

10 Being where the people are: the EU, open government & social media – Jasmijn van der Most

10.1 Introduction

With the expansion of Internet it has become easier to disseminate information to everyone everywhere. With information, allegedly, come opportunities to empower people. Quite often, companies and institutions such as schools or hospitals willingly provide information on Internet for everyone to see and thus provide transparency for the benefit of the public (and of course also for themselves). The same development has been occurring in politics, not in the least because Western democracies are facing a number of problems that threaten their legitimacy. Citizens feel uninformed about policies, voter turnouts have declined, and there is a widespread lack of trust in government. It seems that citizens feel incapable, disinterested or unwilling to hold their government accountable for their actions, despite this being a vital part of representative democracy. Of all contemporary Western institutions the EU is perhaps the one that faces the biggest legitimacy problems, because of its supranational nature, contested powers and complex decision making procedures.

Since US President Obama launched the Open Government Initiative (OGI) in 2009, the idea gained momentum that information as well as participation and collaboration are key to empowering people and regaining accountability. This became a global project when the Open Government Partnership (OGP) was established in 2011, in which 65 countries committed themselves to implement ambitious reforms to boost openness. The EU has also made its efforts to realize a more open government. Via its website, the EU provides all sorts of information on for example recipients of EU funds, access to documents, decision-making and much more. But how can people

be empowered when the information provided does not really reach them because they barely take the effort to visit government websites or watch parliamentary debates? This paper suggests that if the people are not where the government is, perhaps government should be where the people are: on social media.

For this reason, this chapter explores the social media strategy of the EU and aims to find out how and to what extent social media contributes to open government in the EU. By means of three case studies of the use of Facebook by the European Commission (EC), European Parliament (EP) and the Council of the EU (Council) from February 2015 to April 2015, as well as three interviews with officials of the social media department of the three institutions, I hope to develop a well-grounded line of reasoning. This paper evaluates and compares each institution's Facebook strategy with the help of the social media interactions framework developed by Mergel (2010, 2012, 2013) - further explained in section 10.3 - in order to assess their contribution to open government. Open government is broadly defined as including transparency, participation and collaboration. To further specify these three components of open government, transparency is defined as digestible "information about what the government is doing" (p. 1, OGI, 2009, Larsson 1998), participation as allowing "the public to contribute ideas and expertise so that their government can make policies with the benefit of information that is widely dispersed in society" (ibid), and collaboration as "encouraging partnerships and cooperation with ... government" (ibid). This paper finds that all three institutions are mainly focused on pushing information towards their followers on Facebook and therefore are successfully contributing to transparency by making citizens aware via Facebook of new information on their website. Contribution to participation and collaboration is found to be minimal because of the aim of neutral

communication as well as a lack of more extensive collaboration between the social media officials and the politicians.

This paper is structured as follows: firstly the results of the qualitative and quantitative analysis of the Facebook pages of each of the institutions are presented and it is determined what social media strategy is employed. Secondly the results are compared and it is assessed to what extent each of the strategies contributes to open government. Thirdly, it is explained why the institutions behave the way they do on Facebook.

10.2 State of the art: debates on open government & social media

The public sector has started to embrace the potential of social media only as recently as 2009. Just as recent is the research in the field of social media and its use for the public sector (Klang & Nolin, 2011, Mergel, 2013, Khan, Swar, & Lee, 2014, Craido, Dandoval-Almazan, & Gil-Garcia, 2013).

Research conducted by scholars, such as Gunawong (2014) as well as Cho & Park (2011), has specifically been focused on the contribution of social media to open government. However, thus far the focus on the one differentiating quality of social media, interactivity, has been lacking. This paper aims to fill this gap by aiming to find out how and to what extent the EU uses Facebook for open government purposes. In order to do so I apply the recently developed social media interaction framework by Mergel (2010, 2012, 2013). Firstly, there is the push strategy, in which governments push information and news towards citizens by means of social media. The information is often one-directional, comments can be disabled, and the goal is to achieve transparency by information provision and education. Secondly, there is the pull strategy, in which governments not only provide information, but also aim to pull citizens in by seeking feedback. There is some sort of two-way interaction in the form of comments by citizens and

requests of information, which can be answered by the government. The objective is to provide opportunities for participation in order to engage citizens in the policy process. Lastly, there is the networking strategy. This entails a higher level of engagement, in which there exists a reciprocated relationship between citizens and the agency, which allows for the co-creation of government innovations. This could present itself in the form of the government commenting on the feedback given by the citizen. The objective of this strategy is to achieve ongoing community building.

Previous research on social media use for open government purposes has only been focused on either Asia, where social media usage for this purpose has been found to not be very extensive (Gunawong, 2014, Cho & Park, 2011), or on the US (Golbeck, 2010; Mergel, 2013), where it was either used for self-promotion or information provision. However, research of this type for perhaps the one Western government that is most in need of an increase in accountability, is still lacking: the EU. The lack of trust, participation and knowledge of the EU fail to make the EU accountable to its citizens and therefore a way needs to be found to reach citizens. Since 2009, the EU too has become quite active on social media, creating accounts on Facebook, Google+, Youtube, Instagram and Twitter. Therefore, it is both interesting and necessary to find out whether this social media usage was merely the EU following the crowd or whether the EU recognized its great potential and succeeded in making use of it.

10.3 Methods and data collection

In order to find out to what extent the EU uses social media as a tool to increase transparency, participation and collaboration, I have conducted a case study of the messages posted on Facebook by the EC, EP and the Council between February and March 2015. The EP, EC and Council are

chosen as representative for the EU because they are the three key players in the policy process; they represent both legislative and executive levels and have different levels of power delegation. Facebook is analyzed rather than other social media, such as Youtube, Twitter or LinkedIn, because it has the greatest capacity for transparency, participation and collaboration due to the opportunity to post longer messages, to post videos that are directly visible and to add relatively long comments in the comment section. The time period of February 2015 to April 2015 provides up to date results. Postings could be easily retrieved.

