

***POLICY-MAKERS USING SOCIAL MEDIA: COMMUNICATION OF
PUBLIC POLICIES OR POLITICAL PUBLIC RELATIONS?***
*An assessment of EU Information Society's policy-makers' use of Twitter and
Facebook*

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Abstract

While more policy-makers are embracing new tools such as Twitter and Facebook, an important question is what they are doing there. This thesis aims to explore this new field of study departing from the research question of why policy-makers are using social media and whether they are going online mostly for communicating public policies or political PR. The main hypothesis states that the usage will show blurred boundaries between these two concepts. Based on the literature review, an analytical framework is built conceptualizing the communication of public policies and political PR in a continuum. This framework is applied to three European case studies related to the policy area of information society: Commissioner Neelie Kroes, Digital Agenda for Europe and MEP Sophie in 't Veld. The thesis uses a triangulation methodology combining qualitative content analysis of a sample of 105 messages on Twitter and Facebook and a posterior quantification of the results. The findings confirmed the main hypothesis of blurred boundaries as the average result per account is situated in the middle of the continuum. There are some differences connected to the nature of the policy-maker as In 't Veld, as a Dutch MEP, was more involved in political PR than the two other cases.

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INTRODUCTION

Policy-makers have always relied on mass media, such as newspapers, radio and television and the use of information and communication technologies (ICTs) is not something new to governments. However, the growing importance of Internet in citizens' daily lives is changing the way in which policy-makers can relate to and interact with their constituencies. Now a simple post on Twitter or Facebook can reach millions of people in a second, without the need for mass media as a mediator and that is why day by day more policy-makers are going online.

Several examples illustrate the growing importance of social media. Barack Obama's election campaign in the US was a turning point showing the importance of Internet for political communication as he was the first candidate to make full use of social media both for recruiting voters and for fundraising. The online mobilization around the Anti-Counterfeiting Trade Agreement (ACTA) in 2012, which ended in a digital petition submitted to the European Parliament made Maros Sefcovic, European Commission's vice-president, to admit the mistake of underestimating these new powerful tools, as noted in a Silicon Angle article on March 21, 2012: "We saw how our absence in the world of social media on this particular topic caused us a lot of troubles". The same dichotomy between being absent and being present could have been seen when in 2011 the Mexican government urged all their Ministers to open a Twitter account and use it to communicate with their citizens, proudly announcing that they were the first country in the world in which all the cabinet belonged to this social network.

But, while more policy-makers are using social media, an important question is also what they are doing there: is their online presence related to e-government, and specifically the communication of public policies, or is it mainly a new way of increasing their public image via political PR tools. Besides, the use of social media can be different according to the positions, as for example

elected representatives, who depend directly on the vote of their constituencies to maintain their position, may tend to use social media more for political PR rather than members of the cabinet.

E-government is related to the continuous optimization of service delivery, constituency participation, and governance by transforming internal and external relationships through technology, the Internet and New Media (Gartner Research 2000). There are different stages of e-government, and the first one is related to the provision of information. This stage is vital in connection with democracy, as ICTs can improve the availability of information, promoting a culture of transparency and accountability. The communication of public policies is a concept related to the process of engagement with the citizens in the policy process, by providing information and opening the possibility of consultations, while political PR is considered mainly a tool for promotion and image building. In a nutshell, the first is more a citizen-centered approach whereas the latter is more a self-interest approach.

While there is an increasing focus on analyzing how governments are using new tools in the digital age in order to increase public information (Hood and Margetts 2007; John 2011, Weiss 2002), there is still a gap in academic research on the specific use of social networking sites for public policy communication and e-government. On the other hand, political PR is recognized as an inevitable aspect of the promotional cultures of modern western societies (Moloney 2006; Miller 1998), vital for attaining and maintaining positions and power (Moloney 2006; Someville 2004).

The purpose of this thesis is to analyze why policy-makers are using social media and if they are going online mostly for communicating public policies or political PR or a combination of both aims. The main hypothesis is that the usage will show blurred boundaries between these two concepts and that policy-makers use Twitter and Facebook for both purposes. In order to

explore this relatively new field of study, this thesis will analyze the concepts of communication of public policies and political public relations in an interdisciplinary way, borrowing ideas from literature on public policy, political PR and political communication. Answering the research question and focusing on the specific case study of the use of Twitter and Facebook in the European Union (EU) will allow deepening the understanding on the role of social media in policy making. It will also have practical implications by understanding how policy makers are using the tool, describing challenges and best practices, which will allow them to learn more about the tools and choose the best one according to their strategies and objectives. The overall aim is to contribute to the understanding of the role of social media in public policy.

Regarding methodology, this paper will first develop an analytical framework to categorize public policy communication and political PR on Social Media by building a set of criteria for both concepts based on the aforementioned literature review. It will then proceed with a qualitative content analysis of some specific cases case studies related to the policy area of information society in the EU: the European Commissioner Neelie Kroes, the Digital Agenda and the member of the European Parliament (MEP) Sophie in 't Veld. The content analysis will be conducted both on their Twitter and Facebook accounts. Then, the results will be quantified in order to be able to compare and draw conclusions.

The thesis is divided in four major chapters. The first chapter will analyze the literature of public policy communication and political PR in connection with the new tools of social media in an information technology era. Based on the literature review, the second chapter will introduce the analytical framework for conceptualizing the communication of public policies and political PR. The third chapter will develop the methodology of the thesis, introducing the selected case studies. The fourth chapter will present the findings on the case studies, comparative conclusions and recommendations aimed to improve how policy-makers approach social media. Finally,

conclusions will be drawn, mentioning some possible areas of future research connected with the present thesis.

1 LITERATURE REVIEW

Social media has opened new channels of communication for policy-makers who can now use everyday tools such as Facebook and Twitter to communicate with their constituencies. In order to differentiate between the different purposes and usages of this tool and whether it should be considered to be communication of public policies or political PR, it is necessary to develop an analytical framework which departs from current academic literature and borrows concepts from other disciplines.

This chapter consists of two subchapters. The first will review the literature on communication of public policies, including an analysis of the interplay between information and public policy, a topic which has primarily been studied in relation to mainstream media. It will also reflect upon the traditional research area of agenda setting, and how it can be connected with new media. Then it will outline current developments in the specific interplay between public policy and social networks. The second subchapter will focus on the literature on political PR and how an online presence can be linked with self-promotion activities. Furthermore, it will discuss how new communication channels provide a new field for political PR.

The chapter will conclude by putting the two analytical concepts discussed above into perspective and analyzing how these new developments have made the boundaries between communication of public policies and political PR less clear. Both concepts can be situated in a continuum, which will form the foundation of the analytical framework that will be applied to the concrete case studies in the EU.

1.1 COMMUNICATING PUBLIC POLICIES

ICTs are reshaping the way in which policy-makers can relate with citizens, opening new possibilities but also posing new challenges. This shows the importance of ICTs in communicating public policies as governments can connect with citizens in a different way. This is especially true in the case of social media, which can be used to “get closer” to citizens, allowing a more “door to door” feeling. Most of the literature analyzes public policy in relationship with mass media, with a special emphasis on theories such as agenda setting. But while there is an increasing focus on analyzing how governments are using new tools in the digital age in order to increase public information (Hood and Margetts 2007; John 2011, Weiss 2002), extensive academic research on the specific use of social networking sites for the communication of public policies is lacking.

Democratic values are one of the core reasons for communication of public policies and this is why it is also important for governments to adapt to new ICTs developments such as social media in order to increase the transparency and accountability of government agencies. Dave Gelders and Marleen Brans (2007) describe the advantages of improved government communication, which include counterbalancing misleading and/or incorrect information, avoiding misunderstandings, resistance, frustrations and speculations, increasing efficiency and maintaining an informed citizenry. Besides the underlying democratic reasons, the authors believe that communicating policy intentions can help the government to implement and maintain the adopted policy (2007, 159). This is also related to the possibility of monitoring possible reactions in the implementation phase and avoiding future mistakes. Mordecai Lee (2008, 91) stresses the obligation for public administrators to report to the citizenry on agency activities, which in the digital era can be done via e-reporting.

