequently news are consumed on the

Internet. However, compared to consuming news via newspapers the trend seems weaker. For knowing one candidate, the percentages increase from 11% (never) to 13% (once a week) to 15% (every day). For knowing three candidates, the percentages increase from 3% (never) to 5% (once a week) to 7% (every day). This table shows an irregularity to the otherwise positive pattern, just as Table 4 did. For knowing two candidates, the percentage first increases from 8% (never) to 11% (less than once a month) but then decreases to 9% (once a month) and 8% (once a week) before it rises again to 10% (several times a week).

**Table 5**  
**Knowledge about EU-Spitzenkandidaten by news consumption via Internet**

		News consumption via Internet						
		Never	Less than once a month	Once a month	Once a week	Several times a week	Every day	Total
<b>Knowledge about the candidates</b>	Know zero	79%	72%	73%	74%	70%	68%	74%
	Know one	11%	13%	14%	13%	14%	15%	13%
	Know two	8%	11%	9%	8%	10%	11%	9%
	Know three	3%	5%	5%	5%	6%	7%	5%
	Total	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%
	n	12425	2750	769	2051	4200	7655	29850

Source: (EES 2014 Voter Study data set)

Table 6 shows the knowledge about the EU-Spitzenkandidaten by Internet use. The distribution of percentages in this table is similar to the distributions of Table 3 and 5. The percentages in each category of knowledge about the candidates increase the more frequently the respondents used the Internet. Nevertheless, in comparison to news consumption via newspapers, the pattern seems less clear. 11% of the respondents who indicated that they never or seldom use the Internet were able to correctly identify one candidate. This number increases to 15% for those respondents who use the Internet almost every day/ every day. Know two and know three shows the same positive trend, yet know two shows an irregularity as seen in Table 4 and 5. However, it is striking that within the group of respondents who never or seldom use the Internet, 11% were able to identify one and 8% were able to identify two candidates. This means that quite an amount of respondents were able to identify one or two candidates without using the Internet on a regular basis. This might indicate that Internet use is not as influential on political knowledge about the EU-Spitzenkandidaten as initially expected. This finding can also be observed in Table 5, which supports the claim that the Internet is less influential than the other two media channels.

**Table 6**  
**Knowledge about EU-Spitzenkandidaten by Internet use**

		Internet use				Total
		Never/ seldom	Sometimes	Often	Almost every day/ every day	
<b>Knowledge about the candidates</b>	Know zero	80%	71%	71%	68%	74%
	Know one	11%	13%	14%	15%	13%
	Know two	7%	11%	9%	10%	9%
	Know three	2%	5%	5%	8%	5%
	Total	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%
n		10022	9072	7272	3698	30064

Source: (EES 2014 Voter Study data set)

The above displayed tables showed several quite regular patterns<sup>3</sup>. All of them showed positive trends insofar as when one variable increases, the other increases as well. This leads to the intermediate conclusion that the relationships between political knowledge about the EU-Spitzenkandidaten and the four tested media consumption variables are of a positive nature. On the basis of the table observations, the relationship between political knowledge about the candidates and news consumption via newspapers seems strongest. In order to test if these relationships are statistically significant, a measure of association needs to be presented. This measure of association is also needed to quantify the strength of these relationships.

Since the variables are of an ordinal and not interval or ratio measure, the non-parametric test Spearman's rho will be performed. A closer look at the individual histograms of the variables shows serious deviations from the normal distribution (see Appendix A Figure 11) which supports the decision for the choice of test. Spearman's rho measures the direction and strength of association between two variables. The correlation coefficient shows whether a relationship between two variables is positive ( $0 < r < 1$ ) or negative ( $-1 > r > 0$ ). It additionally helps to indicate whether the relationship is weak, moderate or perfect. If  $r$  is zero (0), there is no correlation between the two variables. If  $r$  is one (1), there is a perfect, positive relationship. In contrast, if  $r$  is negative one (-1), there is a perfect, negative relationship. Table 8 (see Appendix B) shows the different levels of strength and sign of the correlation. It is supposed to function as orientation for the reader.