The analysis consists of three main parts. The first part consists of a descriptive statistical analysis of the aims and methods of the Facebook messages as well as the behavior observed by both the institution and the followers. This is done by means of coding the Facebook messages and is supported by interviews with heads of the social media team of the EC, EP and the Council. Coding of the messages is based on the social media interactions framework developed by Mergel (2013), which consists of the push, pull and networking strategies. The strategies represent different degrees of open government and they are identified by looking at the aims of the message, the type of methods used and the type of behavior of the institution and the citizens on Facebook. The push strategy is identified when most messages have a transparency aim, Facebook is used as a medium to recycle information from other communication channels and there is minimal to no interaction with citizens. The pull strategy is identified when messages have both transparency and participation aims, methods are employed which facilitate participation, such as the use of different languages and the pulling of information from citizens as well as when citizens display their opinions in the comment section. The networking strategy can be identified when messages display transparency, participation and collaboration aims and in terms of methods the institution is trying creating a community

around itself. It also displays a two-way interaction concerning policy or public opinion. Based on these classifications each institution's contribution to open government is evaluated.

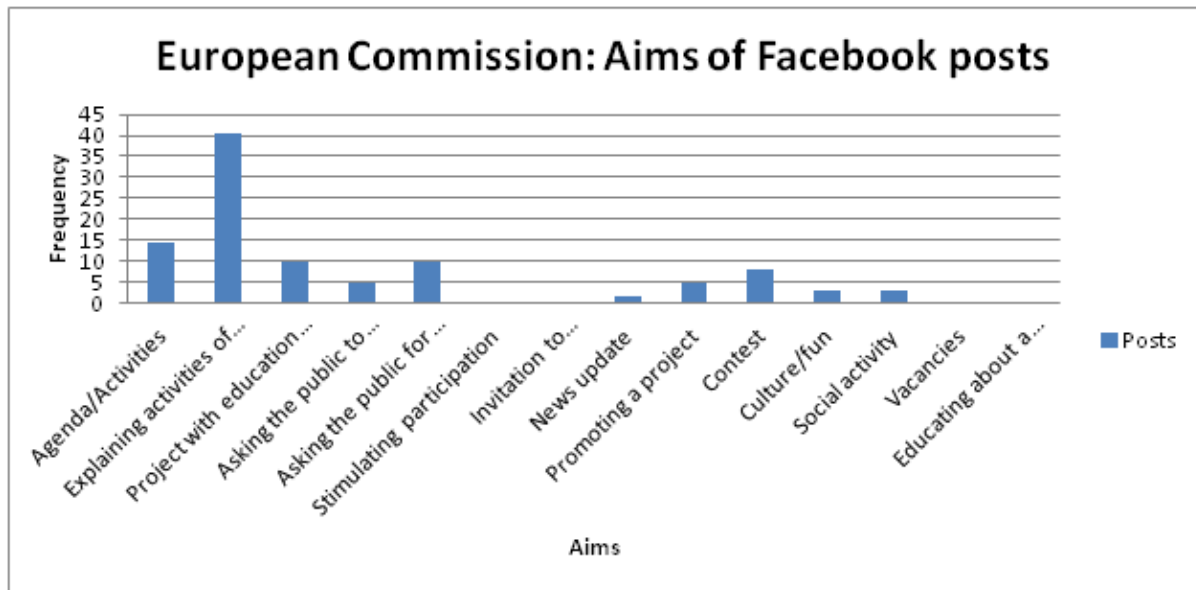
The second part of the analysis aims to compare the social media strategies identified for each of the institutions and based on that assesses how these strategies contribute to open government. This is done by looking at how and to what extent the definitions of transparency, participation and collaboration, as employed by Mergel (2013), are fulfilled. Finally, the third part of the analysis aims to find out why the institutions behave the way they do on social media. This is assessed by means of interviews with the heads of social media or Facebook for each institution.

10.4 The European Commission: a lot of pushing & a little pulling

From a careful analysis of the aims, methods and behavior of the EC on Facebook it becomes clear that the EC's posts display strong characteristics of a push strategy, but that the EC is well on its way to establishing a pull strategy. In the period of February 2015 to April 2015, most posts by the EC had a transparency aim. In Graph 1 it is visible that the categories with a transparency aim, *Explaining activities of EU, Agenda/Activities, Project with education or transparency aim* and *Asking the public to ask questions*, make up 69,3% of the posts. *Explaining activities of EU* is by far appears most frequently. This subcategory falls under the transparency aim because it contains in depth and digestible explanations about what the EU is doing, what mechanisms are in place in the EU and how the EU works. Most posts with this aim were dedicated to explaining what the EU is doing in terms of policy making. For example, on the 3rd of March the EC posted a link encouraging citizens to watch the closing session of the conference "From Emergency to Recovery" that dealt with the EU Ebola response.

Furthermore, there were also some posts that informed citizens of a mechanism or piece of legislation that is already in place as well as informed citizens of how the EU works.