But one of the risks that Gelders analyzes in a later article (Gelders and Ihlenb 2010) is the difficulty in differentiating between government communication about potential policies from government propaganda, and the spending of public money for spurious and/or self-motivated reasons. This is connected with the research question of the present thesis: being able to discern the underlying purposes – between “tax-financed propaganda” (2010, 59) on the one hand and communication of policies on the other – will help to protect democratic values. The challenge is to build a democratic interplay between citizens and authorities and to open a truly meaningful and participatory exchange in the policy cycle, rather than to disseminate top-down messages from government to citizens, without any feedback.

Several public policy scholars focus on a tool based approach: tools available for policy-makers when they seek to change policy outcomes. The idea is that they have different tools which can be selected and combined according to the situation and the purpose they want to achieve. Information and communication are among those tools that governments use to relate with the citizenry (John 2011; Weiss 2002; Gelders and Ihlenb 2010; Lee 2007).

Peter John (2011, 10) groups the tools available to governments into six categories, and *Information, persuasion and deliberation* is one those, which the author defines as a non-standard (or softer) instrument, along with networks and governance. Policy-makers, he acknowledges, are less familiar with these non-standards tools in comparison with top-down tools (law and regulation; public spending and taxation) or tools internal to the state (bureaucracy and public management; institutions). The provision of information is a factor that governments “do not fully have under their control” and “which seek to encourage more active involvement on the part of those who are regulated” (John 2011, 8). In short, information is a tool that helps other tools, such as law and regulation, to work effectively, with a focus on a message as a piece of advice rather than a coercive approach with sanctions and fines. This is not to say that

information and persuasion are a novelty: along with a professionalization of the policy making field, tools such as public information campaigns, leaflets or door-to-door proselytism have been part of the landscape for a long time.

Information is a valuable resource, which can be used in a strategic way. Deborah Stone contrasts information in the ideal market (accurate, complete and available to all) with information in the polis, which is interpretative, incomplete and strategically withheld (2002, 28). In this sense, much of the political activity can include efforts to control interpretations or to try to present them in a creative way.

Christopher Hood and Helen Margetts also focus on information as one of the main tools of government in the digital age and how governments can convey bespoke messages, tailored to cater the needs of different audiences (2007, 31). Their influential book *The tools of government in the digital age* reflects upon the sometimes difficult decision for policy-makers to choose the right tool for each purpose and how being able to know what is inside a government's toolkit can "at least help us to think about ways of doing better when – as so often happens – things go wrong" (2007, 3). The aforementioned example about the online mobilization against ACTA is a good illustration of this point and the risks of underestimating the power of social media resulting in a government not being able to react in time.

Information, John believes, is an attractive low-cost resource of governments, easy to introduce and with the potential to influence the behavior of citizens (2011, 154-156). There are differences related to the usage, as the leverage increases when public actors develop the skills to influence the choices of citizens (2011, 156). Janet Weiss also considers information as a policy tool for eliciting desired policy outcomes (2002, 218). But one of the key issues she stresses is that the influence is not necessarily connected with a policy alteration: "People change what they do

because public policy has changed what they think or has changed what they think about, without necessarily changing anything else about the situation” (2002, 218). This, in fact, is one of the main reason why information is such a valuable resource for policy-makers, as it can influence the behavior of citizens.

The differentiation made by Weiss is connected to the foundational ideas of Bernard Cohen (1963) for whom persuasion (what people think) and agenda setting (what people think about) are key aspects of the influence of media. In this case, the press has an important effect: “It may not be successful much of the time in telling people what to think, but it is stunningly successful in telling its readers what to think *about*” (Cohen 1963, 13). As defined by John Kingdon (1995, 3), “the agenda is the list of subjects or problems to which governmental officials, and people outside of government closely associated with those officials, are paying serious attention at any time given”. The influence of mass media in agenda setting has been an object of many controversies. Mediocracy theory is the proposition that the media agenda sets both the public agenda and the political agenda and, following this theory, the media might affect public policy to the extent that policy-makers may tailor policy decisions thinking about how media will portrayed them (Kleinnijenhuis and Rietberg, 1995). On the other hand, some studies have found that media is not such a powerful agenda setter and do not have such a strong impact on the outcome of policies (Baumgartner and Jones 1993).

Sigrid Baumgarten and Katrin Voltmer’s work (2010) goes same way to fill the academic gap in the literature about this topic by also reflecting upon the interplay between mass communication and political decision making and how mass media shapes the processes and outcomes of public policy. If, as suggested by them, the nexus between media and policy is still in its infancy (2010, 225), then this must be even more true in the case of the new developments regarding social media. They highlight that media have a different influence depending on the stage of the policy

cycle. For Voltmer (2007), for example, the media are mainly involved in the early stages of problem definition and agenda-setting, but their influence is largely insignificant in the process of policy formulation and implementation. In this case, media have a strong influence when debating a specific proposed policy – a compelling reason why policy-makers may want to utilize Facebook and Twitter. What Baumgarten and Voltmer demonstrate is the growing power of the media in public policy, as well as its limitations: “The media can affect policy processes, the content of policy debates and the institutional contexts of policy making. However, findings indicate that processes of mediatization are not linear, continuous or all-encompassing. Rather, media effects depends on the policy field and the time period in question; they are discontinuous and inconsistent” (2010, 224).

Weiss also analyzes the existence of multiple channels to deliver information and the possibility of reaching a higher degree of effectiveness. But in any case she also poses an important caveat:

Even if no intermediary is used, putting information in front of people does not guarantee that it will be seen, heard, or used. Government-sponsored information competes with information from entertainment, news, commercial advertising, newspapers, magazines, radio, mail, and, of course, the press of daily life. Somehow the information must be sufficiently compelling to attract attention to itself, to engage the notice of the reader, listener or viewer. Information may need to be delivered to the audience in a way that is novel, creative, intense, graphic, fast paced, visually arresting, or suspenseful in order to engage the interest of the audience long enough to be noticed and remembered. (2002, 230-231).

The existence of multiple channels is fundamental for the following analysis and case study. Policy-makers are using Facebook and Twitter, which are not tools that were created for the purposes of communicating public policies. Therefore, posts and tweets by policy-makers should have the potential to attract an audience that is there for a limited period of time and that goes online for reasons that are not related with public policy (i.e. connecting with friends, checking the latest update of their favorite celebrity or even watching funny videos of cats). For this reason, there is a risk that policy communication might start to look more and more like

“infotainment” (information plus entertainment) updates and the purpose of using information to empower citizens gets replaced by the desire to simply gain their attention. Although using visual or graphic presentation in addition to text and numbers can enhance the likelihood that the information will be understood (Weiss 2002, 237), it is also important to find a balance and keep in mind what is the underlying purpose that a specific message is trying to convey.

1.1.1 SOCIAL MEDIA AND COMMUNICATION OF PUBLIC POLICIES

Regarding the role of social media in democracies, much has been said about e-democracy, e-mobilization or e-campaigning. However, there is still no extensive research corpus focusing on how policy-makers can use social media in a meaningful way in order to engage more citizens in the policy making process and encourage participation. In general, ICTs are viewed as a way of increasing available information and, therefore, promoting transparency, accountability and reduce the opportunities for corruption (Bertot et al 2010; Anderson 2009).

Some authors focus on the possibilities of democratization (Kay, Römmele and Ward 2004), while on the other hand highlighting the risks of facilitating surveillance techniques by governments (Morozov 2011) or increasing weak ties among individuals (Gladwell 2011). Bruce Bimber’s (1998) theory of accelerated pluralism points out that the Internet contributes to the fragmentation of the system of interest-based group politics, in which there is less stability and institutional coherence. There is also extensive academic literature regarding e-mobilization and ciberactivism (Aday, et.al, 2010; McCaughey and Ayers 2003) and just a couple of years after the launch of the microblogging site, people started talking about “Twitter revolutions”.

