

**Introducing Social Networking Tools into Members of the  
European Parliament's Communication Patterns**

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## Abstract

This PhD research adopts an interdisciplinary approach to answer the following research question: *to what extent could Members of the European Parliament incorporate social networking tools (SNT) as part of their communication resources in engaging with other actors when carrying out their work as legislators?* The methodological framework chosen to conduct this study is exploratory and combines two qualitative methods: elite interviews and observation. Interviews with MEPs and their staff aimed to explore MEPs' understanding of SNT use, their motivations and their perceived benefits of using SNT when carrying out their work as legislators. Interviews with officials of the EP and members of the European civil society were purposely designed as validating interviews. In total, 29 interviews were conducted in 2011-2012. Observation of MEPs' communication patterns during parliamentary weeks has allowed me to assess, on the one hand their communication patterns from an organisational perspective and on the other hand the potential for introducing new communicative tools into MEPs' communicative practices. Observation was conducted with two MEPs and their staff during two weeks each. The theoretical framework of this study relies strongly upon communication network theories and organisational studies that explore the adoption of SNT in the workplace. Based on a grounded theory approach, this exploratory study suggests an emergent model of use of SNT for MEPs in carrying out their legislative work, based on MEPs' motivations and perceived benefits of using these tools. Findings suggest that there are four domains in which MEPs could use SNT in their legislative functions: to democratise lobbying practices in the EP, to raise their awareness of public opinion, to reshape their relationship with journalists and finally to coordinate their actions as representatives with the European civil society's. Thus, this study explores the adoption of SNT by elected members of the European Parliament by focusing on their understanding of their use of SNT when carrying out their role as legislators.

## Table of content

<b>Chapter 1 - Literature review and knowledge gap .....</b>	<b>5</b>
<b>1.1. Summary .....</b>	<b>5</b>
<b>1.2. Introduction .....</b>	<b>5</b>
<b>1.3. Reconsidering the role of MEPs as representatives and the emergence of new ICTs and SNT .....</b>	<b>6</b>
1.3.1 MEPs as legislators, policy expertise and new ICTs.....	6
1.3.2 Political representation and cross border representation.....	13
<b>1.4. Organisational communication, communication networks and SNT.....</b>	<b>18</b>
<b>1.5. Research design .....</b>	<b>21</b>
1.5.1. Assessing the extent of adoption of a new communicative tool .....	22
<b>1.6. Conclusion.....</b>	<b>23</b>
<b>Chapter 2 - Methodology .....</b>	<b>24</b>
<b>2.1. Summary .....</b>	<b>24</b>
<b>2.2. Research design .....</b>	<b>24</b>
2.2.1. An exploratory study of MEPs' communication patterns.....	24
2.2.2. Interpretive approach in IS research .....	27
2.2.3. Research methods, unit of data collection and unit of data analysis.....	29
2.2.4. Validity, reliability and triangulation of research methods.....	30
2.2.5. Ethical considerations .....	32
2.2.6. Limitations to research methods .....	32
<b>2.3. Data collection .....</b>	<b>34</b>
2.3.1. Access to elite and researcher's identity .....	34
2.3.2. Informants' and gatekeepers' roles when doing research in EP .....	35
2.3.3. Reflexivity .....	37
2.3.4. Interviews .....	37
2.3.5. Observation.....	44
<b>2.4. Data analysis.....</b>	<b>51</b>
2.4.1. Interviews .....	51
2.4.2. Observation notes: Communication dynamics appraisal .....	52
<b>2.5. Conclusion.....</b>	<b>53</b>
<b>Chapter 3 - Organisational communication when drafting and amending legislation.....</b>	<b>54</b>
<b>3.1. Summary .....</b>	<b>54</b>
<b>3.2. Introduction.....</b>	<b>54</b>
<b>3.3. Formal processes in committee work: actors and settings .....</b>	<b>55</b>
3.3.1. Parliamentary committees: the 'backbone' of the EP.....	55
3.3.2. Key roles for MEPs in committees .....	56
3.3.3. Role of the Committee Secretariat.....	58
3.3.4. Public hearings and intergroups.....	58
<b>3.4. Dynamics of interaction in legislative work: An interpretive approach .....</b>	<b>59</b>
3.4.1. Characterising communication dynamics .....	60

<b>3.5. Internal communication: face-to-face interaction and situational informality as watchwords</b> .....	<b>63</b>
3.5.1. Prevalence of internal scheduled and unscheduled face-to-face communication.....	64
3.5.2. Keystone actors: MEP assistants (who).....	68
3.5.3. Mediated and electronic communication (how) .....	71
<b>3.6. Interaction with external actors: lobbying the EP</b> .....	<b>76</b>
3.6.1. Introduction.....	76
3.6.2. Lobbying the EP at the right time: when lobbyists know when and who to lobby.....	78
3.6.3. Face-to-face encounters with external actors during committee and political group meeting weeks.....	81
3.6.4. The role of European citizens in the process of drafting and amending legislation.....	86
<b>3.7. Conclusion</b> .....	<b>87</b>
<b>Chapter 4 - Analytical framework: communication network theories and social networking tools</b> .....	<b>89</b>
<b>4.1. Summary</b> .....	<b>89</b>
<b>4.2. Relevant major communication theories</b> .....	<b>89</b>
4.2.1. From Weber to the network structure of organisations.....	89
4.2.2. Motivations of use and perceived benefits: On the relevance of cognitive theories.....	90
<b>4.3. Social Networking Tools: Definition</b> .....	<b>96</b>
<b>4.4. Network awareness, information retrieval, information dissemination and coordination</b> .....	<b>97</b>
4.4.1. Cognitive social structures and cognitive knowledge networks .....	97
4.4.2. The strength of weak ties: expanding network awareness.....	99
4.4.3. Adoption of SNT in the workplace.....	101
<b>4.5. Analytical framework: properties of SNT and a priori model of use</b> .....	<b>105</b>
<b>4.6. Conclusion</b> .....	<b>107</b>
<b>Chapter 5 - An exploration of the use of SNT in the EP</b> .....	<b>109</b>
<b>5.1. Summary</b> .....	<b>109</b>
<b>5.2. Introduction</b> .....	<b>109</b>
<b>5.3. Secondary literature: Fleishman-Hillard 2<sup>nd</sup> EP Digital Trends Survey</b> .....	<b>110</b>
<b>5.4. Early adopters and SNT use trends: empirical findings</b> .....	<b>112</b>
5.4.1. Use of electronic devices and IT literacy.....	112
5.4.2. SNT type and frequency of use.....	114
5.4.3. Delegated use vs. personal use of SNT.....	117
<b>5.5. EP Secretariat's use of SNT</b> .....	<b>122</b>
5.5.1. SNT use by the EP as an institution.....	122
5.5.2. Committees' use of SNT.....	122
<b>5.6. Conclusion</b> .....	<b>124</b>
<b>Chapter 6 - Network awareness</b> .....	<b>125</b>
<b>6.1. Summary</b> .....	<b>125</b>
<b>6.2. Introduction</b> .....	<b>125</b>
<b>6.3. Cognitive social structures and SNT: raising MEPs' network awareness</b> ....	<b>126</b>
6.3.1. When awareness has an impact on the nature of use of SNT .....	127

6.3.2.	Belonging to the network vs. communicating via the network.....	129
<b>6.4.</b>	<b>Social structure and the strength of weak ties: expanding MEPs' network awareness to weak ties.....</b>	<b>130</b>
6.4.1.	Weak ties in organisational studies: Reminder .....	130
6.4.2.	Weak ties and strong ties when carrying out legislative work: Definition .	131
6.4.3.	Tie strength on SNT: Characterisation .....	133
<b>6.5.</b>	<b>From awareness to acquaintance: democratising EP lobbying? .....</b>	<b>134</b>
6.5.1.	Lobbying the EP: strong ties vs. weak ties .....	134
<b>6.6.</b>	<b>Conclusion.....</b>	<b>140</b>
<b>Chapter 7 -</b>	<b>Information retrieval.....</b>	<b>142</b>
<b>7.1.</b>	<b>Summary .....</b>	<b>142</b>
<b>7.2.</b>	<b>Introduction .....</b>	<b>142</b>
<b>7.3.</b>	<b>Political theory approach vs. organisational approach: public input vs. expertise retrieval .....</b>	<b>143</b>
<b>7.4.</b>	<b>“Get a feel of what people think”: a motto for listening.....</b>	<b>144</b>
7.4.1.	Informality as enabling public opinion gathering.....	144
7.4.2.	Context awareness and lack of interpersonal exchange as an issue.....	147
<b>7.5.</b>	<b>Seeking input and participation: from ‘e-engaging’ to ‘e-empowering’ .....</b>	<b>150</b>
7.5.1.	Launching discussions and debates .....	150
7.5.2.	Individual public opinion seeking vs. organised institutional consultations	156
7.5.3.	Seeking participation: submitting amendments .....	158
<b>7.6.</b>	<b>From e-empowering to expertise retrieval: limitations .....</b>	<b>161</b>
7.6.1.	Potential for expertise retrieval.....	161
7.6.2.	Limitations to expertise retrieval .....	162
<b>7.7.</b>	<b>Conclusion.....</b>	<b>167</b>
<b>Chapter 8 -</b>	<b>Information dissemination.....</b>	<b>169</b>
<b>8.1.</b>	<b>Summary .....</b>	<b>169</b>
<b>8.2.</b>	<b>Informing as usual? Informing on the process of activities.....</b>	<b>169</b>
<b>8.3.</b>	<b>Reshaping relationships with journalists .....</b>	<b>171</b>
8.3.1.	Current state with traditional media.....	171
8.3.2.	Process of activities as an entry point: sequence in communication and media use.....	173
8.3.3.	Journalists' use of SNT.....	176
8.3.4.	What impact does it have? .....	178
<b>8.4.</b>	<b>‘Cutting out the middleman’: informing and educating .....</b>	<b>181</b>
8.4.1.	Bypassing traditional media via SNT .....	181
8.4.2.	Educating by informing .....	182
<b>8.5.</b>	<b>Process of activities vs. content of legislation in information dissemination via SNT... ..</b>	<b>185</b>
<b>8.6.</b>	<b>Conclusion.....</b>	<b>186</b>
<b>Chapter 9 -</b>	<b>Coordination .....</b>	<b>188</b>
<b>9.1.</b>	<b>Summary .....</b>	<b>188</b>
<b>9.2.</b>	<b>Representation as coordination.....</b>	<b>188</b>
9.2.1.	Defining coordination in the context of legislative work .....	188
9.2.2.	The European civil society and representation: Definition.....	189
<b>9.3.</b>	<b>Issue-campaigning via SNT .....</b>	<b>192</b>

9.3.1.	Coordinating by issue-campaigning .....	192
9.3.2.	The European civil society's coordinated action .....	194
<b>9.4.</b>	<b>Towards networked representation? Co-representation via SNT .....</b>	<b>198</b>
<b>9.5.</b>	<b>Conclusion.....</b>	<b>203</b>
<b>Chapter 10 - Emergent model of use and Conclusions .....</b>		<b>204</b>
<b>10.1. Introduction .....</b>		<b>204</b>
<b>10.2. Key findings .....</b>		<b>204</b>
10.2.1	EU representation as policy-oriented representation: reconsidering lobbying practices and limitations to expertise finding via SNT.....	205
10.2.2	Cross border representation: informing on EP activities and reconsidering roles in representation at the EU level via SNT.....	206
<b>10.3. Research implications and emergent model of use.....</b>		<b>208</b>
<b>10.4. Advance in knowledge of research topic .....</b>		<b>209</b>
<b>10.5. Implications for further research .....</b>		<b>211</b>
<b>10.6. Conclusion.....</b>		<b>213</b>
<b>Chapter 11 - Appendix.....</b>		<b>214</b>
<b>Appendix 1 – Information Sheets and Consent form (Interviews) .....</b>		<b>214</b>
<b>Appendix 2 – Interview Questions .....</b>		<b>219</b>
<b>Appendix 3 – EP Powers and Composition.....</b>		<b>222</b>
<b>Appendix 4 – EP Secretariat – Organisation .....</b>		<b>224</b>
<b>Appendix 5 – Ordinary Legislative Procedure and institutional actors' role.....</b>		<b>225</b>



## Figures

Figure 1 Theory Building Research Design.....	28
Figure 2 A priori model of use of SNT for MEPs when carrying out their work as legislators .....	107
Figure 3 Emergent model of use of SNT for MEPs when carrying out their work as legislators .....	209

## Tables

Table 1 List of interviewees .....	41
Table 2 Categorisation of communicative actions in EP committee work .....	62
Table 3 SNT features: Blogs, Microblogging and Internet applications.....	97
Table 4 Review of SNT properties in organisational studies.....	104
Table 5 Type of SNT, frequency of use and personal/delegated use by interviewed MEPs .....	120
Table 6 EP Facebook chats, November 2009 to April 2012.....	155

## Glossary

ACTA	Anti-Counterfeiting Agreement
CSO	Civil Society Organisations
DG	Directorate-General
DG COMM	Directorate-General for Communication
DG ITEC	Directorate-General for Innovation and Technological Support
EC	European Commission
ECI	European Citizens' Initiative
EP	European Parliament
EPADES	European Parliament Document Exchange System
EPO	European Parliament Official
ICT	Information and Communication Technologies
IS	Information Systems
IT	Information Technology
LOB	Lobbyist
MEP	Member of the European Parliament
MP	Member of Parliament
NGO	Non-Governmental Organisation
OEIL	Online Legislative Observatory of the EP
SNA	Social Network Analysis
SNS	Social Network Sites
SNT	Social Networking Tools
STOA	Science and Technology Options Assessment
TAMS	Text Analysis Markup System Software

## Introduction

Online social networks have become a subject of interest for research in social and political science. A fair number of studies have looked into the way decision-makers, and especially elected representatives have adopted the tools, and a strong emphasis has been put on the link between representative and represented, thus looking at the tool as a possible means to ‘reconnect’ with citizens (Williamson et al. 2009). One challenging approach would be to look at the use of social networking tools for their organisational characteristics in the context of the workplace in politics.

The Internet has been recognised as offering new means of political communication in democratic societies and extensive research has been conducted on the democratic potential of new Information and Communication Technologies (ICTs) (Coleman 2004, 2005; Coleman and Blumler 2009; Norris 2000; Ward and Gibson 1998). More specific research on social networking tools (SNT) is still very limited (N. Jackson 2008; N. Jackson and Lilleker 2009, 2011; Lilleker and Michalska 2011). At an organisational level, the adoption of SNT such as microblogging has been studied for their implication in the workplace and their impact on work efficiency (DiMicco et al. 2008; P. Meyer and Dibbern 2010; Riemer and Richter 2010; Zhao and Rosson 2009).

The objective here is to look at the communication patterns of actors involved in the legislative process of the EP in a digitalised world. I aim at answering the following question: *To what extent could Members of the European Parliament incorporate social networking tools as part of their communication resources in engaging with other actors when carrying out their work as legislators?*

This study, based on the assessment of MEPs’ motivations of use and perceived benefits of use of SNT and on an observational exploration of communication patterns in the EP, explores ways in which MEPs could use SNT when they carry out their legislative work. A categorisation of use of SNT based on MEPs’ understanding of their use of SNT has allowed me to assess the extent to which these tools could enable MEPs to communicate in their working environment

when drafting and amending legislation. MEPs' motivations for using SNT in the workplace reflect factors related to political representation at the EU level as defined in the theoretical framework of this study. Thus, findings constitute suggestive ways in which SNT could be further used by MEPs as tools to:

- democratise lobbying practices in the EP,
- establish a two-way communicative relationship with citizens by raising their own awareness of public opinion,
- reconfigure their relationship with traditional media, putting into question the so-called communication deficit of the EP
- and finally, MEPs could further use SNT as part of their communication resources to initiate a more networked form of representation that includes more systematically the European civil society and European citizens into the legislative process.

Chapter 1 introduces the main concepts that are then discussed in the thesis. The professional role MEPs play as legislators calls for the consideration of their workplace, the organisational communication that takes place in the framework of committee business and the role that the European Civil Society plays in MEPs' legislative work as policy experts. The introduction of new information and communication technologies as part of elected representatives' communication resources has mainly been approached as 'reconnecting' tools between representatives and citizens. The interactive dimension of new technologies, and especially SNT, offers more than one-to-one communication or campaigning advantages to parliamentarians. The knowledge gap that exists when it comes to assessing MEPs' understanding of use of new technologies, their motivations and perceived benefits of SNT more specifically, is emphasised in this chapter.

Chapter 2 introduces the methodology chosen to conduct this study. The exploratory dimension of the study, as well as the interpretive approach taken to conduct the research is articulated. Selected methods – elite interviews with MEPs, their staff, EP officials and lobbyists identified in this study for their early adoption of the technology as well as observation with two MEPs and their staff – are put in perspective with the analytical framework developed in line with the grounded

theory approach taken throughout the research. A detailed explanation of data gathering methods and data analysis as well as the study limitations constitutes this chapter.

Chapter 3 presents an exploratory study of communication practices in the EP from an organisational perspective. This chapter introduces observation findings and plays the role of a contextual framework for a better understanding of communication patterns in the context of legislative activities. After a short presentation of EP formal legislative work processes, observation and interview findings suggest a contextual and organisational framework of communication practices.

Chapter 4 then presents the theoretical concepts put forward in this study. As part of the grounded theory approach taken here, Chapter 4 introduces theories of communication and analytical notions that prove indispensable to exploring the adoption of SNT in the workplace for MEPs. The chapter also presents the analytical framework that is used throughout the theory building process. This analytical framework suggests an a priori model of SNT use for MEPs based on four elements: network awareness, information retrieval, information dissemination and coordination.

Chapter 5 introduces a scoped presentation of SNT use and practices in the EP. It focuses on early adopters' use of SNT and their staff's, and emphasises a number of contextual variables necessary to articulate the categories of use that are presented in the following chapters. Empirical findings are supplemented by secondary literature on general use of SNT in the EP.

Chapter 6 develops the first of the four components of the emergent model of use: network awareness. The exploration of networks formed when using SNT and the creation of ties between actors involved in these networks constitute the core of this chapter. Findings suggest that the use of SNT allows MEPs to raise their network awareness, to the extent that they expand it to a broader civil society. Relying on the concept of the 'strength of weak ties', I argue in this chapter that SNT could allow MEPs to expand their awareness to a broader civil society, thus enabling a democratisation of EP lobbying practices.

Chapter 7 articulates the second component of the model of SNT use for MEPs: information retrieval. Whereas the analytical framework developed in Chapter 4 sees expertise retrieval as an element of SNT use, I argue in Chapter 7 that MEPs better appreciate public opinion when they use SNT, allowing them to use new communicative avenues with European citizens. Limits to expertise retrieval are discussed in the second part of the chapter, in light of the argument articulated in Chapter 6.

Chapter 8 focuses on information dissemination. This chapter is articulated around the argument that informing on the process of legislative activities via SNT – as opposed to informing on the content of legislation – has enhanced the MEP-journalist relationship. The stormy relationship that exists between MEPs and traditional media is emphasised in this chapter where I suggest that SNT could further be used to create a relationship with journalists, beyond the communication deficit that has so far separated them.

Chapter 9 presents the last element of the model: coordination. Whereas internal coordination has been seen as essential in organisational studies that look at SNT use in the workplace, findings call for a broader reflection on the representation paradigm. This chapter looks jointly at legitimate representation (MEPs) and self-authorised representation (European civil society) and their use of SNT as ways to gather and coordinate support on specific issues, and further discusses its impact on the concept of representation.

Finally, the concluding chapter summarises the rationale for this research study, and the findings presented in each chapter. The conclusions are articulated around the key findings of this study, raising questions about political representation at the EU level and the use of SNT as a technology of representation. Directions for future research and a reflection on the contribution of this study to knowledge in the overlapping fields of political communication and organisational studies are also discussed.

## **Chapter 1 - Literature review and knowledge gap**

### **1.1. Summary**

This chapter presents existing literature in an interdisciplinary approach. It defines the role Members of the European Parliament (MEPs) play as elected representatives and it identifies the knowledge gap that exists when it comes to assessing the adoption of Social Networking Tools (SNT) by MEPs in the context of their legislative work. This chapter also presents a research design that aims at filling in the aforementioned knowledge gap and that addresses the following research question: *to what extent could MEPs incorporate SNT as part of their communication resources in engaging with other actors when carrying out their work as legislators?*

### **1.2. Introduction**

This chapter questions and defines the role MEPs play as representatives. It also introduces existing work that has been carried out on the adoption of new ICTs by parliamentarians and more specifically their adoption of SNT. It shows the strong emphasis that has been put on the representative-represented relationship in existing literature and consequently researchers' interest in assessing the potential of SNT – and new ICTs in general – to enable parliamentarians to 'reconnect' with constituents. Thus, I emphasise in this chapter the professional/legislator role MEPs play as European representatives. The importance and relevance of committees as units of analysis is demonstrated in this part of the chapter. Indeed, studies that look at MEPs as legislators generally focus on their voting behaviours and their final votes in plenary (i.e. examination of roll-call votes). These studies also generally explore the potential 'influence' of external actors (lobbyists) leaving aside the process and dynamics of interaction when drafting and amending legislation in parliamentary committees. The third part of this chapter presents the theoretical basis for this study and puts together theories of communication networks and the direct implications for SNT in the EP legislative process. Within this theoretical framework, I argue that there is a need to adopt a more organisational approach to studying dynamics of interaction in the legislative process. Finally, and to sum up, I

demonstrate how this study aims at filling in a knowledge gap that intersects different disciplines and contributes to two major fields: political communication and organisational studies.

### **1.3. Reconsidering the role of MEPs as representatives and the emergence of new ICTs and SNT**

This thesis considers the role MEPs play as elected representatives in a unique, supranational context. I argue here that the definition of representation for MEPs defers from the political representation paradigm in classical terms, as used at the national level for example. This thesis suggests a refined definition of the classical notion of representation in two respects: first, the refinement of the definition lies in the balance between representing and governing, between representing constituents *stricto sensu* and being a legislator. I argue here that MEPs' role as legislators needs to be emphasised as they are increasingly becoming policy experts in their work. Second, when it comes to the representative-represented relationship of representation, the EU context is complex and representing means representing interests of 27 countries' constituents. Besides, in this context, the classical notion of the representative-represented relationship is seen from the legislator's lens where interests are represented in accordance with the predominant role MEPs play as legislators. Therefore, I argue in this chapter that the representative-represented relationship at the EU level relies in part on the classical definition of representation (elected representatives represent voters from their constituencies) but also strongly relies on the legislative role MEPs carry out by representing interests according to policy areas for European citizens who are potentially outside their constituency.

#### *1.3.1 MEPs as legislators, policy expertise and new ICTs*

According to Coleman and Nathanson's (2005) definition of elected representatives, Members of Parliament play three interlinked and inseparable roles: representative, party actor and legislator. Although being a representative is a key role for MEPs, the other roles are equally valuable:



“The *Representative* refers to the Parliamentarian in his or her capacity as an elected political representative, representing the interests and concerns of his/her electors, in the parliamentary assembly. [...] The *Party Actor* on the other hand, has as objectives the interests of the Party as a whole, as well as his or her relative position within it. [...] The third head of the Parliamentarian is the *Legislator*, whose main function is the development, processing, adoption, review and amendment of legislation. The Legislator is interested in efficient, accurate and relevant information exchange, consultation and deliberation among colleagues, with expert inputs where appropriate. The Legislator as law maker and regulator, must be mindful of the potential for distorting influences by interested (mostly external) parties.” (Coleman and Nathanson 2005: 27)

The increased powers of the EP as a co-decision maker on European legislation has forced MEPs to become more and more knowledgeable on issues they work on. As argued by Benedetto (2005), MEPs have had to become policy experts. Along the same line, Coleman and Nathanson’s (2005) definition above calls for policy expertise and a need to be provided with accurate and balanced information. In such context, MEPs need to access a mass of complex, competing and often contradictory information sources to carry out committee business; accessing information has become crucial to their everyday work. Thus, the source of information has become as essential as its validity and reliability. The dynamics that allow MEPs to obtain valuable information is of interest here, as much as the media allowing the acquisition of such information. Marcella et al. (1999: 168-78) concluded that:

“informal contacts were considered to be the most important and reliable source of information for all MEPs. This result [...] includes contacts with various groups, organisations and individuals, both associated with and independent of the European Parliament and respective national parliaments. Constituents, interest groups, professional bodies, trade unions, and business organisations all provide information of varying quality on issues that concern them.”

This tallies with Leston-Bandeira’s (2007) conclusion on committee business. Communication and information sharing are carried out in a very traditional and established way where face-to-face meetings are essential and where

the management of information sharing is not necessarily sustained (Leston-Bandeira 2007). I argue here that the adoption of SNT as part of MEPs' communication patterns may modify existing dynamics of interaction for MEPs when receiving policy expertise for their committee work. The adoption of SNT needs to be assessed in the light of MEPs' growing need to be provided with policy expertise.

From a methodological perspective, policy expertise and therefore committee work have hardly ever been the main focus of analysis when studying MEPs and the EP in general. Most research has taken elected representatives and MEPs as the main focus and as a unit of analysis. The consideration of other valuable units of analysis should be sought:

“the unit of analysis of the MP should be seen as one among other such as PGs [Political Group] or Committees [and] pointing out other functions beyond representation does not mean we should not pay special attention to this one; it merely intends to show that parliaments do far more beyond the function of representation; in particular, it is important to study the impact on the legislative and scrutiny functions further.” (Leston-Bandeira 2007: 668)

The dynamics of communication in the process of legislating in the EP give a fascinating context of research for studying jointly communication that takes place in the workplace and the inevitable political dimension that drives the work achieved in committees. I am interested here in the dynamics of interaction in a workplace, where a network of actors work together, interact and share information for the purpose of drafting and amending legislation<sup>1</sup>.

The overall decision-making process of the European Union (EU) is complex and involves a large number of actors. This is why I have chosen to look at a specific moment during the EU decision-making process, which is the drafting and amending of legislation in EP committees. Committees are essential in the decision-

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<sup>1</sup> This study interchangeably uses the following terms to describe the same process of legislating at the committee level: 'the legislative process'; 'the drafting and amending of reports' and 'committee work'.

making process and have been described as the “legislative backbone” of the EP (Westlake 1994). Committee members adopt draft legislation that has been introduced to the institution as draft reports or opinions (Corbett et al. 2007). The 7<sup>th</sup> legislature of the European Parliament that started in July 2009, counts 20 policy committees – or parliamentary committees – (e.g. Foreign Affairs, Industry, Research and Energy, Women’s Rights and Equality) and 2 subcommittees (Human Rights and Security and Defence). Proposals initiated by the European Commission allow the allocation of legislative work in each committee. Reports are the working documents for everyday work in committees. Rapporteurs – MEPs in charge of reports – play a pivotal role in their committees and carry out a precise and technical work (Corbett et al. 2007: 126). Most legislative work is done at the committee level in the EP. Consequently, it is of interest here to look at communication that occurs in the context of committee work. Thus, and as discussed later in Chapter 2, committee work is considered as a unit of analysis in this study, rather than focusing on MEPs as the central objects of study.