Graph 1

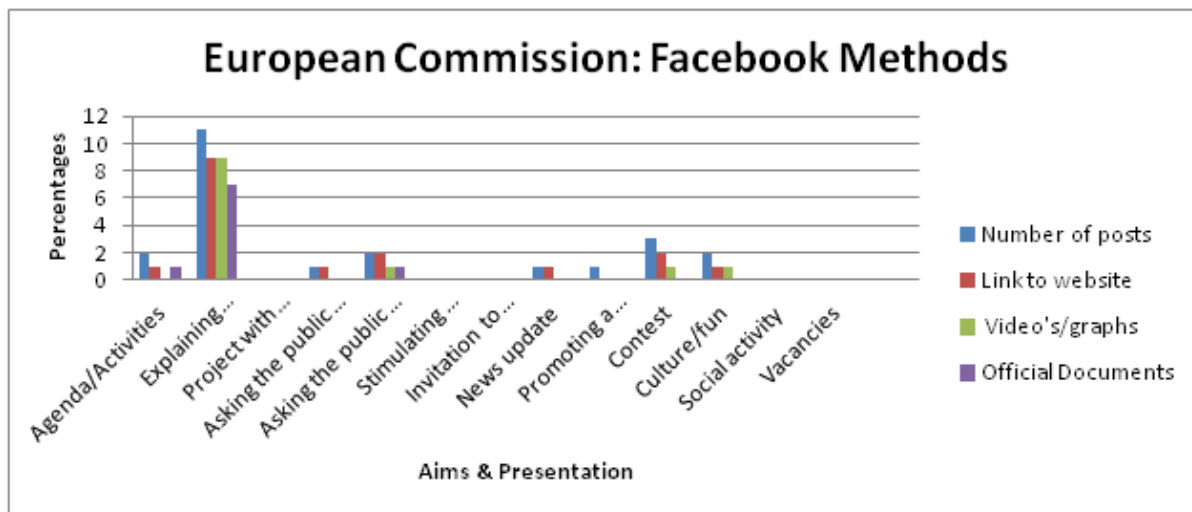


Data Source: European Commission Facebook page (February to April 2015).

9,7% of the posts was devoted to *Asking the public for its opinion*, which is a participation aim that is an element of the pull strategy. However, this happened in the case of one topic only: the Investment Plan. With this new plan Finnish Commissioner Katainen decided to go on a roadshow throughout the EU for the purpose of a Citizen's Dialogue on what the EU should invest its money in. Moreover, the EC actively encouraged Facebook followers to join their LinkedIn group in order to find out what EU citizens think the EU should invest in. Finally, no posts were found to have a collaboration aim and the rest of the 20,8% of the posts was dedicated to aims that are unrelated to transparency, participation or collaboration.

In terms of methods, the push strategy is strongly present as well. Graph 2 provides an oversight of the additional tools that the EC used with their Facebook posts and shows that the EC often recycles information already posted on its other media platforms. It can be observed that the EC directs the citizen back to its official website in 82% of the cases. This is often where the bulk of the information can be found. Furthermore, in 27,4% of the cases, the EC presents official documents, although they are almost always provided after one has been led back to the website. In 46,6% of the cases videos are used, which includes both videos on the website, but there are also a number of videos that have not been recycled but which have specifically been created for social media in order to explain certain things in a digestible manner.

Graph 2



Data Source: European Commission Facebook page (February to April 2015).

When looking at its methods, the EC also displays some elements of the pull strategy. For example, the EC has its Facebook page available in all languages of the EU and thus it makes an effort for everyone to understand

what it has to say. Furthermore, the EC reads the comments posted by its followers every day and it has a moderate reply rate of about 36 replies stretched over 62 posts. Nevertheless, this is not used for policy purposes all that often. It is more difficult to observe the EC actively pulling information from citizens. It was only once, in the category *Contest*, on the 24th of April 2015, that the EC asked its followers to submit their Spring pictures for the Spring in Europe photo competition. Whether this should be called participation can be doubted, as it does not reveal anything to the EC about the participant's sentiments, opinions or policy suggestions for the EC. (EC Social Media Coordinator, personal communication, June 2, 2015).

The behavior of the EC on Facebook shows some elements of the pull strategy as well as some of the networking strategy. The EC receives on average 19 comments per post, but this differs per subject. Through these comments citizens participate and display their sentiments and opinions, which shows that the EC presence on Facebook fosters and creates a degree of engagement. However, when contrasting this to the total number of 450K followers, the EC should be able to trigger more comments. The presence of the networking strategy can be demonstrated by the average of 139 shares per post, which shows that the EC to a certain extent succeeds in creating a network of people that not merely passively absorbs the content posted, but engages with it by sharing it with their social network. Furthermore, there is a certain degree of interaction between the citizens and the EC on Facebook. In table 1 it is visible that the EC posted comments under its messages 22 times and reacted to 14 out of the 28 questions posed. Nevertheless, this interaction never quite takes the form of co-design, as is intended by this strategy. The EC often only partially reacts to the question or comment and uses that opportunity to push more information towards the citizens. This happened, for example, when the EC posted (23 April, 2014): "Europe shows solidarity and moves ahead united to save lives. EU leaders have

agreed to triple the resources available to Triton border mission..." This is followed by following comment: "Hold the horses, who is showing solidarity? Those 2 on the picture? I can't remember if I was asked in any kind of referendum or else. For sure that don't have my mandate". By his comment this citizen shows that he thinks there should be a referendum on how to deal with the migration issues that the EU is experiencing. However, the EC consequently reacts to this by stating: "The members of the European Council are the heads of state or government of the 28 EU Member States..." followed by a link to the Council website, where the tasks of the Council are explained. This is a very indirect and standardized response to the statement by the citizen, something which also did not fall well with the citizen in question, as he replied: "You think I'm stupid? I know well enough who they are...". Moreover, the EC never reacts twice to the same person, which prevented that Facebook would serve as a platform of debate between the EC and its citizens.