Furthermore, political communication scholars have increasingly focused on the use of social media during political campaigns and elections. For example Lilleker and Jackson (2010) analyzed the impact of web 2.0 in the UK 2010 general election and found that Internet had two main

functions: selling the party and its personnel to online visitors and encouraging activism. Thus, they concluded, that websites and social media have become key tools of campaigns, but have not fundamentally changed the nature of campaigning (2010, 25). In another article Lilleker (Lilleker and Michalska 2011) analyzed the online communication strategies of MEPs and looked at how they use social networks strategically to communicate with a range of audiences, from journalists to supporters, putting an end to “the era of the brochureware website” (2011, 16). This does not automatically mean that there is always interaction between MEPs and the citizens - a question that remained open for the authors - but among their findings they conclude a “less than expected use of the internet for personal promotional strategy” (2011, 11).

Andrew Chadwick (2006) posed an interesting question that can be extrapolated to the social media field: is the Internet, by reconfiguring the relations between states and between citizens and states, causing fundamental shifts in patterns of governance? Although he believes that in Western democracies the online presence of government departments is now taken for granted, history shows that “the arrival of e-government, which signaled the acceptance of Internet connectivity as a tool that could be used to improve efficiency, cut costs and change the way governments have traditionally interacted with citizens, constitutes a dramatic shift in the dominant ethos of public policy and administration” (2006, 178). Although social media sites such as Facebook and Twitter are free of charge, it should be noted that an effective social media usage requires training, developing of skills and time to post frequently and be able to engage with citizens (i.e. by answering their online messages). In this sense using social media to communicate public policies (as well as for political PR reasons) does not come without cost. Besides, policy-makers should consciously and continuously think about what they are using the tools for, in order to redirect their efforts in the most effective way.

Thinking of information as a tool, one of the first links between mass communication and policy making is influencing public opinion. This, in turn, can also be extrapolated to social media, which as mentioned earlier, is a way to connect with citizens in a less mediated way. Of course, social media is also a way to reach mass media and to be in contact with journalists. In today's world publishing a press release is not enough and journalists also pay extensive attention to social media and they even write stories focusing solely on that. In a way this is also a risk, as sometimes media coverage sometimes talks about social media realms as something newsworthy in itself, tending to forget that this is simply one more communication channel.

Finally, when thinking about the interplays between mass media and policy making, agenda setting is one of the most traditional areas of research. Some scholars are starting to deal with how the theory can be adapted to the digital age, for example by exploring agenda setting effects in the digital age to determine whether, or how, the traditional theory functions in the new media settings, specifically for online newspapers (Lee 2005). Another study (Sayre et al. 2010) makes a comparison between agenda setting in social media, online news and conventional news for gay marriage opponents in California. Among their findings, they demonstrate that the connection between mainstream media and social media varies across time, and that the latter can be used to bring attention to an issue when the mainstream media are not (2010, 26). In short, the traditional media system "may be losing some of its agenda-setting ability to emerging social media" (2010, 26).

1.2 POLITICAL PR

The conceptualization of political PR is connected with two distinct academic research areas: traditional PR and political communication. While there is an inner debate around the conceptualization of political PR, this thesis will focus on the narrow definition of political PR as

a tool for promotional strategy in opposition to the communication of public policies which aims to engage citizens in the policy making process. The objective is to provide an overview of the literature without going deeper into internal academic and professional debates to be able to operationalize a definition and build the analytical framework used in the thesis.

Kevin Moloney (2006) is an influential author who takes a narrow position, defining PR as weak propaganda, as a way of constructing messages to gain the compliance of citizens and its aim is to persuade through special selection of messages and styles of communication. The public relations machine is part of what Ralph Negrine defines as governments “carefully crafted communication strategies” (1996, 10). For Moloney this crafted communication does not necessarily imply a negative connotation, but it challenges us to understand the potential consequences of the positive and negative effects of PR (2006, 176). Political PR is an inevitable part of the powerful self-advantaging promotional cultures of modern western societies (Moloney 2006; Miller and William 1998). This is stressed by Moloney, who finds the purpose of political PR straightforward: “Above all, it is communication designed to further the interests of its principals. They would not invest resources in PR if it has otherwise” (2006, 168).

Moloney proposes an alternative paradigm to one of the mainstream theories of PR in modern democracies. While the so called Grunigian paradigm (1984) established a four step approach to PR aiming for the ideal “two-way asymmetrical communication”¹, Moloney argues that PR in democracies should be recognized basically as a process of persuasion for maintaining public

¹ The foundational text for this traditional paradigm is *Managing Public Relations* (1984) by J. Grunig and T. Hunt. In there they set up a four-part typology of PR (Ranging from a more propagandistic one -press agency- till a two-way symmetrical PR). Moloney believes that the Grunigian paradigm “has taken hold in many universities and colleges has been to over-emphasise PR as a practice of virtuous messaging, known as a two-way communications between equal, listening, negotiation, mutually respectful message senders and receivers” (Moloney 2006, preface). In any case, in the Grunigian paradigm there is a recognition that much of the PR is propagandistic (with a purely aim to persuade public opinion). Other authors also show (Theunissen and Wan Noordin 2012) a critical approach to the idea of dialogue in public relations practice and the philosophical underpinning of the concept, which go beyond an abstract idea of a two-way symmetrical model.

support and he positions itself against the idea of communicative symmetries as, he highlights, the idea is to strengthen the communicative advantage of the PR practitioners, providing the best public image according to their purposes.

To a large extent, the idea of political PR is to catch the attention of citizens and convey popular messages. One basic opposition is between political PR promotional techniques (which can be more visible or invisible) in opposition with paid advertising (Moloney 2006, 165). In this sense, Moloney defines PR propaganda as: “The one-sided presentation of data, belief, an idea, behavior, policy, a good or service in order to gain attention and advantage for the message sender. It seeks attention and advantage through attitudinal change and then through behavioral compliance. It intends to persuade through the use of selective facts and emotions in its message construction” (2006, 167). Hood and Margetts also establish a similar dichotomy to the one proposed in this thesis, but in this case between government messages and propaganda: “Much, if not all, of government’s information output can be seen as ‘propaganda’ in the sense that is designed to persuade or to structure the informee’s perception rather than to convey purely neutral or technical information” (2007, 37).

There is general agreement that one of the main purposes of political PR is to increase public support for public policies or campaigns (Froehlich and Rüdiger 2006), which also apply for the purpose of communication and public policies. However, in political PR there are also self-serving reasons, related to, for example, attaining and maintaining positions of power (Moloney 2006; Someville 2004; Froehlich and Rüdiger 2006). In this sense, one would expect to find differentiated social media usage, for example, between elected officials (who need the votes of their constituencies in order to be in power) and public administrators.

Similarly to communication of public policies, ICTs also bring the opportunity for a new kind of PR, which some authors categorize as PR 2.0 (Breakenridge 2008), connected to self-promotion and image cultivation. In modern democracies today, there is no need to rely exclusively on the traditional media to reach the public with messages and this has changed the nature of fields such as political communication. Simultaneously, ICTs also open new opportunities for policy-makers to connect with journalists. Another key aspect for defining political PR is the media relation approach. For Lee, one of the most traditional purposes of the external relations of a public administrator is to deal with reporters (Lee 2008, 9).

1.2.1 SOCIAL MEDIA AND PR

The emergence of social media as a new channel of communication provide a new field for political PR and academics are prolifically producing research around analysis of sites such as Facebook or Twitter. Zizi Papacharissi (2009) developed a comparative analysis of social network sites and concluded that Facebook emerged as the architectural equivalent of a glasshouse, with a publicly open structure, loose behavioral norms and room for spontaneous interaction. In connection with the political PR usage, he found that social networking websites operate as a self-presentation tool (2009, 202). Following Erving Goffman (1959), Papacharissi describes the process of self-presentation as a performance taking place on a single or multiple stages, depending on the situational context. Public identities can be constructed through this self-presentation and the connection-building facilitated by social media (2009, 201). Besides, in sites like Facebook and Twitter those performances can be enabled through a public display of friends, like and dislikes and affiliations (Liu 2007).

