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SVENJA KATHARINA SCHOLZ

University of Helsinki

svenja.scholz@helsinki.fi

https://orcid.org/0000-0003-4002-2661

Negotiating Digital Terrain: European Union Public Sector Communication Between Social Media, Civil Service and Political Demands

Abstract: As government institutions increasingly adapt to the logic of social media, questions arise about how these changes align with public service norms and democratic ideals. This article investigates the European Union's use of social media from an organizational perspective, contributing to research on the mediatization of public bureaucracies. Using an institutional logics framework, it explores how communication officials across five EU institutions negotiate tensions between social media logic, civil service logic and political logic and what new goals, practices, and structures emerge in this process. The analysis draws on 27 semi-structured interviews with communication staff and internal communication strategies. Findings show that social media integration has led to significant organizational change, particularly in centralization, departmentalization, audiovisual production, and reliance on private-sector expertise. In terms of practices and goals, communication is shaped by algorithmic pressures, data-driven targeting, and an emphasis on positive engagement. Normative ideals of transparency, objectivity, and inclusion are increasingly displaced by strategies of curated visibility and institutional promotion. By focusing on social media units rather than traditional press offices, and comparing multiple institutions, this article offers new empirical insights into the evolving logic of government communication in a platform-driven media environment.

Keywords: mediatization; social media logic; institutional logics; European Union; government communication

Introduction

Whether Facebook, Instagram, X or LinkedIn – government bodies today maintain a wide range of social media presences. Yet research into the organizational rationale behind such communication remains surprisingly scarce (Figenschou, 2020).

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From a democratic perspective, addressing this gap is essential, as scholarship shows that the professionalization of government communication has started to undermine the normative ideals meant to regulate it – namely providing factual, objective, and transparent information to foster scrutiny, debate, and participation (Fredriksson & Pallas, 2016). These studies show a permeation of promotional culture into public bureaucracies often connected to the increasing consideration of media logics in public communication efforts (e.g. Figenschou, 2020).

While an abundance of studies has explored public bureaucracies' adaptation to news media logic (e.g. Laursen & Valentini, 2013, 2014), research on government social media communication remains relatively rare. Understanding why and how governments employ social media platforms and what changes this induces is, however, important as social media rewards personalized, emotional and polarizing content that promotes communication dynamics largely at odds with democratic ideals (Klinger & Svensson, 2015, 2016).

Drawing on Klinger and Svensson's (2015, 2016) concept of network logic, this article contributes to understanding public bureaucracies' social media communication by examining how five EU institutions' communication officials negotiate between social media, civil service and political logic and what new goals, practices and organizational structures emerge. The EU offers a particularly relevant case for the study of this subject as its institutions were early adopters of social media (Vesnic-Alujevic, 2012) and have since amassed a relatively large followership – despite communicating in English to a multilingual audience. While once criticized for a lack of public communication (Meyer, 1999), more recent criticism focuses on its marketing-oriented approach (Hennen, 2016; Scholz, 2022). It is hence important to explore whether social media has enforced this emphasis on political promotion.

Through qualitative research based on 27 interviews with communication officials and internal communication documents from the European Parliament (EP), the European Commission (EC) and the Council of the European Union (CEU), as well as the consultative bodies – European Economic and Social Committee (EESC) and European Committee of the Regions (CoR), the article offers a comprehensive overview of how EU institutions organise and conduct their social media communication. In doing so, it contributes to scholarship on mediatization of public bureaucracies and the EU's communication deficit.

Public bureaucracies, mediatization and institutional logics

Government bodies have always used communication to manage their public image alongside fulfilling the public service duty of informing citizens (Fredriksson & Pallas, 2016). When exploring how strategic government communication is changing, the concept of mediatization is helpful. On the meta-level, it illustrates how media

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increasingly shape how social knowledge is produced and circulated (Hepp, 2012); on the meso-level, it describes the institutionalization of new communication patterns responding to media's growing influence (Strömbäck & Esser, 2014).

Closely related is the concept of *media logic*, referring to the norms and production routines through which different media – including traditional news media such as television, radio and print, but also digital and platform media – select, frame and present information (Altheide & Snow, 1979; Hjarvard, 2008, 2014). Within this broader category, we can broadly distinguish between *news media logic*, referring to the routines, formats and news values characteristic of journalism (Strömbäck & Esser, 2014), and *network* or *social media logic*, shaped by the affordances, metrics and algorithmic systems of digital platforms (van Dijck & Poell, 2013; Klinger & Svensson, 2015).

