**the EU public communication problems and social media’s potential**

1. **How can public communication contribute to the legitimacy – necessary and sufficient conditions**

While earlier works have recognized the role of public communication literature, the more recent contributions on the discursive self-legitimation have largely, if not explicitly, ignored the role of public relations efforts in producing and reproducing empirical legitimacy. For example, in his seminal contribution Meyer (1999) clearly states that the EU will have to work for its popular legitimacy by communicating more with citizens. Yet, this perspective is hardly mentioned in the more contemporary analysis of the EU public communication. On occasion, the scholars who are dealing with how authorities beyond nation state claim their legitimacy vis-à-vis the citizens explicitly stated that the public relations is beyond the scope of political legitimacy study(Gronau & Schmidtke, 2016) as public relations efforts may target garnering support for specific policies and authorities rather than a diffuse support for the polity.

While we concede that public relations, and specifically public communication, have a broader portfolio than only generating support for the political system, it still carries a significant place for political systems to produce and reproduce popular legitimacy. First and foremost, public communication is a viable and an important tool for producing and reproducing legitimacy for a polity. As the recent research clearly indicates that most political authorities increase their public communication effort when they are politicized, and their legitimacy is questioned(Ecker-Ehrhardt, 2018; Rauh et al., 2020). Secondly, for political systems that lack a direct accountability mechanism such as national elections, the line between specific and diffuse support, as Easton put it, is rather blurred. Unfavorable policies and scandalous authority holders can easily be damaging to the legitimacy of the political system, if the audience of the political authority is unable to hold the individual authorities accountable for misconduct and unpopular policies. this is exactly the case for the EU since the EU lacks such an accountability mechanism for its supranational executives(Hobolt, 2014; Wilde & Trenz, 2012). Under these circumstances, as the case is, the public communication offers a lifeline to political authorities beyond nation states to produce and reproduce popular legitimacy.

Public communication, however, should have three features in order to contribute to the popular legitimacy of the polity. The first among these features is the *comprehensibility*. Comprehensibility refers to ease-of-read of the message, i.e how much cognitive mobilization and education is required from the reader to comprehend the key information in a given text (Flesch, 1948). The public communication can assist producing or reproducing legitimacy if and only if the messages are understandable to its audience. Extant literature demonstrates that citizens integrate political information into their political knowledge structure much better if the information is delivered in a easy to comprehen manner(Bischof & Senninger, 2018; Tolochko et al., 2019). Therefore, public communication messages should be easy to understand to have any effect on the individuals’ perception of the political authority.

The second required feature is *transparency.* Transparency in this sense refers to the fact that political institutions report conflicts and responsibilities in political decisions on the allocation of resources (Curtin & Meijer, 2006). Underlying assumption is that transparency of responsibilities allows citizens to make a better informed decision in democratic systems. While the EU lacks any such mechanism for citizens to make a direct decision about their executives, it still provides mechanisms to aggregate citizen preferences such as the European parliament elections. Thus, public communication can help the EU executives to maintain popular legitimacy if it reports on political responsibilities, i.e provide transparency, as the recent research indicates that citizens, in fact, want the EU to be more transparent(Schafer et al., 2021).

The last feature is the *publicity*. Publicity refers to the degree to which the audience engages with the issues, acts and processes of the political system (Hüller, 2007). In other words, the message is not consumed by a specialized group, but larger audience and it becomes a regular part of political discussion. While comprehensibility and transparency are necessary for public communication to assist with popular legitimacy, they are not sufficient by themselves. The audience should read and engage with the public communication message. In other words, it is not enough to put information on political responsibilities with a simple language out in the ether. Citizens should be aware of this information, actively engage and digest this information. Only then, public communication messages can be expected to influence both individuals’ perception of the political authority and broader public debate about the legitimacy of the polity.

1. **Where the EU lacks vis-à-vis these conditions**

The extant literature demonstrates that the EU supranational public communication faces several obstacles in meeting these necessary and sufficient conditions. Part of these obstacles are internal; public communication is often subject to internal conflicts and competition over limited resources (Altides, 2009; Bijsmans & Altides, 2007; Hartlapp et al., 2014: ch. 9). In institutions with delegated powers that often involve high levels of expertise, consensus-orientation, and diplomatic restraint, public outreach has traditionally not been a primary concern (Brüggemann, 2010; Meyer, 1999) thus can offer limited transparency.

Moreover, supranational communication of the EU is often found wanting in terms of comprehensibility. When facing controversial public debates, moreover, supranational institutions may have incentives to avoid clear communication in their strategic efforts to calm controversial debates (Biegoń, 2013; Bressanelli et al., 2020; De Wilde & Zürn, 2012; Schimmelfennig, 2020). In effect, supranational communication efforts are often illegible for the wider public (Rauh, 2021; Rauh et al., 2020).

Externally, supranational institutions also face notable communication obstacles in the broader communication environment. Although supranational institutions are tasked with defending the European interest in their policy areas, mass-mediated public spheres tend to be fractured along national borders, languages, and media systems, thus forcing supranational institutions to communicate via national media (Koopmans & Statham, 2010; Risse, 2014; H.-J. Trenz, 2004; Walter, 2015). National media are, however, rather selective in covering EU affairs, as traditional journalistic selection logics are often partial to national interests, domestic executives, and their challengers (De Vreese, 2001; De Vreese et al., 2006; H. Trenz, 2008). Media coverage of the EU is then primarily driven by controversial and contested events such as summits of the heads of state and government, European Parliament (EP) elections, and scandals on the European level (Boomgaarden et al., 2013; Hobolt & Tilley, 2014). Thus, supranational institutions have a hard time getting their message across via traditional media channels and achieve publicity.

Social media platforms proves to be a solution to some of these obstacles. With a view to external constraints, social media allow citizens to engage with content beyond national boundaries (Bossetta et al., 2017), thus potentially ameliorating adverse effects of fractured public spheres. Furthermore, social media imbue users with a degree of gatekeeping power (Wallace, 2018). The decentralized structure of these platforms, where users themselves can choose which messages will be allowed and amplified in the information environment, gives supranational EU actors some freedom to determine which issues to highlight, thus allows them to partially circumvent traditional media selection logics to generate publicity. Moreover, social media platforms, specifically Twitter, can act as a ‘double-barrelled gun’ for reaching out to the citizenry: recent research shows that journalists tend to pick up tweets from political actors (especially highly engaging tweets) and incorporate them in news articles (Cage *et al.* 2020; Oschatz *et al.* 2021), boosting their communication potential further.

Furthermore, social media has the potential to mitigate internal conflict over limited resources and comprehensibility. Firstly, It takes mere minutes to set up an account and they are rather easy to maintain. In addition, platforms usually reward clear and concise messaging which are arguably cheaper to produce than press releases. Secondly, the platforms usually reward clear and concise messaging which are arguably cheaper to produce than press releases. Thirdly, social media allow multimedia features that are also beneficial for accessible and engaging communication. Lastly, social media provide a low-hurdle and continuous information source for users. Unlike official webpages, social media do not require the user to consciously search for information about supranational activity in the EU. Users may encounter EU messages in their timelines from their connections on social media or they could simply follow respective accounts by a simple click.