Dawn Gilpin (2011) also provides an interesting contribution on the field of social media and PR, specifically analyzing professional identity construction in Twitter. As PR professionals need to build relationships with several stakeholders, the growth of online communication environments

constitutes a good opportunity to extend the reach of public relations efforts. In this sense Twitter serves multiple purposes: such as information sharing, networking, and establishing professional expertise (Gilpin 2011, 232). One interesting conclusion is that Twitter “emerges as a boundary-blurring tool that links multiple online spheres and spans the divide between offline and virtual professional domains” (Gilpin 2011, 232). It is in this new environment that policy-makers should make use of social media and try to adapt to new forms of communication. In this sense political PR encompasses, as noted earlier, a self-promotional tool in which policy-makers can build an image using both personal and professional aspects. This image building is also connected to the idea of building an online reputation, something that can be crafted by the policy-maker or their spokesman via social media. In short, political PR via social media can be seen as a personal promotional tool or, borrowing a marketing concept, as personal branding.

1.3 BLURRING BOUNDARIES

The emergence of social media has made the distinctions between public and private spheres less clear. The key aspect being that now the same technologies are used for personal as well as mass communication purposes. Accordingly, and as is the focus of the thesis, the blurring of boundaries also applies to political PR and the communication of public policies. Papacharissi concluded that the merging of private and public boundaries in online social networks brings “behavioral consequences for individuals, who must adjust their behavior so as to make it appropriate for a variety of different situations and audiences” (2009, 206-207). Marika Lüders (2008, 685) also explores how the use of digital media technologies have destabilized the traditional dichotomy between (inter)personal communication (e.g. blogs, instant messengers) and mass communication.

To conclude, in this context policy-makers now have more tools at hand both for communicating public policies and to engage in political PR. Thinking about the differences between both concepts, and the inner differences between the channels for reaching the audience is an important step in order to be able to distinguish between the pros and cons of each communication strategy. Thinking about the purpose and the audience is a basic step. Being able to choose the right tool is connected with thinking about the underlying purpose behind the communication. Based on democratic values, policy-makers should be able to distinguish between communication of public policies and political PR, and be aware of which kind of message they are trying to convey. Therefore, the above literature review serves as a base for building a specific analytical framework, which will be described in the following chapter.

2 ANALYTICAL FRAMEWORK

Based on the review of the literature, an analytical framework was created. Both concepts – communication of public policies and political PR- were described based on three different criteria each (See Figure 1). The main objective of situating the two main concepts as endpoints on a scale is to be able to develop a critical understanding in a field that proved to be complex. This framework situates both concepts in a continuum: some practices such as a neutral message about a new policy are distinctively part of the first category, while self-promotional messages aiming to strengthen a public image are part of the political PR realm.

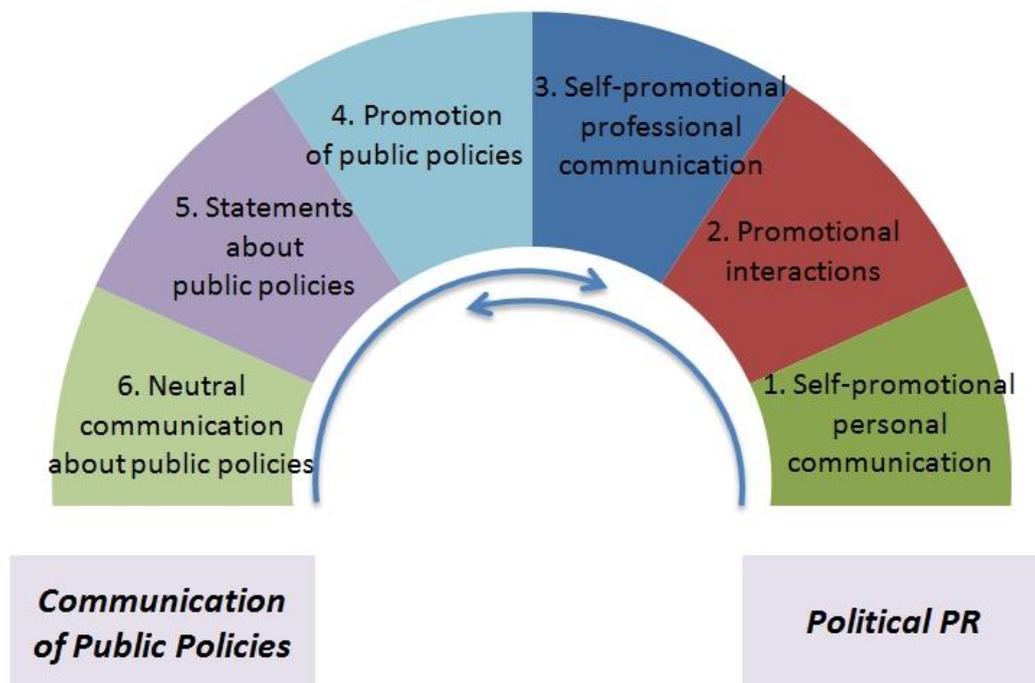
The framework departs from the realm of communication of public policies, on the level of *Neutral communication of public policies* (6). At this level policy-makers convey purely neutral or technical information, which may include a link to a new policy or policy proposal or purely neutral information about the agency. On the next level of *Statements about public policies* (5) there is an added value, as policy-makers are expected to include an interpretation or evaluative comment about policies. This paved the way for the following level of *Promotion of public policies* (4), which is the boundary with the political PR categories. Is on this fourth level where the active promotion of public policies takes place, for example by promoting policy debates, interacting with citizens via consultations and trying to present the information in an attractive way.

The second part of the framework is the three levels of Political PR, departing from the *Self-promotional professional communication* (3). This level is connected to strengthening a professional image rather than a specific policy. This can be done via announcements of press conferences, congresses or seminars, or linking to public speeches. The next level is the one of *Promotional interactions* (2), in which policy-makers are supposed to relate to citizens discussing non policy-related topics. This is also a level for strengthening contacts with journalists and other

stakeholders, for example by sharing information or simply by congratulating someone. Finally, in the extreme right comes the level of *Self-promotional personal communication* (1) which is supposed to stress just personal image cultivation (i.e. by showing the human side of the user or posting information about personal achievements).

Sometimes it is not so easy to differentiate between these two kinds of communication, and this is why there are some categories that share common points, specially the two on the middle (this is represented by the arrows). The levels of *Promotion of public policies* and *Self-promotional communication* share the promotional idea, but the main difference is that the second one is connected to strengthening a professional image rather than a specific policy. But even in the fourth level policy-makers might use more political PR tools, such as trying to present a policy in an attractive way. It is in this area where we can expect to find the blurred boundaries between the two concepts. The clearest antagonists are at the end of the continuum between *Neutral communication of public policies* and *Self-promotional personal communication*. The first one including information, without no evaluation or statement, and the second one connected to the basic idea of personal propaganda, highlighting for example personal achievements (of the policy-maker or the institution).

2.1 FIGURE 1. ANALYTICAL FRAMEWORK.



Communication of public policies	Weight of criterion	Political PR	Weight of criterion
Neutral communication of public policies	6	Self-promotional personal communication	1
Links to specific public policies		Statements about personal feelings	
Convey purely neutral or technical information.		Statements about life events	
Information about services		Post about personal achievements	
Information about the work of the agency			
Neutral information about the agency			
Statements about public policies	5	Promotional interactions	2
Evaluative comments about policies		Thank you messages / Congratulations messages	
Interpretation of policies		Share information about other's stakeholders	
Policy statements with related video, photos, etc.		Contacts with journalists	
		Contacts with citizens (non policy issues)	
Promotion of public policies	4	Self-promotional professional communication	3
Questions to citizens (policy issues)		Links to newsletters	
Calls to consultations		Announcement of press conferences	
Answers to citizens on topic related with public policies		Link to speeches, press releases, etc	
Promote policy debates		Announcements of congresses, conferences, seminars, etc.	
Attractive way to present a policy		Links to policy related newspapers articles, etc.	
Links to policy documents			

Source: the author

3 METHODOLOGY AND CASE STUDY

The starting point of the methodology is the analytical framework developed in the previous chapter. In order to be able to answer the research question of why policy-makers are using social media, if to communicate public policies or for political PR, the framework established a set of criteria for both concepts. For doing so the thesis will use a triangulation methodology combining qualitative and quantitative techniques in some specific case studies.