In the context of public administration, media logic interacts with other institutional logics that structure communication behaviour. These include civil service logic, grounded in principles of neutrality, transparency and service to the public, and political logic, oriented towards persuasion, legitimacy and agenda advancement (Fredriksson & Pallas, 2016; Kumpu et al., 2019). Understanding how these logics coexist and at times conflict is key to analysing how public communication evolves under conditions of mediatization.

Research on the mediatization of public administration shows that government bodies have increasingly adapted to news media logic by aligning communication practices with journalistic rhythms, modes of storytelling, and exclusivity to secure favorable coverage (e.g. Garland et al., 2017; Laursen & Valentini, 2014; Martins et al., 2012). This professionalization has resulted in organizational transformations, where communication departments have gained influence and resources, fueling further adaption to the media (Figenschou et al., 2022; Lounasmeri, 2018; Thorbjørnsrud et al., 2014). In this context, concerns have been flagged about a promotionalization of government + communication as an increasing integration of private sector professionals and external consultants into public administrations has introduced market logics and enforced structural dependency on external expertise (Hjarvard, 2014; Ylönen & Kuusela, 2019), raising criticism of eroding public sector communication norms (e.g. Garland, 2021).

Whilst early literature saw media influence as largely unidirectional, recent scholarship stresses that public actors not only passively adapt but also instrumentalize media logics to serve political goals (Nygren & Niemikari, 2019). From this perspective, officials constantly negotiate between civil service, political and media logics, calibrating their communication to reconcile competing norms and institutional expectations (Kumpu et al., 2019). Public officials, who must assess media strategies against civil service logic, are therefore more restricted than electoral candidates in employing publicity strategies such as emotionalization or negative campaigning. Yet, they have been found to adapt to media logic within their own limits, for example, by gatekeeping unpopular issues, focusing on success stories or offering exclusive news to selected journalists (Martins et al., 2012).

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Interestingly, research shows that political leaders, unconstrained by civil service norms, often pressure officials to adopt more promotional communication strategies to advance institutional goals – positioning political logic as a mediating force between civil service and media logic (Garland et al., 2017). This might explain why officials increasingly identify as both civil servants and publicists, reflecting that promotional demands no longer fit within the traditional civil service role (Figenschou et al., 2022; Laursen & Valentini, 2014).

Social media logic

Most studies exploring how media logic has shaped practices and institutional cultures in public bureaucracies focus on news media logic and its effects on press work. In comparison, social media's impact on public communication remains underexplored (Figenschou, 2020). Yet the logic emerging from these platforms – rooted in distinct technological, commercial, and normative structures – differs from traditional news logics and thus produces different organizational outcomes.

Van Dijck and Poell (2013) define social media logic as "the processes, principles, and practices through which these platforms process information, news, and communication, and more generally, how they channel social traffic" (p. 5). Building on this broader definition, this article draws primarily on Klinger and Svensson's (2015, 2016) conceptualization, which outlines key features of social media logic that are particularly useful for understanding its implications for public-sector communication:

Production. Whereas news media are shaped by journalistic and public service ideals, social media's network structure is normatively aligned with neoliberal market ideals, rewarding visibility, virality, and self-promotion. Beyond advertisement revenue, platforms monetize user data and encourage content maximizing engagement rather than merely conveying information. Research show this logic encourages institutions to post more personalized, informal content and focus on engaging already interacting users, resulting in communication directed at narrowly defined audiences rather than the broader public (Olsson & Eriksson, 2016) – potentially conflicting with civil service norms of equal, factual, and transparent communication.

Distribution. Where traditional media disseminate content hierarchically, social media content spreads horizontally via user networks. Instead of broad, stable and heterogeneous audiences, messages reach fragmented, unpredictable audiences. Consequently, public bureaucracies increasingly rely on external expertise through trainings (Figenschou, 2020; Scholz, 2022) or consultants (Lounasmeri, 2018; Ylönen & Kuusela, 2019), and quantifiable indicators, like likes and shares, to measure success (Olsson & Eriksson, 2016) – while true effectiveness evaluation remains difficult.