#### 1.3.1.1 Communication in the process of legislating

The work that the European Union is achieving every day is the result of the collaboration and exchange of information between three main institutions: the EP, the Commission and the Council. However, when it comes to drafting and amending draft reports at the committee stage in the EP, the Commission and the Council are hardly involved. The Commission and the Council play a background role in this process:

“The rules provide that for legislative reports, after voting on the amendments but before voting on the proposal as a whole, the Commission be asked to state its position on the amendments and the Council to comment. [...] In practice the Commission hardly ever comments at this stage (it has usually made its approach clear in the preceding committee discussions) and the Council never (as it normally has no position at that stage).” (Corbett et al. 2007: 144)

This process involves mainly MEPs, their staff, members of political groups, committee administrators (EP officials) and external actors such as members of the

European civil society (mainly lobbyists) and to a certain extent European citizens (mainly constituents). The complexity of interactions between actors involved in the decision-making process is commonly studied in political science. For example, the role that lobbyists play on MEPs' decisions on final votes is a well-developed subject of research and although influence is a difficult notion to assess, a number of studies have focused on interest groups in Brussels and their relationship to the EP (Benedetto 2005; Bouwen 2004; Coen 2007; Coen and Richardson 2009). However, decision-making in the EP is generally studied at the *end* of its process, when decisions are made in plenaries (Hix 2002; Hix et al. 2003), and as such, consistency of votes – according to the political group or national party delegation – is one of the main areas of interest (Carrubba and Gabel 1999; Hix 2002). Not much research has been driven towards the dynamics of exchange that exist in committees and even less when it comes to the incorporation of new communicative tools into communication patterns such as SNT.

#### 1.3.1.2 Legislative process and ICT use

As mentioned earlier, the focus of the study (unit of analysis) is upon parliamentary committees where legislation is discussed and debated in its early days and where only a few studies have investigated the impact of introducing new technologies into communication patterns (Leston-Bandeira 2007). Leston-Bandeira notes that:

“committee work is one area that still needs considerable development for the maximisation of the benefits of ICT. [...] committee work is still heavily based on traditional procedures, in terms of circulation of information, summoning of meetings, communication and so on.”  
(Leston-Bandeira 2007: 670)

Shahin and Neuhold (2007) have looked at the introduction of new ICTs in the context of committee work in the EP. As of today, academic literature that addresses the impact of interactive online tools on elected representatives' communication patterns at work – in committees – is very limited (Leston-Bandeira 2007; Leston-Bandeira and Ward 2008; Lindh and Miles 2007). Shahin and Neuhold's study sought to answer the following question: “How do members of EP

standing committees use new technologies in order to, on the one hand, fulfil their legislative role and, on the other hand, live up to their function as ‘representatives’ of citizens’ interests?” (Shahin and Neuhold 2007: 389). Relying on interviews with MEPs, EP officials and MEPs’ assistants, the study remains broad but offers a noteworthy basis for developing further research. It introduces interesting characteristics of new ICTs when applied to the decision-making process of the EP and emphasises the network dimension of a committee, its members, and the way business is carried out:

“the use of new ICTs can help create a networked mentality in political institutions, which acts to level out hierarchies in working methods and patterns. These technologically managed networks are capable of increasing efficiency in decision-making, but are also expected to enhance the role of networking between different actors.” (Shahin and Neuhold 2007: 391)

The importance of the notion of policy expert is repeated in this study (in this case when talking about the market and social sectors):

“MEPs are, on the one hand in need of expertise as regards, for example, the legal details of particular dossiers, but also need to be aware of – and try to find a consensus with – actors playing an important role in the field such as trade union, whose inclusion is crucial in negotiations at the EP level.” (Shahin and Neuhold 2007: 395-6)

Moreover, and in line with the argument developed in this chapter, there is a need to look at external actors or ‘intermediaries’ such as the European civil society when we look at online communication in the context of MEPs’ work in committees. The focus then shifts from direct communication between representatives and citizens to the role that external actors such as the European Civil Society can play in EP committee work. As Wright and Coleman (2012: 209) argue:

“A main focus of the literature on online policy consultation has been on direct relationships between government and individual citizens, but in reality, most attempts by governments to gather policy evidence and seek

the views of grassroots experts are mediated via the third sector non-profit, nongovernmental organizations.”

Back to Shahin and Neuhold’s study on ICT use in committee work, the predominance of the ‘network’ dimension in MEPs’ work as legislators and the importance of social structures are important findings in that study. Indeed, it shows that MEPs rely mostly on information given or sent by a network of known acquaintances in their legislative work and do not have or take time to seek information elsewhere: “it has been discovered that some MEPs rely on their knowledge of the networks and participants in the specific policy sphere” and “parliamentarians often rely on their existing networks to help provide information and opinions.” (Shahin and Neuhold 2007: 400). The social dimension of the network becomes more obvious as Shahin and Neuhold note that MEPs’ selection of information via emails depends mainly on who the sender is. Interestingly, the dynamics of communication between MEPs (and their staff) and interest groups (lobbyists) do not seem to have evolved due to the introduction of new ICTs as a communication resource:

“In general, the conclusions [...] show that MEPs need to be selective in their information input, and that this is still a one-way process, with little attempt made at electronic interaction or discourse between MEPs and lobbying organisations in preparation for committee meetings”. (Shahin and Neuhold 2007: 396)

Shahin and Neuhold conclude their study by highlighting the democratic potential of Web 2.0 technologies as well as the organisational potential. Thus, MEPs are in an increasing need to finding policy expertise as part of their committee work and indications of the increasing network-like structure of interaction allow me to question the potential of adopting communicative tools that embrace the same structure. The following section discusses the second aspect of representation in the EP in light of the classical notion of representation and in direct relation with the expertise-driven/legislator role MEPs play.

### *1.3.2 Political representation and cross border representation*

#### 1.3.2.1 The political representation paradigm

In political science, conceptions of representation have shifted from the traditional principal-agent model to more accurate models of representation (Mansbridge 2003; Urbinati and Warren 2008). For example, Mansbridge (2003) suggests four models of representation: promissory, anticipatory, gyroscopic and surrogate. For example, when defining anticipatory representation, Mansbridge (2003: 518) states that:

“Replacing morality with prudence in the incentive structure of anticipatory representation leads us to judge the process with new normative criteria. It makes us shift our normative focus from the individual to the system, from aggregative democracy to deliberative democracy, from preferences to interests, from the way the legislator votes to the way the legislator communicates, and from the quality of promise-keeping to the quality of mutual education between legislator and constituents.”

Further reflections have considered new forms of representation, distinct from the elected representative model. Urbinati and Warren (2008), and Castiglione and Warren (2006) question the representativeness of informal representation, or self-authorised representation, in the light of traditional political representation. This point is further discussed in Chapter 9 by looking more closely at the role of the European civil society in the legislative process.

When MEPs play their role as legislators, they cannot put aside the role that ties them up to their constituents – representative – and the role that ties them up to their political party – party actor (Coleman and Nathanson 2005). Looking at MEPs as representatives implies more than looking at them for the representative-represented relationship. Pitkin ([1967] 1972) argues that theorising political representation has to take into account different facets of the role of a representative. A representative cannot be solely an expert as he also has to represent citizens’ interests and interests call for less objectively rationalised decisions:

“We need representation precisely where we are not content to leave matters to the expert; we can have substantive representation only where interest is involved, that is, where decisions are not merely arbitrary choices.” (Pitkin [1967] 1972: 212)

Coleman (2005: 180) argues that:

“To represent is to mediate between experience, voice and action; to mediate is to represent the absent in the present. Within the dialectic between representation and mediation lies an acute tension, for the quality of representing depends upon a complex interaction between two relationships: the expressed wishes of the represented and the representative’s informed apprehension of the interests of the represented; and the mediated flow of meanings and intentions between representative and represented.”

Such a conception of representation assumes a two-way relationship between the representative and the represented, a relationship that contradicts the traditional principal-agent model of representation. From aggregative democracy, we have shifted towards deliberative democracy (Dryzek and Niemeyer 2008; Mansbridge 2003) where communication between the representative and the represented is an integral part of representation. The expert role MEPs play as elected representatives is emphasised in representation at the EU level and is an overlap of representation of interests as defined in the classical notion of representation. However, representing at the EU level presupposes more than the constituent-elected representative relationship and rather considers cross-border interests that strongly relate to committee work and therefore to expertise or policy in a given area.

#### 1.3.2.2 MEPs as representatives: cross border representation

We often define the EU and its institutions as a *sui generis* system, a unique institutional system where the EP has become an increasingly powerful elected body. The EU has faced a number of criticisms, mainly related to the legitimacy of its institutions (Beetham and Lord 1998; Farrell and Scully 2007; Schmitt and Thomassen 1999). Even though the EP has continuously been empowered up until the Lisbon Treaty with the extension of the co-decision procedure to most legislative matters – procedure now called the “ordinary legislative procedure” (See (EU 2007)



– a debatable perceived democratic deficit remains (Follesdal and Hix 2005; Majone 2000; Moravcsik 2002). At the same time, a number of researchers argue that a growing communication deficit has taken place in the EU (Anderson and McLeod 2004; C. Meyer 1999). The EP endeavours to appear as a legitimate elected body and still struggles to communicate its work efficiently to the outside world. This study tends to consider that the democratic deficit of the EP (not be mistaken with the democratic deficit of the European institutions as a whole) lies in the ‘inadequate’ definition of representation so far applied to elected representatives in the EP. The uniqueness of the EU and its institutions calls for a refining of the notion of representation in the EP as discussed earlier. On the one hand, and as argued in the previous section, representation in the EP emphasises the role MEPs play as legislators. On the other hand, representing at the EU level embraces a cross border representation in 27 countries. In relation with the legislator role of MEPs, I argue that representation of European interests in the EP should be seen with the lens of policy-driven representation. That is to say that representing citizens’ interests in the EP often rhymes with representing policy area/ committee related interests. For example, an MEP who is member of the committee on Agriculture may represent interests of farmers in his/her constituency and also and foremost all farmers concerned with a specific policy decisions across the 27 Member States. This argument is reflected in the little time dedicated to constituency services in the official EP calendar. MEPs officially dedicate less than 6 working weeks (“Green Week”) a year to being in their constituency<sup>2</sup>. MEPs may represent the interests of their constituents but also, due to their committee related expertise requirements, may represent interests of a cross border population.

In such context, the notion of representation in the EP used here drifts from the represented-representative relationship model to the more complex representation of policy-driven interests in the EU. The notion of constituency services cannot be applied in classical terms in the EP. The role of an MEP strongly implies his/her involvement in committee related work. From a political science perspective, political representation at the EU level can be seen as an overlap of all

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<sup>2</sup> See EP calendar at [www.europarl.europa.eu](http://www.europarl.europa.eu)

models of representation suggested by Mansbridge (2003). It also takes into account Coleman's (2005) definition of representation. The model of representation for MEPs I am arguing for highlights the balance between the roles MEPs can play and emphasises the importance of MEPs' role as legislators. By reconsidering the role of MEPs and by emphasising their legislator role, we also address a knowledge gap in political communication where the use of new ICTs has commonly been approached in terms of the representative-represented relationship.

### 1.3.2.3 Representation and use of ICTs

When it comes to studying the use of ICTs by elected representatives, legislative and/or Internet studies have tended to look at the use of new technologies by parliamentarians by mainly focusing on the representative-represented relationship. The emergence of new information and communication technologies has raised hopes of redesigning communication with citizens and of taking new paths to "reconnect". Hoff (2004a: 6) interestingly problematised the use of ICTs by parliamentarians and indirectly questioned their motivations of use as for the changes that occur in their communication practices:

"the underlying assumption being that if MPs merely replace older technologies with Internet-based applications without changing their communication patterns or use of information resources this will arguable change little more than the pace of communication."

Similarly, Leston-Bandeira argued that: "The question is not anymore whether parliaments are using the Internet, but more in what way this is happening and what impact it is having on parliamentary activity." (Leston-Bandeira 2007: 656). In the past decade or so, studies have shown that the introduction of new ICTs in parliamentarians' communication patterns has led to changes in their communication practices (Cardoso et al. 2004; Hoff 2004; Zittel 2004). Furthermore, it seems to have had added a new level of complexity to their existing means of communications (Shahin and Neuhold 2007). Besides, we hear officials and elected representatives justifying their presence on the Internet – and especially on social platforms such as Facebook or Twitter – by saying that 'they go where people are':

“Consistently, political parties and elected representatives adopted the Internet as a means of keeping up with their competitors, rather than a strategic communication tool (Ward & Gibson 1998, Sednow 1998, Newell 2001). A secondary motive was to demonstrate a level of being modern and up to date (Ward and Gibson 1998).” (Lilleker and Jackson 2009: 3)

A lot of research in this field focuses on the use of interactive tools as a way to reconnect with constituents, considering therefore the representative-represented relationship and more broadly exploring the notion of e-democracy (Dai 2007). New ICTs tools have widely been studied as campaigning tools during different elections in Australia, the UK or European Parliament elections (Elvebakk 2004; Jankowski et al. 2005; Lusoli 2005; Ward and Gibson 1998). When it comes to the use of SNT, studies have emphasised the direct relationship that such tools allow between parliamentarians and their constituents. A study conducted by the Parliament of New Zealand (C. Busby and Bellamy 2011) shows that the campaigning dimension of SNT is strongly exploited by MPs. The study concludes on a critical note by pointing out the tendency to use social network sites as “only broadcast” tools for political communication during election campaigns. In the case of the American Congress (Glassman et al. 2010), a content analysis of tweets sent by Members of Congress during a two-month period concludes that Twitter increases direct communication between members and their constituents and that the interactive dimension of the tool is an added-value. In the UK, Jackson and Lilleker have studied the use of microblogging by UK MPs for its ‘constituent-MP’ relationship dynamics. Their conclusions suggest that microblogging remains a marginal tool in the House of Commons. Both studies (N. Jackson and Lilleker 2009; Lilleker and Koc-Michalska 2011) suggest that MPs are using SNT to present themselves as politicians in a non-traditional way and to reinforce their impression management. Other research suggests that politicians’ use of SNT has been limited to the traditional/conventional way of communication, that is to say broadcasting information rather than engaging (C. Busby and Bellamy 2011; Francoli and Ward 2008; N. Jackson 2008; N. Jackson and Lilleker 2010, 2011). Most of the research mentioned above takes the content of communications – political messages (i.e. blogs posts, tweets, etc.) as a central object of study. This study however does not

intend to analyse political messages but is rather interested in MEPs' understanding of their use of SNT from a politico-organisational perspective.

At the supranational level of the EP, academic research in this area is still very limited. Besides, SNT as communicative tools for parliamentarians are hardly mentioned or explored. Private consultants such as Fleishman-Hillard (2011) have offered overviews of the use of SNT by MEPs by applying survey methods and statistical findings but academic research still needs to be developed.

Thus, the literature review presented here suggests the emphasis is on the representative role of parliamentarians, leaving aside their legislator role when it comes to communicating and to adopting new communicative tool. Because of their need for expertise and their increasingly important role as legislators, it is important to look at MEPs' representative role from an organisational perspective. Besides, the supranational dimension of representation when it comes to studying MEPs' adoption of new ICTs has not been considered. The approach taken here seeks to fill in a knowledge gap and be original in three instances: it defines and emphasises representation in the EP in relation to the legislator role MEPs play. Secondly, it considers MEPs' representation from a cross border perspective where representing interests encompasses geographical interests and policy area interests. Finally, communication that occurs during the legislative process draws on both political and organisational components. Therefore, this study considers the use of new ICTs and more specifically of SNT in the aforementioned role MEPs play by adopting an organisational lens when exploring communication taking place in the process of legislating.

#### **1.4. Organisational communication, communication networks and SNT**

Since the 2009 EP elections, a large number of MEPs have adopted online social networks as part of their communicative practices. First adopted as a campaigning tool for the EP elections, a large number of MEPs have kept using SNT. Nowadays, 70% of MEPs have a Facebook presence, and 38% have a Twitter

account<sup>3</sup>. As discussed earlier, the campaigning potential of SNT has been studied as well as its potential to ‘reconnect’ elected representatives with their constituents. As SNT adoption in the EP is not a marginal phenomenon, the network structure of the tool, as well as its social dimension are of interest in the context of committee work.

#### *1.4.1 Communication networks*

Structures and relationships have increasingly been defined as networks. Castells has come to the conclusion that today’s society – characterised by the rise of the Internet – is a network society (Castells 2000, 2004). A network approach has been applied to many different domains and areas of research (biology, sociology, or politics) and Hardt and Negri (2004: 142) have justified such an approach by stating that:

“we see networks everywhere we look – military organizations, social movements, business formations, migration patterns, communications systems, physiological structures, linguistic relations, neural transmitters, and even personal relationships. It is not that networks were not around before or that the structure of brain has changed. It is that the network has become a common form that tends to define our ways of understanding the world and acting in it.”

The multidisciplinary origins of networks make it sometimes difficult to define what they are. The notion of network in social sciences has been studied since the 1930s (Scott 2000) but only became a legitimate methodological subject of research in the 1960s with research led by Radcliff-Brown, Nadel, Mitchell or Granovetter (Cavanagh 2007).

Communication in committees is in constant evolution as actors involved in the legislative process regularly change, and the settings of communication and the multiple means of communication vary. Such a context calls for a flexible approach where social structures are not considered as rooted, and where communication

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<sup>3</sup> Data gathered by the author late in 2011. Twitter figures obtained in Fleishman-Hillard’s Second EP Digital Trends Survey 2011, retrieved <http://www.epdigitaltrends.eu/>

practices are seen as constantly evolving. Theorists such as Garfinkel have been considered for this study. Indeed, Garfinkel's work has looked at naturally occurring contingencies as important occurrences which are worth taking into account when studying social structures (Rawls 2008). This is in line with the adoption of an interpretive approach to studying organisational communication in committees.

#### *1.4.2 Communication network theories*

“Communication networks are the patterns of contact that are created by the flow of messages among communicators through time and space [...] These networks take many forms in contemporary organizations, including personal contact networks, flows of information within and between groups [...]” (Monge and Contractor 2003: 3)

Applying a network structure to the legislative process of the EP is conceivable in today's network society: “Key to the changing organizational landscape is the emergence of network forms of organization (Monge, 1995) as an integral part of the coevolution of the new “network society” (Castells, 1996).” (Monge and Contractor 2003: 4). The complex process of interaction in committees, which involves a large number of internal and external actors, offers an interesting setting of study of communication networks. What is at stake in this study is the adoption of a new communicative tool that creates its own communicative network but investigated in perspective with other existing communication networks formed when carrying out legislative work. The perceived benefits of using such communicative tools within an organisational context and as part of a broader range of means of communication are to be explored. The application of communication network theories to communication in committees helps define an analytical framework for the study. This study is interested in exploring MEPs's understanding of using a communicative tool and therefore, the cognitive structure of networks are also essential.

Many studies have analysed online social networks, mainly by defining and analysing the structure of the network, the centrality of the nodes, the influence embedded in the notion of centrality in a network, the density or the size of the network (Garton et al. 1999; Lewis et al. 2008; Mislove et al. 2007). The analysis of

the structure of an online social network and the position of nodes (actors) in the network is not central to this study as I am interested here in what motivates actors to use SNT. The structure of the network comes only as a secondary element that may allow the identification of actors involved. With the introduction of the Internet and interactive ICTs in the workplace, the speed of information exchange and the amount of exchanged information have dramatically increased. In organisational studies, SNT have become a serious object of research as presented in Chapter 4 (Richter and Koch 2008; Zhao and Rosson 2009). The increasing need for expertise that MEPs have in their work as legislators is intrinsically tied up to their other functions they carry out as representatives and party actors but it also justifies to looking at MEPs' workplace from an organisational perspective where communication occurs in relation with the legislative process

Thus, I investigate the extent to which MEPs could incorporate SNT as part of their communication resources in carrying out their work as legislators by exploring their motivations for adopting SNT as well as their perceived benefits of using these tools when communicating in the workplace. From that, I aim at drafting an emergent model of use of SNT in the specific context of legislative work in EP committees.

### **1.5. Research design**

The context of the EP is commonly studied in political science. However the complex dynamics of interaction that exist in the early stage of the legislative process in committees – that consequently lead to a final decision on legislation – remain hardly studied. The process of communication in committees, which leads to a final vote in plenaries, and the adoption of SNT, characterised by their network structure, are central questions to this study. Committees' organisational communication constantly evolves and includes a large number of actors as well as a complex set of means to communicate. In this perspective, the adoption of SNT needs to be explored. The assessment of the benefits of use of SNT by actors involved in the process is one way of exploring it. An analysis of communication dynamics and patterns of information retrieval in relation to the European legislative process is central to this research.

The assessment of the extent to which MEPs could incorporate SNT as part of their communication resources when carrying out their work as legislators is taken from the approach of looking at early adopters' understanding of their use of SNT. Looking at early adopters allows the exploration of emergent communicative trends rather than general users'/non-users' trends. Such assessment presupposed that two subsequent questions are addressed. First, an exploration of general communication patterns of actors involved in the legislative process in committees is needed. Thus, organisational communication in committees needs to be characterised. Actors involved in the process, their role, and their way of communicating with each other is identified. Addressing this question also suggests that the communicative resources available to them during the process of drafting and amending draft reports are known, as well the settings that allow such communication to happen. Thus, the framing of communication dynamics in committees facilitates the assessment of the adoption of a new tool. Second, the purposes of use of SNT are of interest in this research. Indeed, the focus is on MEPs' motivations and perceived benefits of using the tools. Therefore, it is important to look at how and why MEPs – and other actors involved in the process of drafting and amending legislation – use SNT in their work environment. The following question needs therefore to be addressed: for what purposes do early adopters use SNT in their role as legislators?

#### *1.5.1. Assessing the extent of adoption of a new communicative tool*

As stated in the previous section, this thesis analyses MEPs' motivations and perceived benefits of using the tools in their workplace. Interestingly, legislative studies and Internet studies that look at parliamentarians' use of the Internet do not reflect their perceptions of the technology and do not explore how they have included the Internet into their communication patterns in their work environment. Referring to the use of digital media by UK MPs in their representative role, a Hansard Society recent study concluded in that sense that:

“A gap exists in the body of knowledge for a broader analysis of how MPs themselves perceive the internet, their use of web-based media in the broadest sense and the impact that they perceive it to have on their communication with constituents.” (Williamson et al. 2009: 6).



Once again, the focus of this thesis is upon committees and direct communication with constituents is not directly at stake. Nevertheless, Williamson et al.'s study points at the lack of consideration of perceptions and cognitive structures when evaluating Internet adoption by parliamentarians. Besides, it is important to note that it is not the aim of this study to focus on the content of communications but rather to understand MEPs' motivations for using SNTs and their understanding of the impact of such use upon their work as legislators. Thus, one way of assessing the extent to which a technology could be incorporated in MEPs' communication patterns is by looking at their understanding (motivations of use and perceived benefits) of using the tool.

### **1.6. Conclusion**

This research is interdisciplinary and at the crossroad of separate but complementary disciplines. It brings together a political context – the legislative process of the EP, its actors – MEPs as well as all other actors involved in this political context, and an information and communication structure limited to the aforementioned legislative process in parliamentary committees. The aim of this research is to enhance our understanding of MEPs' motivations when adopting SNT and their perceived benefits when they incorporate these tools into their communication patterns. The assessment of the potential of these tools as communicative tools when engaging with actors involved in their legislative work is at stake. The framework of this research is fairly original and unique and the dynamics of interaction in EP committees are very specific and thus do not allow generalisation. The focus made on people's perceptions of the benefits of using the tools, as well as a special interest in the motivations of use justify the definition of this study as an exploratory and interpretive one. The following chapter explores the methodology chosen to conduct such exploratory study of SNT adoption by MEPs.

## Chapter 2 - Methodology

### 2.1. Summary

This chapter presents the methodological framework taken to conduct this study. After presenting the research method design, I describe each research method chosen and their implications for the study, keeping in mind the research question introduced earlier: *to what extent could MEPs incorporate SNT as part of their communication resources in engaging with other actors when carrying out their work as legislators?* The third part of the chapter presents the strategy taken to analyse the data and its relation with the analytical framework discussed in the first part of the chapter.

### 2.2. Research design

#### 2.2.1. *An exploratory study of MEPs' communication patterns*

Two elements make this study an exploratory one: (a) the unique context of research – communication in a *sui generis* supranational body – and (b) the early stage of interdisciplinary research on SNT at the crossroads of organisational studies, IS, legislative studies and political communication. Indeed, the dynamics of the EP's decision-making and the specificities of internal and external communication are unique in the EP. This institution can hardly be compared to any other legislative body, due to its supranational dimension and its composition (See Appendix 3 for a presentation of the composition and powers of the EP). Therefore, general theories of communication applied to legislative studies need to be adapted to the specific context of EP's legislative process. Besides, the introduction of new communicative tools needs to be assessed in perspective with and enlightened with the social and organisational context within which those tools are incorporated. This is why a qualitative approach to studying the adoption of new communicative tools by MEPs has been favoured for this study. Secondly, we are still at an early stage of research in a field at the crossroads of Information Systems (specifically Internet studies), organisational studies, political communication and legislative studies. SNT have only emerged as communication tools a few years ago and their use in the

workplace has been explored in a limited number of studies (DiMicco et al. 2008; Efimova and Grudin 2007; Huh et al. 2007; A. Jackson et al. 2007; P. Meyer and Dibbern 2010; Riemer and Richter 2010; Skeels and Grudin 2009; Zhao and Rosson 2009). Such studies can be used as a basis for further reflection when researching parliamentarians' communication in the workplace. However, the workplace as defined in organisational studies differs from the workplace as seen in parliaments. For all these reasons, there is a need to adopt research methods and a research design that can throw light on a specific case. This is why I have decided to adopt a *theory-building* strategy, or grounded theory approach, where existing theories help design a model that fits the specific and unique case of drafting legislation in EP committees and where the setting of the EP can be seen as a case study:

“[T]here are times when little is known about a phenomenon [...] building theory from case study research is most appropriate in the early stages of research on a topic or to provide freshness in perspective to an already researched topic.” (Eisenhardt 1989: 548)

Here, empirical data does not play the positivist role of testing hypotheses but rather helps to develop constructs and build theory:

“a priori specification of constructs can also help to shape the initial design of theory-building design. Although this type of specification is not common in theory-building studies to date, it is valuable because it permits researchers to measure constructs more accurately. If these constructs prove important as the study progresses, then researchers have a firmer empirical grounding for the emergent theory.” (Eisenhardt 1989: 536)

This research is not quantitative and does not aim at being statistically representative or to be generalisable to an entire population (i.e. all Members of Parliament). The sampling of the unit of data collection has not been defined upon statistical considerations. Instead theoretical sampling was favoured. Theory-building in case study research “relies on theoretical sampling (i.e. cases are chosen for theoretical, not statistical reasons (Glaser and Strauss, 1967) [...] The goal of theoretical sampling is to choose cases which are likely to replicate or extend the emergent theory.” (Eisenhardt 1989: 537) Sampling will be discussed in greater

detail in the following section. Besides, as discussed later in this chapter, units of data collection are individuals who were selected specifically on the basis of their early adoption of SNT.

The methodological framework of this research is strongly based on Glaser and Strauss' (Glaser and Strauss 1967) definition of grounded theory in Social Sciences. Interestingly, it reflects interpretive research principles in IS:

“The research methods appropriate to generating valid interpretive knowledge are field studies, as these examine humans within their social settings. Following on the ontological belief that reality is socially constructed, the interpretive researcher avoids imposing externally defined categories on a phenomenon. Instead of the researcher coming to the field with a well-defined set of constructs and instruments with which to measure the social reality, the interpretive researcher attempts to derive his or her constructs from the field by in-depth examination of and exposure to the phenomenon of interest.” (Orlikowski and Baroudi 1991: 14)

This piece of research is as an exploratory study of MEPs' perceptions of their adoption of a new communicative tool. It draws mainly upon elite interviews, and in-depth exploration of backstage communication practices in the process of legislating in the EP. These methods of investigation assist in understanding the general communication settings in relation to MEPs' perceptions and cognition relating to their adoption of new communicative tools. Such an approach, as discussed later in this chapter, results in a better and deeper understanding of internal communicative practices and a more nuanced analysis of findings on the ways in which legislators could adopt SNT in the EP.