Firstly, a qualitative content analysis of posts on Facebook and Twitter was conducted, applying the analytical framework in three specific cases in the European Union: one EU Commissioner, one institutional account and one MEP. This methodology has been chosen because it allows an in depth analysis of the content of the messages and it will provide useful information for continuing to build a new academic area of research, in a field like social media which is changing fast thanks to the development of new technologies. Each message was interpreted and fit into one of the criteria in the framework. Each message was coded in a separate sheet and placed into one category. In the few cases in which a message could be applied for two categories (i.e. promotional interactions and self-promotional professional communication), a qualitative interpretation allowed to decide which was the main purpose of this message.

Secondly, the final results per account were quantified in order to be able to situate the final result into the continuum between the communication of public policies and political PR. To facilitate the quantitative analysis, a different weight was assigned to each criterion and the final result was an average of all results.

The main proposition that guides the research is that policy-makers use Twitter or Facebook both for communicating public policies and for political PR. The nature of the tools in itself

provides a field for unclear boundaries. In this sense, the overall result is expected to be found in the middle of the continuum. Differences in usage between Commissioners and MEPs are also expected to be found, as the former depend on the direct vote of the citizens to maintain their position, making political PR a more useful strategy. Commissioners also need to involve in political PR, but as their role should involve promote policy debate and helping to engage citizens in the policy process, the overall result should be in the realm of communication of public policies.

The goal of choosing a specific case is to study the complexity of that specific situation. As defined by Robert Stake, “case study is the study of the particularity and complexity of a single case, coming to understand its activity within important circumstances” (1995, xi). Case studies are the preferred strategy for a “why” question (Yin 2006, 1), such as the one posed in this thesis. As the present objective is not to perform statistical generalizations, but to contribute to the understanding of a relatively new field of study in the realm of the online media studies, the present selection of study cases does not pretend to be representative of the whole population. The assessment of the social media usage of each policy-maker or institutional account should be done by a case-by-case basis. But, departing from a detailed analysis of a one case can be a good starting point to learn more about similar cases.

3.1 *EU POLICIES AND THE CITIZENS*

Studying how policy-makers communicate online in a multilevel system such the EU represents an interesting case study. Focusing on the European policy realm, being able to compare the European Commission² with an elected member of the European Parliament, can be an added value of this work, instead of one country approach. Several scholars have focused on the

²The EC is the EU's executive body and represents the interests of Europe as a whole (as opposed to the interests of individual countries).

concept of lack of European integration and the democratic deficit in the European Union (Craig and de Búrca 2011; Andersen and Burns, 1996; Raunio 1999;) which ended in an increase in executive power and a decrease in the control of the parliament. In that sense EU citizens do not have a real power in the decision making process. Craig and de Búrca (2011) highlight the executive dominance, as the growing imbalance between the legislature and the executive due to the transfer of competence from the democratic Member States to the EC.

In Europe, political decision-making processes take place within complex and heterogeneous settings and a considerable amount of today's legislative process in European countries is driven by EU policies (Baumgarten and Voltmer 2010, 220). Taking into consideration all this criticism, understanding and making use of the new possibilities of social media is vital in the search for a more democratic governance system. Thanks to ICTs policy-makers can promote a culture of transparency and show a closer approach to the people.

3.2 FACEBOOK AND TWITTER

Regarding social media, as citizens are getting informed using new communication channels, European institutions need to adapt and follow their constituencies. According to Internet World Stats (2011) 71% of households in Europe had access to the Internet. The study entitled *Social Media around the world 2011* shows that 347 million Europeans use social media sites (73% of European Internet users). Facebook is the most popular site with 62%, followed by Twitter with 16%. Although 16% are users of Twitter, 80% of all Europeans know it and 28% have stated their intention to start using it in the near future. Besides the survey concludes that social media have penetrated all layers of society.

Although there are a different social media tools (i.e. YouTube, LinkedIn and a high number of local websites per country), this thesis focus on Facebook and Twitter as the two most popular tools among policy-makers in the EU. By being able to compare the same policy-maker in both sites, it will also be possible to reflect upon possible differences among the two tools. Both tools allow different form of interactions. On Facebook one can like, share or comment a post. But there are also inner structural differences that can influence the usage. Facebook is recognized mainly as a “the biggest store of friends in the world” (Delfour 2010) or a “public displays of connection” (Boyd and Heer, 2006, 73). Facebook gives more room for visually attractive features, being able to insert photos and videos. Twitter also has the possibility to do so, but in a less visual way. The main difference is that Twitter is a microblogging site with a limited amount of characters (140) to convey a message.

3.3 CASE SELECTION

As said before, the unit of analysis was each tweet and each Facebook post from three different accounts. In order to enable a better comparison, three related different accounts in the policy area of information society in the EU were analyzed, both in Facebook and Twitter: a Commissioner’s account, the Digital Agenda for Europe account and an account of an MEP. Below it will be explained why these cases have been chosen, follow by sampling and coding criteria.

- **Neelie Kroes**³. Vice President of the European Commission, responsible for the Digital Agenda for Europe and the Directorate General for Communications, Networks, Content and Technology (DG Connect)⁴.

³ Twitter: <http://twitter.com/neeliekroeseu> / Facebook: <https://www.facebook.com/NeelieKroes>

⁴ This new name will be effective from 1st July 2012. Formerly it was called Information Society and Media Directorate-General. http://ec.europa.eu/dgs/information_society/connect_en.htm

- **Digital Agenda for Europe**⁵. The mission is to create an inclusive, competitive and sustainable Europe and to get every European digital.
- **Sophie in 't Veld**⁶. She is in her second term as a member of the European Parliament for the Dutch social-liberal party D66, concerned with issues of social media and data privacy.

The cases were chosen because all of these accounts are connected to the new EU digital strategy. The expected expertise and deeper knowledge on the possible uses of social media is expected to bring a catalog of good online practices that can help to understand the purposes of using tools like Facebook and Twitter. In order to choose which Commissioners and institutional accounts to analyze, first a survey was conducted including the 27 EU Commissioners and Directorates. Table 1 shows which Commissioners and Directorates have Facebook and Twitter accounts. It can be concluded that although policy-makers are starting to embrace new media, it is still not widely accepted. There is a full presence in both media just for two Commissioners: Kroes and Digital Agenda⁷ and Janez Potočnik and Environment.

⁵ Twitter: <https://www.facebook.com/DigitalAgenda> Facebook : <https://www.facebook.com/DigitalAgenda>

⁶ Twitter: <https://twitter.com/SophieintVeld> / Facebook: <https://www.facebook.com/sophieintveld>

⁷ The Directorate for General Communications, Networks, Content and Technology (DG Connect) does not have Facebook or Twitter account, but the Digital Agenda for Europe does.