Use. Studies show civil servants perceive the quasi-journalistic role, direct citizen access and increased image control as the social media's greatest benefit (Figenschou,

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2020; Olsson & Eriksson, 2016). Yet, to generate data, social media's affordances incite users to interact through liking, sharing or commenting, revealing values and affiliations. Studies reveal that while public institutions rhetorically emphasize social media's interactive potential, they tend in practice to adopt a broadcasting approach, mobilizing user engagement to disseminate institutional messages rather than to foster exchanges (Olsson & Eriksson, 2016; Scholz, 2022).

The case of the European Union

Few studies have examined how public bureaucracies negotiate and adapt to social media logic or whether resulting practices align with public communication norms. The EU is particularly relevant due to its distinct communication history: Once criticized for opaque, technocratic style (Meyer, 1999), it has heavily professionalized its communication. While this may have improved transparency, interview studies with press officials show a shift toward strategic publicity aimed to "sell" the institutions (e.g. Laursen, 2012; Laursen & Valentini, 2014; Martins et al., 2012; Meyer, 2009).

Little research has yet explored the EU's social media strategies from an organizational perspective. Content analyses of EU accounts (e.g. Krzyzanowski, 2018; Tarţa, 2017; Vesnic-Alujevic, 2012) cast doubt on early academic assumptions about social media facilitating meaningful exchanges between institutions and citizens. However, existing studies leave several aspects insufficiently addressed. First, few consider what forms of communication social media structurally affords. Second, the institutions' objectives and internal motivations remain largely unexplored. One organizational study finds that the EP's social media activities, much like its press work, are primarily driven by promotional aims (Scholz, 2022) – a finding that invites further exploration across the EU's institutional landscape. Third, most analyses focus on single institutions, even though the EU bodies differ markedly in their roles and communication goals (Laursen, 2012). Earlier research on press work has shown that these differences shape the degree of mediatization (Martins et al., 2012). A more comprehensive perspective that examines how institutional logics interact with social media logic could therefore provide important new insights.

Research method

The study examines how EU institutions interpret and adapt to social media logic. Without organizational research into how communicators negotiate this logic, it remains unclear whether such communication advances public value – that is, whether it contributes public service norms such as transparency, objectivity, and accountability, or primarily serves promotional and political interests. By analyzing how actors

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define goals, adapt practices, and justify communicative choices, the study clarifies how internal dynamics shape democratic quality of institutional communication and facilitates normative assessment. In doing so, it provides the first systematic account of the aims, practices, and organizational changes underlying EU social media communication and contributes to scholarship on mediatization of public bureaucracies and EU public communication.

To enable comparison across institutions, this study includes the three main EU bodies (EP, EC and CEU) and two advisory committees. The inclusion of the latter is particularly relevant given their distinct roles representing local and regional politicians (CoR) and socio-economic organizations (EESC) within the EU policy process, as well as their participation in interinstitutional initiatives such as the Social Media Steering Committee. Despite these roles, both have been largely overlooked in EU communication research.

The study draws on two main data sets:

1. 27 semi-structured expert interviews conducted with communication officials from the five institutions between May 2022 and June 2023. Interviewees included civil servants involved in planning and implementing social media communication, with varying responsibility levels – from Heads of Unit and team leaders to specialists and practitioners – plus two recently retired Director-Generals of Communication.

Participants were selected through convenience sampling. Organizational charts helped identify Directors, Heads of Unit, and relevant staff with publicly available contact details. Initial contacts were invited to participate or refer colleagues. Further outreach included communication heads of national representations and relevant Directorate-Generals.

While limited access to interviewees – a common issue in elite interviewing – posed constraints, the sample size was considered sufficient. Prior studies on EU communication officials have relied on similarly sized samples (e.g. Anderson & McLeod, 2004; Laursen & Valentini, 2013, 2015; van Brussel, 2014). Moreover, the analysis aims to explore the officials' accounts in full discursive complexity, not to generalize statistically. Saturation was reached as recurring patterns emerged. Interviews, averaging 36 minutes, were recorded, transcribed, returned to participants for validation and analyzed using Atlas.ti.

2. The second data set consists of institutional documents illuminating communication goals and practices published between 2018 and 2023 (see Appendix): a) communication strategies and guidelines; b) annual work programs outlining objectives; and c) activity reports evaluating outcomes. Non-public documents were accessed via official requests under Regulation 1049/2001.