Table 7 presents the correlation coefficients of the dependent variable political knowledge about the EU-Spitzenkandidaten and each of the independent media consumption variables.

<sup>3</sup> It should be noted that the tables showed minor irregularities as well. These could be caused by the way the values were coded, since the irregularities occurred for the same values in all tables.

**Table 7**  
**Correlation coefficients of the media consumption variables**

	<b>Spearman's Rho correlation coefficient</b>	
	Knowledge about the candidates	p-value
News consumption via TV	.10**	.00
News consumption via newspapers	.23**	.00
News consumption via Internet	.11**	.00
Internet use	.10**	.00

\*\* p ≤ .01 (2-tailed)

Source: (EES 2014 Voter Study data set)

As table 7 shows, the correlation coefficients between political knowledge about the candidates and the media consumption variables are all positive. The correlation is significant for all four variables at the 0.01 level which means that there is only a one percent chance that the observations occurred coincidentally. The strengths of the individual relationships however differ. The relationship between knowledge about the candidates and news consumption via TV can be considered weak, since the correlation coefficient is with 0.10 below the indicated threshold of 0.2 (see Appendix B Table 8). The same applies for the relationship with news consumption via Internet and for the relationship of political knowledge about the candidates and Internet use. Both relationships can be considered weak with Spearman's rho correlation coefficients of 0.11 and 0.10. The relationship between political knowledge about the candidates and news consumption via newspapers is with 0.23 stronger than the others. The relationship could be considered moderate since it passes the suggestive threshold of 0.2. The relationship is not of a strong nature, yet suffices to confirm the positive direction, the statistical significance and the moderate strength of the relationship between political knowledge about the candidates and reading newspapers. The statistical measure of association presented thus supports the interpretation of Table 4. For the other three media consumption variables the correlation coefficients indicate weak but positive and significant relationships with knowledge about the candidates. The correlation coefficients thus support the interpretations of Table 3 to Table 6.

### 5.3 Interaction effects

Table 9 to Table 12 (see Appendix B) present the relationships of the news consumption variables and political knowledge about the EU-Spitzenkandidaten by taking different age groups into account. The pattern found in Table 3 can be observed in Table 9 as well. The trend that reading newspapers positively affects knowledge about the candidates is replicated across all the three age groups, 16-29, 30-64 and 65+. The Spearman's rho correlation coefficients for the different age groups are with .07, .09 and .07 very low but similar. The interference of the variable age can be considered irrelevant for this relationship since the differences of the values are very small. When looking at Table 10, a similar conclusion can be drawn. The pattern observed in Table 4 is replicated throughout all age categories and the correlation values found for the different age categories are similar (.18, .21, .24). On the basis of this, it can be concluded that no interaction effect by age occurs, the relationship of news consumption via newspapers on political knowledge about the EU-Spitzenkandidaten is therefore not a spurious relationship.

When examining the relationship of knowledge about the candidates and Internet use across different age groups, a different conclusion must be drawn. Table 12 shows the same general pattern as observed in Table 6, yet the correlation coefficient values differ across the age groups (.09, .14, .22). This indicates that an interaction effect is present for all age groups yet strongest among the group of



elderly people. This means that Internet use has a stronger effect on knowledge about the candidates for elderly people than for younger people. A similar but less stronger observation can be made for news consumption via Internet (Appendix B Table 11). The correlation coefficient values for the three age groups are .13, .13 and .19.

Table 13 to Table 16 (see Appendix B) present the relationships of the news consumption variables and political knowledge about the EU-Spitzenkandidaten by taking different education levels into account. For news consumption via TV, news consumption via newspapers and news consumption via Internet, no interaction effects can be observed. The effects of all these variables are replicated across all the three education levels, lower education, secondary education and higher education. This observation is supported by the correlation coefficients which are very similar across the education levels for all three variables.