As this study aims at understanding and assessing the extent to which SNT could be used as part of MEPs' communication resources in their legislative work, it has become crucial to look into communication network theories and their properties in the studied context. Secondly, it is important to bear in mind that the setting of this study implies a workplace and organisational communication. That is why I have also found of relevance organisational studies that have studied the adoption of SNT in the workplace. Although these studies, and any theory resulting from them,

do not directly apply, their consideration as well as looking at MEPs' work and communication patterns when drafting and amending legislation (See Chapter 3) help to assemble an analytical framework that guides the rest of the theory building process. Finally, and as argued by Glaser & Strauss (1967) and Silverman (2006), grounded theory suggests a work in process and the collection of empirical data is an essential part of the process. Constructs are suggested at the start of the process with the elaboration of the analytical framework, but these constructs will gradually change through the collection of empirical data and through its first analysis. By the end of the process, initial constructs might change dramatically, giving place to empirically based constructs. Such an approach is not without risks of bias and dependence upon preconceived ideas in the field of research. Adopting a grounded theory approach raises issues in that sense and it has been constantly discussed by theorists (Dey 1993; Glaser and Strauss 1967; Urquhart et al. 2010). When doing qualitative research and when adopting a grounded theory approach, researchers acknowledge their subjectivity in researching the field and reject the idea of conducting research with an 'empty head'. As stated by Dey (1993: 65):

“There is a difference between an open mind and empty head. To analyse data, we need to use accumulated knowledge, not dispense with it. The issue is not whether to use existing knowledge, but how. Our problem is to find a focus, without committing ourselves prematurely to a particular perspective and so foreclosing options for our analysis. The danger lies not in having assumptions but in not being aware of them [...]”

### *2.2.2. Interpretive approach in IS research*

The interpretive approach in IS is intrinsically linked to grounded theory in Social Sciences. As Gregor (2006: 615) puts it, “the interpretivist tradition steers researchers toward a different outlook, where the primary goal is not to develop theory that is testable in a narrow sense (although its validity and credibility may still be assessed)” but rather to understand the subjects studied in their context. The interpretive approach in IS finds its place between two other major approaches. First, the positivist approach that is used “primarily to test theory, in an attempt to increase predictive understanding of phenomena.” (Orlikowski and Baroudi 1991: 5) Secondly, “critical studies aim to critique the status quo, through the exposure of

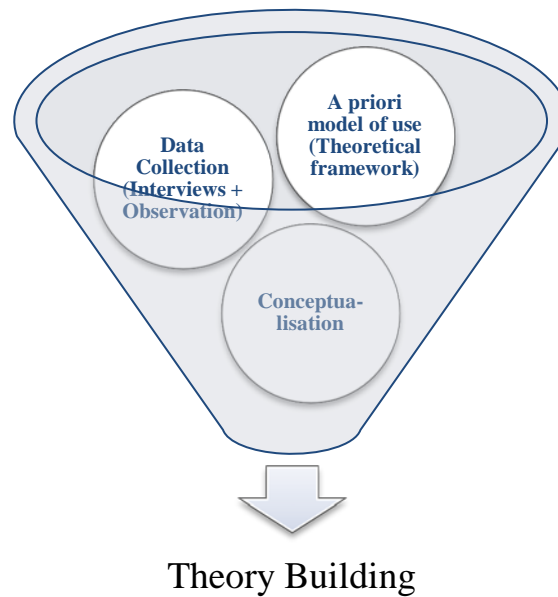
what are believed to be deep-seated, structural contradictions within social systems, and thereby to transform these alienating and restrictive social conditions.” (Orlikowski and Baroudi 1991: 6) Such approaches are not suitable for this research as reconsidering and challenging existing theories is not at stake. Besides, the unique framework of this study and the early stage of research on SNT do not allow the reconsideration of existing theories. Rather, in my case, theory is yet to be defined and therefore justifies the adoption of an interpretive approach.

The analytical framework that is developed as an a priori categorisation of constructs (Chapter 4) is then tested with different sources of empirical data. As discussed later, the multiplicity of empirical data sources – interviews and observation – makes research findings stronger:

The triangulation made possible by multiple data collection methods provides stronger substantiation of constructs and hypotheses. [...] The qualitative data are useful for understanding the rationale or theory underlying relationships revealed in the quantitative data or may suggest directly theory which can then be strengthened by quantitative support. (Eisenhardt 1989: 538)

The a priori concepts developed as part of the analytical framework are then put in perspective with empirical data, where new and modified concepts emerge. This process is made possible by analysing the data gathered on the field and by creating categories that can be descriptive but most importantly conceptual. The conceptual categories are grounded in the analytical framework developed earlier in the process. (For more information on conceptualisation, see (Bryman and Burgess 1994: 219).) The diagram below summarises the research design of this study:

**Figure 1 Theory Building Research Design**



### *2.2.3. Research methods, unit of data collection and unit of data analysis*

Two qualitative methods have been consequently chosen to conduct this research, with the objective of answering as accurately as possible my research question. Semi-structured interviews with MEPs, their staff, EP officials and lobbyists have enabled me to explore aspects of the nature of use of SNT and the motivations and perceived benefits of using these tools in the context of legislative work. Observation of two MEPs and their staff during committee and political group weeks is the complementary method chosen to help understand communication patterns in the workplace. The unit of data collection is defined as individuals who have adopted SNT at an early stage. The sampling process will be developed in the following sections. Committee work was selected as the unit of data analysis as the dynamics around such work (when drafting reports in committees) is central to this study. Thus, the adoption of SNT as tools of exchange of information and communication is to be investigated in such context. As Whiteman (1995: 3) noted in his exploration of communication flow in the American Congress:

A full understanding of communication within the contemporary Congress requires [...] an **enterprise perspective** on congressional decision-making. The first assumption is that the congressional enterprise, rather than the individual member, has become the most appropriate unit of analysis.

#### 2.2.4. *Validity, reliability and triangulation of research methods*

It has been argued for a very long time that qualitative research did not offer strong criteria of reliability or validity as it does not follow systematic procedures of research as quantitative and positivist research does. However, it has also been argued that validity and reliability can be assessed in qualitative studies. I suggest in this chapter that the thorough description of the research process and detailed explanations of the methods adopted to analyse data contribute to satisfying the reliability of this study. Moreover, the emphasis put on the necessity of a theoretical framework contributes to the reliability of qualitative work. As argued by Moisander and Valtonen in Silverman (2006: 282), “[...] paying attention to ‘theoretical transparency’ through making explicit the theoretical stance from which the interpretation takes place and showing how this produces particular interpretation and excludes others” allow to meet reliability criteria in qualitative research. Thus, the theoretical framework discussed earlier is directly linked to a grounded theory approach but it also contributes to making this research’s criteria reliable. Second, the validity of the research needs to be assessed. Validity is intrinsically related to the triangulation of research methods. Indeed, as validation is generally seen as the possibility to replicate research conditions and variables in a systematic way, qualitative research does not allow such falsifiability. I would argue here that the social world that we study needs to be seen as a scene that is hardly steady and where changes occur constantly. Silverman (2006: 290-91) argues that there are two forms of validation that can be used in qualitative research:

“1 Comparing different kinds of data (e.g. quantitative and qualitative) and different methods (e.g. observation and interviews) to see whether they corroborate one another. This form of comparison, called **triangulation**, derives from navigation, where different bearings give the correct position of an object 2 Taking one’s finding back to the subjects being studied. Where these people verify one’s findings, it is argued, one can be more confident of their validity. This method is known as **respondent validation**.”

As much as the combination of these two forms of validation would improve the validity of the study, the second suggestion – respondent validation – has not



been adopted here. Indeed, researchers need to consider their options when doing research and, above all, they need to take into account the realities of the field. Seeking validation by each respondent would have meant that all MEPs, assistants, EP officials and lobbyists would have been contacted once for interviews, and a second time for validation. The reality of researching elites makes such process hardly feasible (see section ‘Access to elite and researcher’s identity’ below). Obtaining a time slot out of MEPs’ schedules has been a constant and repetitive task where numerous emails and phone calls had to be included in preparing the field. Replicating such scheme of contacts after having conducted first interviews, and follow-up interviews in some cases, would have been unfeasible.

On the other hand, the first method suggested by Silverman – triangulation of research methods – has been applied to this study. The combination of interviews and observation has helped corroborate a number of research findings and invalidate others. Observation itself has allowed the collection of two types of data: direct observations and reported words. In some cases, reported words obtained during observation have validated some direct observations and vice-versa. Besides, interviews with a large range of actors involved in the process of drafting and amending legislation have allowed a steady validation of data. As Denzin and Lincoln put it in Silverman (2006: 292):

“[...] ‘interview and field data can be combined... to make better sense of the other’. Triangulation, from this perspective, is not a way of obtaining a ‘true’ reading but ‘is best understood as a strategy that adds rigor, breadth, complexity, richness and depth to any inquiry’.”

Although the multiplication of empirical cases would have strengthened this research design and the quality of grounded theory consequently emerging, the design described in this chapter nevertheless offers a strong framework for an exploratory study of the adoption of a new communicative tool by MEPs when they carry out their legislative work. As argued by Glaser & Strauss (1967: 30):

“A single case can indicate a general conceptual category or property; a few more cases can confirm the indication. [...] generation by comparative analysis requires a multitude of carefully selected cases, but the

pressure is *not* on the sociologist to “know the whole field” or to have all the facts “from a careful random sample”. His job is not to provide a perfect description of an area, but to develop a theory that accounts for much of the relevant behaviours.”

#### *2.2.5. Ethical considerations*

Before conducting interviews and observation in the EP in Brussels during Spring 2011 and Winter 2012, the University of Leeds’ Ethics Committee granted me with its approval for empirical research<sup>4</sup>. Thus, the specific conditions of research, including the fact that I was about to interview and observe public figures, were acknowledged. Once participants were approached and had agreed to participate, they were asked to read carefully through an information sheet that was sent to them and were asked to sign a consent form (See Appendix 1). Prior to observation, the two MEPs and their staff were informed of the ongoing research from the start and were given a very similar information sheet as the interviewees and were also asked to sign a consent form (See Appendix 1). Participants, in both cases – observation and interviews – were able to withdraw from the study at any time. The data has been anonymised as seen in Table 1 and therefore participants are not identifiable. Finally, no sensitive or upsetting topics were discussed during the interviews or the observation phases (i.e. controversial political issues). What was covered by the interviews and the observation was related to communication practices, the use of new technologies and changes in communication patterns.

#### *2.2.6. Limitations to research methods*

This study is exploratory and therefore does not intend to be generalisable to all MEPs or other legislative contexts than the European Parliament. Due to the early stage of research in the multiple fields of legislative studies, IS and organisational studies, the attempt here has been to develop a model from a specific context of research, enabling therefore further research in the field. This research was first designed to include multiple case studies that might have generated a clear

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<sup>4</sup> PVAC & Arts Joint Faculty Research Ethics Committee’s Approval Reference: PVAR 10-012, 18 January 2011.

conceptual framework. Indeed, the choice for the unit of data analysis was a report. It would have allowed me to follow the legislative process from the beginning to the end of drafting and amending a report. Unfortunately, it has been very difficult to get access to the EP and more specifically to an MEP who would have been in charge of a report at the time of data collection. Too many unmanageable variables were combined, limiting significantly the chances to choose a report as unit of data analysis. First, as explained later in the ‘data collection’ section of this chapter, getting access to MEPs to conduct observational work has been tedious and MEPs who eventually accepted to be observed were not in charge of reports at the time. Secondly, the timeline for report allocation is fairly random and prone to political decisions. These decisions are taken within political groups and are not necessarily made public. Thus, the allocation of rapporteurship is not made public prior to first discussions in committee. Finally, although the multiplication of empirical cases would have strengthened this research design and the quality of grounded theory consequently emerging, the design described in this chapter nevertheless offers a strong framework for an exploratory study of the adoption of a new communicative tool by MEPs in their legislative duties. As argued by Glaser & Strauss (1967: 30):

A single case can indicate a general conceptual category or property; a few more cases can confirm the indication. [...] generation by comparative analysis requires a multitude of carefully selected cases, but the pressure is *not* on the sociologist to “know the whole field” or to have all the facts “from a careful random sample”. His job is not to provide a perfect description of an area, but to develop a theory that accounts for much of the relevant behaviours.

## 2.3. Data collection<sup>5</sup>

### 2.3.1. Access to elite and researcher's identity

“Unless you are already known in the organization or the industry, you are likely to be in the position of ‘cold calling’ the organization.”  
(Hartley 1994: 216)

This statement could not be more accurate in the framework of the EP. We are talking here of a political body that receives hundreds of academic requests similar to mine every month. Graduates students doing research on MEPs and the EP with a political science lens are numerous. It is therefore essential to make a difference in contacting interviewees. In my case, mentioning my former professional experience within the institution has proven to facilitate access. It had become clear after a few weeks of contacting MEPs that my experience within the EP had made a difference as a number of respondents mentioned the fact that they noticed I used to work in the EP. A feeling of somehow ‘being one of them’ has allowed some doors to open more easily.

Secondly, one other crucial aspect of getting access was simply the physical access to EP buildings. As a visitor in the EP, one has to wear a ‘visitor’ badge that does not give access to the buildings unless you are accompanied at all times by an MEP assistant or an EP official. Thus, one’s doings are very limited and depend upon a third party. One way of avoiding that was to apply for a ‘study visit’ access to the institution. That meant that for a month, I would be affiliated to a Directorate-General (DG) and would be provided with a ‘trainee’ badge, giving me access to all buildings at all times. As trivial as a badge can sound, it did make a difference in getting access to the institution. In her observation of the European Commission, Bellier makes reference to the colour of one’s badge in the institution as ‘symbolic identification’. She thus states (2002: 12):

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<sup>5</sup> Data gathering and data analysis are inextricably linked and there has been a constant interplay of the two processes throughout this research. However, for the sake of clarity, data collection and data analysis are described separately as well as the two methods chosen to conduct this research.

“Access can be negotiated in a contractual or in a symbolic form. The symbolic identification doubtlessly simplifies the displacement within the field of research. The badge given to me in the EC, a small blue-colored plastic card featuring my picture and an expiration date, was a door-opener which cleared my status to my “observers”, whom I wanted to observe, too. The little tag had the power to suppress questions and to give a freedom of circulation inside and outside the EC.”

Finally, my role as an observer in this study was overt. From the start of the observation, MEP and their staff were informed of the ongoing research and of its purposes. Covert research implies ethical issues that were not necessary in this setting. MEPs are public figures and therefore, one can expect openness and transparency that do not require covert work. Besides, an observation of communication patterns would have been physically difficult – if not impossible – if the role of the observer was not stated from the beginning of the observation phase.

### 2.3.2. *Informants’ and gatekeepers’ roles when doing research in EP*

My former professional experience within the institution and my acquaintance with a number of ‘insiders’ have strongly facilitated access and ensured that fieldwork would go smoothly. There were two categories of insiders who proved themselves indispensable for this research: *informants* and *gate-keepers*. One might see the two roles as slightly similar but in the case of this study, informants and gatekeepers have played different but complementary roles in getting access to the institution as to ensure the completion of observation and interviews. In some cases, the same person played both roles at different times during the research.

The remoteness of doing research outside the EP, and for that matter, in a different country, has made it very difficult to follow the EP’s day-by-day activities and its evolving and ongoing political developments. *Informants* are therefore essential. Dexter describes:

“[...] *key informants* as ideally... individuals who have not only proved themselves well informed and well connected, but have demonstrated a capacity to adopt the standpoint of the investigator.

Informing him of rumours and coming events, suggesting secondary informants, preparing the way, advising on tactics and tact, securing additional data on their own, and assisting the anthropologist in numerous ways.” (Dexter 2006: 20)

Thanks to these informants, I was kept aware of developments and most importantly, I was advised on whom to contact for interviews and/or observation. Those informants had a strong knowledge of internal functioning and internal dynamics and their help has proven to be indispensable when doing remote research from Leeds, as well as once on the field in Brussels.

Furthermore, correspondence alone proved to be insufficient and somehow inadequate for requesting access to an MEP’s office for observation. Thus, *gatekeepers* have had the additional merit of offering direct access to MEPs for observation and interviews. As stated by Hartley (1994: 216):

“deciding on who are the critical ‘gate-keepers’ to organizational research is important. These are the people (there may be several) who are influential in deciding whether you will be allowed access, for how long, and who can introduce you to useful informants.”

For example, in one case, an official I worked with while doing my traineeship arranged a prior meeting with an MEP, only for me to introduce myself and discuss my research. At this informal meeting, the MEP showed interest in my research and was keen on being part of it. He kindly offered to let me come back to the EP and observe him and his staff for a week. Thus, MEP B was scheduled for a week of observation. An additional week was then arranged with his assistant via email. For the second case of observation, an MEP assistant helped me get access. She knew of an MEP from her national party delegation who was very active online and an ardent user of SNT and contacted her on my behalf. This assistant proved to be extremely important as a gatekeeper but also as an informant as thanks to her, the second observation with MEP A was agreed on and scheduled for two weeks. Her presence in the EP, while conducting fieldwork, was useful as she also advised me on the people to contact to obtain interviews with other MEPs and/or assistants.

### 2.3.3. *Reflexivity*

Qualitative research is always interpretive. Fieldwork was conducted within a social context and I, as a researcher, was part of this social context when collecting data. There is no need here to seek a perfectly objective and positivist setting of research where the researcher does not interfere in the studied context. On the contrary, I acknowledge here that as a researcher, my presence and my participation in the conduct of the research in the field may have had an impact on the data collected throughout fieldwork. My role was not limited to a ‘fly on the wall’ type of researcher and interactions with studied subjects did occur. Thus, “once we abandon the idea that the social character of research can be standardized out or avoided by becoming a ‘fly on the wall’ or a ‘full participant’, the role of the researcher as active participant in the research process becomes clear.” (Hammersley and Atkinson 2007: 17). Consequently, a constant awareness of reflexivity issues that would potentially impact on empirical data has been maintained and findings presented in this thesis necessarily reflect reflexivity limitations.

### 2.3.4. *Interviews*

#### 2.3.4.1. Interviewing elites: Purposes

Interviews aimed to understand the purposes of MEPs’ SNT use by exploring their motivations and perceptions of the benefits of using these tools. Interviews with MEPs as well as their staff were necessary to address the research question and interviews with officials and actors of the European civil society enabled a bigger picture of the adoption of SNT and its potential as a communicative tool in the legislative context.

My knowledge of the institution, its functioning and its mechanics have allowed me to focus on the substantive content of interviewing rather than asking for basic clarifications on EP committees for instance. As argued by Dexter (2006: 26) when discussing elite interviewing:

“[...] Interviews may well lead to valuable analyses of legislatures; but if so, it will be because of one or the other (or both) of the following factors: either the interviewer will have had a great deal of relevant previous

experience which enables him to interpret what he hears and ask meaningful supplementary questions, or the interviewer will be able to observe and/or take part in the group life of some legislators or lobbyists so that he comes to know what is meaningful to ask or to record.”

The semi-structured interviews aimed at learning about three different but related aspects of communication when using SNT: the nature of use, the purposes of use and the perceived benefits. Thus, interviews remained general open questions that focused on those three aspects (See questions in Appendix 2). Specific and rather narrow questions were avoided as much as possible as they would have limited the interviewee’s freedom to explicate important points: “In preparing any sort of interview guide on design for study, it is safer to suggest asking about the moderately general rather than the particular, unless one is trying to test rather than discover.” (Dexter 2006: 75) This goes in line with the methodology chosen for this research – grounded theory – where I have not intended to test hypotheses but rather aimed to build theory.

#### 2.3.4.2. Interview sampling

The choice of interviewees has been made on the basis of two considerations. First, as discussed earlier, interview sampling has followed the grounded theory approach taken to conduct this study. As discussed by Glaser (1978: 45) researchers

“go to the group which they believe will maximize the possibilities of obtaining data and leads for more data on their question. They will also begin by talking to the most knowledgeable people to get a line on relevancies and leads to track down more data and where and how to locate oneself for a rich supply of data.”

Thus, MEPs who were interviewed were not necessarily representative of the overall EP; no statistical considerations have been taken such as country, political party, gender, consideration of age, etc. This choice is justified by the theoretical sampling favoured here and is supported by Dexter (2006: 43) who explains that:



“one of the important differences between elite and specialized interviewing, on the one hand, and survey interviewing on the other, is that in elite and specialized interviewing it is not usually possible to determine by any mechanical method who should be interviewed. The population cannot be satisfactorily randomized or stratified in advance; and different interviewees make quite different and unequal contributions to the study.”

Access to the field, as discussed earlier, and the help of informants and gatekeepers have strongly impacted the sampling of interviewees. Secondly, the adoption of SNT in time has been the second consideration for interviews sampling. Early adopters, following diffusion of innovation theory, are defined in this study as the population of MEPs who have adopted SNT at an early stage. Early adopters are described as such for being the first to trying new ideas or using new tools. In researching emergent communicative trends, it is highly valuable to look at most innovative users (Dutton and Meyer 2009; Dutton 2013) as they are likely to embody trends to come. Thus, 55% of MEPs were on Facebook in April 2010 and 31% were on Twitter. In 2012, 70% were on Facebook and 38% on Twitter. The selection of MEPs was made in 2010 and active MEPs – at the time – were first considered. Europatweets<sup>6</sup> – tweet aggregator – has been a useful indicator to select interviewees as it has given an up-to-date ranking of MEPs’ activity on Twitter at the time of interviewee sampling. Thus, the primary selection criteria was MEPs’ online activity on Twitter (cross-checked with their presence on Facebook). Selected MEPs also had to be permanent members of at least one parliamentary committee (See Table 1). Their political affiliation, country of origin, gender and age were not considered as selective criteria. However, a fair representation of each of these variables has been sought. Thus, 70 MEPs were contacted via email or by post in November-December 2010. 18 MEPs responded positively to the request, giving a 26% positive response rate. Out of the 18 interviews with MEPs, 9 were conducted with the MEPs themselves and 9 were conducted with assistants or staff based in

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<sup>6</sup> Europatweets.eu “is a service that connects the public with politics, and promotes better and more transparent communications between voters and Members of Parliament through open conversations”, retrieved on <http://www.europatweets.eu/>, December 2011.

Europatweets has been used only as an indicator and limitations to using Europatweets need to be acknowledged as the platform is based on manual data gathering and therefore limits the reliability of the platform as a source for selection (informal discussion with Henri Lastenouse, creator of Europatweets, Brussels, May 2011).

Brussels. 14 interviews were conducted face-to-face in January, April, May and June 2011. 2 interviews were sent back to me by email and one other interview was conducted by phone. One interview was conducted on the phone where both the initial interview and the follow-up interview were done at the same time as it occurred late in the process of data gathering (December 2011). Finally, 2 follow-up interviews were conducted, one in December 2011 on the phone, and one face-to-face in February 2012.

All EP officials contacted by email in the first place accepted to meet me for an interview or to answer questions by phone. At the time of the research, only two committee secretariats had started to use SNT for their committee (i.e. creation of a profile for the committee on SNT)<sup>7</sup>. Early adopters in committee secretariats were included in the empirical research, as well as officials from DG Communication (DG COMM), who have facilitated online chats for MEPs and who are responsible for EP's official presence on SNT. One interview with an official of DG Innovation and Technological Support (DG ITEC) played a validating role by seeking specific information on newest provisions of new technologies to MEPs by the EP. Thus, 6 interviews were conducted with EP officials. Three EP officials were interviewed face-to-face in January 2011 and April 2011. A member of a committee secretariat was interviewed by phone in September 2011, and a follow-up interview was conducted face-to-face in February 2012. An informal chat with one EP official of a committee secretariat<sup>8</sup> was also considered. One interview with another official of a committee secretariat was conducted face-to-face in June 2012 and finally, a validating interview with an official of DG ITEC was conducted face-to-face in June 2012.

A snowball effect was applied to approach lobbyists in Brussels. It was only during fieldwork in spring 2011 that lobbyists were contacted after either having been in their presence during observation or by being introduced by informants. 2

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<sup>7</sup> Towards the end of this research, the Human Rights Subcommittee had opened a Facebook page (January 2012). As the focus of the study was on early adopters, the late adoption of SNT by the Human Rights Subcommittee was not considered for this study.

<sup>8</sup> As the meeting was very informal (lunch), I did not record the conversation and therefore did not exploit the data obtained as collected data. Rather, this meeting allowed me to get a bigger picture of the motivations of the committee secretariat to use SNT without following a strict set of questions.

interviews were then conducted face-to-face with lobbyists in May 2011. One lobbyist was involved in one of MEP A's committee work and was in direct contact with her office. The second lobbyist was contacted via an informant and was highly involved in parliamentary business with its agricultural and food activities as a Brussels based consultancy.

Interview time ranged from 12 min to 90 min and was highly dependent on interviewees' availabilities. All interviews were conducted in English or in French, according to interviewees' preferences. All French quotations presented in this thesis were translated to English by the author.

**Table 1**List of interviewees

<b>Interviewee</b>	<b>Political group</b>	<b>Committee member<sup>9</sup></b>
MEP1	ALDE	BUDG LIBE
MEP2	ALDE	ITRE LIBE
MEP3	EPP	ENVI TRAN
MEP4	EPP	LIBE PETI IMCO
MEP5	EPP	IMCO ENVI
MEP6	EPP	ENVI ECON
MEP7	GREENS	LIBE AFET DEVE
MEP8	GREENS	ITRE ENVI
MEP9	GREENS	ENVI AFCO PETI
MEP10	S&D	ITRE ECON
MEP11	S&D	ECON REGI CRIS
MEP12	S&D	PECH ITRE
MEP13 (MEP A)	S&D	BUDG PECH
MEP14	S&D	INTA AFET
MEP15	S&D	AFCO ENVI ITRE PECH
MEP16 (MEP B)	S&D	EMPL CRIS CULT
MEP17	EFD	PECH
MEP 18 (+ Follow-up)	ALDE	LIBE CONT
Follow-up MEP 1	ALDE	
Follow-up MEP 9	Greens	
EPO1		DG COMM
EPO2		DG COMM
EPO3		DG EXPO
EPO4		FEMM

<sup>9</sup> BUDG: Budgets; LIBE: Civil liberties, Justice and Home Affairs; ITRE: Industry, Research and Energy; ENVI: Environment, Public Health and Food Safety; TRAN: Transport and Tourism; PETI: Petitions; IMCO: Internal Market and Consumer Protection; ECON: Economic and Monetary Affairs; AFET: Foreign Affairs; DEVE: Development; AFCO: Constitutional Affairs; REGI: Regional Development; CRIS: Financial, Economic and Social Crisis (ended July 2011); PECH: Fisheries; INTA: International Trade; EMPL: Employment and Social Affairs; CULT: Culture and Education; CONT: Budgetary Control; FEMM: Women's Rights and Gender Equality.