The document set was used to contextualize the interview material and to corroborate how the institutions formally articulate communication goals and practices. While the interviews form the primary data for the analysis, the documents provided an important frame of reference for interpreting officials' accounts and for identifying consistencies or

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discrepancies between stated strategies and everyday practices. Relevant documents are cited in the findings where they directly support or illustrate specific points.

Table 1. Interview sample size

	EC	EP	CEU	CoR	EESC
n	6	11	5	3	2

Source: Author's own study.

Methodologically, the study adopts a critical constructivist stance (Hopf, 1998). Like more conventional forms of social constructivism, it assumes that social reality is constructed through language but pays greater attention to the power relations embedded in discourse. It is well suited to explore how discourses embedded in social media logic are adopted to implement and legitimize new forms of communication.

Thematic text analysis identified key logics and practices across interviews and documents. Following Braun and Clarke's (2006) approach, the analysis proceeded inductively to map recurring themes but also interpretively to examine how language constructs meaning and justifies practices, allowing attention to power relations embedded in organizational discourses shaped by social media logic.

Findings

This analysis explores how social media has reshaped the organization, goals, and practices of communication units across five EU institutions and shows how these bodies navigate between civil service, political, and social media logics. The findings are presented in three main areas.

Objectives

Since information about EU activities is already published via websites and press work, how officials interpret social media's added value is essential. The analysis shows that, rather than fostering participatory dialogue or transparency once associated with digital platforms (e.g. Tarta, 2017), institutions primarily use social media for two interrelated goals: strategically disseminating information to selected audiences and improving the institutional image.

The most frequently cited goal is informing about the institutions' activities and agendas. In line with previous studies (e.g. Figenschou, 2020), officials particularly value social media's ability to bypass traditional gatekeepers and talk directly to citizens – especially as many feel the press covers the EU inadequately or unfairly.

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Yet, the analysis shows that the logic of "informing" is embedded in a more strategic rationale, as the second most frequently named goal is improving the institutional image. This gained particular importance after Brexit.

> I think Brexit was the tipping point that made it absolutely clear that the EU was not doing a good enough job in selling itself and that the consequences of that mistake could be drastic. So, there was a paradigm shift. (EC2)

Social media is seen as particularly suitable for political marketing as it allows for measuring and targeting specific audiences. In fact, most communication plans stress an "audience-driven approach", where messages are adapted to specific platform audiences to increase impact and efficiency.

With those objectives pointing towards a more promotional and persuasive logic, this finding supports the argument that government communication inherently combines a duty to inform with strategic and political objectives (Fredriksson & Pallas, 2016). While emphasis on "informing" reflects the civil service logic underpinning public communication, the explicit concern with institutional image already signals the incorporation of corporate or promotional logic – one that social media affordances such as measurability and targeting actively reinforce.

When asked about engaging in dialogue with citizens online, officials explained that their civil service status prevents them from entering political discussions. Overtly political content is moreover deliberately avoided, since Meta platforms' algorithms restrict the visibility of political communication. This contrasts starkly with the democratic ideals initially associated with social media in academic literature and echoes theoretical work showing platforms are ill-suited to complex or neutral communication and instead privilege affective and self-promotional content (Klinger & Svensson, 2016). The findings suggest that social media logics do not facilitate deliberative engagement but rather political marketing. This underscores the need to account for structural constraints surrounding institutional communication when interpreting online content in future research.

Organizational transformation

Research on institutional mediatization highlights the growing need for organizational professionalization to keep up with social media's ever-changing trends and algorithms (Figenschou, 2020; Scholz, 2022). In line with this, the findings reveal major structural changes within the EU's communication departments triggered by social media. While uneven across institutions, they include three key trends: 1) new investment areas, 2) the integration of private-sector expertise through hiring and outsourcing, and 3) stronger central control with more departmentalization.

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New investment areas

As platforms increasingly prioritize visual, short-form and mobile-friendly content, EU institutions have expanded their in-house capacities for audio-visual production. One official succinctly summarizes this structural dependency on platform preferences: "If the platforms want more video, we will produce more videos" (EP3).

