Bird’s eye view R&R:

Editor Decision

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| **Comment** | **Task** | **Do/Don’t** | **Responsible** |
| Attached the reviews to your submission for the Politics and Governance special issue on Analyzing Citizen Engagement with European Politics through Social Media. You will see both are quite positive and we are therefore happy to offer you a revise & resubmit. |  |  |  |
| Both reviewers ask for work on the theory section, including, for example a discussion on reasons for including both institutional and personal accounts into the analysis. While we do not think formal hypotheses are strictly necessary, it would be good to substantiate this section based on the reviewer suggestions, which are quite concrete. Including, for example, the kind request to take the work of some guy called Rauh a little bit more seriously. We will not rehearse the reviewers’ comments at length here though, as both are very elaborate and encompassing. |  |  |  |
| As editors, we would like to see an explicit return to the challenges laid out in the introduction to the special issue. Not the legitimacy challenges the EU faces, but the ones you faced when doing this type of research. Perhaps you could discuss this in a paragraph in the concluding section, aimed at what other academics wanting to do similar research could learn from your study. |  |  |  |

#### **Reviewer 1**

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| **Comment** | **Task** | **Do/Don’t** | **Responsible** |
| The authors endeavor to describe why the EU should communicate via social media, but this is a moot point: we already know, among others by virtue of the authors being able to perform their study, that the EU institutions have embraced social media comms full heartedly. Instead of demonstrating that “social media platforms should be promising communication channels for supranational actors” (p2), the authors could make the case about why knowing something about the way in which EU institutions perform their online communication on Twitter is important and relevant. Which are some of the debates about institutional communication that are relevant here? Which are the criteria for good public communication? To which standards should the EU citizens uphold their supranational institutions? | 1. Go straight to why we should know more about the EU communication on SoME |  | 1. Sina |
| While indeed, the EU faces some particular challenges, such as those enumerated on page 1, the introduction should not focus on these alone. The first page of the article should, in my opinion, present the research question driving the paper and argue for its relevance and, not in the least, its goodness of fit with the theme of the special issue, namely citizen engagement. The paper in its current form does not present in a clear-cut way a motivation for its relevance to the special issue. I find the introduction to be optimally suitable to make the case for why this study addresses the concerns of the special issue and connect to the literature on social media, citizen engagement and institutional communication. | 1. Refocus the first half of introduction to research question and relate the motivation to special issue |  | 1. Sina |
| The section is transparent but there are still some issues that need to be more justified.  - Why were both personal and institutional accounts included? The institutional accounts have a continuous presence since the establishment of an EU social media presence, whereas personal accounts of EU leaders may have come into existence much later or, if in existence for a while, have content that is not relevant to the European level but to the domestic politics where the account holder had a stake in prior to their becoming active in the EU institutions. | 1. Justify using personal accounts 2. Justify using full timeline of personal accounts (or trim the data only to include timeline of “in office” onwards) |  | 1. Sina 2. Christian (trim on the analysis data) |
| - Why was the UK used as a benchmark? Is the UK government a well-established role model for institutional communication? Is the institutional architecture of the UK most similar to that of the EU? Why not benchmark against Germany, for example, or The Netherlands? | 1. Justify using the UK as a benchmark |  | 1. Sina |
| The characteristics in question (volume over time, language clarity, media type) should be theoretically motivated. Why do the authors choose to examine these variables and not others? In the theory section (which the article does not contain), the authors could outline some of the features considered important for good institutional communication, and use this literature to argue for their variable choice. Why is volume of messages important for effective (and engaging – the focus of the SI) institutional communication? Why is language clarity important? Why is media type important? | 1. Re-introduce some of the arguments from the earlier draft on indicators |  | 1. Sina |
| Alternatively, the authors could look at some of the existing literature about EU comms and structure their presentation of the variables as answers to expectations/hypotheses. For example, the authors may want to argue that EU comms reorient themselves from traditional to social media, then compare the volumes of the two types over time to demonstrate this point. | I am not really sure if there is anything to do with this comment? |  |  |
| The concept of publicity is not defined anywhere in the paper. The authors write “We approximate the publicity of the messages via user engagement with the messages” (p. 8). If the two concepts are interchangeable, why not use engagement, which is the theme of the SI? And if they are different, why not explain where the two concepts are similar and where they are not? | 1. Make it clear that publicity is the concept and engagement with the message on social media is the operationalization   (I am fairly sure we do define this in the introduction) |  | 1. Sina |
| When presenting the results of the statistical analyses, it would be helpful to connect them with some hypotheses regarding their relevance for engagement. On page 10, the authors highlight some variables ,“embedded pictures and frequent use of meta-linguistic communication”, as most significant for engagement. These should have been grounded in some theoretical literature to justify their inclusion in the model. | 1. I had this in the earlier draft so, I can bring it back in |  | 1. Sina |
| When calculating the number of followers of accounts over time, the inclusion of personal accounts becomes problematic, since some of the ones with a larger followership (Vestager, Borell, etc) belong to established national politicians. How do the authors distinguish between communication regarding the EU and that regarding domestic politics from those accounts that have a history of both? | 1. Either trim the data or justify the full use |  | 1. Christian |
| The authors also highlight the difference between institutional and personal accounts in driving engagement. Is the reason to include both account types to test hypotheses related to personalization? If so, formulate this as a hypothesis backed up by literature and organize the text accordingly. | 1. Find literature on how the EU actors represent the polity (eg. Unaccountability, scandals) |  | 1. Sina |

