So to what extent the style and volume of communication translates into publicity for the EU supranational executives? We approximate the publicity of the messages via user engagement with the messages. Our descriptive evidence and elementary inferential analysis (appendix a4) show mixed results. First of all, a necessary condition for engagement is that users see the messages in the first place. Reliable information on this is not easy to obtain, however. The research track API does not include the number of ‘impressions’ per tweet which is also only available for the last 60 days in commercial access options. In addition, the algorithms by which Twitter decides which messages to show to which users with what prominence are not public.

What we do know is that messages are shown in the timelines of users that have subscribed to follow a supranational account. Yet, historical follower count data are also not available through the Twitter APIs – only the numbers for the access day can be retrieved. Thus, we exploit the Internet Archive, a non-profit organisation working for free access to online information. Their archive.org engine crawls the web and takes static, timestamped snapshots of individual sites. We set up automated scripts that extract all available snapshots for each Twitter account in our sample to then scrape the follower counts from the raw html of the snapshots.

One caveat applies: the availability of archive.org snapshots is rather unequally distributed. Within our 115 supranational EU accounts, we can, for example, extract 842 snapshots of the @EU\_Commission profile, 548 for @EUClimateAction, or 380 for @vonderleyen. But there are five accounts with only one snapshot and seven that have never been crawled by archive.org. We linearly interpolate the daily number of followers between each measurement point, taking only the account creation date and the scraping date for accounts without snapshots. This is not very precise but offers a suitable proxy for historical follower counts. Figure 4 estimates how many users followed supranational Twitter profiles over time.

Chart, line chart

Description automatically generated

**Figure 4**: Followers of supranational Twitter accounts

*3.1. Volume*

We begin our investigation by examining the volume of communication on twitter. Figure 1 shows the average number of tweets per account and day.

Chart, line chart

Description automatically generated

**Figure 1**: Number of tweets per day and account

The left panel initially indicates that supranational actors have markedly increased the number of messages on Twitter. It increased nearly seven folds from roughly one tweet every second day during the early phase of supranational Twitter presence to 3 to 3.5 daily tweets. The major increase in supranational Twitter messaging happened during 2010-2016, a phase of strongly surging public EU politicization amidst the Euro- and Schengen crises. It also coincides with a period in which the European Commission notably reduced its output of traditional press releases (Rauh 2021b), possibly indicating a re-distribution of internal communication resources.

The right panel of Figure 1 highlights that this supranational tweet volume is to a large extent driven by institutional accounts, indicating a centralized and probably professionalized approach to supranational social media presence. Institutional EU accounts post around 3.5 tweets per day, while supranational actors tweeting in personal capacity issue around one fewer daily tweet. Moreover, the right pane indicates that the EU institutional accounts outperform their peers in terms volume while the individual executives are only marginally behind their peers on national level. The volume indicates that the EU supranational actors are equally, if not more, keen on engaging in public communication on Twitter compared to their peers.

There is significant variation within our supranational population. Among the most avid tweeters are the Commission’s Directorate-General for Digital Policies (@DigitalEU) with 13.7 tweets per day and the official account of the whole EU Commission run by the spokespersons service (@EU\_Commission) with 10.4 tweets a day. On the lower end of the distribution, we find the European Court of Justice (@EUCourtPress) with around one tweet every second day and the Euratom Supply Agency (@EuratomA) issuing a message only around every 10th day on average. Yet, this variation in the tweet volume across supranational EU actors (standard deviation: 2.58 daily tweets) is not distinct from our UK sample (2.23 daily tweets) and markedly lower than in our sample of international organization tweets (4 daily tweets).

Internally, the EU public communication is often subject to conflicts and competition over limited resources (Altides 2009; Bijsmans and 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). 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 and Zürn 2012; Moschella *et al.* 2020; Rauh *et al.* 2020; Rauh 2021a; Schimmelfennig 2020).

Externally, previous research shows that the EU public communication has hard time delivering their message to the wider public via traditional mass media. 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 and Statham 2010; Risse 2014; 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; 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 and Tilley 2014). Thus, supranational institutions have a hard time getting their message across via traditional media channels.