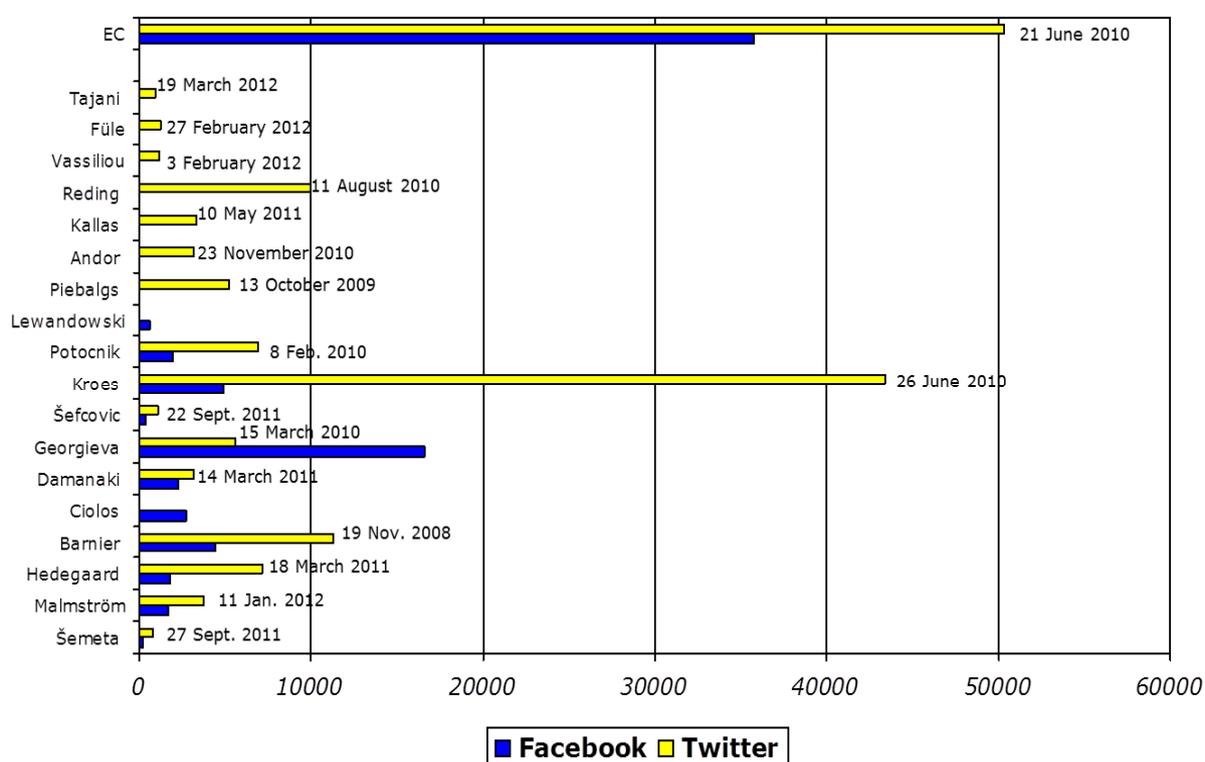
Table 1. EU Commission on Facebook and Twitter (May 2012)

EU Commission (2010-2014)					
Comissioners' account	Facebook	Twitter	Institutional Account	Facebook	Twitter
Jose Manuel Barroso			European Commission	x	x
Catherine Ashton			European External Action Service	x	x
Viviane Reding		x	Justice	x	x
Joaquín Almunia			Competition		
Siim Kallas		x	Mobility and Transport		
Neelie Kroes	x	x	Digital Agenda	x	x
Antonio Tajani		x	Enterprise and Industry	x	x
Maroš Šefčovič	x	x	Inter-Institutional Relations		
Olli Rehn			Economic and Financial Affairs		x
Janez Potočnik	x	x	Environment	x	x
Andris Piebalgs		x	Development and Cooperation	x	x
Michel Barnier	x	x	Internal Market		x
Androulla Vassiliou		x	Education and culture		
Algirdas Šemeta	x	x	Taxation and Customs Union		
Karel De Gucht			Trade		
John Dalli			Health and Consumers		
Máire Geoghegan-Quinn			Research and innovation		
Janusz Lewandowski	x		Budget		
Maria Damanaki	x	x	Maritime		
Kristalina Georgieva	x	x	International Cooperation		
Günther Oettinger			Energy		
Johannes Hahn			Regional Policy		
Connie Hedegaard	x	x	Climate action		
Štefan Füle		x	Enlargement	x	x
László Andor		x	Employment	x	x
Cecilia Malmström	x	x	Home Affairs		x
Dacian Cioloș	x		Agriculture		

Source: The author

The case of Kroes is interesting also because she is one of the early adopters of social media, which gives her an influential role, as other Commissioners can learn from her, and take some of her practices as examples to follow. Table 2 shows that she was among the first Commissioners to open a Twitter account (June 2010) and up to May 2012, she is the one who has more followers (44,000), far ahead from the next Commissioners on the list (Michel Barnier with 11,000 followers and Viviane Reding with 10,000). Besides she has publicly advocated for the importance of social media for communicating public policies and for interrelating with citizens: “More Europeans are on social networking sites than they are subscribing to newspapers – so you need to follow people. Using social media means talking with Europeans instead of sitting up in an ivory tower” (Waltzing Matilda 2010).

Table 2. Commissioner on Twitter and Facebook and number of followers (May 2012)⁸



Source: DG COMM Social Media Team

As Kroes is the Commissioner in charge of the Digital Agenda for Europe, that account was also selected in order to be able to open a possibility to draw conclusions between possible usage differences among personal and institutional account. Finally, the inclusion of an MEP will provide also a comparative possibility to check if policy-makers appointed by the citizens will be getting more involved in political PR via Facebook and Twitter. In 't Veld has been selected also for her connection with digital policies and because she is, by May 2012, the most active MEPs on Twitter, with more than 17,000 updates (since January 2009), as shown by a ranking produced by the website Europatweets (europatweets.eu).

⁸ The date refers to the start date of the Twitter account.

3.4 SAMPLING

This thesis focuses on a sample of 25 consecutive tweets per account in Twitter and 10 consecutive posts per account on Facebook (a total of 105 messages were coded). The difference in the number of samples is connected with the difference in usage: in all cases, the frequency of Twitter updates was much higher than the Facebook ones. As all the accounts have a different frequency of posts, the sample was taken on the month of April, with some variations.

Regarding Twitter, in the case of Kroes, the sample of 25 consecutive messages was taken from 19 April to 2 May. The Digital Agenda was taken from 17 April to 27 April. In the case of In 't Veld, being the most active MEPS on Twitter, the sample of 25 messages was covered in just one day: 23 April. Regarding Facebook, Kroes is not nearly as active on Facebook as on Twitter, and the 10 messages analyzed were from March 25 to May 8. For Digital Agenda the messages selected were from 17 April to 29 April. Finally, as In 't Veld also had a very low frequency of Facebook updates comparing with her active presence in Twitter, the 10 messages analyzed ranged from 28 February to 24 May. In the case of Kroes and Digital Agenda, most of the messages were in English, including just a few in foreign languages to promote specific policies and events (Spanish, French, Portuguese and Latvian). The case of In 't Veld is the opposite, as all the messages analyzed were in Dutch. Before coding, all messages were translated into English.

Some messages were filtered and excluded from the sample. Facebook pages allow the possibility for both the user and the audience to post online (Post by page and Post by other). In this case the messages analyzed were just the ones created by the account. The qualitative analysis was conducted in the main post, not including possible comments, or answers to questions related to the original message. The same criterion was applied for Twitter. On Twitter there is the

extensive use of the retweet (RT) function⁹: re-posting of someone else's tweet and also answering people (messages are preceded by the @ symbol). All the basic RT messages were excluded from the content analysis, but if the user added some personal message, then it was included. Messages which were not meaningful or where just an emoticon was inserted in an answer to some other user were also excluded from the sample.

⁹ There are different retweets: Typing "RT" at the beginning of a tweet to indicate that someone is re-posting someone else's content; the default RT version looks like normal tweets, including the original author's name and username, but they include a retweet icon and the name of the user who retweeted the message; and finally people can share a message, but adding some personal comment or interpretation.

4 FINDINGS

The present chapter will present the findings on the qualitative content analysis and the posterior quantification of the sample of messages analyzed both in Facebook and Twitter for the cases of Commissioner Kroes, Agenda Digital and MEP In 't Veld. As it will be shown, the hypothesis of a mixed use both for communication of public policies and personal PR has been confirmed for all of them. However, there are also differences, especially between Kroes and Agenda Digital, as part of the EC environment, and In 't Veld as an MEP depending directly on the votes of citizens. First, the individual results will be presented and later on a comparison of all the cases will be drawn opening the floor to a set of policy recommendations for a better use of Facebook and Twitter by policy-makers.