EPO5		PETI
EPO 6		DG ITEC
Follow-up EPO 4		FEMM
LOB1		
LOB2		
TOTAL 29 interviews		

#### 2.3.4.3. Question design

Questions were constructed around three main dimensions: ‘What’, ‘How’ and ‘Why’. ‘What’ questions aimed at defining the type of SNT that were used by the interviewees. ‘How’ questions allowed a better understanding of the nature of the use of the tools. Questions included the frequency of use, the different functions that could be used on the different SNT and the people who manage the online accounts (i.e. MEPs themselves or/and their assistants). Finally, the ‘why’ questions have allowed me to collect valuable data to analyse interviewees’ motivations to use the tools, and their perceived benefits of using them in their everyday work as members of the EP. Questions such as ‘why do you use these tools?’ were not always asked upfront as the interviewee would naturally develop their answers by explaining from the ‘what’ and ‘how’ questions why they had decided to use SNT.

The aim of these interview questions was to explore the use of SNT by MEPs, their assistants as well as members of committee secretariats, as a way to understand the relationship and the possible changes that are taking place when communicating with each other. This research explores the possibility for MEPs to adopt SNT as efficient communicative tools as part of their communication resources when they carry out their work as legislators. As seen earlier, more than 70% of them have adopted one of the SNT looked at in this study, and they did so for several reasons: some of these reasons will be discussed in the following chapters. The aim here is to assess their motivations and assess their awareness of any communicative benefits SNT could bring to their work or that it would have brought already. Interviews with EP officials aimed to get a bigger picture on communication practices in the EP and more specifically on the adoption of SNT by MEPs but also by the institution as an entity. Questions were designed as investigating the institution’s motivations to using SNT and the integration of

MEPs' use in the broader communicative picture. Interviews with lobbyists aimed, on the other hand, at exploring the potential changes in external actors communicating with EP decision-makers and were purposely designed as validating interviews.

#### 2.3.4.4. Follow-up interviews

MEPs selected for follow-up interviews were selected according to their answers to the first set of questions. Indeed, after a first analysis of interview data, a number of MEPs appeared as 'original' users of SNT in their work environment (a use that was in line with the analytical framework that is described in detail in Chapter 4). This use led me to ask them a second set of questions. The first couple of questions remained general (i.e. 'How do you generally communicate with other people involved in committee business?') and the second part of interview questions was targeted to their specific use of SNT and the potential they saw in such tools in their work environment (See questions in Appendix 2).

#### 2.3.4.5. Limitations

Interviews scheduled with MEPs did not necessarily take place with the MEP himself/herself and interviewing their assistants could be seen as a limitation as it does not provide first-hand information. On the contrary, interviews with assistants have proven to be as important and as fruitful as interviews with MEPs. The initial interest driven towards elected representatives – rather than their staff – quickly turned to the office as a whole, as in many cases, assistants were the ones in charge of the communication in the office (See Chapter 3).

Interviewing elites is a challenging method of research and the number of interviewees has been fairly limited. This is partly due to the limited availability of MEPs and the constraints of conducting fieldwork in a foreign country for the researcher. Phone interviews were considered to fill the physical gap of not being in Brussels. However, getting MEPs on the phone, even for a short interview, turned out to be more challenging and more difficult to achieve than scheduling a face-to-face meeting in their office.

### 2.3.5. *Observation*

#### 2.3.5.1. Purposes of observation in 2 MEP offices

Observation has been chosen as a method of research with the aim to providing a contextual understanding of communicative practices in the EP in the framework of legislative work. It is important to restate here the objective of the research: assessing the extent to which SNT could be used by MEPs when carrying out their work as legislators by looking at their perceptions and motivations when using a new communicative tool in their work environment. Therefore, this research focuses on MEPs' understanding of SNT use (i.e. not on the analysis of the content of communications). Observation in two MEP offices served as an exploration of communicative settings with an emphasis on the contextual understanding of communications (i.e. how is day-to-day communication happening in the EP?). As the framework of this study relies on cognitions rather than actual communication, observation and analysis of the content of communicative actions (i.e. subject of exchanges, tone used when exchanging information, etc.) have not been considered. As discussed later in Chapter 3, observation has been limited to a situational and contextual analysis of communicative actions.

#### 2.3.5.2. Institutional ethnography: major studies

This part of the chapter does not intend to be an extensive review of literature on institutional ethnography but rather to present briefly the major studies that have been conducted so far. There are very few ethnographic studies of western democracies' institutions. Anthropology and ethnography have always been leaning towards the study of indigenous societies, leaving aside researchers' own societies to look at. But in the 1970s and 1980s, researchers such as Richard Fenno in the United States and Marc Abélès in France have marked a twist in choosing fields of research. Thus, Richard Fenno (1973, 1978), with his *Home Style: house members in their districts* and *Congressmen in committees*, conducted long-term observation with congressmen in the United States to achieve a better understanding of American politicians and American politics.

Marc Abélès, a French ethnographer, conducted ethnographic work in the French Assembly (Palais Bourbon). Like Fenno, Abélès (1989) observed local politicians in one region of France in the 1970s. In his preface to the French edition of *Quiet days in Burgundy*, Abélès suggests that for very long, he had been conducting anthropologic work in foreign countries without having a clear understanding of his own country:

“Having just spent many long months trying to understand the concept of politics held by people in Ethiopia, I could not be content with the level of knowledge which had hitherto informed my life as a citizen of my own country. It must have been at this point that I first felt the desire to cast an anthropologist’s eye over political life in France.” (Abélès 1989: xvi)

As comfortable as studying an environment one intimately has knowledge of can seem, accessing western democracies’ institutions and grasping all subtleties of internal systems are not straightforward processes. Thus, Abélès’ work has raised a number of significant issues when entering an elitist environment that involves politicians by throwing light on issues such as grasping the meaning of processes and content of political activities in institutions. When describing his work conducted in the European Parliament in the 1990s, Abélès (1995) points to the fact that we do not know much about the internal dynamics of the institution (EP) and its everyday functioning remains obscure in many different ways. In the same way, Wodak’s exploration of ‘Politics in action’ in the EP emphasises how little we know about internal dynamics and how backstage politics is not a straightforward exercise as she states (2009: 14):

“It is much more difficult to explore the ‘backstage’, the everyday life of politicians, than the staging of ‘grand politics’. Once we enter the backstage, for example, in the European Parliament, we encounter the routines of political organizations which are – at first sight – non-transparent and seem chaotic as in any organization (Clarke et al., forthcoming; Holy 1990; Iedema 2003; Wodak 1996)

Thus, observational work in the EP can help throw light on processes, actors and/or relationships that remain unknown in its traditional academic study. But observational studies of the EP remain an exception in academic research. Most of the studies that look at communication and information in the EP or relationships between different actors involved in the legislative process (Kohler-Koch 1997, 2010; Leston-Bandeira 2007; Leston-Bandeira and Ward 2008) are conducted quantitatively (surveys) or the most qualitative approach would include interviews with MEPs, their staff and EP officials. My approach partially follows Abélès' and Wodak's approach to exploring an institution backstage with the attempt to throw light on internal processes and patterns that can only be documented by the collection of qualitative data.

#### 2.3.5.3. Observation in the EP: strategy and research setting

When I first contacted MEPs via email or post with the possibility to observe them, I needed to elaborate a strategy to approach them to be accepted in their very restricted area of work to ensure adequate completion of observation. An early strategy was thus taken and consisted of being accepted as a trainee. Thus, this would have meant being included as a member of staff in a position that, theoretically, involves little responsibility in the legislative process. I would have therefore been able to conduct a participant observation, which would have given me a chance to observe while learning about the legislative process and MEP's communication patterns. This strategy was adopted, as being accepted in a natural setting is essential and can change the nature of exchanges and therefore the resulting findings:

“Building trust is an important part of observing research subjects; if it is accomplished, the researcher benefits from the natural responses, opinions and insights of their research subject.” (Dargie 1998: 66)

Observation was however accepted by MEPs, thanks to gatekeepers (See previous section on the importance of informants and gatekeepers). Where fieldwork was first defined as participant observation, it turned into observation in which my participation into the workplace was not required.



#### 2.3.5.4. Presentation of two offices

It was agreed with both MEPs that I would come to Brussels to observe them and their staff during two weeks. The reality of the EP made the actual observation period shorter as MEPs hardly ever stay a whole week in Brussels. During committee weeks and political group meeting weeks, meetings are officially scheduled from Monday afternoon to Thursday morning (or afternoon sometimes) giving therefore the time for MEPs coming from remote parts of the EU to travel to Brussels. In practice, and this depends on the involvement of the MEPs in committees and their involvement in their constituency, MEPs spend an average of two to three days in Brussels during those working weeks. Observation took place in Brussels in April, May and June 2011, during four non-consecutive weeks.

#### 2.3.5.5. Office A

A few months before observation, I was put in contact via email with MEP A's assistant. Soon, we agreed that I would only be an observer since a new trainee had just been hired for spring and summer 2011. As the second week of observation coincided with Easter weekend, the assistant warned me that the week would probably be shorter than usual. Given the low probability of getting another set of observations with another MEP in the time I had allocated for fieldwork, I accepted, even though the phase of observation might result as a short one. Thus, during two consecutive weeks, I observed MEP A's office. During the first week of observation, I spent four days in the MEP office, from 9:00 to 18:00 most days (Day 1 9:00 to 18:00; Day 2 9:00 to 18:00; Day 3 8:15 to 18:45; Day 4 9:30 to 16:15). Lunch break would typically be one hour and some days, lunch was spent with the assistants of the national party delegation, therefore continuing observation during lunch. During the second week, three days were spent with the office staff and the MEP (Day 5 9:30 to 18:30; Day 6 9:00 to 19:00; Day 7 9:30 to 18:00). In total, more than 62 hours were spent in MEP A's office within two parliamentary weeks. It is worth mentioning here that MEP A is strongly involved in committee work as she is a full member of two committees and a substitute for a third one. She also had, at the time of observation, just succeeded in getting her report approved in plenary, a report on which she was a rapporteur. She was also shadow rapporteur on all reports

in one of her full membership committees. At the time of observation, MEP A had one assistant and one trainee. The trainee was new, she had been in the office for only three weeks when I started the observation and she was still in the process of learning about the EP. The gatekeeper introduced me to MEP A's assistant as an experienced researcher who had worked in the EP in the past and who would benefit from her and her MEP's participation in my study. As my identity as a former employee of the institution was revealed from the beginning, access was made easier for me and the relationship with the assistant was friendly as it was assumed that I knew the institution and its functioning. That also meant that MEP A's staff would not need to spend time explaining to me the basics of the EP. From the start, I was introduced to people coming to MEP A's office as a researcher who was interested in SNT and communication in the EP and that I would be observing them for a couple of weeks. I made it clear to them that I was not so much interested in the content of their conversations but rather in the way they interact and the means they use to communicate. Thus, the atmosphere was friendly and everyone in the team quickly 'adopted' me as an observer. I spent most of the time of observation observing the assistant and the trainee as the MEP was only in Brussels a total of three days during the two weeks of observation. The assistant seemed to understand the purposes of the observation and she made sure that when her MEP was in Brussels, I would follow her to all meetings so far as possible. The MEP however, gave me less access to her day-to-day workplace and I made sure that I was not intruding in any way in conversations or exchanges with third parties.

Office A's observation was thus a mixture of direct observation with the MEP and her team, and reported words, conversations that occurred between the assistant or the trainee (or any other person for that matter) and me or questions that I purposely asked to better understand a situation or an exchange.

#### 2.3.5.6. Office B

Observation with MEP B had also been agreed a few months before observation. Whereas only one week of observation was agreed on from the start, I politely asked for a longer period of observation to the assistant via email, who kindly accepted. Thus, two non-consecutive weeks of observation were also

scheduled with MEP B. time of observation was shorter than with MEP A's office and strongly relied upon MEP B's and his assistants' availability. Thus, a typical day in MEP B's office was from 9:30 to 16:00 (Day 1 9:50 to 16:30; Day 2 9:55 to 14:00, Day 3 9:45 to 16:15; Day 4 9:10 to 15.40). In total, about 24 hours of observation were conducted in MEP B's office within two parliamentary weeks.

Observation with MEP B occurred during two political group meeting weeks, giving me therefore a full overview of working weeks in EP. MEP B's role in the EP was slightly different from MEP A's as he had stopped being involved in committee work a few years before as he had acquired a decisional position within his political group. That meant that his involvement in committees was very limited but that his involvement in the group's politics was stronger. Although the main purpose of observation was to look at communication occurring in the context of committee work, it soon became essential to understand other types of roles MEPs can play as legislators, representatives and political party actors.

Whereas MEP A's assistant let me spend the entire two working weeks with her and the trainee in the office for observation – whether MEP A was there or not – MEP B's assistant saw the observation as limited to his MEP. Thus, MEP B's assistant suggested I would come for observation only the days MEP B was there. I could not argue against it as being accepted as an observer had been a difficult and fragile process and I took what was given to me for observation. MEP B had two assistants at the time of observation, one full-time assistant who had a long-running experience within the EP and a second assistant who covered all plenary sessions in Strasbourg and who was working part-time in Brussels. Once again, observation was conducted in a very friendly atmosphere. Contrary to observation with MEP A, MEP B gave me more access to his work and conditions of work, as for example, he would let me sit in his office while he was there working. During observation with MEP A, I would sit in the assistants' office while MEP A was in her office, limiting therefore my capacities to observe her actions.

#### 2.3.5.7. Stages of observation of communication patterns

The focus of observation was on processes and practices (communication patterns). An observation and an assessment of the general setting – that is to say the

office of an MEP and his/her staff – were necessary. Communication patterns could not be understood without assessing and understanding the general settings of an office. Therefore, the role of each actor (in the office) and the relationships that exist between these actors were assessed. Communication resources that were available to an MEP and his/her staff were included in the observation and an attempt to assess the use of the different tools and encounters was taken (i.e. face-to-face meetings in the office, phone, computers, portables devices, etc.). Furthermore, observation of MEPs in committee meetings and other relevant meetings was also included when access was given. This has helped understand the types of communication that occur in the office but also outside of it, during meetings (i.e. face-to-face communication but also mediated communication as MEPs take their laptops and smartphones in meeting sessions) and anywhere else in EP buildings where I was invited to follow the observed MEPs (i.e. other MEP office, corridors, EP restaurant). Further details of observations of the general settings are presented in Chapter 3.

#### 2.3.5.8. Limitations to doing observational work in the EP: pragmatic considerations of political realities

One could argue that there are numerous limitations to conducting observational research in an organisation. The potential influence the researcher can have on the natural setting is a start. On a number of occasions, I realised that my presence in Office A had an impact on the way the assistant would conduct her activities as she would make sure that I would attend or follow her or her MEP to meetings. In Office B, I became more aware of such influences on people's behaviours as the assistant mentioned one day, while talking about a meeting he just had, that it was a good thing I arrived only once the meeting was over because he really needed to focus during that meeting. Such behaviour certainly affects the authenticity of the setting and the nature of observed subjects. But as stated earlier, issues of reflexivity have been acknowledged and there has been a continuous attempt to reduce its impact on empirical findings.

Second, direct observation of the use of SNT by MEPs and their staff has been very difficult and almost impossible to conduct – this would have meant that I would have had to sit behind the MEP every time he or she was using a computer, a

laptop or a smart phone, in the office, in corridors, or in meeting rooms. In some occasions, it has been possible to observe accidentally such use of SNT. Observation has allowed me to assess general communication patterns and reported words obtained during observation and interviews have been the main basis for understanding MEPs' use of SNT in the workplace – thus limiting the assessment to cognitive reports of use. The two methods have been complementary in their function to assessing the use of SNT in the workplace.

## **2.4. Data analysis**

### *2.4.1. Interviews*

Most interviews were recorded and then transcribed verbatim. Non-recorded interviews were replaced with notes taken during interviews and completed immediately after the meeting ended. Interviews conducted in French were transcribed in French and only those pieces of interview material that were then used as part of the thesis were translated to English by the author. It is important to acknowledge here that translation can be problematic as some of the meaning can be lost in translation. Expressions have been translated to English to the best knowledge of the author but it remains that some references (i.e. to events or to facts) or some word-to-word expressions are difficult to translate into English.

Axial coding (Silverman 2006: 96) was done while bearing in mind the context of the research – legislative work – and therefore considering the use of SNT in this work context. The reliability of data analysis was ensured by applying an intra-coder reliability test. Intra-coder reliability consists in ensuring the reliability of the coding conducted by one researcher only. Therefore, data has been coded at two different times, leaving a certain amount of time between the two codings (several months), thus ensuring consistency over time.

Data was first coded as 'how' and 'why' categories. From that, and in order to narrow down the results to two categories, data was coded as 'model of use' and 'understanding the use'. 'Model of use' includes all data that is relevant to the research question, regardless of emerging themes. 'Understanding the use' gathers all pieces of data that were considered as important to the understanding of the

motivations of use or perceived benefits but that were not necessarily relevant as motivations or perceived benefits per se.

All ‘model of use’ data was coded according to emerging themes while bearing in mind the analytical model developed later in Chapter 4. From the first coding, five themes have emerged: ‘network’ (anything related to the network structure or the network nodes), ‘information dissemination’, ‘people’s feedback’, ‘campaigning’ and ‘traditional media’. A second round of analysis allowed a refinement of the categories and ‘traditional media’ and ‘information dissemination’ merged as both came under information that is broadcast to the outside of the EP, be it direct or mediated. The new section then created is ‘information dissemination’. ‘Campaigning’ has been refined to ‘coordination’ as the re-analysis of data suggested a broader meaning than simply campaigning. ‘People’s feedback’ was a general theme that allowed me to gather all data that suggested that MEPs were not only broadcasting information but were also listening. As there were different levels of feedback received, I refined the category to ‘information retrieval’. Finally ‘network’ has been renamed ‘network awareness’. Thus, by the end of the theory building process, and always in perspective with the analytical framework developed for this study at the beginning of the grounded theory process, four themes emerged: *network awareness, information retrieval, information dissemination and coordination.*

#### 2.4.2. *Observation notes: Communication dynamics appraisal*

Observation notes were taken while observing. One set of observation notes was written in French and then translated to English. The other set of observation notes was directly written in English. All original notes were then typed and imported to the qualitative data analysis software TAMS Analyser (for Mac OS X only).

The two sets of observation notes were coded with the same coding scheme. Direct observations of communications and/or interactions were systematically coded with the following scheme:

- Communication medium,

- Place (setting or place where communication/interaction occurred),
- Situational formality (level of formality of the setting of communication),
- Involved actors 1 (set of actors primary observed),
- Involved actors 2 (actors observed as secondary as part of interaction with primary observed actors),
- Length (length of exchange if known).

As data related to SNT was limited in observation notes, I decided to exploit this data separately when it came to SNT use and coded it as 'SNT' for use in findings chapters 5 to 9 (as opposed to the coding scheme described above that was used mainly for the contextual framework articulated in Chapter 3).

## **2.5. Conclusion**

To summarise, this chapter has presented the methodological approach taken to conduct this study. The exploration of MEPs' motivations and perceived benefits of using SNT in their work environment has led me towards an interpretive approach to studying organisational communication in the EP. The grounded theory approach adopted here justifies the elaboration of an analytical framework based on theoretical considerations, which are then put in perspective with empirical findings in order to build an emergent model of use of SNT for MEPs. Important notions such as validity, reliability and reflexivity have been tackled in this chapter. A thorough presentation of research methods has also been part of this chapter, building therefore a strong case for the selection elite interviews and observation as research methods. It also justifies the validity and reliability of this research's qualitative approach. Finally, emphasis has been put on the exploratory dimension of this study and its limitations.

## **Chapter 3 - Organisational communication when drafting and amending legislation**

### **3.1. Summary**

This chapter presents the contextual framework of this study. By adopting an interpretive approach, this chapter intends to characterise communication patterns when carrying out legislative work. A categorisation of communicative actions has helped to present the findings of this chapter from an organisational perspective. The focus of the observation conducted during four parliamentary weeks in 2 MEP offices did not take the content of communications as central object of study. Rather, findings presented in this chapter give an overview of patterns of communication when parliamentary business occurs. Findings presented here are exploratory and do not intend to generalise communication patterns in the EP. Thus, findings suggest that internal communication practices revolve around three intertwined patterns: (1) face-to-face communication is predominantly favoured, (2) the informality of encounters of communication exchanges has been seen as an essential dimension of communication practices and (3) the role that assistants play in the legislative process has been characterised as an important one in the process of legislating. External communication emphasises the role Brussels lobbyists play in the legislative process and findings suggest that face-to-face communication plays an essential role in relationship creation with MEPs. The mixture of formal and informal, scheduled and unscheduled encounters constitutes a large array of external communication that occurs in the context of committee work.

### **3.2. Introduction**

The legislative process of the European Union is complex and so are the dynamics of interaction around it. This explains why this study has been restricted to a specific process at a specific time: the legislative work (the drafting and amending of reports) in EP committees. Information flow and communication patterns are poorly defined in this process. In the literature, official settings such as committee



meetings or public hearings, and official means of communication such as computer-mediated tools (e.g. EP intranet) are indicators of the nature of the flow of information but the multiplication of settings and media that are used makes it sometimes difficult to define and systematize patterns. An interpretive approach to defining communication patterns is taken here to characterise types of communication. Such characterisation helps me later to assess the potential of adopting a new communicative tool in MEPs' overall communication patterns.

First, this chapter introduces the formal processes that surround committee work by emphasising the role each actor involved in such process can play. Second, the application of an interpretive approach (Putnam 1983) to studying communication practices helps characterise a categorisation of the dynamics of interaction in the process of drafting and amending legislation in the EP. This chapter presents the analytical classification of communicative actions that has been used for exploring communication practices. Adapted from Yates and Orlikowski's (1992) genre of communication categorisation, the classification used here allows me to analyse communicative actions occurring at different levels and in different forms, in the copresence of mediated communication means and document repositories necessary for the retrieval of valuable information in the legislative process. As discussed in Chapter 2, observation of institutional settings has a real potential to help understand the internal dynamics and the political practices of the EP and in this case, it will help me develop a categorisation of communication patterns in the process of drafting and amending legislation.

### **3.3. Formal processes in committee work: actors and settings**

#### *3.3.1. Parliamentary committees: the 'backbone' of the EP*

The literature refers to committees using different terms: *standing committees*, *parliamentary committees* or simply *committees*. These terms are all synonymous in the context of the EP, and for the purposes of this research, mentions to EP's standing committees are made using mainly the term *committees*.

The EP works on the same institutional patterns as national parliaments where legislation is first discussed and debated in smaller and more specialised

groups of parliamentarians than in plenary sessions. Thus, committees are an important stage in the legislative process of the EP. This is where issues are dealt with in detail and where MEPs play an increasingly crucial role when in charge of a report<sup>10</sup>.

Moreover, since the adoption of the Lisbon Treaty, the EP has been empowered with the ordinary legislative procedure, giving it a full-fledged co-legislator power. The Commission and the Council have a direct relation with committees and have the duty to consult them on ongoing discussions about reports which were first introduced in the EP as Commission proposals (the EP also has the possibility to initiate proposals on its own initiative). The EP Secretariat dispatches proposals to appropriate committees who will draft reports, thus allowing discussion on EC proposals on co-legislation matters with the Council (See Appendix 5).

### 3.3.2. *Key roles for MEPs in committees*

Committees are organised and structured around key players: a chairman, vice-chairmen, political group-coordinators and rapporteurs. The *chairman* chairs committee meetings and can have a potential influence on decisions made in his/her committee. The *vice-chairmen* (generally three MEPs) play a background role and mainly replace the chairman when absent to chair the session. They do not have an influential decisional power on committees. *Political group coordinators* have an organisational role in committees. They allocate work to the members of their political group and they make sure that the group speaks as one voice in the committee and in plenary session. Finally, the *rapporteur* (an MEP appointed at an early stage of the process, who is in charge of a report) has a particular importance in the battle of power between the different political groups in the EP and “rapporteurs accumulate policy expertise, build consensus among party groups, and

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<sup>10</sup> The 7th legislature of the European Parliament counts 20 committees: Foreign Affairs (with 2 subcommittees in Human Rights and Security and Defence); Development; International Trade; Budgets; Budgetary Control; Economic and Monetary Affairs; Employment and Social Affairs; Environment, Public Health and Food Safety; Industry, Research and Energy; Internal Market and Consumer Protection; Transport and Tourism; Regional Development; Agriculture and Rural Development; Fisheries; Culture and Education; Legal Affairs; Civil liberties, Justice and Home Affairs; Constitutional Affairs; Women’s Rights and Gender Equality; Petitions; And two special committees on Financial, Economic and Social Crisis; and Policy Challenges committee. These committees are policy oriented and gather up to 60 members (members and substitutes).

negotiate with the Commission and the Council, three factors essential of legislative influence.” (Mamadouh and Raunio 2003: 334). The focus of this study ends when reports are voted in committees, a vote that takes place before reports are brought to plenary vote.

Rapporteurs play a central role in committees. Their appointment follows the D’Hondt formula for a fair allocation of reports to all political groups. The process is well described by Neuhold (2001):

“The selection of rapporteurs and draftsmen is normally decided within the individual committees by a system, which is more or less the same in all committees. Each political group has, according to its size, a quota of points. The group co-ordinators then discuss reports and opinions to be distributed, decide how many points each subject is worth and make bids on behalf of their group, the bids based in theory (but not always in the practical political process) on the relationship between the number of points already used by the group and the original quota (Corbett, Jacobs, Shackleton 2000, p. 117).”

*Shadow rapporteurs* and *draftsmen* for opinions have secondary roles. Once a rapporteur is appointed on a specific dossier, discussions and debates start within the framework of a selected committee, giving a chance to other committees to hand in opinions to the committee via their draftsmen for opinions. For example, the Committee on Environment, Public Health and Food Safety (ENVI) has been in charge of a report on ‘The analysis of options to move beyond 20% greenhouse gas emission reductions and assessing the risk of carbon leakage’ (2011/2012(INI)). Whereas ENVI committee was in charge of the report, the committee on Industry, Research and Energy proposed an opinion on the aforementioned report. Inter-committee work and collaboration occurs and is generally encouraged to obtain inputs from other policy committees that would have relevant insights on a given issue. In that case, draftsmen for opinions have a role to play. However, the role of draftsman is less sought than rapporteur, which is most prestigious, especially if it deals with a very controversial and mediatised issue.

### 3.3.3. *Role of the Committee Secretariat*

The committee secretariat has a crucial role in committee business as it not only deals with administrative tasks but is also a central platform for the exchange of information on ongoing legislation. It also plays the role of data repository on dossiers that the committee has dealt with in the past and provides MEPs with necessary expertise on ongoing dossiers. Note, however, that the Secretariat should not be seen as only a provider of technical and administrative support to members of the committee but also as a policy agenda-setter (Winzen 2011), maintaining however political neutrality as an institutional entity. Indeed, the political neutrality of committee secretariats is often mentioned as a positive and indispensable prerequisite for assisting MEPs in their legislative function:

“Officials [...] help in technical and organisational questions, background research, providing basic information on actors’ positions and the questions of relevance to a report, and they assist the chairman of a committee.” (Winzen 2011: 38).