However, there is a difference when examining the relationship of knowledge about the candidates and Internet use across the three education levels (Appendix Table 16). With correlation coefficients of 0.13, 0.05, 0.04 the trend seems reversed to what has been observed for the variable age. This indicates that the lower the education of an individual is, the stronger the effect of Internet use is on the political knowledge about the candidates.

## 6. Discussion

This chapter will discuss and interpret the findings of the data analysis. The hypotheses of the thesis will then be rejected or supported. Finally, the sub-questions of this thesis will be answered.

The cross tables have shown positive patterns for all four media consumption variables and political knowledge about the EU-Spitzenkandidaten. While the patterns were not equally strong and clear, they seemed to be of a positive nature for all four media consumption variables. A closer look at the Spearman's rho correlation coefficients supports these first observations. All relationships between political knowledge about the EU-Spitzenkandidaten and the tested media consumption variables are positive and significant. However, three out of the four relationships can be considered weak with Spearman's rho correlation coefficient values less than 0.2. Only the relationship between knowledge about the EU-Spitzenkandidaten and news consumption via newspapers can be described as moderate with a Spearman's rho coefficient of 0.23. The correlation between consuming news on TV and knowledge about the Spitzenkandidaten ( $H_1$ ) is with a Spearman's rho correlation coefficient of .10 of a positive and weak nature. On the basis of this, hypothesis 1 can be supported. The relationship between consuming news through newspapers and knowledge about the candidates ( $H_2$ ) is positively related as well and even in a moderate way (0.23). This hypothesis can thus also be supported. The relationship between consuming news online and knowledge about the candidates ( $H_3$ ) is of a positive and weak nature with a Spearman's rho value of 0.11. Still, this leads to the confirmation of the hypothesis. The fourth hypothesis between using the Internet in general and knowing the candidates ( $H_4$ ) can be supported as well, since the observed relationship is of a positive, weak (0.10) but significant nature.

- ✓  $H_1$  = Individuals who often consume news on TV are more likely to have political knowledge about the EU-Spitzenkandidaten than individuals who do not often consume news on TV.
- ✓  $H_2$  = Individuals who often consume news through newspapers are more likely to have political knowledge about the EU-Spitzenkandidaten than individuals who do not often consume news through newspapers.

- ✓ *H<sub>3</sub> = Individuals who often consume news online are more likely to have political knowledge about the EU-Spitzenkandidaten than individuals who do not often consume news online.*
- ✓ *H<sub>4</sub> = Individuals who often use the Internet are more likely to have political knowledge about the EU-Spitzenkandidaten than individuals who do not often use the Internet.*

This research was guided by four sub-questions which asked whether the consumption of TV news, newspaper news, Internet news and the general Internet usage contributed to gaining knowledge about the 2014 EU-Spitzenkandidaten. On the basis of the discussion and the above confirmed hypotheses, all four questions can be answered positively. Nevertheless, the analysis of age and education as additional, intervening factors shows that they affect the relationship of knowledge about the candidates and Internet use, and to a smaller extent the relationship with news consumption via Internet. There are most likely several explanations for these findings. One explanation could be that younger people use the Internet for different purposes than elderly. Elderly people might use the Internet as information source and not so much as a social meeting point. Elderly people might read more carefully and much slower, while younger people scroll through websites such as Facebook without really looking at the information on the screen. It is quite likely that younger people use the Internet in a different way than older people, which would explain the differences of the patterns and of the correlation coefficients which the age groups created. The trend is reversed for education and internet use. It seems that there is a stronger effect of Internet use on political knowledge for those who are lower educated than others<sup>4</sup>. Nevertheless, all four media sources most likely contributed to gaining knowledge about the candidates but to different extents. Reading newspapers seems to be correlated the strongest. Watching TV news and Internet news are correlated less strongly. Using the internet showed the weakest correlation, which is contrary to the belief of this thesis that the 2014 European elections and in particular knowledge about the 2014 EU-Spitzenkandidaten was mainly visible online.