Table 1 – European Commission Facebook Page Behavior

Aim	Posts	Likes	Shares	Comments under post	Comments by EC	Questions By citizens	Answers by EC
Agenda/Activities	9	2664	736	192	0	4	2
Explaining activities EU	25	9575	4812	477	8	10	5
Project with education or transparency aim	6	3335	1133	274	2	4	2
Asking public to ask questions	3	509	66	27	4	1	1
Asking the public for their opinion	6	3812	649	50	1	1	0
Stimulating participation	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Invitation policy platform	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
News update	1	1211	186	45	2	1	1
Promoting a project	3	795	522	55	4	4	2
Contest	5	1119	186	31	1	1	0
Culture/Fun	2	406	248	11	0	1	1
Social activity	2	857	92	22	0	1	0
Vacancies	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Educating about a subject	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Total	62	24283	8630	1184	22	28	14

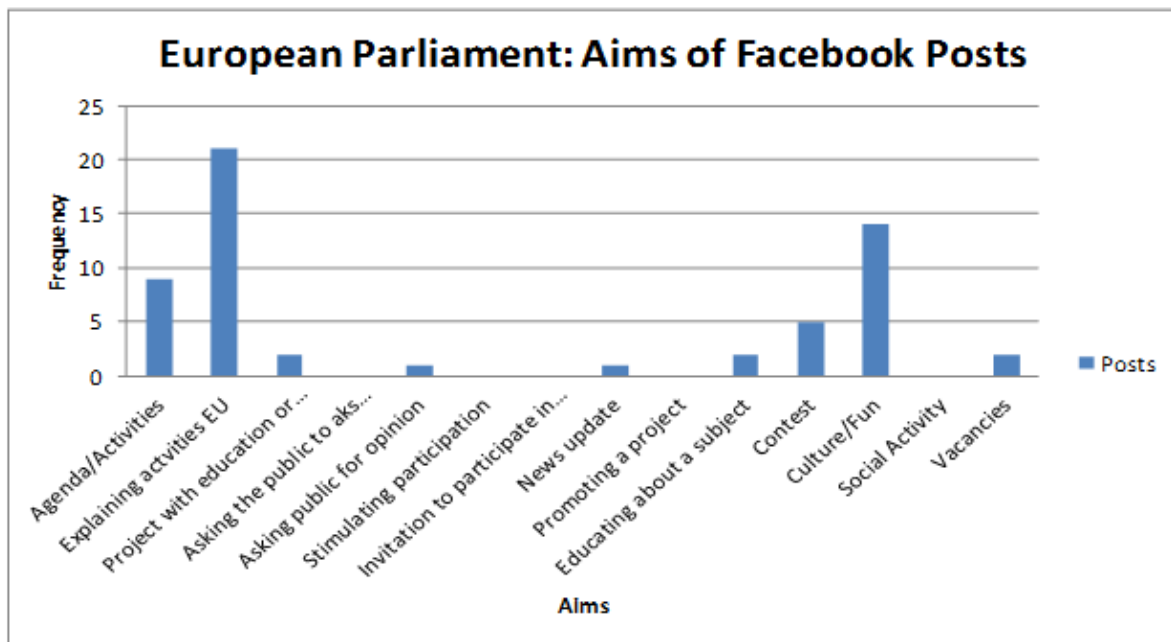
Data Source: European Commission Facebook page (February to April 2015).

10.5 The European Parliament: pushing transparency and pulling pictures

Similarly to the Commission, the EP mainly displays elements of the push and pull strategies. Graph 3 shows that most posts (56,1%) are devoted to the transparency aims and thus the push strategy can be detected here. *Explaining activities of EU* is by far the largest category, with 36,8% of the posts falling in that category. The EP makes an effort to explain in detail various aspects related to the EP and the EU. Most posts were dedicated to describing what the EU is doing, in the field of, for example, creating jobs, maritime policy and mobile phone legislation. To a lesser extent the EP paid attention to *Agenda/Activities* and *Project with education or transparency*.

The EP only twice asked for the opinion of its followers. On the 28th of March they asked how countries should adapt to the change from winter to summer time and on the 21st of April the EP asked what more the EU should do to about the migrants crossing the Mediterranean. Because there are so few of these messages, a pull strategy cannot clearly be observed. Furthermore, as no messages were dedicated to *Invitation to participate in a policy platform*, the networking strategy is also not present in the aims of the messages. In contrast, 42,2% of the posts were dedicated to aims that are unrelated to transparency, participation and collaboration. The most appearing sub-category (24,6%) here was *Culture/fun* which mainly contained posts about sharing pictures of cities in Europe, European films and holidays, such as Valentine's Day and Easter.

Graph 3



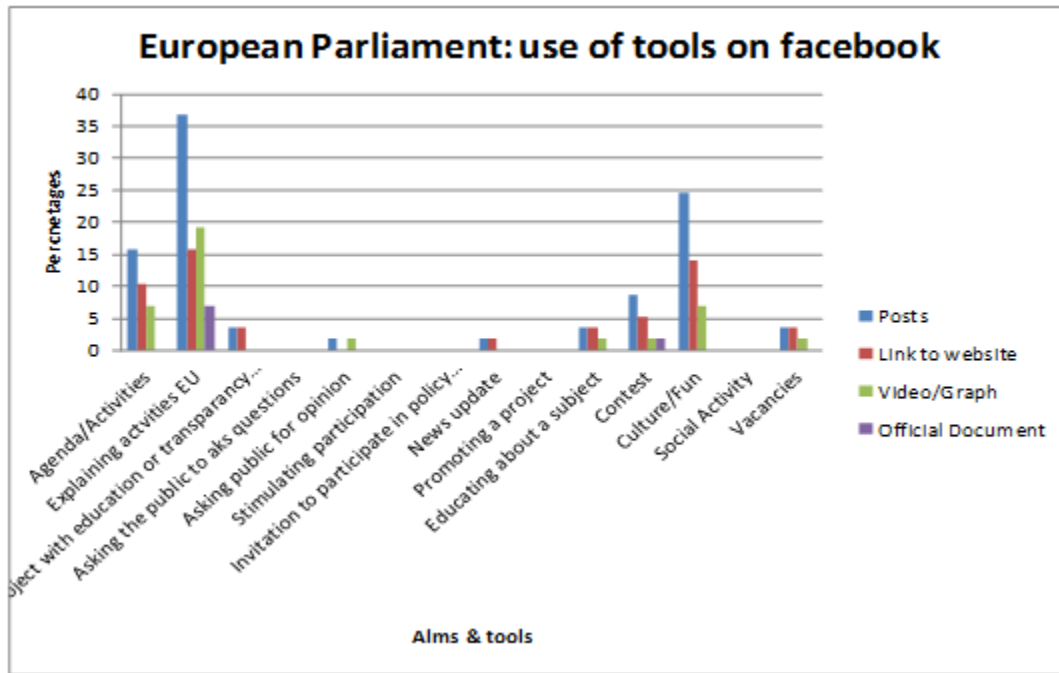
Data Source: European Parliament Facebook page (February to April 2015).