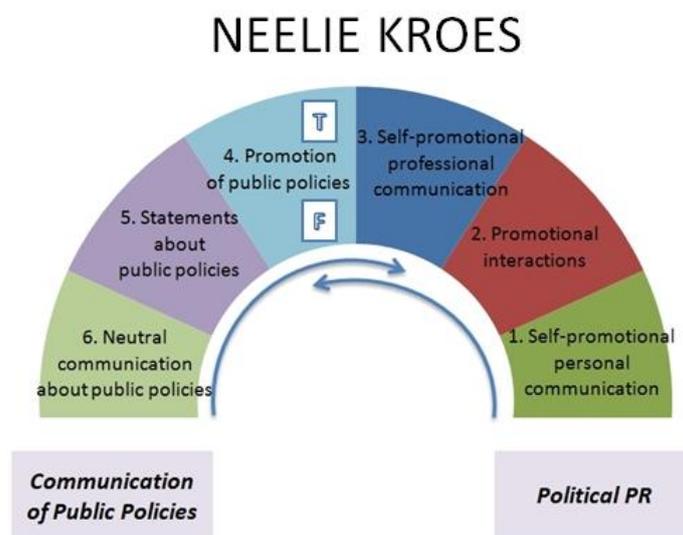
4.1 NEELIE KROES

The findings do not suggest substantial differences in the use of both tools for the communication of public policies and political PR. In an article in her blog, Kroes stated that Twitter is a tool more suitable for the communication of policies, while Facebook is more social (Watzing Matilda, 2010), but in this case the overall result is the same: the average of messages is situated in the middle of the continuum (4. *Promotion of public policies*). But there are some differences between Facebook and Twitter related to the inner technical conditions: as Facebook does not have such strict length limitations, the posts tended to be longer and using more appealing language¹⁰. She also posted more videos and photos, including for example a video in which she was interviewed.

¹⁰ This can be seen on a post of April 28 in which she linked a press release, but presented in a more engaged way, asking: “Ever been stung by high charges when using a mobile abroad? Then I've got some great news for you: a new EU deal to put an end to mobile roaming rip-offs”.

In Twitter, 40% of the messages were promotional interactions and Kroes proved to be active in connecting with people. She also provides statements about policies (12%) mainly linking to opinions written in her personal blog, and encourage the promotion of public policies (24%). A similar component can be seen on Facebook, in which she also has the opportunity to share photo albums of events and stories in which she was featured, more closely related to political PR.

Figure 2. Neelie Kroes



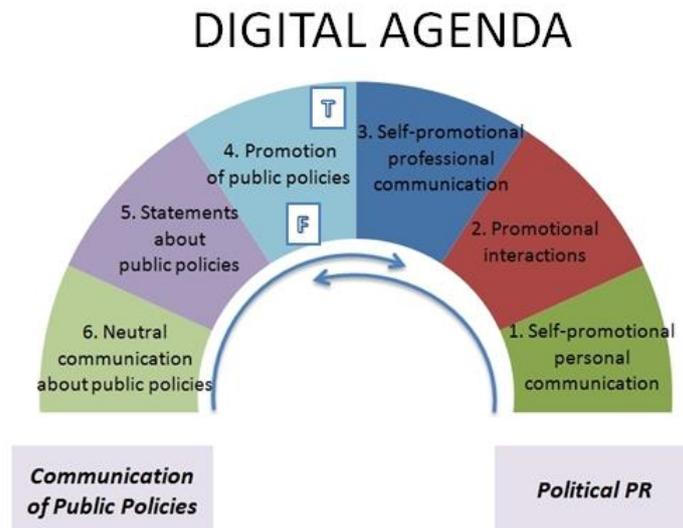
Communication of public policies	TW	Sub-total	FB	Sub-total	Political PR	TW	Sub-total	FB	Sub-total
	Neutral communication of public policies (Weight of criterion: 6)		12			6	Self-promotional personal communication (Weight of criterion: 1)		0
Links to specific public policies					Statements about personal feelings				
Convey purely neutral or technical information.	1		1		Statements about life events				
Information about services					Post about personal achievements			1	
Information about the work of the agency									
Neutral information about the agency	1								
Statements about public policies (Weight of criterion: 5)		15		5	Promotional interactions (Weight of criterion: 2)		20		4
Evaluative comments about policies	2				Thank you messages / Congratulations messages	6			
Interpretation of policies	1				Share information about other's stakeholders	2		1	
Policy statements with related video, photos, etc.				1	Contacts with journalists	2			
					Contacts with citizens (non policy issues)				1
Promotion of public policies (Weight of criterion: 4)		24		8	Self-promotional professional communication (Weight of criterion: 3)		12		9
Questions to citizens (policy issues)					Links to newsletters				
Calls to consultations	2				Announcement of press conferences				
Answers to citizens on topic related with public policies	2				Link to speeches, press releases, etc				1
Promote policy debates	1				Announcements of congresses, conferences, seminars, etc.	2		2	
Attractive way to present a policy	1		2		Links to policy related newspapers articles, etc.	2			
Links to policy documents									
Average Twitter: 3.32									
Average Facebook: 3.30									

Source: the author

4.2 DIGITAL AGENDA FOR EUROPE

Both Facebook and Twitter average posts are situated in the promotion of public policies sphere (4) with a slight difference between Twitter (3.1, almost in the boundary with self-promotion professional communication) and Facebook (3.4). In Twitter there is a high number of promotional interactions (36%), mostly concerned with sharing information about other stakeholders (6 out of 9). There are also a relatively high number of messages situated in the level of self-promotional professional communication (28%), mostly concerning announcements of congress and conferences. In Facebook plenty of videos are posted, accompanied by appealing messages directly referring to citizens. There is also place for sharing photos and articles related to the digital challenges.

Figure 3. Digital Agenda for Europe



Communication of public policies	TW	Sub-total	FB	Sub-total	Political PR	TW	Sub-total	FB	Sub-total
Neutral communication of public policies (Weight of criterion: 6)		6		0	Self-promotional personal communication (Weight of criterion: 1)		0		0
Links to specific public policies					Statements about personal feelings				
Convey purely neutral or technical information.					Statements about life events				
Information about services					Post about personal achievements				
Information about the work of the agency									
Neutral information about the agency	1								
Statements about public policies (Weight of criterion: 5)		5		0	Promotional interactions (Weight of criterion: 2)		18		2
Evaluative comments about policies					Thank you messages / Congratulations messages	1			
Interpretation of policies					Share information about other's stakeholders	6			
Policy statements with related video, photos, etc.	1				Contacts with journalists				
					Contacts with citizens (non policy issues)	2		1	
Promotion of public policies (Weight of criterion: 4)		28		20	Self-promotional professional communication (Weight of criterion: 3)		21		12
Questions to citizens (policy issues)	3				Links to newsletters	1			
Calls to consultations	3		2		Announcement of press conferences				
Answers to citizens on topic related with public policies					Link to speeches, press releases, etc				
Promote policy debates	1				Announcements of congresses, conferences, seminars, etc.	4		2	
Attractive way to present a policy			3		Links to policy related newspapers articles, etc.	2		2	
Links to policy documents									
<i>Source: the author</i>									
Average Twitter: 3.12									
Average Facebook: 3.40									

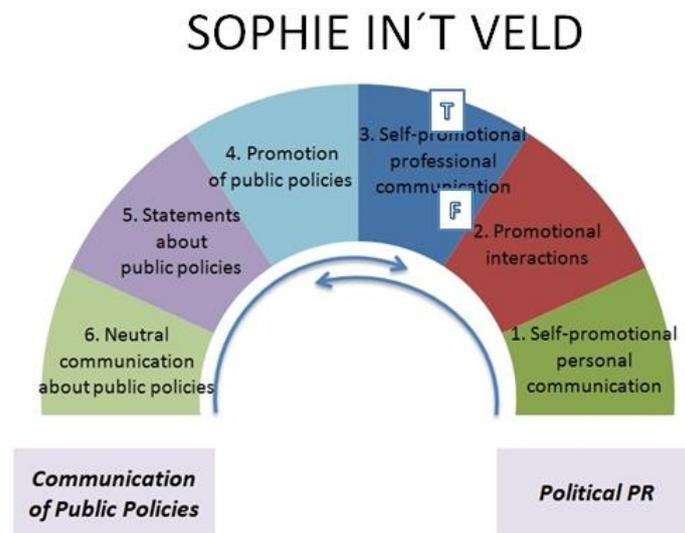
4.3 SOPHIE IN 'T VELD

In this case there is also a consistency between Twitter and Facebook as in both cases the average result is situated in the middle of the continuum, but in the level of self-promotional personal communication, in the Political PR side (Twitter: 2.4 and Facebook 2.2). But although the overall number is almost the same, there is a difference in the way that result is reached. In the case of Twitter it is reached as an average, but the MEP also has messages in different categories (from 1. *Self-promotional personal communication* to 4. *Promotion of public policies*). In 't Veld is the one that is most closely in contact with citizens, answering questions and engaging in dialogues via Twitter: the level of promotional interactions reaches the 56% and 13 out of 14 messages are in the subcategory of contacts with citizens. She also engages in some personal communication, for example by talking about the amount of coffee she consumed that day with another user, and using emoticons and more informal language.