## 7. Conclusion

This bachelor thesis has focused on political knowledge about the EU-Spitzenkandidaten for the 2014 European elections. The 2014 elections have, for the first time in the history of the EU, introduced six EU-Spitzenkandidaten for the post of the European Commission President. Newspapers have however stated that the awareness of these candidates among European citizens was rather low. The analysis of this thesis can support this observation. Most of the respondents of the EES 2014 Voter Study were unaware of the 2014 EU-Spitzenkandidaten and their affiliated parties. The survey asked respondents to match the three candidates Jean-Claude Juncker, Martin Schulz and Guy Verhofstadt correctly to their respective national or European political party. The findings show that only very few respondents were able to name all three of the candidates and their affiliated parties.

The research question of this thesis asked to what extent new and established media sources played a role in informing citizens about the Spitzenkandidaten. On the basis of the analysis and discussion it can be concluded that both, established and new media, influenced the voter's knowledge in the 2014 European elections. Of all tested variables, reading news via newspapers showed the strongest correlation to political knowledge about the EU-Spitzenkandidaten. Those respondents frequently reading newspapers were better able to identify the candidates than others.

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<sup>4</sup> Future research could take a closer look at this, in particular on the potential of the Internet to increase the general knowledge of individuals with a lower education.

Watching TV news was positively correlated to knowledge about the candidates as well, but only to a lesser extent. A special focus in this thesis was placed on new media and in particular on the usage of the Internet. It was hypothesized that the usage of the Internet contributed to knowledge about the Spitzenkandidaten. The results however only show a weak relationship of a positive nature. The Internet as information source is therefore not as strongly correlated as initially expected. In contrast, the analysis has shown that reading newspapers had a stronger effect than watching TV news or reading news online. There are several possible explanations for these findings. They could indicate that newspapers reported more about the candidates than the other media sources. This would require TV and online news to provide more information about candidates in the future in order to limit the differences in amount of information provision by the channels. Another reason could be that newspapers reported better than the other media sources about the candidates. This would require more quality news coverage by the TV news and online news. Third, the findings could indicate that newspaper articles were better memorized by individuals, which would most likely be due to the different formats of the news channels (oral, visual and written). Future research could investigate which power each media channel holds and examine not only how the attention of voters is caught but also how information can be mediated.

The findings of this thesis about the positive effects of different news channels and the Internet on knowledge are supported by several scholars. Kenski and Stroud (2006) found that Internet access and online exposure to campaign information are both positively associated with political knowledge. They state that the associations were positive and significant, yet of a weak nature. This is very similar to the findings of this thesis. Bakker and de Vreese (2011) portray the Internet more positively – in particular the use of the Internet and its positive effects on political participation. They support the notion that social networks and ‘being online’ foster political participatory behavior. In addition, they also highlight the positive effects of established media in particular regarding young people’s political involvement. Prior (2005) distances himself from such optimistic claims about the power of the Internet. He confirms that the Internet with its greater availability of political information does indeed increase political knowledge, however, only for those groups which do not prefer entertainment media (Prior, 2005). For those people who prefer to use new media for mainly entertainment purposes, completely ignoring political content became much easier with the Internet – especially due to the Internet’s diverse offer of content. He claims that motivation and content preferences of users are the future’s key determining factors for understanding political knowledge and media use. Prior (2005) further states that entertainment-seeking users will only be reached by political campaigns and political advertisement which appear online or during commercial breaks.

This bachelor thesis has stressed the important role different media channels and in particular the new media play in informing citizens about political topics. Regarding the 2014 European elections, the media were quite sceptical about the EU-Spitzenkandidaten and the entire procedure (Vincenti, 2015). Furthermore, while news coverage of the candidates increased the closer the elections approached, the main focus of news channels in most European countries remained on national topics (Niedermayer, 2014). Julian Priestly and Nereo Peñalver García both highlighted that the 2014 European elections campaign had several flaws (Vincenti, 2015). They attribute these flaws to the pan-European nature of the campaign, which was not able to reach all EU member states in a satisfying manner, to the missing financial resources of the European political parties, the late nomination and introduction of the candidates and to the missing depth of the candidates’ debates and campaign pledges. They argue that both, the news coverage by the media about the candidates and the campaigns by the candidates and their parties, need to be improved and expanded significantly for the 2019 European elections (Vincenti, 2015). Hobolt (2014) and Heidbreder and Auracher (2015) go one