But as Neunreither’s study (2006: 49) suggests:

“Insiders agree that direct assistance via the committee secretariats has decreased over the last decade. [...] Several factors contribute to this evolution, including the increased availability of documentation and background material, especially via electronic means [...]”<sup>11</sup>

### 3.3.4. *Public hearings and intergroups*

Two settings are worth mentioning here as they allow interactions between internal and external actors in the official premise of the EP: public hearings and intergroups. Public hearings are where civil society actors (who are not allowed to take part in committee debates) are invited to talk. During these public hearings,

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<sup>11</sup> It is worth mentioning here that, as far as providing MEPs with valuable internal information necessary to achieving legislative work is concerned, the EP library plays a role as an information provider. Although minimal, the ‘Library’s contribution is an effective, impartial and professional information service dedicated to providing the European Parliament – and especially its individual Members (MEPs) – with information of value. The Library should be an information service that every MEP can rely on.’ Retrieved on European Parliament Library, [www.eurolibnet.eu/3/72/&for=show&tid=7917](http://www.eurolibnet.eu/3/72/&for=show&tid=7917), 5 June 2012

specific issues are discussed and technical aspects of draft legislation are presented by organised civil society's actors to MEPs (Corbett et al. 2007). Intergroups are:

“unofficial groupings of MEPs who share common interest in a particular cause or interest” [...] They allow “MEPs to focus on a ‘particular set of issues of specific national, constituency or personal concern’, to specialise, to make contacts with outside interest groups on an informal basis, and to facilitate political contacts outside their own political groups.” (Earnshaw and Judge 2006: 66)

Intergroups tend to happen in Strasbourg when all MEPs are gathered for plenary sessions and where accredited organised civil society's actors have access to the EP. They are sometimes directly coordinated by NGOs: “Intergroups provide those NGOs in the role of coordinator or secretariat the opportunity to inform and to influence the various parties that attend their meetings.” (Butler 2008: 577) Intergroups are therefore informal platforms that allow NGOs not only to communicate with MEPs but also to create genuine – although informal – links with decision-makers: “MEPs and NGOs seem to be engaged in a mutually beneficial relationship where MEPs have the opportunity to be kept informed while NGOs have the chance to exert some influence.” (Butler 2008: 578)

### **3.4. Dynamics of interaction in legislative work: An interpretive approach**

This part of the chapter relies on empirical data collected during observation in the EP as discussed in Chapter 2 and interviews with MEPs, their staff and lobbyists. It is also based on existing literature, which helps identify and present key players involved in committee work. The aim of this section of the chapter is to problematise relationships among actors involved in the drafting and amending of reports. It shows that whereas infrastructures are based on processes, dynamics of interaction do not necessarily follow a predetermined process. As Bellier (2002: 16) noted when conducting ethnographic research in the European Commission:

“Observing concrete social and cultural relations are doubtlessly much more efficient in terms of the quality of the data collected than trying

to justify a pre-established model of interaction or administrative science that would have been set without knowing any of the social conditions that are part of the institution's life.”

### *3.4.1. Characterising communication dynamics*

This chapter has been strongly inspired by two complementary approaches to understanding organisational communication. First, Yates and Orlikowski's work on structuring communicative practices in organisations has been a stepping-stone for conceptualising the framework of this study. As argued by the authors, structuring communication actions in organisations – in their case by applying a genre analysis to communicative practices – allows a better understanding of organisations:

“Understanding how communicative action shapes various genres, and how these organizing structures in turn shape communication action, is valuable to organizational researchers interested in understanding a community's nature and activities and how they change over time.”  
(Orlikowski and Yates 1994: 573)

Although this study does not intend to categorise genres of communication but rather categorise the types of communication dynamics, genre analysis specifications are of relevance in this context. It allows an organised categorisation of communication dynamics' variables such as actors involved, settings of communicative actions or purposes of communication. I would argue here that the adoption of a new communicative tool in the workplace could only be efficiently assessed if the communicative environment that already exists is comprehensively studied and categorised:

“In order to apply knowledge in new conditions, we need an environment where well-categorized typical examples are documented and available, where we can find similar cases to understand conditions for use and get ideas to apply to new situations or media, and to which we can add emergent examples.” (Yoshioka et al. 2001: 432)

Thus, Orlikowski and Yates (1994: 572) see the adoption of a genre analysis as a useful analytical tool when studying the introduction of new communicative tools in organisations:

“Genre and genre repertoire may be particularly useful for conceptualizing and investigating the introduction, use, and influence of new media in organizations. By examining the structuring of communicative practices in detail, we should be able to gain insights into the types of changes that may occur as a result of introducing new media.”

Secondly, and complementarily with the approach taken here, empirical data has been collected using qualitative methods and exploited with an interpretive approach (Putnam 1983). The details of the research methodology have been explained in Chapter 2.

The following table is adapted from Yates and Orlikowski’s genre and genre systems categorisations. It is used throughout the chapter as a reference for an analytical and classifying framework of interactions and communicative actions occurring in the committee work context. Such classification includes the constituent elements of communication as well as the necessary social context of communicative actions. Genre and genre systems as defined by Yates and Orlikowski (Yates and Orlikowski 1992; Yoshioka et al. 2001) are jointly present in this generic typology. Note that interpersonal (i.e. emails) and impersonal communicative actions (i.e. document repositories) are both considered in this study. Research in the field of IS tends to separate interpersonal (human) networks and non-human networks of information and communication. Yet, I would argue that research that aims to analyse networks formed by individuals who communicate and exchange information in the context of EP legislative work should be studied in the copresence of digital knowledge sources such as document repositories. In addition, recent research conducted by Su & Contractor (2011) adopted an integrated analytical framework that considers both human and non-human information sources in a multidimensional network approach and that supports the approach I have taken.

Table 2 Categorisation of communicative actions in EP committee work

Category	Definition	EP context
<b>How</b>	Medium used for communicative action	<p><b>Face-to-face</b></p> <p><b>Mail</b></p> <p><b>Electronic communication</b> Phone PC Fax <i>Portable devices</i> Mobile phone/ smartphone Laptop Tablet <i>Document management system</i> Email Internet/Intranet EPADES L' Oeil</p>
<b>Who/Whom</b>	Actors involved in communicative action	<p><b>Internal</b> MEP MEP Assistants Political group member EP officials</p> <p><b>External</b> EC Council National Parliaments Lobbyists Civil society at large Citizens</p>
<b>What When Where</b>	<p>Setting of communication</p> <p>Qualitative categories of communication time frame</p> <p>Location of communicative action</p>	<p><b>Situational formality</b> <b>Situational informality</b></p> <p><b>Scheduled meeting</b> Committee meeting Political group meeting Meeting</p> <p><b>Unscheduled encounter</b> <b>Spontaneous encounter</b></p> <p>Meeting room Office Corridors EP building at large Outside EP building</p>
<b>Why</b>	Purposes of communicative actions	<p><b>Professional</b> Committee related, Work related EP related</p> <p><b>Professional and personal</b> <b>Personal</b></p>



This table is used throughout this chapter as a reference point as a way to organise communicative actions in the context of committee work. The following sections are organised around two separate but related themes: internal communication and external communication. The first section emphasises the importance of certain categories of the table such as the means of communication used (how), the setting of communicative actions (what/when/where) or the actors involved in communicative actions (who/whom). Other categories – where, when and why – are naturally raised as part of the categorisation of communicative actions. The second section operates similarly with a special emphasis on means of communication (how) and settings of communications (what/when/where) when communicating with external actors.

### **3.5. Internal communication: face-to-face interaction and situational informality as watchwords**

This section of the chapter questions how internal communication occurs and emphasises its shape. Thus, observation conducted with two MEPs and their staff has shown that face-to-face communication (how) is a predominant form of interaction and that situational informality (what/when/where) in communicative exchanges is significantly characteristic of internal communicative actions<sup>12</sup>. The second part of this section throws light on the actors involved in communicative actions (who). Findings show that MEPs' assistants play an essential role in dealing with parliamentary work and as playing a political and policy advisors role. Finally, I return to the media used to communicate (how) to discuss mediated communication. The importance of analysing communication practices in copresence of information resources such as data repositories is once again emphasised in this section.

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<sup>12</sup> As mentioned earlier, the scope of this exploratory study did not take the content of interactions as the subject of observation. Therefore, the formality/informality of the content of communication exchanges was not part of the intended observation as the focus of the research is on perceptions and motivations (cognitions) rather than actual communication.

### *3.5.1. Prevalence of internal scheduled and unscheduled face-to-face communication*

One predominant way of exchanging information in the context of legislative work was through face-to-face communication, with an important informality dimension with unscheduled informal chats happening within or outside formal processes. This finding is in line with research on media use conducted by Haythornthwaite & Wellman (1998: 1106) within an organisational context:

“Cerise members predominantly used unscheduled face-to-face encounters, face-to-face meetings, and E-mail. The most frequently used communication media were unscheduled face-to-face encounters followed by E-mail and, less frequently, by scheduled face-to-face meetings [...]”

The prevalence of face-to-face communication as internal interactions was confirmed by MEP B’s assistant and justified by the political environment of the workplace. Several times, the preference for face-to-face encounters – rather than a phone call – was mentioned. Once he explained that phone calls are not handy when an MEP needs to talk to MEP B. He usually tells assistants to send their MEP straight to the office to talk to him face-to-face. Observed assistants always struggled with transferring calls from one phone to the other so it seemed easier to take the lift and come talk to the MEP directly. One MEP confirmed his preference for face-to-face encounters:

[...] It is usually face-to-face. I mean it is the best way... to discuss a matter is, for example, once I am at a committee meeting, I might just approach a colleague and discuss a point, maybe we have to find a solution this and that, it is rather, it is usually more quicker than an email because you get an immediate response, you have the possibility to... take on board certain counter-arguments maybe somebody has so it is more likely that you have a short discussion with a solution at the end than having emails traffic which maybe sometimes you could avoid. So it is possible generally, I do prefer face-to-face. (FU MEP 1)

Committee meetings, as well as political group meetings are the formal settings where MEPs gather to discuss ongoing legislation. As discussed earlier,

committee meetings are public events where MEPs, members of the Commission, the Council, EP officials and external actors are present. MEP assistants generally accompany their MEPs to those meetings. In the case of political group meetings, the event is generally limited to political group members, and national party delegation meetings (which normally take place the same week as political group meetings) are strictly limited to members of the political group (be it from the same party delegation or from the party delegation of another member state).

During committee meetings and/or political group meetings, dynamics between MEPs, their assistants and the committee secretariat are not limited to formal and official speaking time. Indeed, committee meetings are the occasion for MEPs to interact with each other in the meeting room and outside the meeting room. In one occasion, MEP A recounted to her assistant after the meeting that another MEP from her national party delegation came to talk to her and would not let her go for about an hour. During a political group meeting that I observed, MEP B took the chance to meet with another MEP for a private meeting, outside the meeting room, while the political group meeting was ongoing. On the same occasion, when I mentioned to MEP B's assistant that it was hard to follow them sometimes, his reply was straightforward: "you know, work is not done and decisions are not made by sitting here [in the office]".

The end of a meeting was also the occasion for MEPs to talk to their colleagues or to other people who attended the meeting. In one observed instance, the closing of a meeting was the occasion for MEP A to slowly leave the room, when someone would come up to her to speak with her. Several other people then came up to talk to her on her way to the office. The meeting ended at 5:25pm and she only arrived in her office at 5:40pm. It took her 15 minutes to get back to the office, on a journey that would take no longer than 2 to 5 minutes if not interrupted.

In another observed instance, this time involving MEP B during a political group week, he saw someone he knew outside the meeting room, at the end of a meeting, and kindly asked this person if she would mind walking with him to the exit of the building as he needed to talk to her. MEP B took advantage of the

randomness of the encounter to initiate an exchange. In the meantime, MEP B's assistant stopped another assistant in the corridor, while going back to his office, to start chatting. He then turned to me and said "this is social networking". Thus, from observed instances, face-to-face unscheduled encounters can play an important role in sharing information.

Although political groups are not directly involved in the drafting of reports, they are indirectly involved via their political group coordinators who make sure that group decisions within committees remain consistent and cohesive. As Neuhold (2001) puts it: "If committees are the legislative backbone of the EP, the political parties are its "lifeblood" or the "institutional cement pasting together the different units of the Parliament (Williams 1995, p. 395)". Members of political groups can also play an informative and consultative role to MEPs in their committee work as they also conduct background research on different policy areas.

The role and weight of political groups is not straightforward during committee weeks. However, observation during political group meetings has shown a strong implication of the groups into legislative decisions, as for the discussions that took place during political group meetings and for the closeness of MEP B with some members of his political group. As studied by Hix (2002; Hix et al. 2003), EP political groups seek group cohesion in their decisions. MEPs' turnout to political group meetings was striking. Whereas most committee meetings generally showed low attendance and only gathered a few MEPs involved and/or interested in ongoing dossiers, political group meetings gathered a large number of MEPs and assistants. In committee meetings, it is only at the time of voting that the room fills up. Besides, during political group meetings' week, MEP B had several scheduled meetings with members of the political group to discuss current political and legislative affairs.

Back in their offices, spontaneous and unscheduled encounters are favoured for MEPs from the same political group as for the spatial organisation of the buildings. Indeed, in the main building, MEPs' offices are distributed according to their political groups and national party delegations. Typically, MEPs from the same country and political group would be on the same floor, which immensely facilitates

direct communication such that face-to-face exchanges among MEPs from the same national party delegation were very common during working days, in the office or in the corridor. Different national party delegations from the same political group would be on the same side of the building, meaning that taking the lift up or down is the only added condition to see a member of the group face-to-face. On the other hand, if an MEP or his/her assistant need to see an MEP or an assistant from the opposition they would need to cross the building. Such a route can take up to several minutes, given the floor area of EP buildings. Therefore, spatially, encounters between same political group members are facilitated. For example, face-to-face exchanges among MEPs from the same national party delegation were very common during working days, in the office or in the corridor. Several times, an MEP from MEP A's political group, but from a different Member State, spent time in her office. His first visit lasted more than 40 minutes. The second time, the meeting started in the office and continued at lunch outside the office. On two other occasions, MEPs from the same national party delegation came to MEP A's office to talk either to her or to her assistant.

Proximity within the office is also essential. MEPs' offices are all structured in the same way (except perhaps for presidents of political groups and head of national party delegations). The MEP's office is attached to the assistants' office, with a communicating door between the two offices. The space in the assistants' office is limited depending on the number of assistants working for the MEP (up to three assistants and a trainee in some cases). MEPs' offices' furniture is fairly standard: a private bathroom, a desk (or a large meeting table), a sofa, a couple of chairs and a cupboard. The small size of offices can be seen as a disadvantage but through the observation, I noticed that communication was in fact facilitated thanks to the proximity. MEP A and B and their assistants would communicate and exchange information through the open internal door by speaking out loud while continuing with their work, each one in their office. Separate offices would not allow as much spontaneity in exchanges.

Situational formality of communicative actions has been defined in this study in terms of the location but also as the extent of scheduling put in an encounter (i.e. spontaneous chats vs. organised committee meetings). The following section gives

an example of the importance of informality as a characteristic of communicative actions in the EP. As defined in the categorisation of communication exchanges the formality/informality of communicative actions can be depicted both by the time dimension (when) and the location (where). Thus, the setting of communicative actions is a combination of these dimensions and is pervasive in all sections of this chapter.

One specificity in the two MEP offices was the coffee machine. MEP offices are not provided with coffee machines. It is at MEPs' discretion to have one in their offices. There are several coffee bars in EP buildings, which are undoubtedly places that facilitate informal interaction between MEPs and any authorised person in the buildings. In the case of both observed MEPs, they – the MEP and their staff – decided to have their own coffee machine in their office, reducing therefore costs and time wasted in going back and forth to coffee bars. MEP A's assistant mentioned during the first day of observation: "Well, it is joke, but not really, but we have a coffee machine in the office and everyone comes here to have a coffee". The informality of the coffee machine did bring many people to their office, with at least two to three people coming every day to have a coffee. Dynamics were different when MEP A was in the office with a lower number of people daring to come to have a coffee, as generally, conditions of work were more hectic when the MEP was in the EP. During the second observation, the coffee machine had a different purpose and was meant only for people who were invited to meetings with MEP B. Only then coffee was offered to people who were to meet with MEP B in his office. Other assistants from the same national party delegation did not pop in to have a coffee.

I now turn to the actors involved in communicative actions (who), with a strong emphasis on MEP assistants' role in committee work.

### 3.5.2. *Keystone actors: MEP assistants (who)*

MEP assistants, in both observations, appeared to be keystone actors, taking on a great deal of parliamentary work on the one hand and a great deal of advisory role on political decisions on the other hand.

Parliamentary assistants work in the shadow of their MEP. Most of the time, their role is underestimated and their status was for a very long time uncertain. Since 2009 EP elections, MEP assistants have obtained an official status within the institution, guaranteeing their work conditions, salary and social security status. Up until 2009, their status was decided upon their country of origin and their working conditions depended on national regulations. Since 2009, assistants' work conditions have been harmonised and every accredited assistant signs a contract with the institution.

Assistants either take on board a great deal of the legislative work (i.e. writing amendments) or on the contrary, they are limited to secretarial tasks. During his observation of MEP assistants' role and functions in the EP, Michon (2004) concluded that assistants can play four important roles: a secretarial role, where they receive and filter information to be consulted by the MEP; a public relations assistant role where they deal with the external communication of the office; an active role on the MEP's legislative work and finally, a role as a contributor to the MEP's political activities (i.e. link with national party and local political activity monitoring). Here, I am interested in the role MEP assistants can play in the legislative arena. In this regard, Michon (2004) notes for instance that parliamentary assistants can play a crucial role by providing MEPs with essential information for committee business. Assistants make sure their MEP gets translations of reports or amendments on ongoing issues in his/her committees as reports can be drafted in any of the 23 official languages of the EP. Assistants can be asked to write amendments, oral questions, speeches for plenary interventions or even to take part in the writing of a report when his/her MEP is appointed rapporteur. Finally, and occasionally, assistants can take part in negotiations in the process of drafting and amending legislative texts in committees. They also appear as indispensable assets to MEPs when it comes to taking informed decisions on legislation (i.e. what amendment to submit, what report to look into, etc.) and they can be their MEP's "eyes and ears" in Brussels when the MEP is back in his/her constituency (Corbett et al. 2011). I would argue in this chapter that observation has shown the existence of a spectrum of assistants' roles where the four categories suggested by Michon exist but are rather intertwined (A. Busby and Belkacem Forthcoming).

Thus, the role of MEP assistants is multiple and somewhat underestimated when it comes to their capacity to be keystone players in the legislative process. The assistant observed in Office A took on most of the legislative work, in collaboration with the newly arrived trainee. Whereas the trainee was there to learn how things worked in the EP in general and in the office in particular, her role was not necessarily faded by the assistant's job. On a few occasions, MEP A gave guidelines to the trainee directly, placing her in charge of dossiers that the assistant would not need to deal with. The idea of hierarchy between the assistant and the trainee was blurred and both their work was seen as valuable by the MEP.

MEPs are generally full members of at least one committee and substitute to another. Full membership in two committees (like MEP A) makes it difficult for MEPs themselves to be present and aware of every issue discussed in each committee. For instance, the time MEP A spends in Brussels is limited and is generally restricted to two days and a half a week during committee and political group meeting weeks. When in Brussels, MEPs manage to attend some of the important meetings whereas their assistants (and in this case the assistant and the trainee) take care of attending committee meetings, following up on dossiers and sometimes dealing with the submission of amendments.

Although most of MEP assistants are university graduates, the institution does not provide new parliamentary assistants with any formal training. As for long they have been depending on their MEP and more generally on their national party delegation and political group, it was up to the MEP to offer training. In some cases, assistants entered the institution first as trainees, and became assistants at the end of their traineeship. While discussing her MEP's political and professional background, MEP A's assistant admitted that she never received any training from the EP, she "had to learn on the job" when she arrived there.

The sharing of tasks and dossiers was carefully spread between the assistant and the trainee in Office A, with each of them covering one committee and all issues related to the latter. During the time spent in MEP A's office, the number of interactions that happened between assistants from the same political group (and mainly from the same national party delegation) was significant compared to MEP



B's office. Indeed, ongoing reports as well as the submission of amendments were discussed and decided among assistants during those weeks, especially when their MEPs were not physically in Brussels. In one occasion, MEP A's assistant called a meeting with two assistants from her political group. The meeting took place face-to-face between those three assistants behind closed doors in MEP A's office. Several times during the same week, the assistant spoke on the phone with other assistants to discuss amendments. Interactions were multiplied and more intense on the day of amendment submission, with a continuous coming and going of members of the national party delegation (mainly assistants) in MEP A's office. Whereas the door of the assistants' office had remained open most of the time, people passing by had had a chance to stop by and talk to the assistant and the trainee. Unscheduled exchanges that revolved around committee work or legislation in general were multiple during a committee week. Several times, an assistant from the national party delegation, whose MEP was a member of the same committee as MEP A's, would walk by and come into the office to discuss reports with MEP A's assistant.

It would be difficult to argue that all national party delegations bind together but in the case of MEP A's national party delegation, MEP assistants were strongly bounded and spent a lot of time together, during working hours and outside working hours. Almost every day, the majority of the national party delegation's assistants would meet for lunch, giving again space and time for personal and professional conversations to take place. Busby's (2011) ethnographic study of the EP and her findings on internal dynamics of the institution go in the same line and emphasises the crucial role of assistants in internal politics of the EP, as well as the informal nature of exchanges.

### *3.5.3. Mediated and electronic communication (how)*

Face-to-face interaction is not the only way of communicating during working weeks (committee weeks and political group meeting weeks) as electronic communication is pervasive and phones, particularly mobile phones, play a great role in the institution. Whereas emails have overtaken traditional mail as a textual mean of communication, the telephone has strong foundations in the way MEPs and their staffs communicate. In MEP A's office, there seemed to be a direct correlation

between the use of mobile phones and the presence of the MEP in Brussels. Indeed, the assistant would hardly ever use her mobile phone for professional purposes when the MEP was in her constituency. The use would significantly increase when the MEP was coming to Brussels and when she was physically present in the EP. Here again, the distinction between professional and private use of the mobile phone was blurred. The assistant herself mentioned that the distinction between private use and professional use of her own smartphone was unclear. During an informal meeting with an external actor in a corridor discussed later in this chapter, the use of the mobile phone correlated with being efficient and with making quick decisions. On that occasion, MEP B's assistant quickly used his mobile phone to send a text message to his MEP to advise him on the procedure for acting on the situation discussed at the meeting. The MEP immediately received the text message, read it and recommended to the audience what the assistant suggested in the written text message. Later, the assistant would explain that he once sent a text message to his MEP during a conciliation meeting<sup>13</sup> to give him advice on what to do. The MEP repeated, at the conciliation meeting, word for word, what the assistant had sent by text message. Such example confirms once again the keystone role that assistants can play as political advisors.

While mentioning the blurred distinction between private and professional use of her smartphone, MEP A's assistant also mentioned the importance of emails in her work: "you have to have access to your emails all the time". Emails are a strong component of MEPs' office's communicative patterns. The email inbox was constantly open on both MEP assistants' desktops, as a background image that never goes. Observations conducted by Busby (2013) in an MEP office shows that the observed MEP received an average of 194 emails a day: on the official EP email address, 262 emails during plenary week, 181 emails during political group meeting week, 138 emails during committee meeting week (data collected on 3 Wednesdays during June 2010). MEP A's assistant explained that the office would receive hundreds of emails every day and that although MEP A has direct access to her

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<sup>13</sup> A conciliation committee is put together when after two readings (in ordinary legislative procedure) the EP and the Council still cannot agree. The conciliation committee is made of an equal numbers of members of the EP and representatives of the Council. For more details on procedures, see <http://www.europarl.europa.eu/aboutparliament/en/0080a6d3d8/Ordinary-legislative-procedure.html>

emails, she would hardly ever check them unless they have been filtered first by the local assistant and then by the office assistant in Brussels. She also explained that it could be different according to the MEP office policy. For instance, in one of their national party delegation MEP's office, the MEP checks emails herself first and she then forwards important and relevant emails to her assistants. MEP A's assistant concluded by admitting that emails "are really a part of the job". In MEP B's office, the same logic than in MEP A's office applied. The assistant would set a rule for certain emails sent to the MEP's professional email address to be sent to his own email account so that he can filter information before forwarding important emails to the MEP. Thus, information management has appeared to be a large part of an assistants' job.

Whereas emails seem to take most of an assistants' attention and time, traditional mail has a limited place in communication in both observed offices. Indeed, even though MEP A's assistant received the mail twice a day for her MEP, she would not dedicate a specific time of her working day to open the mail but would rather open it while doing other things. In MEP B's office, the assistant would also be the one to deal with the mail. In his case, he would quickly open the mail in the morning, both internal and external mail. External mail is received and delivered on each floor of MEPs' offices, whereas pigeonholes, situated on the main floor of the building – which allow any person in the building to leave mail in any of the 754 MEPs' pigeonholes – receive internal mail.

On the first day of observation in Office A, a 'messenger' stopped by the MEP's office to give a letter to the assistant. Her natural reaction to this, once the messenger was gone, was to comment: "well, there are pigeonholes, you know". Such a remark showed the established codes and processes as for mediated communication: 'there is no need for face-to-face interaction if you are to give me a letter. You could just leave it in our pigeonhole as per the rule'. The letter turned out to be a greeting letter from an MEP to MEP A on her successful report. Following this, the assistant explained that greetings are usually made by email or directly in the hemicycle when a report is voted in favour. On other occasions, MEPs would have a coffee to congratulate each other or they just do so in the corridor. It is very unusual to send a 'messenger' to drop a letter directly to an MEP's office.

The limited number of laptops in committee meetings and political group meetings clashes with the important use of mobile phones (including smartphones). Even though the EP Secretariat, with its Directorate-General for Innovation and Technological Support (DG ITEC) aims at a paperless parliament by promoting paperless meetings, the distribution of official documents (i.e. reports, agenda, etc.) at the beginning of every formal scheduled meeting is still very important. Besides, the number of MEPs who would go to meetings with their laptops was very low. The use of smartphones and portable devices however was very common, with MEPs openly and frequently using them during meetings, in their offices, or in the corridors. MEPs tended to be more hooked on their smartphones than their laptops (even though the institution provides MEPs with laptops on demand). Both observed MEPs would go to committee meetings and political group meetings with their laptop. However, by observing other MEPs who attended meetings, such behaviour seemed to be the exception rather than the rule. MEP B's second assistant would take all working documents on her laptop at meetings rather than hard copies. She once explained to me that they [in their office] would always use electronic copies of working documents and would share them on an online network so that every time one person would modify the document, it would be saved and synchronised on everyone else's laptop in the office. The only time that a meeting was filled up with portable devices other than mobile phones was during a meeting with DG ITEC to discuss EP's IT Plan. On that occasion, most MEPs present (or their assistants) had a laptop or a tablet.

Committee work does not only presuppose one-to-one communication – face-to-face or mediated – but also supposes the retrieval of valuable information such as working documents and background information on an issue worked on. Although documents are available on the European Parliament Document Exchange System (EPADES), other repositories are also used by MEP staff to retrieve working documents. Whereas Shahin & Neuhold (2007: 307) mentioned that: “There is little use of new ICTs beyond applications such as email and the EPADES system, which are used to speed up transmission and broaden internal dissemination of documents between committee members”, observation has revealed the use of other online sources that facilitate internal actors' retrieval of working documents. In both offices observed, 'l'Oeil', the online legislative observatory of the EP, was

used to find documents. MEP A's assistant admitted that she doesn't use EPADES but that she knew assistants who do. MEP B's assistant explained: "it's quicker to use l'Oeil [to retrieve working documents] but if you know the document reference, EPADES is quicker" and later added "l'Oeil has become more and more efficient so there is no need to use EPADES."