In terms of methods, the push strategy is largely present. Graph 4 provides an oversight of the additional tools that the EP uses with its post and it is visible that in 57,9% of the cases the EP leads citizens back to its website. However, the EP does not recycle official documents as much, as they can be found via the EP Facebook page in only 8,8% of the cases. This means that the EP makes an effort to create its own content on its website to make the information more accessible to the public. This is also reflected in the number of videos posted, which happened in 38,7% of the cases. The pull strategy can be detected in the fact that the EP Facebook page is available in other languages than English, facilitating transparency as well as participation. The EP also reads the comments multiple times a day and therefore is informing itself about the opinions of the citizens. However, this does not mean that the EP actively seeks out and uses the comments by followers for policy. The EP itself confirmed this on its Facebook page (13 April, 2015) in a reply to a citizen that their main intent behind their Facebook page is to provide information: "We believe that our best defense tool is the truth, and we try to give people as much information as possible on the works of the EP through this page..." (Social Media Coordinator EP, personal communication, 10 June, 2015).

Although the EP may not be pulling opinions and ideas of citizens, they are pulling something else: pictures. In the category *Culture/Fun* the EP often asks its followers to post their spring, winter and Easter pictures as well as pictures of European capitals. In general these posts do very well with the followers as *Culture/fun* is the category that received the most likes out of all categories and followers actively participate and share their pictures. Despite the engagement that these posts may generate, they cannot be seen as contributing to the pull strategy nor to participation because the term here means that the public is asked to contribute its ideas and expertise in order for the government to use this information when

making policy and the type of information generated from these posts is not useful for policy.

Graph 4



Data Source: European Parliament Facebook page (February to April 2015).

The behavior of the EP displays pull as well as some limited networking elements. The EP allows comments and on average citizens comment 62 times per post. This shows that citizens are engaged and are participating by providing their opinions. On average, there are 324 shares per post, which demonstrates that citizens are actively trying to share the EP's messages with their network and thus are helping the EP to build a community. Moreover, there also is some interaction between citizens and the EP. As can be observed in table 2, the EP has as answered 9 out of 20 questions and has reacted to followers' comments 33 times over the 57 posts placed by the EP. However, the EP is not behaving in such a way to create an environment on their Facebook page that fosters collaboration. The EP never interacts

twice with the same person and therefore does not allow a collaborative discussion to ensue. In fact, when it reacts or answers a question the reply is often informative in nature, referring followers to more information. For example, when the EP (16 March, 2015) created a post explaining the tasks of the EP a citizen commented that the EP should make it mandatory for representatives to attend all general sessions. The EP replied, providing an article on what MEPs are doing when they are not attending the plenary. This shows that the EP is actively avoiding a discussion, but instead chooses to provide more information.

Table 2 – European Parliament Facebook Page Behavior

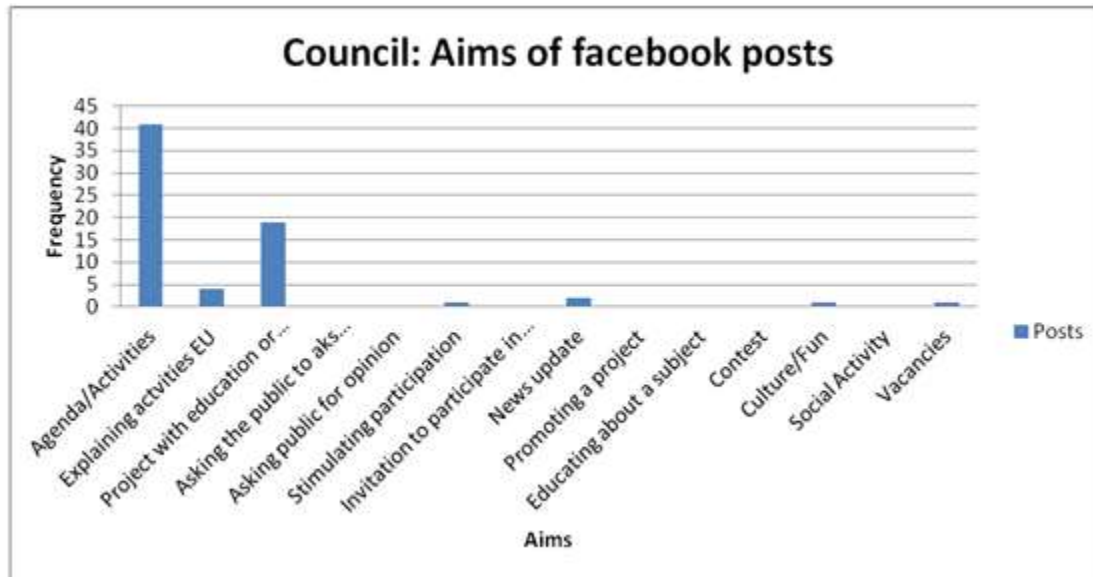
Aim	Posts	Likes	Shares	Comments under post	Comments by EP	Questions By citizens	Answers by EP
Agenda/Activities	9	3476	569	260	4	7	6
Explaining activities EU	21	18430	6554	1384	12	10	1
Project with education or transparency aim	2	1630	232	64	2	1	1
Asking public to ask questions	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Asking the public for their opinion	2	933	569	258	0	0	0
Stimulating participation	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Invitation policy platform	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
News update	1	615	287	11	0	0	0
Promoting a project	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Contest	5	7723	1523	310	7	0	0
Culture/Fun	14	21155	2977	723	6	2	1
Social activity	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Vacancies	2	1483	836	108	2	0	1
Educating about a subject	2	26012	5452	508	2	2	0
Total	58	81457	18999	3626	35	22	10

Data Source: European Parliament Facebook page (February to April 2015).