#### **Reviewer 2**

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| **Comment** | **Task** | **Do/Don’t** | **Responsible** |
| The paper starts out with two related challenges for supranational EU actors: politicization and blame shifting. While I find this starting point convincing, the framing might benefit from more nuance and a theoretical spin. The manuscript might engage with the literature on politicization as well as blame attribution to the EU and supranational EU actors within it (e.g., Vasilopoulou et al. in JCMS; Rittberger et al. 2017 in JCMS; Schlipphak & Treib 2017 in JEPP; Traber et al. 2019 in EJPR; Sommer 2019 in JCMS; Heinkelmann-Wild et al. 2020 in PaG). Instead of discussing the obstacles to supranational EU actors’ communication, it could confront a theoretical debate within this literature. Some scholars consider supranational EU actors as less willing and able public communicators as compared to member state governments. These contributions usually emphasize the communicative disadvantages of supranational EU actors as well as their technocratic nature (e.g., Gerhards et al. 2009 in PVS; Schlipphak & Treib 2017 in JEPP). On the contrary, several recent contributions emphasize supranational actors’ willingness and ability to engage in public communication and actively respond to politicization and blame attributions (e.g., Ecker-Ehrhardt 2018; Heinkelmann-Wild & Zangl 2020 in Governance; Rauh et al. 2020 in EJPR; Heinkelmann-Wild & Zangl 2021 in PVS; see also JEPP Special Issue ‘EU Actors Under Pressure’ edited by Bressanelli et al. 2020). Yet, these analyses cover so far only news media and public speeches and often focus on specific cases. The manuscript could build on and add to this strand of literature by assessing, first, whether supranational EU actors take advantage of the opportunities posed by social media and, second, how (good) they are employing them. The answer to this question should then be spelled out concisely in the introduction. | 1. Relate the paper to the extant work stronger in the introduction 2. Make introduction more concise and concrete |  | 1. Sina 2. Sina |
| Embedding the results within existing scholarship and focusing on the most important ones would generally increase accessibility and clarity of the manuscript’s message. Some technical discussions, such as the pre-processing of tweets, could be moved to the appendix | 1. Relate the results to the extant literatures 2. Move technical description to appendix |  | 1. Christian 2. Christian/Sina |
| (1) The analysis comprises both personal accounts’ and ‘institutional accounts’. I missed a theoretical justification for this choice. Why are personal accounts included but differentiated from institutional accounts? After all, if there is no such difference, why not aggregate them? A short discussion about who exactly is assumed to communicate over these accounts and whether there are different communicative logics involved would help the reader to understand the choice. If there is no important difference, the clarify of the findings might be easily improved by moving the disaggregated analysis to the appendix and discussing only the aggregated values in the manuscript. If there is an important difference between them, addressing it would underline the relevance of the findings. Moreover, I also have some empirically reservations: The authors seem to have used the institutional and personal accounts existing in May 2021 as a starting point for their analysis (p. 3). If this is correct, then there seems to be a problem especially with regards to personal accounts. While the vast majority of EU institutions likely existed in 2009, presumably not all persons in office today worked for the EU for the full period. This implies that the share of personal accounts likely increased over time. The manuscript differentiates between institutional and personal accounts and finds major differences between them, including the average number of tweets per day. If over time the share of personal accounts increased, this likely negatively affected the average number of tweets by supranational EU actors. In addition, when personal accounts were not created after assuming office in the respective institution but already existing before, the analysis would falsely count at this point in time unrelated persons as supranational EU actors. | 1. Justify why use personal accounts 2. Trim out the timelines of personal accounts when they are not in an EU office and rerun the analysis |  | 1. Sina 2. Christian |