step further by arguing that the 2014 European elections did not really involve and inform voters at all, which would explain the low knowledge of citizens and low interest of the general media for the EU-Spitzenkandidaten. Hobolt (2014) argues that the introduction of the Spitzenkandidaten procedure has indeed made the EU more legitimate, but not by involving voters and creating a democratic mandate for Juncker. Whereas the EU-Spitzenkandidaten procedure was created mainly to politicize the elections and to activate and involve the voter, the actual impact of the procedure was on the inter-institutional balance of power within the EU. With its new Spitzenkandidaten procedure, the European Parliament achieved a new interpretation of EU law. The election of Juncker could thus be considered a major win for the European Parliament over the European Council. Moreover, proponents of the new procedure suggest that it can transform the EU over time by allowing the European citizens to hold the 'EU executive' accountable for their actions (Hobolt, 2014).

On the basis of this, it can be concluded that the 2014 European elections did introduce something new. They did not involve the voters as hoped by the European Parliament and they did not create a clear democratic mandate for the new European Commission President Juncker, but they introduced a new presidential Spitzenkandidaten procedure which had implications on the inter-institutional balance. With the 2014 European elections and the introduction and successful implementation of the EU-Spitzenkandidaten procedure, the European Parliament has fought and won a battle for the future of the EU. In the long-run this procedure could provide the EU executive with a democratic mandate. But in order to hold the EU Commission president and the executive accountable, politically informed citizens are required. More and better media coverage by all media channels to provide information and to stimulate European citizens is therefore needed. In particular, new media with their rapid growth in popularity will have a pivotal role in this.

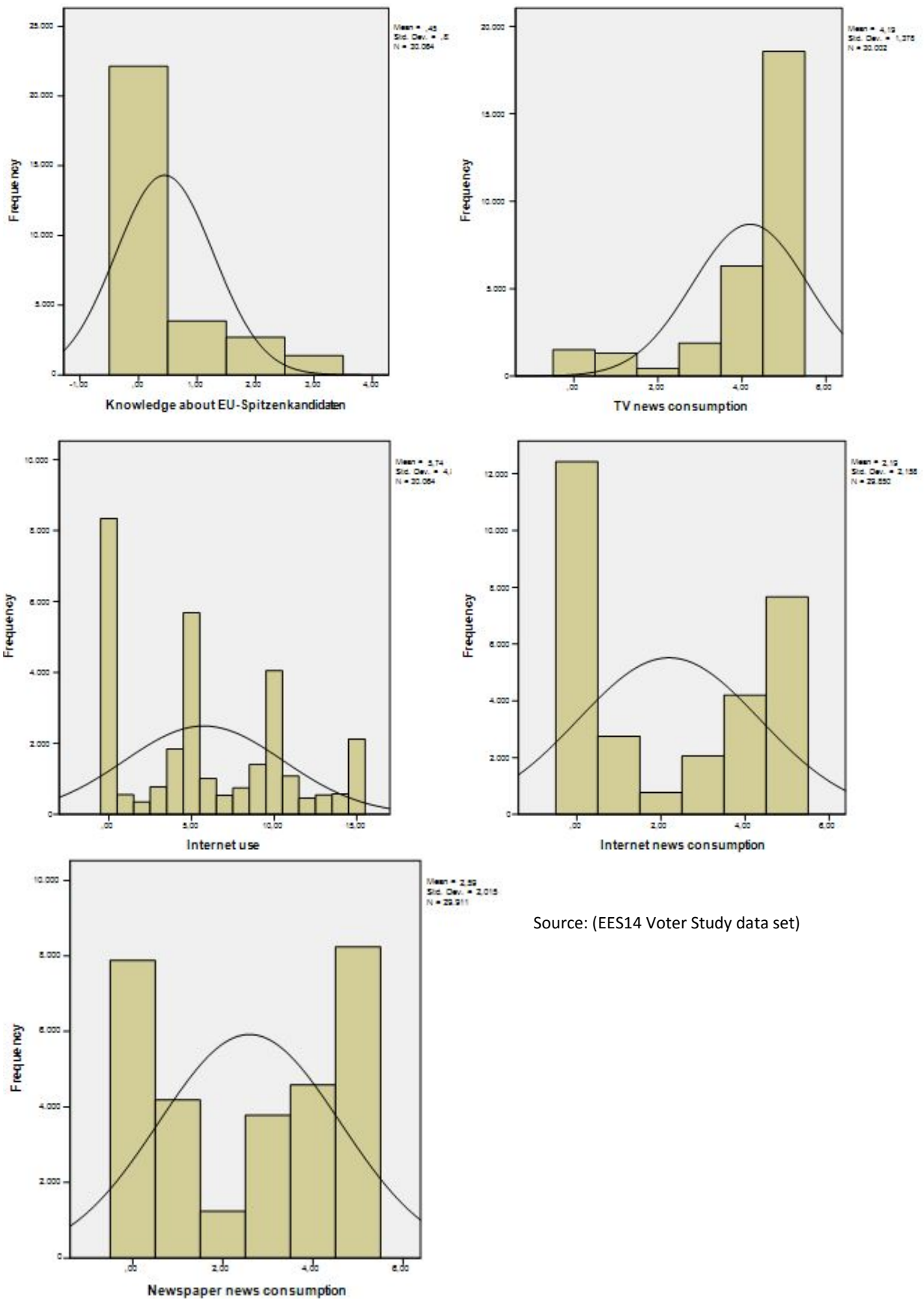
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## Appendix A