10.6 The Council: pushing Council meetings

The social media strategy of the Council mainly displays elements of the push strategy. The Council focuses on providing its followers with information on what is going on at the moment in a consistent and coherent way. Graph 5 shows that a large majority of the posts (92,8%) have transparency aims, and that *Agenda/Activities* is the category that appears the most, as it makes up 59,4% of all posts. The reason for this is that the Council predominantly posts messages that either announce the agenda of an upcoming Council meeting or report on the outcome of a passed Council meeting. These messages often shortly sum up the topics that were or will be discussed: "Amongst other topics at last week's Justice and Home Affairs Council meeting, ministers held a discussion on #migration and stressed that the fight against criminal networks of smugglers and traffickers should remain a priority. Learn more about the full outcome of the meeting:<http://ow.ly/Ko2DT>"(Facebook Council, 16 March 2015). The pull and networking strategies cannot be detected in the aims of the Facebook posts of the Council. Only the post on the 31st of March displayed the participation aim to a certain extent as it concerned an encouragement for citizens to participate in a debate with descendants & colleagues with the EU's founding fathers. But in none of the other posts did the Council ask for the opinion or expertise of citizens on certain issues.

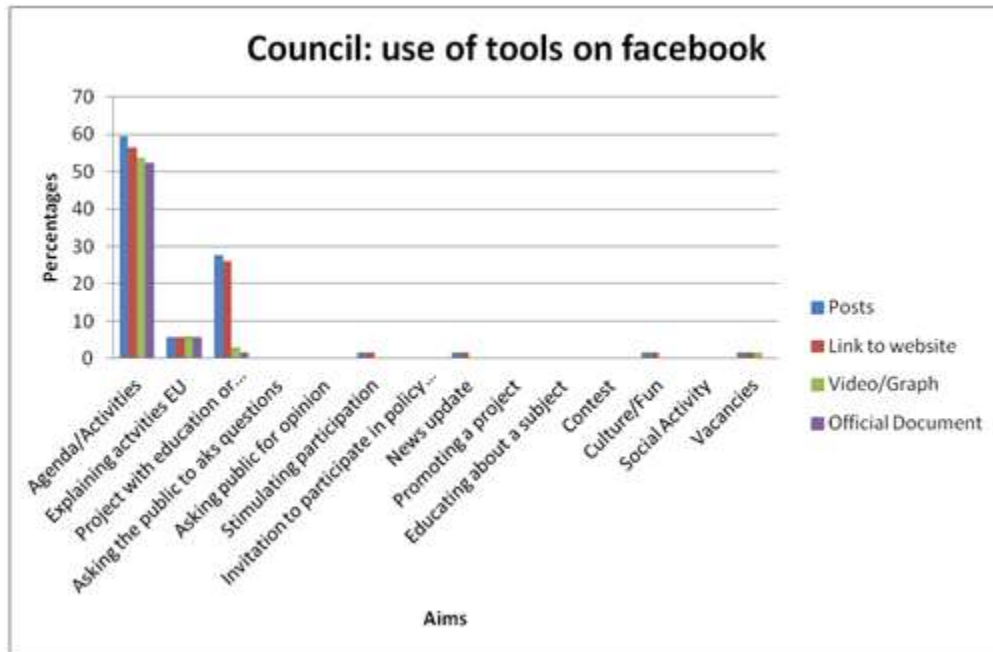
Graph 5



Data Source: Council Facebook page (February to April 2015).

The Council mostly makes use of links to its website to push more information towards citizens, as can be seen in graph 6. These pages often contain a short summary, quotes by Ministers as well as a short video of the press conference and links to relevant official documents. This shows that the Council uses Facebook as a tool to support and lead citizens to its website, rather than using Facebook as a tool of communication in itself. There is no sign of the Council using methods that are inherent to the pull strategy or the networking strategy. Graph 5 furthermore shows that the Council does not actively pull information from citizens, since it does not ask for the opinion or ideas of citizens in its messages. It does, however, read the comment section multiple times a day, albeit this information is not used for policy purposes (Member of the Secretariat of the Council, personal communication, June 3, 2015).

Graph 6



Data Source: Council Facebook page (February to April 2015).

Both the citizens and the Council are not very interactive on the Council Facebook page. From table 3 it can be deduced that the Council barely reacts to the comments posted by its followers. Although only 11 serious questions were asked during the three month period of February 2015 to April 2015, the Council only answered 4. The Council also never reacts twice to the same person. This interaction is so limited that it cannot fall under the networking strategy nor the pull strategy. Furthermore, out of all 166K followers who receive the Council's posts there were on average only 174 likes per post, 36 shares per post and merely 10 comments per post. The small number of average of comments per post indicates that even the inherent pull strategy of Facebook is barely present because citizens are not displaying their opinions in great numbers. Nevertheless, there are still comments that do show opinions as the following reactions to the Council post display: "Why an informal body and a minister never elected by me can

decide of my life???"(Facebook Council, 9 March, 2015), "Excellent!! Green Revolution in action" (Facebook Council, 5 March, 2015) and "Solidarity with the Greek people!" (Facebook Council, 20 February, 2015).