| Regarding the selected samples, I think that, first, the manuscript would benefit from a more explicit discussion what the benchmarks represent in theoretical terms and what we learn from comparing them. Relatedly, with regards to the IO sample, I would suggest listing the selected IOs and justify why exactly they were selected. Why look at IOs that cover a similar number of issues and not issue specific IOs or IOs with fewer delegated authority? Why are IOs’ tweets aggregated and not treated as separately. Finally, I would ask the authors to clarify whether the other three samples also span the full period from 2009-2021. | 1. Justify the selection of IO benchmark sample based on literature (more authority more politicization thus more need for pr) |  | 1. Sina |
| There are several analytical choices that are not – or merely implicitly – backed by theoretical considerations. Engaging more explicitly with the relevant literatures and theory might – in my view – help the manuscript to get a conceptual grip on its important empirical findings and thereby demonstrate their relevance. For instance, I was wondering why the analysis covers the period from 2009 to May 3, 2021. Moreover, I wondered why the manuscript focuses on volume, clarity, and media usage of as well as user engagement with supranational EU actors’ tweets. While some of these dimensions seem to be linked with the “two cardinal duties” of communication transparency and publicity (p. 2), the manuscript could be more explicit in explaining its focus on theoretical grounds. | 1. Justify the time period 2. Justify the indicators (can repurpose some stuff from the older drafts) |  | 1. Sina 2. Sina |
| With regards to the chosen measures, I also have some questions and suggestions: The manuscript relies on an impressive array of indicators for clarity (the Flesch reading ease score, a familiarity score, as well as verb-to-noun-ratio), multimedia engagement (pictures, videos, emojis/symbols, and external links – by the way: do emojis and links really count as media?), and user engagement (likes, retweets, quotes, and replies). While the amount of collected information is impressive, the number of indicators renders a clear interpretation difficult. To arrive at a clearer and stronger message, the manuscript could either focus on the most important indicator(s) for each concept or construct an index. | 1. Statistically simplify indicators (dimension reduction etc.) 2. Focus only on the most important indicators (based on their theoretical foundation) in the body, move the rest to appendix |  | 1. Christian 2. Christian |
| I was not convinced by the value of the variation within the sample of supranational EU actors as well as the multivariate analysis about the impact of their tweets (p. 10). Regarding the latter, the manuscript could either put more emphasis on the analysis and address the question when supranational EU actors communicate successfully on twitter – or restrict itself to assuming that specific features are particularly successful on twitter and show how often supranational EU actors use them as compared to other types of actors. | 1. Make the yellow highlighted more explicit in the article |  | 1. Sina |
| The manuscript could profit from situating its findings in the literature. | 1. See task 1 |  | 1. Sina |
| What additional information might be of interest to get a better impression of supranational EU actors’ twitter communication (e.g., sentiment or topic)? What might explain similarities and differences across national executives, IO actors, and supranational EU actors? What might explain similarities and differences across different supranational EU actors or over time? What are the consequences of supranational EU actors’ communication on twitter? Relatedly, the discussion of the results’ normative implications might be more pronounced: Is it overall good or bad news that supranational EU actors embrace twitter? | I feel like we already did this tho… |  |  |