In Facebook, 90% of the messages are already in the level of self-promotional communication. Several posts are used to share part of her speeches in the EP. She also shared information about activities related to the International Day against homophobia and letting citizens know her

positions. Finally there is also place for videos related with one of her areas of specialty, data protection.

Figure 4. Sophie in 't Veld



Communication of public policies	TW	Sub-total	FB	Sub-total	Political PR	TW	Sub-total	FB	Sub-total
	Neutral communication of public policies (Weight of criterion: 6)		0			0	Self-promotional personal communication (Weight of criterion: 1)		2
Links to specific public policies					Statements about personal feelings	2			
Convey purely neutral or technical information.					Statements about life events				
Information about services					Post about personal achievements				
Information about the work of the agency									
Neutral information about the agency									
Statements about public policies (Weight of criterion: 5)		0		0	Promotional interactions (Weight of criterion: 2)		28		0
Evaluative comments about policies					Thank you messages / Congratulations messages				
Interpretation of policies					Share information about other's stakeholders	1			
Policy statements with related video, photos, etc.					Contacts with journalists				
					Contacts with citizens (non policy issues)	13			
Promotion of public policies (Weight of criterion: 4)		12		4	Self-promotional professional communication (Weight of criterion: 3)		18		18
Questions to citizens (policy issues)	2		1		Links to newsletters				
Calls to consultations					Announcement of press conferences				
Answers to citizens on topic related with public policies	1				Link to speeches, press releases, etc	2		5	
Promote policy debates					Announcements of congresses, conferences, seminars, etc.			3	
Attractive way to present a policy					Links to policy related newspapers articles, etc.	4		1	
Links to policy documents									
<i>Source: the author</i>									
Average Twitter: 2.40									
Average Facebook: 2.20									

4.4 COMPARATIVE CONCLUSIONS

The individual analysis of the three selected cases allows being able to draw comparative conclusions based on the main topic. Differences and similarities about the location of the messages in the continuum and how the boundaries proved to be blurred, the language of postings and the promotion of policy debates will be the main categories to be highlighted. After that, some policy recommendations will be presented aiming to improve how policy-makers approach both Facebook and Twitter.

Blurred boundaries: All in all, the findings confirmed the main hypothesis of the thesis, which states that policy-makers use Facebook and Twitter both for the communication of public policies and for political PR, showing how boundaries are getting blurred. All the messages were situated in the middle of the continuum, but there were also some differences among them. Finally, in the case of the MEP we find bigger differences. While both Kroes and Digital Agenda are in the middle, but in the communication of public policies side, In 't Veld's average message is situated in political PR side, in the self-promotional professional communication level.

Differences in usage between executive and legislative branch: The case studies showed a difference in usage among the executive branch and the legislative branch of the EU. Among the three cases In 't Veld is the one more involved with political PR interactions. This is closely related with the theoretical framework and the idea of political PR as a way to maintain a position in power.

Language differences: Most of the messages of both Kroes and Digital Agenda are in English and that is why it can be concluded that they are addressing an international audience. However,

In 't Veld is the only one to post messages exclusively in her native language and in that way her intended audience for her messages is Dutch citizens (her voters).

Promotion of policy debates: These tools allow a less mediated relationship with citizens, and in this sense they can be used to promote and encourage the promotion of public policies. In the case of Kroes and Digital Agenda this is done more often than in the case of the MEP.

In short, policy-makers now have more tools at hand both for communicating public policies and to engage in political PR. Thinking about the differences between both concepts, and the inner differences between the channels for reaching the audience is an important step in order to be able to distinguish pros and cons. Based on the previous analysis, some policy recommendations should be introduced:

- **Be aware of the purpose of using each tool.** Policy-makers should treat Twitter and Facebook as separate tools, considering the inner differences (i.e. length of posts, visual possibilities, etc). In the cases this difference can be appreciated. Although there are now technical possibilities to integrate both feeds (i.e.: automatically posting Twitter messages on Facebook or vice-versa), no one used this feature. This is a welcome sign, as audiences are different and should be catered for in a different way.
- **Diversify channels.** Closely connected with the first recommendation, policy-makers should try to diversify their communication channels via social media. The three case studies have shown that all policy-makers are focusing their social media communication efforts on Twitter, and Facebook is used in a less frequent way. Facebook also offers plenty of possibilities for engaging both in the communication of public policies and

political PR, for example being a more visually attracted tool. Besides, Facebook is the most popular social network in Europe.

- **Keep a balance.** As mentioned before, political PR is an intrinsic part of political communication, but not the only one. The use of Facebook and Twitter to communicate public policies should be encouraged and policy-makers should try to keep a balance, prioritizing the latter before the more promotional communication and trying to be clearer between the boundaries of personal and professional communication.

CONCLUSION

The objective of the thesis was to answer the research question of why policy-makers are using social media and when they are going online whether they do so mostly for communicating public policies or political PR or a combination of both aims. The main hypothesis was that the usage will show blurred boundaries between these two concepts and that policy-makers use Twitter and Facebook for both purposes. After conducting a transdisciplinary literature review, an analytical framework was built in order to situate the concepts of communication of public policies and political public relations in a continuum. This framework was later applied to the case studies of Kroes, Digital Agenda and In 't Veld, through a qualitative content analysis of 75 tweets and 30 Facebook posts. The posterior quantification of the results allowed situating each case into the analytical framework.

The main findings of the case studies confirm the hypothesis that policy-makers engage in a mixed use of Facebook and Twitter, and that there is a blur of boundaries between the communication of public policies and personal PR. However, there are also differences, as in the case of In 't Veld, as a Dutch MEP, the overall result was in the middle of the continuum, but still in the level of political PR (self-promotional personal communication). In the other two cases, Kroes and Digital Agenda are also situated in the middle, but in the realm of communication of public policies (promotion of public policies). The conclusion suggests that this is connected to the nature of the policy-maker, as in the case of an MEP their position in power is directly related to the vote of their constituencies, while the Commissioners are in power for a fixed term and are not elected to represent the citizens in an election.

This thesis aimed to deepen the understanding of the role of social media in policy making. The practical component, based on the analytical framework, provides a field for allowing policy-

makers to be more aware of the usage of tools like Twitter and Facebook, knowing more about the possibilities of the channel and choose the best approaches according to their strategies and objectives. The overall aim is to contribute to the understanding of the role of social media in public policy.

As suggested before, the research on the link between social media and policy is still in its infancy. Further studies could apply the analytical framework, including more Commissioners and Directorates in the EU, and also MEPs in order to be able to get more generalizations and insights into patterns of usage. As this framework is general, it can also be applied in other context outside the EU, or be adapted for specific contexts. Simultaneously, a study that focuses on broader periods of time can allow drawing conclusions about the differences in usage among months of years, as it is expected that policy-makers engage in a trial-and-error approach. ICTs are reshaping the way in which policy makers can relate with citizens, and more academic work will be welcome in order to better understand both the new possibilities and challenges of these changes.

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