Table 3 – Council Facebook Page Behavior

Aim	Posts	Likes	Shares	Comments under post	Comments by Council	Questions By citizens	Answers by Council
Agenda/Activities	41	6441	1442	426	1	6	1
Explaining activities EU	4	676	233	45	0	0	0
Project with education or transparency aim	19	3059	467	198	1	5	3
Asking public to ask questions	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Asking the public for their opinion	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Stimulating participation	1	1370	31	6	0	0	0
Invitation policy platform	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
News update	2	1323	110	14	0	0	0
Promoting a project	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Contest	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Culture/Fun	1	184	25	9	0	0	0
Social activity	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Vacancies	1	205	218	22	0	0	0
Educating about a subject	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Total	69	13258	2526	720	2	11	4

Data Source: Council Facebook page (February to April 2015).

10.7 Comparing the Commission, Parliament & the Council

The degree to which the Commission, the Parliament and the Council use their social media account for open government purposes is quite similar. The three institutions mainly display elements of the push strategy and to a lesser extent elements of the pull strategy. Despite the fact that followers did share messages, the networking strategy is not present anywhere since no collaborative interaction between the institutions and its followers could be observed. Regardless of these similarities, it is possible to detect some

differences in both the extent to which they are dedicated to open government as well as how they contribute to open government.

The EP and the EC are dedicated to open government to a similar extent as they both maintain a mixed push/pull strategy, albeit they reach this objective in different ways. Both the EC and the EP are strongly focused on transparency aims, which make up 69.3% and 56% of their posts, respectively. However, the EC also dedicated 9,7% of its posts to asking citizens about their opinion on the investment plan. This remains a relatively small share of the total number of messages, but it is much more than observed for the other institutions. Looking at methods and behavior, the EP manages much better to passively pull information from citizens than the EC through their comments, as the EP, on average, received 62 comments per post, which is the highest number out of all three institutions. The EP's Facebook page was also the most interactive since it reacted 42 times stretched over 56 messages. Furthermore, it is notable that 42,2% of the messages of the EP were not related to open government purposes at all, which shows that the EP also seemed quite focused on creating a non-political relationship with its followers.

The EP and EC's presence on Facebook contributed to transparency by bringing to the attention of citizens detailed, but digestible explanations about the activities of the EU. Furthermore, both institutions were available to answer questions and they replied in about 50% of the cases. They also contributed participation, albeit this contribution remains limited because only part of the definition of participation is fulfilled: the public is allowed to contribute its ideas and through comments and they do so. Citizens even discuss with each other, which shows that citizens are engaged, as intended by the pull strategy. However, it can be questioned to which extent their comments are useful for policymaking as there are many spam and offtopic comments. Moreover, the EC uses these comments for policy purposes only

when this is demanded by policy makers, which is not very often (EC Social Media Coordinator, personal communication, June 3, 2015).

The Council's Facebook use contributed less to open government than the EP or the EC, because of the former's sole focus on the push strategy. 92% of its aims were transparency related, it mainly used push methods by leading citizens back to its website and it reacted only 6 times, stretched over 69 posts. Citizens also seem least triggered to show their opinion on the Council Facebook page. With its presence on Facebook, the Council contributes to transparency to a certain extent because it covers almost every Council meeting and brings this to the attention of the citizens. This shows that the Council is making a great effort to keep its followers up to date on what it is doing. Contentwise, the information provided in the summaries is very digestible. In addition to an official document, the Council provides a short summary of the topics discussed as well as some quotes by Ministers. However, the summaries do not contain very much information. For example, the summary provided by Council in its post of the 16th of March, mainly sums up what has been discussed: "The Council held a public debate on two proposals to improve rail services in the EU (fourth railway package). The proposals aim to liberalize services and strengthen the governance of railway infrastructure". It is not elaborated upon what this entails exactly and how this is going to be achieved. For more information, readers will have to resort to the official document on the outcome of the meeting. This, however, may be too difficult to comprehend for some readers.

An aspect that limits transparency is the fact that focus seems to lie on simply stating what is happening rather than explaining what is happening. This is the main difference between the category *Agenda/Activities* and *Explaining EU activities*. The latter provides a different, and perhaps more profound, transparency because it allows the reader to truly understand

what is happening rather than merely taking notice of it. In this aspect the Council Facebook page is lacking because it only posted 4 messages that were related to explaining what the EU was doing and how the EU works. Occasionally, the Council does have such information available, but one has to actively look for it on the Council website. It can thus be concluded that the Council contributes to transparency with its push strategy concerning Council meetings, albeit this transparency is more informative than explanatory.

10.8 Explaining the EU's Facebook use

This paper found that in terms of aims and methods the push strategy was predominantly present on the Facebook pages of the three institutions. In the cases of the EP and the EC this benefitted transparency by bringing to the attention of citizens detailed but digestible information on the activities of the EU. This focus comes from the objective to not only inform but also to explain and to justify the EC's actions on social media. The Council, in contrast takes a slightly different approach, since their Facebook strategy benefits transparency because of its focus on updating its Facebook followers on new events as well as by presenting the information in a digestible way, rather than explaining the activities of the EU. The Council Facebook page mainly consists out of posts that lead to a short summary of the agenda of Council meetings and the decisions made there.

The reason for this approach can be explained by how the Council views transparency and what information is readily available to share. A source inside the Council declared that how much transparency the Council offers on its Facebook page depends on how much transparency EU politicians allow. In EU legislation it is determined that EU citizens have access to documents and have the right to information about the Council

meetings and this is why the Council Facebook page reports on this. This could also possibly explain why the Council Facebook page lacks posts on *Explanations of activities of EU*. As the Council solely focuses on providing information that is explicitly allowed or mandatory to be provided, it is easy to overlook the possibilities that Facebook offers to provide information that the EU has not explicitly made mandatory to provide, but which it also not disallows to provide, such as information on how the EU works or in depth topical information. Another factor that played into the lack of posts on *Explanations of activities of EU* is the fact that this information is not as readily available on the Council website. However, Council is planning to change this and provide more topical and in depth information via its posts (EC & EP Social Media Coordinators & Member of the Secretariat of the Council, personal communication, June 3, 2015).