Figure 11: Histograms of the media consumption variables



Source: (EES14 Voter Study data set)

## Appendix B

**Table 8**  
Strength and sign of correlations

Strength of correlation	Sign of correlation	
	Negative relation	Positive relation
no relation	0	0
weak relation	$0 < -0.2$	$0 > 0.2$
moderate relation	$-0.2 < -0.5$	$0.2 > 0.5$
strong relation	$-0.5 < -1$	$0.5 > 1$
perfect relation	-1	1

Created by the author

**Table 9**  
News consumption via TV across age groups

Age			Knowledge about EU-Spitzenkandidaten				Total	n
			Know zero	Know one	Know two	Know three		
16-29	<b>News consumption via TV</b>	never	86%	9%	3%	2%	100%	1901
		monthly	85%	9%	5%	1%	100%	795
		weekly	81%	11%	6%	3%	100%	1208
		daily	78%	11%	7%	4%	100%	1356
	Spearman's Rho		.07					
30-64	<b>News consumption via TV</b>	never	82%	10%	5%	3%	100%	3504
		monthly	82%	10%	5%	2%	100%	2405
		weekly	77%	12%	7%	4%	100%	3553
		daily	71%	14%	10%	6%	100%	2992
	Spearman's Rho		.09					
65+	<b>News consumption via TV</b>	never	84%	10%	6%	0.4%	100%	1880
		monthly	80%	10%	8%	3%	100%	1674
		weekly	74%	12%	9%	5%	100%	2972
		daily	68%	14%	13%	5%	100%	3604
	Spearman's Rho		.07					
Total						100%	30002	

Source: (EES 2014 Voter Study data set)

Note: For Table 9 to Table 16, the categories of the media consumption variables are merged to simply the tables.