A parallel shift can be observed in the growing emphasis on data intelligence. The EP's communication unit describes its approach as "evidence-based" and placing "data, intelligence and evaluation at the heart of our work" (DG COMM: 15), reflecting a broader move towards data-driven decision-making. In practice, this entails systematic monitoring of metrics such as reach, engagement, and follower growth to guide both content and resource allocation. In line with literature (e.g. Olsson & Eriksson, 2016), this turn towards data-driven communication illustrates how platform metrics increasingly define successful communication, privileging persuasive targeting strategies over more deliberative or educational goals.

Integration of private sector expertise

Since social media's audio-visual storytelling requires skill sets not traditionally found within the public sector, institutions have invested in specialized staff such as photographers, video editors and multimedia producers or begun to outsource such expertise. The trend to hire private-sector professionals is particularly evident among the three major institutions:

> We have profiles that we are really specifically looking for: social media experts, business managers, project managers. We decide what type of role we need and then we look for the best people out there. (EC1)

One official explains that social media is also used for hiring; specifically, "LinkedIn is very important (…) to attract talent" (CEU3). Since civil service hiring rules limit flexibility, experts are often brought in short-term. In more specialized teams, consultants can comprise most members: "Most of my team are not EU officials. (…) I am an EU official, but the team is 85% consultants" (CEU1).

Occasionally, units outsource specific tasks like data studies to external agencies – usually, when not "all the tools or professionals needed to conduct [a task]" (CEU2) are available. This reflects increasing technical demands and perceived need for market-oriented skills. As Ylönen and Kuusela (2019) point out, this can drive tacit knowledge erosion and structural dependency on external expertise, laying ground for further professionalization in the future.

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Centralization and departmentalization

Whereas press teams are divided by policy expertise and geographic regions (Martins, et al., 2012), social media units are separated into specialized teams, like social media editors, data analysts, community managers and video editors. Rather than attending political meetings, social media editors transform press officers' materials into platform-friendly content. The result is a shift not only in format, but also in function: social media officers operate less as policy communicators and more as communication professionals.

This departmentalization of work has led to a centralization of authority and control. The central social media teams operate under close management oversight and hold strong gatekeeping power. In the EC, for example, DG Communication is tasked with "aligning all Commission communication services towards a coherent and effective corporate communication" and define "clearer corporate messages/ narratives and distinctive visual branding" (DG_COMM_Strategic Plan_2020-2024: 9). Officials from social media teams of Directorate-Generals and national representations report they must implement this "corporate line" (EC5) and seek approval to post certain content and open new accounts. Coordination is streamlined through an internal network of *digital leaders*.

Overall, the findings show that social media communication has become a structurally embedded and resource-intensive function within the institutions, changing communicative outputs, internal workflows and staffing. Particularly the resource demands of audio-visual content and data intelligence have driven the organizational professionalization, rendering the notion of social media as "low-cost" medium outdated.

Practices

Officials describe themselves as structurally disadvantaged on social media, as they represent public institutions conveying dry and technical information about complex policy processes. Facing pressure from political superiors to extensively communicate the institutions' work and promote it creatively, civil service norms leave little room for humor or publicity-oriented strategies that might appear unserious or politically biased. These tensions are further compounded by algorithmic preferences for entertaining and affective content and Meta's restrictions on political content. It is therefore in everyday communication practices that the negotiation between institutional, professional, and platform logics becomes most visible.

Echoing earlier studies on the EU's press services (e.g. Laursen & Valentini, 2014), the analysis identifies strategies developed to navigate these constraints. The following discusses a selection of the most salient practices observed.

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Feeding the algorithm

Officials report constant pressure to "feed the algorithm" (EP2) to maintain visibility. This leads to the production of "community-sustaining posts" – for instance, Happy Monday greetings or references to international days linkable to EU legislation. Interviewees also describe adapting content to platform-favored formats, even when considered ill-suited for political communication:

> I am a bit worried about the current trends. Now we are told that 30 seconds is already long, but I am not sure how I can try to explain European policies in less because some of the issues are so complex. We do not want to dumb down content either. (EC3)

This emphasizes a structural dependency on platform rhythms and preferences, where communicative visibility depends less on content relevance than on algorithmic responsiveness, contradicting public service duty.