The pull strategy is to a limited extent present on the EP and Commission Facebook pages. The EP and the EC showed some, but not too extensive signs of actively encouraging participation by asking citizens for their opinions in their posts. The EC Social Media Coordinator explains that the EC only explicitly asks for the opinion of citizens on social media when there is a specific need for this. This was for example the case in the Investment Plan Roadshow posts by the Commission. The Council does not ask for the opinion of citizens at all on its Facebook page because it is not actively planning on doing something with these opinions. A source inside the Council explains that the Council, as an indirectly and nationally elected and selected body of ministers, is positioned relatively far away from EU citizens and because all ministers are delegates of their own country, the consultation of citizen's opinions or policy advice takes place in different degrees per Member State and happens through national channels.

Although, the institutions may not actively seek feedback from citizens on Facebook all that often, they automatically receive it through the

comment sections. All institutions read these comments at least once a day or more. The EC and EP do share useful information drawn from the comments with other spokespersons, EU officials or the units dealing with citizen feedback, albeit this does not happen often. In contrast, the Council does not at all make use of information they receive out of the comment section for policy purposes because of the large scale that Facebook operates on and the lack of good content driven discussions on Facebook (EC & EP Social Media Coordinators & Member of the Secretariat of the Council, personal communication, June 3, 2015).

For all institutions it was observed that the networking strategy occurred the least. Although citizens were triggered to share posts, no institution tried to actively stimulate citizens to collaborate or even to promote or announce a collaboration project, such as Citizen's Dialogues on certain topics. The EC Social Media Coordinator noted that perhaps this is a point for improvement for the future. Furthermore, no passive collaboration, flowing from interactions in the comment section, could be observed, as the interaction that took place never quite took the form of co-design or even collaboration on policy. When the institutions respond to citizens, it is mainly to provide more information, to answer a question or to correct false statements, rather than to enter into a discussion; the institutions try to remain as neutral as possible. As pointed out by all interviewees, the social media unit is separate from the policymakers and there is no extensive collaboration between the two. The social media teams' main task is to provide objective and neutral information about the institution and when responding to comments they cannot speak on behalf of the policymakers. Oftentimes citizens think that they are speaking to politicians on Facebook, but the EC always tries to clarify that it is in fact the social media team they are talking to. Additionally, they try to facilitate real opportunities for citizens to get into contact with politicians through chats that they announce and

organize on their Facebook page, since it has a much wider reach than the pages of the individual commissioners (EC & EP Social Media Coordinators & Member of the Secretariat of the Council, personal communication, June 3, 2015).

In sum, the extent to which Facebook use contributes to transparency depends on the institution's view of transparency as well as the tools that are readily available to offer transparency. Moreover, Facebook's contribution to participation depends on how interested policymakers are in citizen's opinions, which was found to be rather low for the time period of the study. Nevertheless, this can differ per institution, as an intergovernmental institution is less interested in such matters than the European Parliament and the Commission, since they are of a more supranational nature. Furthermore, the effectiveness of participation depends on how triggered citizens are to comment and whether fruitful discussions occur. Finally, collaboration on Facebook is difficult to achieve as long as the social media teams are not in closer contact with policymakers .

Comparing the results of this study to previous research in this field on the US and Asia, this study finds that the EU's social media use for open government purposes is largely similar to that of other governmental institutions. Being where the people are and providing information is often the main objective (Mergel, 2013, Golbeck, 2010, Gunawong, 2014). The US agencies' as well as the EU's social media behavior goes slightly beyond this by also displaying some elements of the pull and networking strategies by being present on social media and letting citizens comment, but in general they remain rather passive in their contribution to participation and collaboration. This paper was among the first to address social media usage for open government purposes and therefore it is difficult to place the results of the case of the EU in perspective. Further research will need to show whether neutrality issues and a lack of collaboration between the social

media department and the policymakers are among the main reasons why social media use is not more focused on participation and collaboration aims in other governments.

10.9 Conclusions

This paper aimed to find out to how and to what extent social media use by the EC, EP and Council contributes to open government. It found that the institutions mainly displayed elements of the push strategy and to a lesser extent elements of the pull strategy, while the networking strategy barely appeared. The EC and EP's Facebook pages contributed to transparency by providing citizens with digestible information on the activities of the EU by means of leading them to their websites, whereas the Council mainly focused on keeping citizens up to date on Council meetings. The reason for the differing approaches was found in differences in the perception of transparency as well as the material that was available on the website. This paper also found that the EU's Facebook pages contribute to participation by letting people comment on their pages. However, the extent to which they use this information for policy purposes is limited because there is limited demand for this by policymakers. Finally, it was found that Facebook use by the institutions does not contribute to collaboration since the social media teams do not actively ask or promote collaboration on the Facebook pages and they cannot enter into discussions since they cannot speak on behalf of the policymakers.

The results show that the EU institutions' presence on Facebook has an added value in terms of open government because it is able to update citizens on where and when new or old information can be found in a relatively easy way. However, the unique feature of social media, interactivity, is used only to a limited extent for open government purposes

and therefore much progress can still be made on this aspect. The institutions could make better use of the opinions of citizens offered on Facebook and integrate policymakers better into the social media activities of the institutions to make participation and collaboration on Facebook becomes possible.

It must be kept in mind that the results of this paper only paint part of the whole picture as the research was conducted over a time period of a mere three months. This could have influenced the results because the content of the posts is naturally affected by salient issues at the time, which may call for different degrees of transparency, participation and collaboration. However, the results are also based on interviews and they do not indicate that this paper should have found different results. Nevertheless, it would be useful if further research could explore a longer period of time and could also include other social mediums on which the EU is present, such as twitter and Youtube. Furthermore, because the EU is more than its institutions, more research could be done on the contributions of individual EU official's social media presence to open government.