It had been noticed in Office A that intranet facilities were also used as a source of information. On the first day of observation, the assistant advised the trainee to use more systematically the intranet to retrieve documents. The trainee would later admit however that it is a bit difficult sometimes to know where to look for information as there is an EP intranet, a political group intranet and a national party delegation website where she could potentially retrieve information. The assistant confirmed that the political group intranet, the EP intranet as well as the political group and national party delegation websites are information resources for their everyday work.

DG ITEC presented, during the IT committee meeting mentioned earlier, a new document repository that is to be implemented in all committees by 2014 as to improve and facilitate MEPs' work conditions as far as committee work is concerned. It is also part of a broader plan aiming to reduce document printing for committee meetings (Paperless Parliament). Thus, eCommittee constitutes a platform that coordinates MEPs in the context of their legislative work. It was introduced as:

**"a new working tool** designed to make committee work more easy and efficient. It is an intranet, which provides all committee information and documents in one single place [...] eCommittee is **a common working space** for Members, assistants, committee secretariats and political group staff – for everybody whose work relates to committees."<sup>14</sup>

An official of DG ITEC explained the necessity for the institution and for MEPs to work on a single point of access repository:

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<sup>14</sup> Bold in original documents. "eCommittee: an ALL in ONE solution". Private correspondence with EP official dated 8 February 2012.

We have databases that follow the legislative documents' workflow, amendments, opi... opinions, draft reports and all that, and all that with the aim to push forward a report that comes from the Commission, that goes through the whole cycle... to end up [...]at some point DG Presidency decides 'OK, this committee takes the report for example, all the legal aspects, we will give it to the JURI committee, and we will say that it also has some, I might say something wrong here, it has some international aspects or international trade or something like that, we will ask the foreign affairs, the foreign affairs committee for opinions on the report that the JURI committee is in charge of. So all of this is a well-structured procedure, that is already implemented but it is scattered among different databases. And eCommittee is really a space, an intranet that will aggregate all this information and put it under one global form, a single point of access for each committee. (EPO 6)<sup>15</sup>

### **3.6. Interaction with external actors: lobbying the EP**

#### *3.6.1. Introduction*

For a very long time, the EP had not been seen as an appealing target by interest groups and lobbyists as EP's legislative powers were very limited. Over the past decades, a growing interest towards the European elected body has seen the number of lobbyists dramatically increase and lobbying elected representatives has become common practice. A quite limited number of political science studies have explored lobbying in the EP (Coen 2007; Earnshaw and Judge 2006; Kohler-Koch 1997, 2010; Marshall 2010; Neuhold 2001), giving a wider interest to lobbying in the European Commission. But since the EP has become a co-decision maker on a large number of matters with the Maastricht Treaty and since its powers have been constantly strengthened with each revision of the treaties, today's ordinary legislative procedure has established the EP as a central actor and lobbyists have started to see in elected representatives a sound target to try to impose their influence. Non Governmental Organisations (NGOs) and interest groups are known as "lobbyists" in Brussels (they had such a status on the EP Register of Lobbies up

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<sup>15</sup> Translated from French to English by the author.

until 2011). According to the EP, “Lobbyists can be private, public or non-governmental bodies. They can provide Parliament with knowledge and specific expertise in numerous economic, social, environmental and scientific areas.”<sup>16</sup> In 2003, the EP counted “5,039 accredited interest groups [of which] 70 per cent are business oriented and 20 per cent are non-governmental organisations.” (Coen 2007: 335). In June 2011, the EP and the European Commission established a common register for interest groups called the Transparency Register. It incorporates the previously separate registers of the EP and the Commission. In June 2012, there were 4,999 registrants with 2,385 in-house lobbyists and trade/professional associations, 1,432 NGOs and 261 organisations representing local, regional and municipal authorities just to name a few<sup>17</sup>. The Transparency Register gives access to EU civil society’s organisations to come and discuss issues with MEPs in an attempt to share expertise and/or to influence MEPs’ decisions on legislation. As noted by Earnshaw and Judge (2006: 63):

“‘Interest representation’ and ‘lobbying’ in parliaments are normally justified in terms of information transmission, translation and timing. The transmission of information from interest organizations to MEPs is deemed essential as it provides pre-digested information for elected representatives who are often not experts in the particular policy area under consideration. This ‘briefing’ function also allows specific groups and organizations to translate often complex and technical information into accessible data for busy elected representatives.”

For the purpose of this study, mention to the European civil society, be it an NGO, an association, an interest group or a consultancy, are gathered under the term ‘lobbyist’. I want to acknowledge here that the notion of ‘lobbyist’ is more complex than it seems but I take the chance here to adopt a terminology that has been given by the institution itself for many years as it gathers under the same term different facets of the European civil society. Today, the terminology has changed and ‘lobbyist’ has been replaced by ‘interest group representatives’ as a broad category

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<sup>16</sup> Europarl Website, Accredited lobbyists, Introduction, Retrieved on <http://www.europarl.europa.eu/parliament/expert/staticDisplay.do?language=EN&id=65>, 4 March 2010.

<sup>17</sup> See Transparency Register Statistics, retrieved <http://ec.europa.eu/transparencyregister/public/consultation/statistics.do?action=prepareView>, 5 June 2012

of external actors. However, both terms can be seen as synonymous in this research<sup>18</sup>.

Thus, lobbyists provide MEPs with expertise and insights on the needs and realities of European businesses and/or citizens where legislation applies at local, national or European levels, realities of which MEPs are not necessarily aware of due to their remoteness or their lack of expertise in one field or another:

“Lobbyists increasingly see the EP as an important arena for the representation of interests. MEPs act as far as possible as representatives of the "European people", even if they are elected by local constituencies. They have to integrate interests with relevance to Europe as a whole and are therefore contacted by actors working within the myriad of networks to be found in the EU system of multi-level governance (Benz 2001, p. 7).”  
(Neuhold 2001)

### *3.6.2. Lobbying the EP at the right time: when lobbyists know when and who to lobby*

MEPs and lobbyists have established mutual relationships where MEPs receive policy expertise on ongoing dossiers and lobbyists aspire to influence MEPs on their final votes on a piece of legislation. An empirical study conducted by Marshall (2010) shows the key moments and the key actors that lobbyists turn to when lobbying the EP. Marshall defines three key phases in the legislative process in the EP where lobbyists tend to get involved: the drafting of a report – when a piece of legislation is introduced in the EP as a proposal by the EC; the open amendment phase – when a rapporteur receives amendments from his committee fellows; and finally, the compromise phase – when amendments have been submitted and negotiations take place before final vote in committee (Marshall 2010: 558). Thus, Marshall’s study shows that “the open amendment phase, following the presentation of the draft report, is shown to be highly significant venue

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<sup>18</sup> If we add up the two subcategories ‘professional consultancies’ (575) and in-house lobbyists (2,385) which are both characterised by their lobbying practices, they cover the majority of registrants (2,960 out of 4,999). Therefore, it justifies the choice I have made to maintain the term ‘lobbyist’ throughout this study. Figures retrieved in June 2012, on <http://ec.europa.eu/transparencyregister/public/consultation/statistics.do?action=prepareView>



for lobbying activity, with at least as great an impact on a committee's final position as the rapporteur's draft report" (2010: 554). Additionally, it shows that lobbying certain influential committee members is common practice for lobbyists. An interview with a lobbyist in Brussels also confirmed that the choice of MEPs to lobby is important:

We have different levels of interaction, indeed, with MEPs. I would say that in practice... there are MEPs who are necessarily more important than others on each dossier. So we work, or at least we try to work with people who are important on a dossier and who are important in different committees. In the end, we see that... maybe I am saying this too fast, but in each committee, about 10 to 20-25 MEPs are important, the rest... it is not always important to work with them because they are less involved in those dossiers, because first, they might not have the time, so we work, we try indeed to work as close as possible, that is to say, we exchange as much information as possible and... ideas with people who are indeed involved in the dossier, which generally I would say are about 5 to 10 people. (LOB 1)<sup>19</sup>

Empirical findings are moderated when it comes to evaluating the most appropriate time for lobbying MEPs according to the phases of a piece of legislation. Whereas Marshall (2010) sees the open amendment phase as a crucial phase for lobbyists to contact MEPs, interviews with lobbyists have shown that both phases – drafting and open amendment – are equally important.

Thus, the same lobbyist mentioned above confirmed the importance of lobbying MEPs upstream, during the drafting phase of a report :

It is true that when new dossiers come up, we try to do work upstream and indeed to think about what is at stake and to define a number of... of lines of action which are important for the people we represent here and then we try to, indeed, have a chance to go and explain often with our clients, actually not so often alone, rarely alone, with our clients, so that they can explain why such or such matter is important, why we would like the Parliament, for example, to look into one aspect or another of Commission

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<sup>19</sup> Translated from French to English by the author.

proposals. So that, we often organise meetings pretty quickly, upstream to the legislative work, as upstream as possible because it allows us, indeed, to provide MEPs with information and to fuel their thinking internally, be it the rapporteurs, the shadow-rapporteurs and even some times members of the committee secretariat, because there are also EP civil servants who deal with those dossiers, who, in the end, are the ones who write the reports [...] (LOB 1)<sup>20</sup>

The position of another lobbyist however, did not emphasise the draft report phase as the most important phase:

[...] it depends on, of course, on the stage of the process also when it is just starting: not so often. And maybe we meet two MEPs during the Brussels week but when, when it's really hot, you can meet 5 MEPs a week... so, the best is to go to Strasbourg and meet there really kind of groups of MEPs... [...] Yeah, I mean, I haven't been going so much, [to Strasbourg] but yeah, that's what we tend to do. (LOB 2)

She however emphasised the importance of having a direct contact with an MEP as being an added value for their work:

And it's also you know many things are once you have the contact with the MEP... it's, you can, you can sort, you can deal with many things on the phone, or through email communications or once we have some MEPs who, with whom we have some, some quite warm relationship so they are, we are just in touch with assistants on the phone. (LOB 2)

Marshall's typology supports the contextual framework chosen for this study as it demonstrates that the drafting and amending of reports are essential phases in the legislative process of the EP and that the dynamics of interactions involve internal and external actors, with a special emphasis on the role of lobbyists.

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<sup>20</sup> Translated from French to English by the author.

### *3.6.3. Face-to-face encounters with external actors during committee and political group meeting weeks*

Classic communication – be it mediated or direct – seems to be crucial for lobbyists to be known as reliable work partners by an MEP. Both observed offices would consider direct contact to be essential for building a relationship between a lobbyist and their MEP. The observation, as well as reported words confirmed that. Indeed, while discussing the relationship the office had with the European civil society, MEP A's assistant stated that if a lobbyist's request was pertinent from the start, she would consult her MEP on that matter and would then get in contact with the lobbyists. She also considered that face-to-face meetings were necessary as first contacts. Contacts can then be made by phone or email. The way Office A deals with lobbyists they know well is mainly via emails and phone. MEP A's assistant gave the example of a lobbying group that had been overloading them with information via email: "it is bugging us so we need to block them." Besides, when the assistant knows the lobbyist (from previous contact or exchanges), it makes a difference in the way she treats the information. This goes in line with Shahin and Neuhold's finding (2007) that information selection in MEPs' offices is strongly based on who is at the origin of the message. This is of particular relevance when it comes to exploring social structures and strongly relevant for the theoretical framework of this study as well as the findings developed in Chapters 6 and 7.

The case of a lobbyist who had a scheduled meeting with MEP A's trainee and a civil servant to organise an event is a good example. MEP A's assistant explained that they first got the contact of the lobbyist via another MEP of their national party delegation. This lobbying group gathers locally organised actors from different Member States. It turns out that one of the MEP's acquaintances was a member of the local branch of the lobbying group. When explaining to me the existing relationship between the MEP and the lobbying group, the assistant mentioned that this contact was 'less conventional' than the usual but that the acquaintance at the local level had allowed the consideration of the lobbying group at the European level as a possible partner. Thus, the personal relationship that the MEP and the acquaintance had maintained has facilitated the creation of a professional, lobbyist-based relationship with the MEP's office.

Thus, direct contact with lobbyists seems to be essential to establish a work relationship. As one MEP explained the importance of face-to-face interaction for internal communication, he considered face-to-face interactions with external actors to be as common and important as in internal communications:

Usually as well too. I mean... it... mostly it end up the way that you make an appointment for 30 min and then one [lobbyist] goes through the issues which they put on the table and I express my views, and then we have a discussion about it, so most of the time that it is also face to face. Although if NGOs or lobbyists or who else is purely interested in sort of making sure that you received their point of view, they just send you an email with one or two pages, which has a 50/50 chance of being read so that's why they actually, I assume, prefer personal meetings as well. (FU MEP 1)

A lobbyist based in Brussels confirmed that:

Generally, we have the classic reaction, that is to say, we meet with them [MEPs], this is always a bit important. After that, we contact them by phone, often with their assistants... and actually meetings with assistants are as important as meetings with MEPs themselves most of the time... and then... apart from that, we send them press releases, we send them policy statements, we send them... yes, I don't know, dossiers, information, we also regularly organise events with them... this is very regular, we organise round tables, workshops, conferences in the EP with some of them [MEPs], even meetings indeed, lunches or dinners, which is a bit more unusual but it can happen and we also organise some times training trips for MEPs. (LOB 1)<sup>21</sup>

The lobbyist who met with MEP A's trainee confirmed the importance of direct communication as a first approach, followed by sustained mediated communication via phone calls and emails:

So what do we do? We... yeah, the usual stuff so we, we do meetings, we do events in the Parliament, we, the key tool is briefings, so

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<sup>21</sup> Translated from French to English by the author.

we, we produce briefings on... which summarize our policy tasks... [...] We meet MEPs, we do briefings, we send them to respective committees, so what we do, we follow the legislative process, and we prepare targeted briefings which are reflecting the... the legislative stage so, and now we have a general briefing then we have a voting recommendation, we have, you know this stuff, we tried to also commend on amendments, you know the usual things which any NGO would do. But we do it through personal contact [...] (LOB 2)

Observation confirmed the importance of face-to-face meetings between MEPs, their staff and lobbyists during committee and political group meeting weeks. Two types of encounters occurred and are presented here according to their location (where): scheduled and unscheduled office meetings; and unscheduled corridor discussions and event organisation meetings.

#### 3.6.3.1. Scheduled and unscheduled meetings in MEPs' offices

On several occasions, MEP B had meetings with external actors in his office. The first time, a meeting gathered the MEP, a political group member, the assistant and a trade unionist. As stated by MEP A's assistant, the direct contact between an MEP and a lobbyist is important. Once the meeting was over, MEP B's assistant and the trade unionist left to have lunch together. Once again, the situational informality of a lunch was favoured. On another occasion, the encounter was unscheduled. The visitor was known as a former MEP. She was very comfortable with all members of the office. The then MEP was nowadays considered as a lobbyist in the EP. The assistant told her on a teasing note: 'you know the sign on the door applies to you too!' In spring 2011, a scandal shook the EP when a number of MEPs got caught for accepting money from lobbyists in exchange of changes in legislation in their favour. Since this episode, the EP has voted a Code of Conduct for its members to fully disclose their financial and other interests (EP 2011). As a consequence of the scandal, MEP B put a sign on his door stating that he would not accept any financial interests from lobbyists. This is why MEP B's assistant teased her on attempting to 'influence' MEP B. Whereas the former MEP's visit was unscheduled, she came in with a printed copy of a document from the EC that she gave to the assistant. The face-to-face encounter, combined with the situational informality of popping into the

office unscheduled was common in MEP's office<sup>22</sup>. The importance of situational informality was once again raised when MEP B mentioned to his assistant that it would be good to reschedule a tea that he was supposed to have with someone who was to give him a working document. He then said: "I hope this guy will still bring the document in a brown envelope." Situational informality, combined with the time frame of communicative actions (unscheduled and scheduled meetings) with external actors is further discussed in the next section.

### 3.6.3.2. Corridor talks, political action and event organisation

Earlier, I described committee meetings and political group meetings as facilitating internal communication. Thus, the closing of meetings and the moving around EP buildings are an opportunity for unscheduled encounters. When it comes to interaction with external actors in EP corridors, an interesting encounter took place in one of EP's buildings' corridors while observing MEP B. The encounter gathered three MEPs, their assistants and a woman who represented workers of a nuclear station based in one EU Member State. Whereas the workers' representative came to the EP for a working group organised by a specific political group, she managed to gather three MEPs from different Member States, their assistants and members of MEP B's political group for a meeting in a corridor. For about 20 min, she presented and represented work conditions of those workers and managed, by the end of the discussion to get the three MEPs to agree on taking the issue forward.. The informality of the encounter in a corridor as well as the face-to-face confrontation turned out to be a driving force for political action.

Events – such as receptions and exhibitions – play an important role in their communicating and networking dimensions in the EP. Corbett (2007: 321) defines 'exhibitions' in the Parliament as 'non-commercial' events "that have a European dimension [and which do] not interfere with Parliament's business or undermine its dignity." During those events that take place in EP buildings – in Brussels and/or Strasbourg – MEPs, assistants, EP officials and external actors who have access to

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<sup>22</sup> Although the purpose of observation was not on the content of communications, it is worth mentioning the following example, and the content of the discussion between those actors, as it reflects the dynamics of relationship and communication between external actors and MEP A's office at the time of observation.

the buildings can gather in an informal context. For instance, a few MEPs, members of the Agriculture committee, might decide to organise an event to raise awareness on Protected Designation of Origin. Doing so, they would organise an Italian wine and cheese tasting session jointly with representatives of a region (potentially lobbyists) and thus promoting Italian regional products in the EP.

During observation with MEP A, the trainee met with a lobbyist to organise a public event in the EP in the context of MEP A's work in one of her committees. MEPs have to follow a formal procedure to host such events and that is why the trainee and the lobbyist met with an EP official who was in charge of the organisation of events in the EP. During that meeting, details and logistics of the event were discussed behind closed doors, face-to-face, rather than via email or phone. On that occasion, the EP official told the trainee: "I prefer when you come [to my office] and we discuss [the organisation] together." Face-to-face meetings seemed to work better for her to achieve efficient work. As found in a number of interviews with MEPs, their staff and lobbyists, face-to-face meetings are indispensable and "work better" than mediated communication.

During a political group meeting week, a second example of event organisation occurred. As member of a Committee, MEP B organised a meeting, together with committee members of his political group, to discuss a current political and social issue, inviting therefore external partners. His assistant explained that the meeting was an internal event reserved to members of the group. He also explained that, as it was a limited and fairly small event and that they do not have money to organise "big things", they called people "from the environment" to come and speak at this meeting. By that, the assistant meant that they did not have enough money to invite a broad range of experts and therefore decided instead to invite external people that they knew. Once again, existing relationships with external actors played a significant role in exchanging information on ongoing issues discussed in the institution and the notion of 'who knows who' appears as a leading force in exchanging information and communicating with external actors in the context of committee work.

### 3.6.4. *The role of European citizens in the process of drafting and amending legislation*

European citizens have a very limited official role to play when MEPs draft and amend legislation. MEPs can be contacted by citizens on a one-to-one basis to hear them out, face-to-face in their constituency<sup>23</sup> or via mediated communication. MEPs seek technical and expert information that will help them draft reports and/or submit amendments. From a political theory perspective, when considering a promissory model of representation (Mansbridge 2003), citizens do not play any role during an elected representative's mandate. However, if we consider alternative conceptions of representation (as seen later in Chapter 4), citizens are called to play a role in the legislative process. The extent to which their inputs are valuable for the technical and expert information MEPs need to carry out their work as legislators is not assessed here. The Petitions Committee (PETI) for instance, plays a bridging role in getting European citizens involved in the legislative process. As explained by the PETI committee chair:

The right to petition, contained in the Treaty on European Union, is a fundamental right inextricably linked to its citizenship. It is an important and often effective way for people to be directly involved in the Parliament's activity and to have their concerns, proposals or complaints specifically addressed by the Committee members<sup>24</sup>.

Besides, the European Citizens' Initiative (ECI), introduced with the Lisbon Treaty, and which takes effect in 2012, allows:

(...) 1 million citizens from at least one quarter of the EU Member States to invite the European Commission to bring forward proposals for legal acts in areas where the Commission has the power to do so. The organisers of a citizens' initiative, a citizens' committee composed of at least 7 EU citizens who are resident in at least 7 different Member States, will

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<sup>23</sup> MEPs receive groups of visitors during their working weeks in Brussels and/or Strasbourg but visits aims to popularise EP's role and its work to EU citizens rather than getting them involved in the legislative process.

<sup>24</sup> Welcome words, PETI Committee webpage, Europarl Website, retrieved on 01 June 2012, <http://www.europarl.europa.eu/committees/en/peti/home.html>



have 1 year to collect the necessary statements of support. The number of statements of support has to be certified by the competent authorities in the Member States. The Commission will then have 3 months to examine the initiative and decide how to act on it.<sup>25</sup>

Citizens' involvement via the ECI would occur upstream and therefore would not modify existing processes and dynamics discussed here when drafting and amending legislation at the committee level.

### **3.7. Conclusion**

This chapter has presented the formal processes of committee work as well as the dynamics of interaction and the actors involved in this process. I argue in this chapter that formal processes and actual dynamics of interaction in the process of drafting and amending legislation are different and should be dealt with in parallel. When it comes to internal communication, four elements have emerged throughout observational work in the EP. First, face-to-face communication remains the main communicative practice when it comes to discussing ongoing issues and reports. Second, situational formality (what/when/where) is a strong component of information exchange during committee and political group meeting weeks; the contextual and situational setting of communication has emerged throughout the exploratory study as a strong component of communicative actions. Third, communication that involves external actors, and mainly lobbyists, happens on different levels of interaction – direct or mediated – but one crucial observation is the necessity for MEPs – and for lobbyists – to have direct face-to-face contacts with each other in order to ‘work’ together in the long term. Finally, findings have shown that MEP assistants play a pivotal role in the committee framework.

Whereas most of political science research has been interested in interest groups' influence and role on MEPs' decision-making, this chapter has intended first and foremost to throw light on the internal and external dynamics of communication. Although I do not intend to characterise the content of those

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<sup>25</sup> European Citizens' Initiative, European Commission Website, retrieved on [http://ec.europa.eu/dgs/secretariat\\_general/citizens\\_initiative/](http://ec.europa.eu/dgs/secretariat_general/citizens_initiative/) 28 November 2011

interactions and although the outcomes of those interactions – as possible influence on the decision-making – are not the main focus of the research, motivations and perceived benefits of using certain communicative tools might result in considering outcomes of communication as sensible motivations of use.

## **Chapter 4 - Analytical framework: communication network theories and social networking tools**

### **4.1. Summary**

This chapter presents the analytical framework of this study. It is organised around four sections. The first part of the chapter introduces major communication theories that are of relevance for this study. The adoption of a network approach to analysing communication in the EP is articulated in this section. The interpretive approach taken to conduct this study allows me to consider unconventional notions such as emergent networks or informality as I outline the analytical framework as an a priori model of SNT use for MEPs. The second section introduces and defines the notion of social networking tools. The third section of the chapter discusses cognitive theories and their relevance in the context of this study and includes a review of SNT adoption in the workplace in organisational studies. Finally, the analytical framework is presented and articulated around four categories of use that are then used to analyse empirical findings.

### **4.2. Relevant major communication theories**

#### *4.2.1. From Weber to the network structure of organisations*

Dynamic forms of organisations and communication are considered in this study. Indeed, as seen in Chapter 3, communication takes several forms and paths in the EP. In particular, two forms of organisations can be compared: bureaucratic and networked. Bureaucratic organisations are defined in Weberian terms as highly structured and rigid organisations characterised by three processes: rationalization, differentiation and integration (Beetham 1996; Monge and Contractor 2003).

Unlike bureaucracy, the network form of organisations allows for a more flexible and dynamic structure. As argued by Monge and Contractor (2003: 18), the network form has emerged in the continuance of other major forms of organisations that have developed in the past century. It has also been argued that networks as organisational structures have emerged together with the network society (Castells 2000). Network forms,

“which are neither classical markets nor traditional hierarchies (Powell, 1990), nor both (Piore & Sabel, 1984), are built around material and symbolic flows that link people and objects both locally and globally without regard for traditional national, institutional, or organizational boundaries.” (Monge and Contractor 2003: 4)

The EU is often seen as heavily bureaucratic. It can be argued here that the structure of the EP is indeed strongly bureaucratic due to its functioning and the organisation of its administration (See Appendix 4 for the EP Secretariat’s structure with its Directorate-Generals and Directorates). However, and as seen in the previous chapter, communication within this bureaucratic organisation has its own forms and does not necessarily follow the structure imposed by the institution. Besides, the bureaucratic structure of organisations is highly debatable as for its rigidity and formal structure-like definition, especially in the context of study here:

“Bureaucracy allowed little room for lateral, cross-level, or cross-boundary communication networks, that is informal or emergent networks, a feature for which it has been frequently criticized (Galbraith, 1977; Heckscher, 1994).” (Monge and Contractor 2003: 17-18)

For this reason, I argue here that the network structure is of value in studying communication in the EP. As seen in Chapter 3, the organisational structure of communication in the EP is strongly defined upon the notion of network where hierarchy and bureaucracy-like relationships do not necessarily prevail over naturally occurring relationships.

#### *4.2.2. Motivations of use and perceived benefits: On the relevance of cognitive theories*

##### 4.2.2.1. Characterising networks: from formal networks to emergent networks

As forms of organisations have been continuously transforming, so should their analysis. In the past, “formal networks” analysis characterised organisations as representing “the channels of communication through which orders were transmitted downward and information was transmitted upward (Weber, 1947).” (Monge and

Contractor 2003: 8). However, my observational study of the EP – as presented in Chapter 3 – has shown the complexity and the dynamism of communicative interactions. Whereas, in general terms, the official structure of the institution is highly bureaucratic, and to a certain extent a facet of communication is also tinged with bureaucracy – i.e. official decisions that need the go-ahead of different levels of decision-makers in the Secretariat and political groups – communication (in the process of legislating) involves less structured, more flexible and dynamic interactions. For this reason, we can think of communication networks in the EP as emergent networks. Emergent networks “originally differentiated informal, naturally occurring networks from formal, imposed, or “mandated” networks [...]” (Monge and Contractor 2003: 8)

Thus, emergent networks are favoured for best describing communication when drafting and amending legislation. Consequently, I introduce two essential aspects of this study. First, cognitive communication network theories inform my understanding of communicative interactions in the process of drafting and amending legislation. And secondly, I emphasise the importance of the setting of these interactions and the space given to informality in analysing and conceptualising communication networks in a workplace context.

#### 4.2.2.2. Actual structures of communication vs. cognitive structures: Perceptions on communication

Monge and Contractor (2003) have offered a fresh approach to analysing networks and have suggested a multitheoretical multilevel approach (MTML), which relies on the properties of the network that analysts are looking at. They also argue that their model can be seen as the combination of three analytic folds: first, they call for a network decomposition, where components of the network are identified and assessed; second, the analysis of attributes of nodes (actors of the network); and finally, the analysis of multiplex networks (multiple networks originating from the same nodes). I choose to rely mainly on Monge and Contractor’s theoretical framework (2003) as a way to access a more comprehensive theoretical framework that gives a general picture of communication theories from a multilevel perspective.