**Table 10**  
**News consumption via newspapers across age groups**

Age			Knowledge about EU-Spitzenkandidaten				Total	n
			Know zero	Know one	Know two	Know three		
16-29	<b>News consumption via newspapers</b>	never	88%	7%	3%	2%	100%	1500
		monthly	84%	10%	5%	2%	100%	1175
		weekly	76%	13%	7%	4%	100%	1282
		daily	67%	15%	11%	8%	100%	494
	Spearman's Rho	.18						
30-64	<b>News consumption via newspapers</b>	never	84%	9%	4%	2%	100%	4468
		monthly	79%	11%	6%	4%	100%	3332
		weekly	72%	15%	8%	5%	100%	5201
		daily	60%	17%	14%	9%	100%	4376
	Spearman's Rho	.21						
65+	<b>News consumption via newspapers</b>	never	83%	10%	6%	2%	100%	1915
		monthly	77%	13%	6%	4%	100%	918
		weekly	75%	12%	10%	4%	100%	1880
		daily	58%	16%	19%	7%	100%	3370
	Spearman's Rho	.24						
Total						100%	29911	

Source: (EES 2014 Voter Study data set)

**Table 11**  
**News consumption via Internet across age groups**

Age			Knowledge about EU-Spitzenkandidaten				Total	n
			Know zero	Know one	Know two	Know three		
16-29	<b>News consumption via Internet</b>	never	89%	7%	2%	1%	100%	759
		monthly	85%	8%	5%	2%	100%	609
		weekly	81%	11%	5%	3%	100%	1441
		daily	76%	13%	7%	5%	100%	1642
	Spearman's Rho	.13						
30-64	<b>News consumption via Internet</b>	never	81%	11%	6%	2%	100%	5970
		monthly	72%	13%	10%	5%	100%	2282
		weekly	71%	14%	9%	6%	100%	4082
		daily	67%	16%	10%	7%	100%	5025
	Spearman's Rho	.13						
65+	<b>News consumption via Internet</b>	never	75%	12%	10%	3%	100%	5696
		monthly	59%	16%	17%	8%	100%	628
		weekly	55%	17%	19%	9%	100%	728
		daily	56%	15%	19%	9%	100%	988
	Spearman's Rho	.19						
Total						100%	29850	

Source: (EES 2014 Voter Study data set)

**Table 12**  
**Internet use across age groups**

			Knowledge about EU-Spitzenkandidaten				Total	n
			Know zero	Know one	Know two	Know three		
Age	<b>Internet use</b>	never/seldom	91%	6%	2%	2%	100%	253
		sometimes	85%	8%	5%	2%	100%	1308
		often	79%	12%	7%	3%	100%	1881
		daily	78%	12%	5%	5%	100%	1033
		Spearman's Rho	.09					
30-64	<b>Internet use</b>	never/seldom	83%	11%	5%	2%	100%	4366
		sometimes	74%	13%	9%	5%	100%	5517
		often	69%	15%	10%	6%	100%	5019
		daily	65%	15%	11%	9%	100%	2571
		Spearman's Rho	.14					
65+	<b>Internet use</b>	never/seldom	77%	11%	9%	3%	100%	5403
		sometimes	56%	17%	19%	8%	100%	2247
		often	57%	17%	15%	10%	100%	372
		daily	50%	21%	15%	14%	100%	94
		Spearman's Rho	.22					
Total							100%	30064

Source: (EES 2014 Voter Study data set)

**Table 13**  
**News consumption via TV across education levels**

			Knowledge about EU-Spitzenkandidaten				Total	n
			Know zero	Know one	Know two	Know three		
Education	<b>News consumption via TV</b>	never	91%	5%	3%	0.4%	100%	266
		monthly	87%	7%	4%	1%	100%	211
		weekly	82%	10%	5%	3%	100%	1202
		daily	76%	12%	9%	3%	100%	3595
		Spearman's Rho	0.10					
Secondary education	<b>News consumption via TV</b>	never	87%	9%	3%	1%	100%	524
		monthly	85%	9%	5%	1%	100%	699
		weekly	79%	11%	6%	3%	100%	3507
		daily	73%	13%	10%	4%	100%	7762
		Spearman's Rho	0.10					
Higher education	<b>News consumption via TV</b>	never	75%	13%	7%	6%	100%	489
		monthly	79%	11%	6%	4%	100%	555
		weekly	71%	14%	9%	6%	100%	2637
		daily	63%	17%	12%	8%	100%	6475
		Spearman's Rho	0.11					
Total							100%	27922