Focusing on topics that attract engagement

A recurring phrase in the interviews is that "social media is all about engagement". While officials face political pressure to communicate every activity or policy position, they stress the need to prioritize topics attracting attention and interaction. This sometimes creates tensions with political authorities:

> Compared to the website, social media is – in theory at least – more about engaging people: relevant stakeholders, ordinary people. However, many politicians still believe that social media is about broadcasting, which it obviously is not. (CoR2)

While the officials sometimes express frustration about needing to communicate "very boring" (CoR3) topics, they also emphasize adherence to public service principles of comprehensive and balanced communication:

> We are very clear that we will communicate on every opinion that is adopted. The amount of effort we put into it is based on our priorities as an institution, not on where the biggest number of likes will be. (EESC1)

In practice, however, officials differentiate efforts and strategies across platforms and audiences. Certain topics receive more visibility depending on perceived audience interests – LinkedIn users are seen as more policy-oriented, whereas Facebook audiences are addressed with lighter, more accessible posts. Whilst civil service and political logics still constrain social media logic, these subtle forms of audience segmentation and prioritization indicate gradual movement towards data- and engagement-driven communication.

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Data analysis and targeting

Data-driven communication has become central to the EU's social media work and interviews and documents show that analytics now guide most content decisions – including the smaller institutions that have only recently begun to professionalize their communication practices (e.g. *EESC Communication Strategy 2022–2027*, pp. 60–63). Anticipated audience reaction – such as the amount and nature of interactions – is a key consideration before publishing. Posts risking backlash or too little traction are often withheld on a particular platform. This illustrates a move away from transparent, dialogic communication towards calculated, risk-averse publicity.

When organic reach is insufficient to reach the target audiences, paid advertisement is employed. The strategy is to target those deemed pro-European or neutral and "convincible", while avoiding groups viewed as too politically distant.

> With those that vote for [extreme right parties], it would be kind of useless or a waste of time to try to convince them to our side, but it is different for those neutral ones. (EC6)

Another reason for this strategic selectivity is social media's horizontal content dissemination. An official explains that if a post is picked up by hostile audiences, it can quickly enter antagonistic discursive spaces likely to attract negative engagement, trigger visibility algorithms and escalate backlash. This undermining communicative goals, officials sometimes prefer not to publish certain content at all. This explicit avoidance of confrontation raises questions about the platform logic of curated visibility's compatibility with public service communication.

Enabling identity work and leveraging networked influence

While institutions strategically aim for a politically undecided audience, several officials also express concern about reaching only "the converted" (EP2). To overcome the organic outreach limits and still avoid hostile audiences, EU institutions increasingly produce content for reuse by other users – including other EU institutions, liked-minded organizations or influencers. Content shared by trusted third parties or other collaborations help access established niche audiences, bypass creative and political restrictions imposed by civil service norms and add authenticity and traction to the political messaging. By sharing social resources with other public actors, institutions tap into platform economies of visibility through engagement while maintaining formal neutrality.

The analysis shows how social media logic has reshaped the EU institutions' communication. Current practices are strategic and data-driven, aimed at maximizing visibility, engagement, and support. Simultaneously, the targeted, affective and low-conflict communication style raises normative questions about the compatibility

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of such selective outreach and message control with the ideals of pluralistic public service communication and civil service neutrality.

Conclusion

This article has examined how EU institutions have adapted their communication strategies, organizational structures, and work practices in response to social media. Drawing on communication strategies and interviews across institutions, the findings show how social media logic has reshaped institutional communication beyond earlier accounts of mediatization. What emerges is not just a format change but a structural transformation in how institutions conceive of audiences, produce content and allocate resources.

Theoretically, the findings support literature framing government communication as balancing a dual mandate: informing citizens and promoting institutional agendas (Fredriksson & Pallas, 2016). Social media intensifies this tension: offering tools for visibility and message control whilst rewarding emotionally resonant, affective content conflicting with ideals of neutral, balanced communication. Targeting neutral or pro-European demographics, preferring positive engagement and avoiding content inviting criticism reflect a logic of curated visibility rather than transparency and objectivity. While effective for defending legitimacy and protecting the institutional image, the absence of engagement with critical voices raises normative concerns around selective outreach and echo chambers.

Organizational changes such as hiring private-sector consultants and investing in audiovisual storytelling illustrate how far public communication moved from traditional press logic. Although many officials remain bound by civil service norms, their work increasingly reflects marketing-style imperatives,with professional identity caught between civil servant and publicist roles. This tension calls for further research into shifting professional identities or the contrast between civil service and political discourse on institutional platforms.