A considerable amount of research has been conducted on social structures by Blau (1972), Wellman (1988), Granovetter (1973, 1983), Knackhardt (1987) and Haythornthwaite (2002), just to name a few. Approaches vary from the psychology field to social network analysis (SNA). This study has an interdisciplinary approach and does not aim to apply one approach over another (i.e. psychology over SNA). This study combines different levels of network analysis, in particular, the analysis of nodes attributes (i.e. MEPs' perceived benefits and motivations of use) is combined to the study of multiplex networks initiating from the same nodes (MEPs). Indeed, offline networks – under different forms as seen in Chapter 3 – and online networks are jointly analysed. This is why Monge and Contractor's MTML approach has been chosen as the most valuable theoretical framework needed to articulate an a priori model of use of SNT for MEPs.

The focus here is on motivations and perceptions on the benefits of using specific communication tools. It would be misleading to attempt to assess actual networks of communication when what is at stake in this study is the perceptions individuals have of their communication practices. Indeed, in the case of communicating during the legislative process, and accordingly with the methodology chosen as argued in Chapter 2, people's perceptions on their practices and their motivations to using certain communication tools are the main focus. Thus, it is necessary to consider underlying theories that do not take the analysis of actual networks of communication as a main pillar but rather adopt an approach that considers cognitions and/or perceived communication as a conceptual and analytical framework.

Besides, it is important to note that this study is not about the perceptions individuals have of the social structure of the network *per se*. Rather, it is about how people's understanding and awareness of other actors in the network is intrinsically linked to the tool one uses to communicate with other members of the network. Indeed, I would argue here that one's awareness of other people present in the network and their awareness of the information available in this network play a role in selecting a communication tool and to communicate accordingly. This is why communication network theories that take nodes (actors)' attributes such as cognitions as valuable components for analysis are of interest for this study.

#### 4.2.2.3. From cognitive structures to informality

To explore communication patterns in the EP, I have chosen to adopt unconventional ways of theorising and more specifically, I have chosen to rely on theoretical considerations that, for a very long time, were disputed and criticised. Indeed, I would like to introduce here one social theorist who has had little influence up until recently on organisational studies (Rawls 2008; Samra-Fredericks and Bargiela-Chiappini 2008) but who nevertheless has developed comprehensive social theories that are of relevance when studying organisations: Harold Garfinkel. Garfinkel's work is broad and has challenged conventional theories of communication and organisations. His most commonly mentioned argument is that:

“social orders, including work, depend for their coherence on constant attention to, and competent display of, shared member's methods (ethno-methods) rather than on formal structures, or individual motivation [...]” (Rawls 2008: 701)

Chapter 3 has allowed me to explore on an observational basis communication in EP. The choice of a qualitative method to exploring communication patterns during committee and political group meeting weeks in EP goes in line with Garfinkel's criticism that theorising without going on the field leaves apart elements that theory alone could not define:

“For many years he [Garfinkel] forcefully and explicitly criticized conventional theorizing, arguing that any researcher who ‘formulated’ research problems theoretically before entering the field could (in principle) not find the actual real-world problems of making action and objects mutually intelligible that people at the work-site faced everyday.” (Rawls 2008: 708)

If I follow Garfinkel's rationale, contingencies and notions such as informality can hardly be characterised or defined in conventional theorising:

“Because conventional theory does not recognize the significance of ordered contingencies, a focus on details seems to be a-theoretical. But there is an intrinsic relationship between detailed studies and their theoretical

premises, at the heart of which is the premise that order is an ongoing achievement of member's methods for producing it [...]" (Rawls 2008: 708)

The analysis of action took a turn in the 1950s and 1960s as scholars such as Garfinkel (1967) and Goffman (1963) called for the consideration of everyday life experience as relevant and important in defining a theory of action:

"This movement of thought, like Garfinkel's work itself, has emerged in a wide-ranging reaction to the normative determinism of the post-war Parsonian synthesis and is expressed in the general view that any new analytic framework for the study of action must not violate fundamental aspects of ordinary human experience." (Heritage 1984: 307)

The observational study conducted for this research showed that the structure of communication was strongly networked and that the setting of communication played an important role in characterising communicative actions. Thus, informality emerged as an important element in communicating in the context of committee work. Informality is a complex notion to define and has various meanings:

"In some context, 'informality' is used to describe a relaxed, casual or non-ceremonial approach to conformity with formal rules, dress codes and procedures, while, in other situations, it can refer to actions taking place behind the official scene and which – because they are not in accordance with prescribed regulation – are perceived as a threat to fair and just treatment, resulting in favouritism, nepotism and patronage." (Misztal 2000: 17-18)

Informality was defined in Chapter 3 as characteristics of the setting of communicative actions. For instance, encounters that had initiated in an MEP's office – by simply stopping by – were characterised as informal. Random encounters in the corridors were also characterised as informal. Meetings in MEPs' offices scheduled between assistants have also been characterised as informal and in opposition with the very formal structure of the institution where MEPs (supposedly) are the ones who meet in formal committee meetings and political group meetings in the process of legislating.



As for the medium used to communicate, informality is often associated with face-to-face interaction but should not be limited to this. Interaction can be mediated and so can informality:

“[...] informality denotes informal processes of face-to-face interaction, which can be either of local space and/or time importance or unlimited space and/or time importance [...] On the other hand, since copresence is not the only form of communication that involves actors facing complex contingencies of social coordination and relying largely upon tacit assumptions and mutual adjustment, informality cannot be restricted only to face-to-face interaction. [...] Thus, informality, instead of being seen as an obvious element of every face-to-face communication, should be conceptualized as existing in any communicational network with a space for interactive indeterminacy or uncertainty.” (Miztal 2000: 19-20)

Thus, as much as the structure of communication is important to understanding communication practices in the EP, I argue here that the setting of communication (formal or informal) is a characteristic that needs to be taken into account in the process of drafting and amending legislation. Chapter 3 has allowed me to characterise communication during working weeks in the EP and to find out that informal face-to-face interactions were essential in relation to official/formal settings of communication (i.e. committee meetings). Observation findings suggest that mediated communication has an important role to play and as seen earlier, if informality is so central to face-to-face interactions, one needs to explore, from a theoretical and empirical perspective, the place given to informality in mediated communication. The network structure of face-to-face communication leads me to considering the same structure in mediated communication. This also calls into question the role of informality in such mediated networks.

The following section introduces SNT as communication tools that need to be studied in parallel with communication network theories in general and social structure theories in particular.

### 4.3. Social Networking Tools: Definition

“Information exchanges, whether face-to-face or computer-mediated, are more than individual human-computer interactions. They are social interactions.” (Haythornthwaite and Wellman 1998: 1102)

The network society has brought with it its share of new communicative tools characterised by their network structure. In particular, tools that I have so far called SNT. boyd and Ellison (boyd and Ellison 2007) have defined Social Network Sites (SNS) as follows:

“web-based services that allow individuals to (1) construct a public or semi-public profile within a bounded system, (2) articulate a list of other users with whom they share a connection, and (3) view and traverse their list of connections and those made by others within the system.”

This is probably the most cited definition of SNT in the literature. However, this definition remains broad and does not differentiate characteristics of different tools. Since boyd and Ellison’s definition in 2007, no other, more up to date, definition has been articulated. New technologies, in this case SNS, have dramatically changed in the past few years and this is why I argue here that boyd and Ellison’s definition needs to be refined to the more recent online social networks landscape. Thus, I choose here to use the notion of social networking *tools* (SNT). By SNT, I mean all new communication technologies and/or Internet applications that embrace a network structure. Thus, blogs and microblogging are examples of SNT as well as Internet applications such as Facebook or LinkedIn. Whereas blogs and microblogging are primarily content-publishing applications, I would argue that Internet applications such as Facebook or LinkedIn are characterised by their connection-building component – i.e. Facebook and LinkedIn revolve around the possibility to connect and build a network of friends, acquaintances, etc., where the individual profile (ego) is central and content-publishing is secondary. Moreover, SNS, as defined by boyd and Ellison, are hardly ever studied all together in organisational studies. Blogging and microblogging have been explored separately in organisational studies and their properties are defined separately too. Thus, I

choose to classify blogging and microblogging separately and make them two elements of SNT rather than combining them under the notion of SNS.

The number of public SNT has dramatically increased in the past decade, with attempts to reach different audiences. Tools such as Facebook or the microblogging tool Twitter have a constantly increasing number of users. Sites such as LinkedIn or Xing for instance are more oriented towards professional networking. Empirical findings have shown that MEPs also use a number of national networks such as MeinVZ in Germany and Hyves in the Netherlands (See Table 5 in Chapter 5). The following table summarises the different SNT features:

**Table 3 SNT features: Blogs, Microblogging and Internet applications**

	<i>Features</i>	<i>Examples of SNT</i>
<b><i>Blogs</i></b>	Content-publishing	Wordpress, Blogger, Tumblr, etc.
<b><i>Microblogging</i></b>	Content-publishing Focus on mobility	Twitter
<b><i>Internet Applications</i></b>	Connection-building Revolve around a profile (ego)	Facebook, LinkedIn, Xing, MeinVZ, Hyves, etc.

#### **4.4. Network awareness, information retrieval, information dissemination and coordination**

##### *4.4.1. Cognitive social structures and cognitive knowledge networks*

“Theories of *cognitive social structures* examine the cognitions people have of “who knows who” and “who knows who knows who.” This set of cognitions comprises the perceived social network among organizational members, and are equally valid within and among organizations.” (Monge and Contractor 2003: 300)

In the case of drafting legislation in the EP, MEPs work jointly with their staff, the secretariat of the committee they are in, the political group coordinators, members of their political group, with other MEPs, as well as with external actors at different stages of the process (See Chapter 3). It can be argued that the awareness actors have of the network they are in is essential. Working on a report is a collaborative task in which a large number of actors are involved. Thus, being aware of the actors involved in this collaborative work becomes a prerequisite for completing one's task and ensuring efficiency. The cognitions – perceptions – individuals have of other people in the network is as important as the actual network. It is because of the perception one actor in the network has over other actors' belonging to the network (or his perception of these actors' knowledge) that a communicative action will be initiated.

The retrieval of information in the context of legislative work, and the sharing of information relies strongly upon the notion of “who knows who” (social structure), where actors of the network will rely on their awareness of other people in the network and rely upon the knowledge they have and share. Their expertise is valued as a prerequisite for being part of that network. Hence, the notions of ‘who knows what’ (knowledge network) informs actors when creating a tie with other actors of the network, when looking for and retrieving information and/or expertise in their work.

The network formed by actors involved in amending draft legislation in parliamentary committees can be characterised as a cognitive knowledge network (Contractor et al. 1998) as the information that is held by these actors can be valuable for others and the exchange of information and knowledge becomes essential for a successful functioning of the legislative process. The perception that each actor has of the potential of other actors to share valuable information is as important as the actual exchange of knowledge.

Thus, when looking at committee work, we can consider the following setting where information is retrieved, recognised, allocated according to people's need for knowledge in the network, and where expertise and information allocation is constantly updated within the network (Monge and Contractor 2003: 199-200):

“Consider a network where each individual is required to accomplish a set of tasks. The tasks may require multiple areas of expertise that they may not individually possess and hence requires them to be interdependent with others in the network.”

These theories inform our understanding of communication and more specifically of the networked structure of communication in the research setting of the EP. As mentioned earlier, the study conducted here considers attributes in the form of individuals’ (nodes) cognitions. Although the cognitions that I refer to in this study relate to actors’ motivations to adopt a communication technology – rather than their cognitions on structures and knowledge – I would argue that these different levels of cognitions (perceptions on benefits and motivations of use, cognitions on social structures and cognitions on knowledge networks) are intrinsically tied up. Besides, the social networks considered in this study are networks that originate from the same nodes, which are analysed at the same time and at different levels (i.e. networks formed when using SNT, face-to-face communication networks, mediated communication networks). The adoption of a communication tool – SNT characterised here by their network structure – is related to the structure of the network and to the cognitive social structure of the network (the nodes (actors) involved in the process of legislating are central to communication practices) and to the content of their communication (information/knowledge). Thus, these cognitive communication theories allow me to deduce properties of the network that can be characteristic of networks formed when using SNT: network awareness (‘who knows who’ and ‘who knows who knows who’) and information (expertise) retrieval (‘who knows what’ and ‘who knows who knows what’).

#### *4.4.2. The strength of weak ties: expanding network awareness*

Granovetter has introduced the notion of ‘the strength of weak ties’ in 1973, in an article that developed a rationale on interpersonal networks and on the importance of differentiating strong ties and weak ties in networks. Granovetter defines the ‘strength’ of an interpersonal tie as “a (probably linear) combination of the amount of time, the emotional intensity, the intimacy (mutual confiding), and the reciprocal services which characterize the tie.” (Granovetter 1973: 1361)

Granovetter argues that weak ties “are actually vital for an individual’s integration into modern society” (Granovetter 1983: 203). It is through weak ties that crucial information is shared and spread in a network. Strong ties, in the contrary, restrict the size of the network to close friends who are typically socially involved with each others. Thus, the exchange and the diffusion of information remain limited to a small group. Weak ties, on the contrary, can play the role of bridges between different networks, allowing the diffusion of information, ideas and possibly influence in a network:

“Intuitively speaking, this means that whatever is to be diffused can reach a larger number of people, and traverse greater social distance (i.e., path length), when passed through weak ties rather than strong. If one tells a rumor to all his close friends, and they do likewise, many will hear the rumor a second and third time, since those linked by strong ties tend to share friends. If the motivation to spread rumor is dampened a bit on each wave of retelling, then the rumor moving through strong ties is much more likely to be limited to a few cliques that that going via weak ones; bridges will not be crossed.” (Granovetter 1973: 1366)

Granovetter’s argument was strongly exploratory at the time and difficult to test empirically. Scholars such as Krackhardt (1992) have challenged his argument by calling into question the need to consider subjective elements in defining the strength of ties and by restating the importance of strong ties. When in 1983, Granovetter revisited his argument by looking at different empirical studies that applied his rationale, he stated:

“I have shown that the argument has in fact been useful in clarifying a variety of phenomena ranging from effects of social relations on individuals, to the diffusion of ideas and innovations, to the organization of large-scale social systems.” (1983: 228)

Nevertheless, he reasserts the necessity to analyse not only the strength of ties but also what it is that flows between those weak ties as they play the role of bridges:

“As Friedkin points out, one needs to show not only that ties bridging network segments are disproportionately weak but also that something flows *through* these bridges and that whatever it is that flows actually plays an important role in the social life of individuals, groups and societies.” (1983: 228-9)

It is in this light that I discuss a number of empirical studies that look at the adoption of SNT in the workplace and their implications on social structures and organisational communication. As SNT are fairly new tools, their analysis as communicative and/or organisational tools in the workplace is still at an early stage and research is still limited. A number of empirical studies are nevertheless worth mentioning. Thus, the following section presents organisational studies that look at the adoption of SNT in the workplace in three folds: blogging, Internet applications such as Facebook, and microblogging (i.e. internal networks or public networks such as Twitter). These findings suggest that network awareness and expertise (information) retrieval, as defined theoretically in the previous section, are part of SNT properties when used in the workplace. Two other properties are suggested here – bearing in mind that the setting of this study is not purely organisational in workplace terms – information dissemination and coordination.

#### *4.4.3. Adoption of SNT in the workplace*

A few studies have explored the adoption of blogging in the workplace in the early days of this activity. For example, Huh et al. (2007) investigated an internal corporate blogging community (BlogCentral) and concluded that the internal blogging system facilitated access to tacit knowledge and resources, and contributed to increased collaboration among employees using the blog:

“1) it works as a medium for a variety of employees to collaborate and give reciprocal feedback; 2) it works as a place to share expertise and acquire tacit knowledge; 3) it is used to share personal stories and opinions that help people to know more about one another, and may increase the chances of social interaction and collaboration; 4) it is used to share aggregated information from external sources by writers who are experts in an area.” (Huh et al. 2007: 2452)

Jackson, Yates and Orlikowski (2007) investigated the adoption of an internal blogging system in a global IT company. Their findings suggested that internal blogging had social and informational benefits. Besides, “in an organizational context, this tool provides a means for creating social ties and the benefits that extend from having these ties across geographies and divisions.” (A. Jackson et al. 2007: 9). It was seen as a organisational benefit that creates “a strong social system within an organisation” (A. Jackson et al. 2007: 9).

Efimova and Grudin (2007) explored the adoption of internally hosted blogs and external blogs in a corporate context. Interviews with employees have suggested that blogging, when used for work-related posting, allows employees to share passion for their work, communicate directly with people from inside and outside the organisation and it also allows them to document and organise their work (Efimova and Grudin 2007: 6).

Research on public Internet applications, as defined in this study, is very limited. For instance, Skeels & Grudin (2009) investigated the use of Facebook and LinkedIn in the workplace in a big IT company. They explored the growing issue of personal/professional boundary tensions when using these tools at work, and among their findings Skeels & Grudin suggested that:

“The principal work-related benefit of social networking software was in the easy, unobtrusive creation, maintenance, and strengthening of weak ties among colleagues.” (2009: 8)

Research on microblogging ranges from content analysis of messages in a corporate context (Riemer and Richter 2010) to the analysis of motivations of SNT users at work (DiMicco et al. 2008; Zhao and Rosson 2009). First, Riemer & Richter (2010) conducted a content analysis based on users’ purposes of using enterprise microblogging and consisted of conducting a genre analysis of texts shared on an internal microblogging software (Communardo) in a German company. From the genre repertoire thus defined, Riemer & Richter identified two team practices: awareness creation and team/task coordination (2010: 11).



Second, Zhao & Rosson's exploratory study of how and why people use Twitter (2009) explored the implications of adopting SNT in the workplace on people's relational benefits and the impact it has on informal communication at work. It shows the implication microblogging (Twitter) has in raising participants' social awareness and its implications in users' ability to retrieve relevant and useful information for their work from a network of people they either personally know or have selected themselves. They also found that microblogging in the workplace may have a potential impact on informal communication and enable people to keep contact with others they do not see or communicate with on a daily basis. This can be associated with Granovetter's argument on the strength of weak ties (Granovetter 1973).

Third, DiMicco et al. (2008) explored the introduction of a closed (internal) SNT called Beehive. The aim of the study was to understand employees' motivations of using Beehive. Their findings point towards the implications those SNT have in connecting with weak ties (colleagues of whom users might not necessarily be in close contact with in their every day work):

“When asked if the site was useful for interacting with immediate colleagues, some users said they started using the site for that purpose, but over time decreased their communication with their close coworkers, as they increased their communication with others on the site” (DiMicco et al. 2008: 714)

Users' motivations were categorised as three main themes: caring (the satisfaction to be connected to other employees of the company), climbing (SNT used in order to assist employees in their career advancements) and campaigning (gathering support for work projects) (DiMicco et al. 2008: 716-7).

Finally, Meyer and Dibbern's (2010: 6) study of Twitter usage of a small team of researchers adopted a participatory action method to conduct their study and concluded that:

“[...] Twitter was exclusively used for conveying availability, activity, process and social awareness and sharing information. [...] Twitter users mainly capitalize on the benefits of awareness such as improved

coordination and enhanced knowledge sharing as well as sharing small pieces of knowledge in the form of links.”

To sum up, this should be seen as a scoped review of organisational studies that deal with the adoption of SNT in the workplace. A few redundant characteristics have been observed empirically, characteristics that go in line with the theoretical framework discussed earlier. Therefore, network awareness is one crucial property when using SNT in the workplace, with a special emphasis on the structure of the network and the importance of connecting with weak ties. SNT also allow for the retrieval and sharing of information as well as coordination and collaboration in the workplace. Finally, a number of studies have emphasised the shape of communication via SNT, noting the importance of informality in communicating via SNT.

The following table summarises the findings of these organisational studies, and presents categories that are based on the empirical findings of these organisational studies as well as the theoretical considerations discussed earlier:

**Table 4 Review of SNT properties in organisational studies**

	<b>Network awareness (social structure)</b>	<b>Information/Expertise retrieval</b>	<b>Coordination</b>	<b>Information sharing/ dissemination</b>
<b>(Huh et al. 2007)</b>		✓	✓	✓
<b>(A. Jackson et al. 2007)</b>	✓			✓
<b>(Efimova and Grudin 2007)</b>			✓	
<b>(Skeels and Grudin 2009)</b>	✓			
<b>(Riemer and Richter)</b>			✓	✓

2010)				
(DiMicco et al. 2008)	✓		✓	
(Zhao and Rosson 2009)	✓	✓		
(P. Meyer and Dibbern 2010)	✓		✓	✓

#### 4.5. Analytical framework: properties of SNT and a priori model of use

Cognitive theories offer a broad framework of reflection for the case of study presented here. Those theories can be valuable when looking at communicative properties of mediated communication via SNT. Indeed, we can infer that the notions of ‘who knows who’ and ‘who knows who knows who’ take actors involved in the network to develop their network awareness, including the social dimension and the context they are in. The notions of ‘who knows what’ and ‘who knows who knows what’ on the other hand, enable actors to develop a knowledge network where information retrieval, recognition, and allocation are crucial. Therefore, I argue that from an organisational perspective, SNT might facilitate network awareness and information retrieval for MEPs when carrying out their work as legislators.

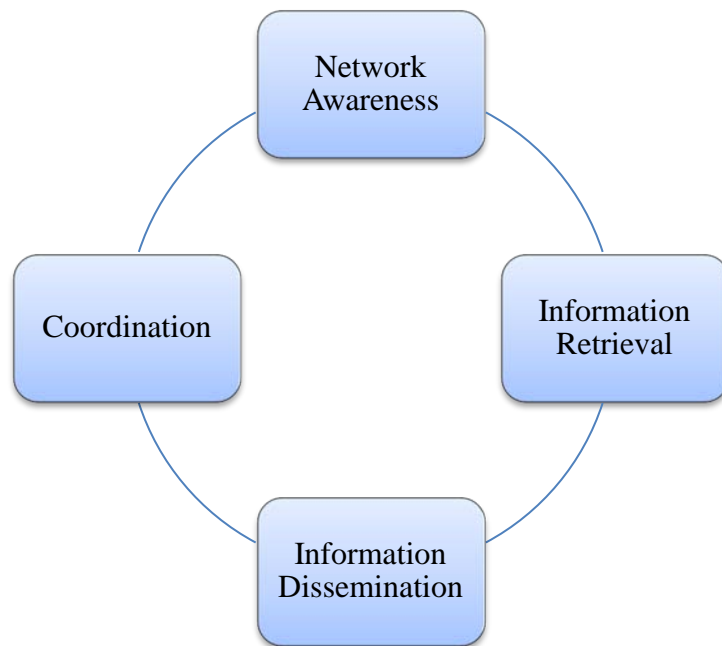
Studies on the adoption of SNT in the workplace, although being limited in their range, have shown the potential field of research to come in organisational communication research. These studies have suggested a broad range of findings. SNT properties (i.e. connecting with colleagues, sharing knowledge, seeking information) tally with the properties discussed previously (network awareness and information retrieval). Coordination (and collaboration) has emerged throughout the review of empirical studies as a key property of SNT use in the workplace. The sharing of information, and the dissemination of information constitute a fourth

category that is characteristic of SNT use in a corporate environment and/or in a political context.

From a political science/political communication perspective, it is important that the cognitive theories discussed earlier, and more specifically cognitive knowledge networks that allow the retrieval of expertise, are articulated together with the political dimension of MEPs' role as representatives in order to assess the potential of SNT as communicative tools. That is why MEPs' use of communicative tools must be seen in the light of the organisational context articulated above, bearing in mind the political properties that SNT can play when used in the drafting and amending of legislation as discussed in Chapter 1. Indeed, conceptualising the communicative potential of SNT in MEPs' work context forces me to go beyond the obvious campaigning feature of the tools that has been repeatedly studied (Utz 2009). The traditional models of representation have proven incomplete in explaining today's forms of representation at the EU level (See discussion in Chapter 1). This is why this study argues that the role of MEPs as legislators strongly relies upon access to expertise and the representative-represented relationship goes beyond the classical definition of representation.

Therefore, after reviewing different theoretical considerations – organisational and political – I argue that the introduction of new communicative tools such as SNT can play a role on four different but related levels: network awareness, information retrieval, information dissemination and coordination. The following figure presents the a priori model of use of SNT for MEPs:

**Figure 2 A priori model of use of SNT for MEPs when carrying out their work as legislators**



These four dimensions of SNT use in MEPs' workplace are put in perspective with empirical findings collected during the interviews with MEPs, their assistants, EP officials and lobbyists, and discussed in the following findings chapters by focusing on and analysing one dimension by chapter.

#### **4.6. Conclusion**

This chapter has presented theoretical considerations that have helped me conceptualise an analytical model of use of SNT for MEPs when they carry out their work as legislators. The observational study of the EP has shown that communication in the process of drafting and amending legislation is hardly structured and organised in Weberian terms. Rather, the notion of emergent networks has more value in this study's settings. Besides, by considering emergent networks as viable structures of communication, I aimed to build up an analytical framework that considers the setting of communication, where formality and/or informality have a role to play. Second, I have argued in this chapter that the analytical framework used in this study should consider cognitive theories of communication networks rather than theories on actual networks. Cognitions are as important in this study – as the methodology chosen suggests – as actual structures.

Third, I suggest that the emergence of SNT as communicative tools can be taken as the object of analysis. The analytical framework developed here is thus modelled for communication mediated by SNT. Two sets of research limitations have informed the emergence of this a priori model. First, earlier research in organisational studies has been limited to the study of SNT use in corporate settings, thus not directly translatable to the non-corporate settings of the EP. Second, recent studies on MEPs' use (or parliamentarians in general) of SNT have ignored the organisational characteristics of the tools – on focusing on the representative role of parliamentarians in classical terms and by focusing on SNT as campaigning tools – and have not allowed the consideration of an emergent network approach where the notion of informality could be assessed and taken into consideration in the communicative process. The role MEPs play as legislators and as representatives of European interests forces me to look at the use of a new communicative tool from an organisational perspective. Thus, the analytical framework presented here addresses a research gap in an interdisciplinary perspective and suggests four political-organisational properties of SNT: network awareness, information retrieval, information dissemination and coordination.

## **Chapter 5 - An exploration of the use of SNT in the EP**

### **5.1. Summary**

This chapter brings together secondary literature on SNT adoption in the EP and empirical findings. Sections presented in this chapter are based on observation conducted in 2 MEP offices and interviews conducted with 18 MEPs and/or their assistants and 6 EP officials. The exploratory findings suggest that first, the interviewed MEPs are increasingly making use of portable devices in their everyday work environment. Second, use of SNT is becoming more integrated into these MEPs' institutional communication practices. Finally, I suggest a spectrum of degrees of SNT use found in MEP offices. Thus, this chapter offers a contextual exploration of SNT use in the EP at the time of research.

### **5.2. Introduction**

The first section of this chapter introduces general figures on ICT use and SNT use in particular. Mostly based on the findings of a survey (Fleishman-Hillard 2011), this part of the chapter aims to offer a context on which my exploratory findings rely on as I introduce more general trends observed in the EP.

The typology used in this chapter is identical to the one developed in Chapter 3 when introducing the categorisation of communicative actions (See Table 2 in Chapter 3). Thus, the media used to communicate are addressed in the second part of this chapter with the increasing role that portable devices play in MEP's day-to-day communication. Second, the frequency of use of SNT and their commonplace nature in MEPs' daily communicative practices is discussed. Finally, I argue that a spectrum of SNT use allocation has developed across different offices, ranging from MEP's personal use of SNT to fully delegated use to their staff.