Source: (EES 2014 Voter Study data set)

**Table 14**  
**News consumption via newspapers across education levels**

Education			Knowledge about EU-Spitzenkandidaten				Total	n
			Know zero	Know one	Know two	Know three		
Lower education	<b>News consumption via newspapers</b>	never	86%	8%	5%	1%	100%	1091
		monthly	84%	11%	4%	2%	100%	795
		weekly	79%	11%	7%	4%	100%	1208
		daily	65%	16%	15%	4%	100%	1356
		Spearman's Rho	0.21					
Secondary education	<b>News consumption via newspapers</b>	never	85%	9%	4%	2%	100%	3504
		monthly	81%	10%	6%	4%	100%	2405
		weekly	76%	13%	8%	3%	100%	3553
		daily	61%	16%	16%	7%	100%	2992
		Spearman's Rho	0.21					
Higher education	<b>News consumption via newspapers</b>	never	80%	11%	5%	4%	100%	1880
		monthly	75%	13%	7%	4%	100%	1674
		weekly	67%	17%	10%	6%	100%	2972
		daily	55%	18%	16%	11%	100%	3604
		Spearman's Rho	0.21					
Total						100%	27844	

Source: (EES 2014 Voter Study data set)

**Table 15**  
**News consumption via Internet across education levels**

Education			Knowledge about EU-Spitzenkandidaten				Total	n
			Know zero	Know one	Know two	Know three		
Lower education	<b>News consumption via Internet</b>	never	81%	10%	7%	2%	100%	4064
		monthly	73%	13%	9%	5%	100%	394
		weekly	69%	15%	12%	5%	100%	423
		daily	68%	12%	14%	6%	100%	360
		Spearman's Rho	0.12					
Secondary education	<b>News consumption via Internet</b>	never	79%	11%	7%	3%	100%	5655
		monthly	74%	12%	10%	4%	100%	1649
		weekly	74%	12%	9%	5%	100%	2588
		daily	72%	14%	10%	5%	100%	2516
		Spearman's Rho	0.07					
Higher	<b>News consumption via Internet</b>	never	72%	15%	10%	4%	100%	2316
		monthly	67%	15%	12%	6%	100%	1198
		weekly	67%	15%	10%	8%	100%	2626
		daily	64%	16%	11%	8%	100%	3989
		Spearman's Rho	0.07					
Total						100%	27778	

Source: (EES 2014 Voter Study data set)

**Table 16**  
**Internet use across education levels**

<b>Education</b>			<b>Knowledge about EU-Spitzenkandidaten</b>				<b>Total</b>	<b>n</b>
			<b>Know zero</b>	<b>Know one</b>	<b>Know two</b>	<b>Know three</b>		
Lower education	<b>Internet use</b>	never/seldom	82%	10%	7%	2%	100%	3915
		sometimes	69%	15%	11%	5%	100%	1016
		often	72%	12%	10%	6%	100%	279
		daily	72%	5%	11%	12%	100%	75
	Spearman's Rho	.13						
Secondary education	<b>Internet use</b>	never/seldom	79%	11%	7%	3%	100%	4466
		sometimes	74%	12%	10%	4%	100%	4669
		often	75%	13%	9%	4%	100%	2430
		daily	73%	13%	9%	5%	100%	949
	Spearman's Rho	.05						
Higher education	<b>Internet use</b>	never/seldom	73%	14%	10%	3%	100%	1399
		sometimes	66%	15%	13%	7%	100%	3067
		often	67%	16%	10%	7%	100%	3472
		daily	64%	16%	10%	9%	100%	2236
	Spearman's Rho	0.04						
<b>Total</b>						<b>100%</b>	<b>27973</b>	

Source: (EES 2014 Voter Study data set)