Empirically, this article contributes by focusing on the often-overlooked field of social media communication. This is the first to systematically explore how social media is practiced across multiple EU institutions. This cross-institutional lens adds depth to existing accounts of EU communication, offering a more complete picture of how the EU navigates the current media environment.

These developments challenge normative assumptions about digital media's democratizing potential, showing instead an increasingly professionalized approach prioritizing visibility and control over transparency and inclusion. While perhaps a pragmatic response to the platform environment, the findings warrant a public debate about the norms and new mechanisms of oversight of tax-funded government communication in the digital age.

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Appendix

REQUESTED EU DOCUMENTS – OVERVIEW

1. European Committee of the Regions (CoR):

Communication Plans 2016–2019

- CoR Communication Plan 2016: Connecting Regions and Cities for a Stronger Europe (11 p)
- CoR Communication Plan 2017: Making the European Union Work for its Citizens (10 p)
- CoR Communication Plan 2018: Working in Partnershipfor a Local Europe (9 p)
- CoR Communication Plan 2019: Renewing Europe with its Regions and Cities (10 p)

Communication Strategy and Evaluations

- Communication Strategy of the European Committee of the Regions 2015-2020: Reconnecting Europe with its Citizens. Establishing a Dialogue between the Local and EU Level (05.10.2015)(13 p)
- A Digital Communication Strategy for the CoR 2016–2020 (04.10.2016) (7 p)
- Mid-term evaluation of the 2015–2020 Communication Strategy of the European Committee of the Regions (6 p)
- Final evaluation of the 2015–2020 Communication Strategy of the European Committee of the Regions (2019) (82 p)

2. European Economic and Social Committee (EESC):

Communication Strategy

- EESC Communication Strategy 2022–2027 (2022) (182 p)

3. Council of the European Union (CEU):

Communication Strategy and Activities

- GSC External Communication Strategy (February 2022) (13 p)
- 2021 Annual activity Report of the Authorising Officer by Delegation – COMM (30 March 2022) (27 pages)
- Staff Note (CP 35/15): GSC Social Media Code of Conduct (02.06.2015) (11 p)

4. European Commission (EC):

Communication Strategy and Activities

- Annual Activity Report 2021 – DG COMM (2021) (44 p)
- Annual Activity Report 2021 Annexes – DG COMM (2021) (114 p)
- Management Plan 2022 – DG COMM (2022) (39 p)
- Strategic Plan 2020–2014 DG Communication (09 November 2020) (31 p)

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- Work Programme for 2022 in the field of Communication – Annex (2021) (23 p)
- DG COMM Work Programme for 2022 (Brussels, 25.11.2021) C(2021) 8346 final: COMMISSION DECISION of 25.11.2021on the financing of the Directorate-General for Communication's operational activities and on the adoption of the work programme for 2022 (4 p)
- Social Media Guidelines for Staff (2023) (12 p)
- The Working Methods of the European Commission, P(2019) 2, (01.12.2019) (45 p)
  - Includes: Communication (2 p)

Others

On Communication Challenges in Europe

- Europe in May 2019: Preparing for a more united, stronger and more democratic Union in an increasingly uncertain world (2019) (84 p)
- The European Commission's contribution to the informal EU27 leaders' meeting in Sibiu (Romania) on 9 May 2019 (84 p)
  - Including: Chapter 3: Europe's unique communication challenge: how to communicate effectively across a whole continent in times of increasing fragmentation and disinformation (16 p)

On disinformation

- The Strengthened Code of Practice on Disinformation 2022
- Tackling online disinformation: a European Approach – Brussels, 26.4.2018, COM(2018) 236 final (2018) (17 p)
- Tackling COVID-19 disinformation – Getting the facts right, JOIN(2020) 8 final (10.6.2020) (17 p)

On Conference on the Future of Europe

- Conference on the Future of Europe: Putting Vision into Concrete Action, COM(2022) 404 final (17.6.2022) (8 p)
- Final Report on the Conference on the Future of Europe

5. European Parliament (EP):

Communication Strategy

- This is DG COMM (23 p)
- DG COMM 2022 Strategic Objectives (1 p)
- DG COMM in facts and figures: Taking Communication to a new Level (11 p)
- Inclusive Communication Guidelines for DG COMM Output (20 p)
- Gender-neutral Language in the EP (2018) (13 p)

Yet to request:

- Guidelines from the EP's Spokesperson Service