### 5.3. Secondary literature: Fleishman-Hillard 2<sup>nd</sup> EP Digital Trends Survey

As stated earlier, at the time of this study, academic research, and more specifically, large-scale research projects on MEPs' use of SNT had not been conducted yet, therefore limiting the scope of my own study as to not being able to put in perspective my findings. Therefore, it is important to bear in mind that this study is exploratory. Only early adopters of SNT have been considered for this study and the number of interviewed MEPs and observed MEPs limit considerably the reach of the findings. Observation made in this chapter should be seen as a possible indicator for future trends. The reliance on secondary literature and existing survey research (Fleishman-Hillard 2011) can help, however, get the bigger picture and identify trends that have emerged in the past few years.

The EP has conducted a survey to list the number of MEPs present on SNT, mainly Facebook and Twitter (See Chapter 1). The results of the survey show that an increasing number of MEPs have a Facebook profile or a Facebook page (from 55% in 2010 to 70% in 2011) and 38% are on Twitter, up from 21% in 2009. The institution has not taken (yet) further exploration of SNT use. The only fairly large-scale research conducted on MEPs' adoption of digital tools – including SNT – has been conducted in 2009 and 2011 by Fleishman-Hillard (2011). Fleishman-Hillard is a public affairs and communications consultancy and it has conducted a survey across the EP (120 respondents), which represents 16% of MEPs<sup>26</sup>. The survey asked 8 multiple-choice questions such as 'which of the following online tools do you use to communicate to voters and other interested parties?' or 'how frequently do you, or your staff on your behalf, use the following online tools/resources in your daily legislative work?'

General questions on MEPs' perceptions of the effectiveness of different communication tools show that 61% of MEPs see social networks (SNT) as effective channels of communication ('how effective do you believe these channels to be in communicating with voters and other interested parties?').

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<sup>26</sup> Total: 736 MEPs at the time of the survey



Results show at the same time that personal contacts are the most useful way to get informed on policy issues for 93% of MEPs<sup>27</sup>. This finding goes in line with the observations conducted for this study, with the unquestionable importance of personal contacts in communicative practices. This is confirmed by two other questions asked in this survey on the effectiveness of communication tools when communicating with voters and other interest parties (96% of MEPs see personal contacts as effective channels of communication) and on the importance of personal contacts with constituents (89% see personal contact with constituents as important or very important). Survey results also show that MEPs do make use of SNT in the context of legislative work. Almost 40% of MEPs consult blogs several times a week for their daily legislative work and blogs and Twitter feeds are seen as useful communication channels coming from stakeholders (around 27% consider blogs important or very important in that perspective and 9% see Twitter as a useful tool)<sup>28</sup>.

Finally, the following questions: ‘if you blog, which is the greatest benefit?’ and ‘if you are on Twitter, which is the greatest benefit?’ show that more than 70% of MEPs see blogs as an efficient tool to express their views directly to their constituents whereas 57% of them find Twitter a useful tool for the same purpose but almost 30% mention Twitter as beneficial to engage with people through dialogue (against 15% via blogs). The possibility for MEPs to engage in discussions, and dialogue via SNT is discussed in the following chapters as one of the properties of SNT. Moreover, the importance of traditional media and the increasing use of SNT as part of MEPs’ communication practices are put in perspective in the following chapters, in light of these findings.

These survey questions aimed to assess the implications of different digital tools (i.e. search engines, SNT, RSS feeds, etc.) in context of other conventional/traditional communication channels (i.e. local/national media, personal

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<sup>27</sup> Question: ‘how useful are the following methods of stakeholder communication in informing your thinking on policy issues?’

Multiple choice answers: blogs, Twitter feed, organisation website, specific issue website, events, position papers, personal contact, Fleishman-Hillard, 2011, retrieved on <http://www.epdigitaltrends.eu/s2011/results-2011>

<sup>28</sup> All survey results available at <http://www.epdigitaltrends.eu/s2011/results-2011>

contacts, etc.). The focus of this survey did not cover the practical and internal dimensions of using SNT in the workplace, dimensions that are considered in the following section.

#### **5.4. Early adopters and SNT use trends: empirical findings**

##### *5.4.1. Use of electronic devices and IT literacy*

A special emphasis is put on the common use of portable devices in this section. As discussed in Chapter 2 and 3, my observations conducted in the EP has allowed me to identify communication practices, mainly in MEP offices but also outside the office. Whereas the two MEPs I observed were fervent users of electronic devices (smartphone, laptop, tablets, etc.), the general impression is more nuanced. MEP A, as well as MEP B, would go to committee meetings with their laptop and smartphone and would use them during meetings. Both of them were in possession of at least one smartphone, a laptop and a tablet. Thus, observations suggest that the MEPs I studied are familiar with ICT.

However, in most meetings attended, only a handful of MEPs and/or assistants brought a laptop with them into the meeting room. This can be also related to the fact that until recently, wifi access in the EP buildings was limited (only available in meeting rooms and hemicycle). Since the time of my fieldwork, wifi access has been expanded to all corridors of the EP, meeting rooms, hemicycle and offices where MEPs are likely to move along, in buildings in Brussels and Strasbourg<sup>29</sup>. The only meeting where a majority of attendees used a laptop was for an ICT meeting organised by DG ITEC.

Nonetheless, the important use of portable devices such as smartphones and digital tablets has been observed and was confirmed by the interviews. Indeed, whereas the use of laptops in meetings as work tools was limited, the use of smartphones was significantly higher. When I asked an official of DG COMM if he

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<sup>29</sup> Emphasis is put by the EP on the likeliness of MEPs moving along some buildings rather than others as the structure of the buildings in Brussels and Strasbourg is made in a way that some parts are never used by MEPs but only by EP officials. Those parts of the buildings have no wifi connection. Interview with EPO 6.

thought that smartphones would make a difference in the way MEPs communicate via SNT, he answered:

Absolutely. Twittering is so easy via iPhones. It is going to make a big difference. You can see MEPs tweeting in plenaries. (EPO 1)

Besides, half of interviewed MEPs (and/or their assistants) – 9 MEPs – mentioned during their interview their use of smartphones and its intrinsic correlation with the use of SNT. Whereas some of them favour one type of smartphone over another, some use multiple devices, including tablets. As one MEP assistant puts it when describing her MEP:

He has a Blackberry grafted to his right ear and an iPhone is his left hand. With his feet, he uses an iPad. (MEP 14)<sup>30</sup>

Observation has validated this finding as mobile phones, and more specifically smartphones were heavily used during meetings. As MEP 13 explained during her observation when I asked her about her use of SNT in her committee work:

Indeed, it is a matter of... of time and resources because, if you don't have a smartphone, concretely, and that you are an MEP, and if you have to be in front of your computer to do that... I do it because it is convenient but otherwise, I did everything this afternoon... from my smartphone... (MEP 13)<sup>31</sup>

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<sup>30</sup> Translated from French to English by the author.

<sup>31</sup> Idem

#### 5.4.2. *SNT type and frequency of use*

##### 5.4.2.1. SNT type

We choose to be on the mainstream networks because this is where most people are in the end. (MEP 8)<sup>32</sup>

The number of public SNT has been growing in the past few years, with various tools developed for various purposes. However, there is one permanent feature: all interviewed MEPs use Facebook and/or Twitter. All MEPs who were interviewed, as well as committee secretariat officials and DG COMM officials, mentioned their use of Facebook. Microblogging (Twitter) is also strongly used by these early adopters, with 15 out of the 18 interviewees using it. Blogs are sporadically used with 7 MEPs having a blog<sup>33</sup>. This low figure can be explained by the distinction made by MEPs themselves on what it means to have a blog and on the distinct needs and responsibilities required to maintaining a blog.

In the definition of SNT presented in Chapter 4, blogging, microblogging and other Internet applications such as Facebook constitute separate categories. Even though this definition remains theoretical and inductive as for the characteristics of the different applications available, empirical findings have suggested that a distinction exists in MEPs' perceptions of the different tools they use and as a result, they do not use all Internet applications with the same purpose in mind and select one over the other for a certain objective.

Thus, blogs have come as a separate tool for most of the interviewees. Interestingly, a few MEPs argued that blogs are high maintenance and that if you are not ready to be strongly active on your blog and write a piece regularly, it is counter-productive to have one. When I asked MEP 1 if he had a blog, he replied:

No. Because, if you have one, you actually also have to take care of it, keep it running, maintain it. I must admit, I haven't managed to make sure

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<sup>32</sup> Translated from French to English by the author.

<sup>33</sup> These figures go in line with the official figures provided by the Institution that were mentioned in Chapter 1 and earlier in this chapter.

that I could say ‘everyday half an hour I could work on it’ or whatever, it’s too unpredictable. So I believe, if you do it, do it on a regular basis and do it right or just forget about it because it wouldn’t have any added value if I just have a blog for the blog sake. (MEP 1)

MEP 16’s argument was in line with MEP 1’s:

Blog... I think if you are going to do a blog and take it seriously, it could take up a lot of time. You would have to a daily (show?) and I’ve never been a diary keeper for the same reason I know I wouldn’t put aside the time to sit down and do that. But people, like a guy who was a member here until the last election, XX, I don’t know how XX does it but he produces a voluminous blog every day. He must work in the small hours of the morning to maintain that. No. We have some of our members who do, YY. She does a daily blog. (MEP 16)

The distinction made by interviewed MEPs (and/or their assistants) between blogs – where the content is strongly related to parliamentary activity – and other Internet applications such as Facebook validates the distinction I previously made in Chapter 4 where blogs are more focused on content-publishing and other Internet applications such as Facebook are less centred on content but rather on connection-building.

A number of other Internet applications were also mentioned by interviewees such as Youtube, Foursquare, Flickr and LinkedIn<sup>34</sup>. National SNT were also used by a number of MEPs, for instance for Dutch MEPs who use Hyves<sup>35</sup> and German MEPs who use MeinVZ or Xing<sup>36</sup>. The technical possibility to connect different SNT such as Twitter and Facebook (i.e. any update posted on Twitter is automatically posted on Facebook and vice-versa) has allowed a number of MEPs to

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<sup>34</sup> Youtube, [www.youtube.com](http://www.youtube.com), is a video-sharing website.

Foursquare, [www.foursquare.com](http://www.foursquare.com), is a location-based SNT designed primarily for smartphones.

Flickr, [www.flickr.com](http://www.flickr.com), is an image and video hosting application that is designed to create communities.

LinkedIn, [www.linkedin.com](http://www.linkedin.com), is a business-related SNT.

<sup>35</sup> [www.hyves.nl](http://www.hyves.nl)

<sup>36</sup> [www.meinvz.net](http://www.meinvz.net), [www.xing.com](http://www.xing.com)

remain present on different platforms, without having to apply extra maintenance or care to run them.

#### 5.4.2.2. Frequency of use: SNT as part of everyday life

There seems to be a general understanding among interviewed MEPs and staff that sustained activity when using SNT is fundamental. A one-off or sporadic activity is seen as counter-productive:

And of course, if you want to use social networks, you have to be there, you have to... it doesn't work if you are only making updates one time at a week or... people must have the feeling that they... I know a lot of my so-called 'friends', every morning when they open their computer they expect to have something that they can debate... 'debate' on... from me.  
(MEP 2)

Interviews show that SNT are used daily by early adopters but observation has shown that this appropriation of the tool as part of MEPs' communication resources goes beyond the simple use. In the case of observed MEPs, SNT have become an integral part of communicative patterns to the point of making the tools commonplace and to mention them naturally in conversations, the same way one would mention phone calls or emails. Thus, during observation in MEP A's office, I observed several times during the two weeks of observation that MEP A's assistant and the trainee used SNT during their working hours. The first time MEP A's assistant logged in to her Facebook account, she did so for professional reasons as she used it to go on her MEP's profile to watch a video of her in regional TV news. The second time, MEP A's assistant used Facebook to find a hyperlink. Once again, MEP A's assistant asked the trainee if she had seen a TV documentary. The trainee replied that she did not and MEP A's assistant instantly replied: 'Ok then, I will share the link [on Facebook]'. MEP A's assistant's use of SNT was fairly sporadic but established in her communication practices. The same applies to MEP A herself. During breakfast the first week of observation, MEP A, her assistant and her trainee had a quick debriefing for the day. While mentioning the visitors' group coming the same day, MEP A spontaneously mentioned: 'I received three messages on Facebook about this visit, they [visitor group] come from XX.' The children coming

for a visit the same day had contacted the MEP prior to the visit via Facebook and she thus found out the regional origin of the group. After a meeting held with another MEP and representatives of the civil society and trade unions, MEP A took pictures of the meeting and posted them on Facebook immediately after the meeting. When I asked MEP A's assistant if she uploaded the pictures to MEP A's profile, she replied that MEP A did it herself after the meeting. Finally, during the first week of observation, MEP A took a few minutes to answer my interview questions and while doing so, she logged in to her Facebook account, making therefore the interview interactive as she kept exemplifying her words by showing me directly on the SNT.

During observation with MEP B, I attended a number of political group meetings and during one of them, I observed that two MEPs sitting in the room had their laptops in front of them and were using SNT. One of these two MEPs was MEP A<sup>37</sup>. As one was using the 'chat' function on the SNT, the other one seemed to be 'checking her wall'. Both MEPs used SNT for at least ten minutes during the meeting.

As much as such behaviour does not tell us anything about the nature of their use and the reasons for using such tools in meetings, it nevertheless tells us that SNT have become of common use for interviewed and observed MEPs in their daily working life.

#### 5.4.3. *Delegated use vs. personal use of SNT*

In Chapter 3, actors involved in communicative actions have been characterised as an element of categorisation. When it comes to MEPs' use of SNT, not only MEPs are involved but their staff. Findings show that it is difficult to categorise and generalise practices of SNT in the EP, especially when it comes to characterising the users. There is no one model of practice where all MEPs use the tools themselves or where all MEPs leave the constraint to their assistants.

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<sup>37</sup> The second MEP I observed that day had also been categorised as an early adopter for this research. She had been contacted by email for interview. Unfortunately, she or her assistants could not receive me.

Fieldwork has shown that, and as one MEP assistant has put it, ‘hybrid models’ are emerging.

Thus, a spectrum of three different types of use can be simplified. First, there are MEPs who use the tools themselves. When I asked MEP 1 if he was the only one using his SNT, he replied:

I’m the only one. No, no I’m the only one. Because it is a mash up between private and professional, and as long as there is an inch of private in it, it is my account... (MEP 1)

Second, there can be a mixture of personal use and delegated use where assistants (local assistants and/or Brussels assistants) maintain the network presence and upload content. For instance, MEP 5 uses the tools himself but is seconded by one of his colleagues:

So, for a long time, I was the one who handled the blog, I used to do everything myself... it is still the case to a large extent, that is to say that all the writing... let’s say that half of the writing, it’s me [...] So and Facebook, I use it myself. One person has my password and he makes sure – because when I publish something on the blog, I want it to be on Facebook and vice versa. (MEP 5)<sup>38</sup>

I tweet myself and my staff helps me to put films on Youtube and they update the websites. But I use Facebook, Twitter and the Dutch social network myself. (MEP 7)

Finally, SNT can be strictly delegated to assistants. The MEP’s name appears on these SNT but he/she does not get involved in using them, the communication tools being entirely handled by the staff. The use of SNT can be spread between local and Brussels assistants, according to the nature of use of the tools. As MEP 3’s assistant explained:

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<sup>38</sup> Translated from French to English by the author.



So, Facebook and Twitter, it is managed by her local assistant. And actually, mostly by the people who work on her election campaign. Her local team, who is not tied up to the EP staff, who is, who is the campaigning team, the local XX team. Whereas for the blog, I manage it or the local assistant does. (MEP 3)<sup>39</sup>

For MEP 8, anything related to electronic communication is delegated to her assistants:

[...] the assistants manage anything related to the Internet, even her email inbox, she does not even read her emails [...] (MEP 8)<sup>40</sup>

Assistants are aware of the different ways SNT are handled in MEP offices. As MEP 12's assistant explained:

[...] in each office, there are not the same people who use them, sometimes the MEPs themselves use them, but most of the time, their assistants do. There are some hybrid models where several people administrate the same page, so the MEP writes something, but pictures and comments are uploaded by someone else, and the person in charge of the agenda will add the schedule to the page... in other words, some real hybrid models. (MEP 12)<sup>41</sup>

MEP 3's assistant, who entirely handles her MEP's blog and who is assisted by the local assistant for Facebook and Twitter, suggested that these new tools have become an integral part of MEPs' communication practices and this reflects in new staff's competences and tasks:

And I... We progressively see in some offices, it has started to appear, some assistants' profiles start to appear where they only deal with communications, who only deal with, actually Facebook, Twitter, blogs, and stuff like this... newsletters whereas these things, we normally do, generally, on top, on top of what we already do. So, she is writing her report,

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<sup>39</sup> Translated from French to English by the author.

<sup>40</sup> Idem

<sup>41</sup> Idem

well, on top of writing the report, we remember that we need to write a short article, but this is less systematically mentioned in our job description than for others and, I see appearing, in terms of assistants' new roles, when often there are two assistants in Brussels, one is more in charge of communications than the other. This is really, it is also interesting... I think it starts to emerge little by little. (MEP 3)<sup>42</sup>

As MEP 3 did not use the tools herself, the assistant explained how the prerequisite of immediacy with certain tools such as microblogging presupposed that the MEP would need to use the tool himself/herself:

The difficulties when it comes to the management, from my experience, from what I have seen and heard... the immediacy needed for these networks sometimes almost requires the MEP to manage them himself, that he needs to update his status himself, things like that, because as soon as several people are in charge, there is always a process of validation that is needed, which makes it a heavy process, well... in the end, we might get lost a bit too much into the process of validation. (MEP 3)<sup>43</sup>

If I follow the spectrum of three different profiles that have emerged in MEP offices, out of the 18 MEP offices interviewed, 3 MEPs use SNT themselves without giving access to their profiles to any member of their staff. 9 MEP offices were a mixture of personal use and delegated use and finally, 4 MEPs would delegate the use of SNT to their assistants<sup>44</sup>. The following table summarises the types of SNT used by interviewed MEPs, their frequency of use and their personal/delegated nature of use.

**Table 5 Type of SNT, frequency of use and personal/delegated use by interviewed MEPs**

<b>Interviewee</b>	<b>SNT</b>	<b>Frequency of use</b>	<b>Personal/ Delegated use</b>
MEP1	Twitter Facebook Smallworld	Daily	Personal only

<sup>42</sup> Translated from French to English by the author.

<sup>43</sup> Idem

<sup>44</sup> Two MEPs did not answer the following question "Who uses them in your office?".

	Xing Geotagging		
MEP2	FB Twitter	Daily (sometimes 3/4 times a day)	Personal only
MEP3	Twitter FB Blog	3/4 times a day during campaigns Blog: once a week to once a month	Delegated
MEP4	FB Youtube	1 to 3 times a week	Personal + delegated
MEP5	FB Twitter Dailymotion Blog Flickr	Daily	Personal + delegated
MEP6	FB Twitter	Daily	Personal + delegated
MEP7	FB Twitter Dutch SNT LinkdIn Youtube	Daily (Twice a day)	Personal + delegated
MEP 8	FB Twitter Blog	-	Delegated
MEP9	Twitter FB Blog	Daily (several times a day)	Personal + delegated
MEP10	FB Twitter Youtube Friendfeed	Daily	-
MEP11	FB Twitter Flickr Youtube	Several times a week	-
MEP12	FB	Daily	Delegated
MEP13 (MEP A)	FB Twitter Foursquare	Daily	Personal + delegated
MEP14	FB Twitter Blog	-	Personal + delegated
MEP15	Twitter Flickr Youtube FB Soundcloud, LastFM, Yumme Stayfriends MeinVZ Blogscript	Daily (several times a day)	Personal + delegated
MEP16 (MEP B)	FB	Daily (several times a day)	Personal only
MEP17	FB Twitter Youtube	Daily	Delegated
MEP 18	FB Twitter	-	Personal + delegated

## 5.5. EP Secretariat's use of SNT

### 5.5.1. *SNT use by the EP as an institution*

This study is interested in analysing MEPs' use of SNT. It is necessary however to include in the analysis the institution as an entity, as it allows me to look at the bigger picture in the following chapters. Thus, an official of DG COMM explained that EP's presence on SNT originated during the 2009 EP elections:

It was for the 2009 elections [...] there was a kind of enlightened Director General who gave the green light and those in the Bureau, which is the administrative... oh, the political body that administrate the administration, they gave its green light to go on social networks and try to get in touch with citizens that wouldn't be interested in EU affairs otherwise, young citizens especially and that this is how we did these three viral videos that were quite... quite broadly welcomed in all member states and got kind of a media... coverage and then, we opened all of these platforms. (EPO 2)

Official communication of the EP is handled by the DG COMM. One unit within this DG handles SNT presence: the WebComm Unit. The EP as an institution is not an exception and favours mainstream networks, to be 'where the people are'. As this same official explained to me:

As EP, the official ones, we have Facebook, Twitter, Facebook in English, Twitter in 22 languages... Flickr, Youtube as a sub... subchannel of the EUtube and... Myspace in English... (EPO 2)

Thus, the EP as an institution makes use of Facebook, Twitter, Flickr, Youtube and Myspace.

### 5.5.2. *Committees' use of SNT*

At the time of this research, only two committees had chosen to use SNT as part of their communication resources. The Committee for Petitions (PETI) and the Committee for Women's Rights and Gender Equality (FEMM) have been therefore selected as early adopters of SNT. Whereas the EP has had an official presence on

most mainstream SNT since the 2009 EP elections, committees have not yet been fervent users of the tools. Even though the internal decision-making of the EP remains heavily bureaucratic in its practice, committees did not need the approval of the higher political entity, the Bureau, to start using SNT. As an official of the FEMM Committee explained:

We checked, we checked the rules, if there were any rules regarding this, in the, in the rules of procedure in, in, in the bureau decisions. And we didn't find anything that would, that would not les... let a committee do this kind of activities like newsletter, Facebook page whatever. So then, they prepared this decision and then the coordinators of the committee decided and ever since it is working. (FU EPO 4)

Thus, the FEMM committee mainly uses Facebook and as MEPs do, on a daily basis:

I would say that we use it constantly, so it is always open in my browser, I would say that I spend a net 10/15 min per day using it, but it is not, it is not one time, I would say it is like if something happens if there is a new comment, I look at it, whether it is relevant, if it is ok to keep it, you know, I just want to oversee the thing. Usually, everyday I try to keep, I try to post at least one article, if there is if there is more to post, then I post two or three, depending on the issue. (EPO 4)

The Committee of Petitions on the other hand uses Facebook, Twitter, Google + and Flickr. The committee secretariat's official admitted that activity via SNT depended on the committee's activities:

I would say it does depend on the activity. The thing I can tell you is that if we are... getting the word out about something then I will use all of them at the same time, customising the message for catering to the different audiences and I would do that several times in the course of the day. (EPO 5)

## 5.6. Conclusion

This chapter should be seen as a scoped review of findings that are considered essential for the understanding of MEPs' motivations and perceived benefits of use of SNT. First, the limited number of large-scale studies on MEPs' adoption of SNT makes it difficult to put findings in perspective with existing literature. One survey however has been mentioned here as it informs our understanding of SNT practices in the EP. The second part of the chapter has emphasised three characteristics of SNT use among 18 interviewed MEPs (and/or assistants). First, the growing use of portable devices, especially smartphones, has been seen in light of the growing use of SNT. Indeed, such emergent communicative practice could have an impact on the use of SNT in the context of the workplace for MEPs. Second, the frequency of use of SNT shows the integral part that SNT have in everyday communication patterns of the small sample of MEPs interviewed for this study. The majority of interviewed MEPs have suggested that they use SNT on a daily basis. Finally, SNT as communicative tools are not considered as exclusively personal tools. Rather, three different profiles have emerged where either SNT are strictly used by the MEP, or the use is shared between the MEP and his/her staff or finally, it is a use that is exclusively delegated to their assistants (staff). The use of SNT by the EP as an entity, including committees, enables me to look at the bigger picture of communication in the process of legislating. Whereas the EP as an institution has been using SNT for a few years now, committees have only just started to consider SNT as potential communicative tools for their activities. These findings are necessary for understanding the cognitions and the properties that result from users' perceptions. The analysis of the motivations and the perceived benefits of using SNT is presented in the next four chapters as the four categories of the a priori model. Each category – Network Awareness in Chapter 6, Information Retrieval in Chapter 7, Information Dissemination in Chapter 8 and Coordination in Chapter 9 – follows a grounded theory approach where theoretical considerations and empirical evidence have been considered at the same time.

## **Chapter 6 - Network awareness**

### **6.1. Summary**

This chapter presents the first of the four categories of an emergent model of use of SNT for MEPs, based on their motivations and perceived benefits of use. Findings suggest that SNT have enabled MEPs to create ties with new actors who are not traditionally involved in the legislative process. These ties are new in comparison with actors involved in MEPs' traditional communication practices when carrying out their work as legislators. Based on empirical findings and on the analytical model developed in Chapter 4, I argue in this chapter that the use of SNT allows MEPs' to expand their network awareness to a larger community of expert/non-expert actors; MEPs' network awareness is expanded to weak ties. The creation of offline relationships, as a result of online network contacts, confirms the argument suggested in this chapter. Finally, I raise the question in this chapter of the potential of SNT as allowing a democratisation of lobbying practices in the EP when used by MEPs in carrying out their work as legislators.

### **6.2. Introduction**

Network awareness constitutes the first category of the a priori model discussed in this thesis. The first section of this chapter looks at network awareness from MEPs' perceptions of their networks when using SNT and the impact it has on their pattern of use. Second, I articulate my argument around theoretical concepts presented in Chapter 4, in particular Granovetter's 'strength of weak ties'. After characterising strong and weak ties in the legislative context of this study, findings show that SNT enable the expansion of MEPs' networks to weak ties, defined here as a broader civil society. Finally, such findings put into question the normative notion of lobbying the EP and the possible democratisation of such practice via SNT.

### 6.3. Cognitive social structures and SNT: raising MEPs' network awareness

Chapter 4 has introduced a number of theoretical considerations, among which cognitive social structures played an important role in understanding communication practices in the legislative process of the EP. We have also seen in a number of organisational studies that looked at the use of SNT in the workplace that network awareness (awareness of the social structure of the network) and social awareness were part of the properties of these communicative tools. This is what I referred to broadly as network awareness in the analytical framework developed at the end of Chapter 4.

Empirical findings suggest that MEPs' network awareness is raised when using SNT:

Because we noticed that her fans are people from XX, and then, people who are interested by European news, by the X party, indeed to see how the X party works at the European level... people from Brussels, there a few lobbyists who also follow our news, but there are really a minority... (MEP 12)<sup>45</sup>

It enables MEPs to expand their network:

And then, in the contrary, I think that it is rather the possibility to, to, to have new contacts, to, to expand... the number of people who follow me in order to, well, I don't know, today I... I... there must be 5,000, 6,000 people who follow me, who follow my activity, well my activity and news, you see, there is no limit to that. (FU MEP 9)<sup>46</sup>

In the same way, MEPs are aware of different audiences that constitute their networks. For instance, some of them are aware that actors who constitute their network have a certain interest in being part of it and that this interest is either directed to the MEP or to common interest (or issues):

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<sup>45</sup> Translated from French to English by the author.

<sup>46</sup> Idem



I assume that people who follow you on Twitter or who want to be your friend on Facebook have at least a minimum interest in what you are doing, otherwise, I don't know why they should do this, connect up with somebody they don't know. So there is, I believe, there might be sort of a general affiliation to what I do and that is why maybe easier to trigger there, [...] (MEP 1)

MEP 8's assistant pointed to the same argument:

And that's when we see that... the notion of network is... is... is real in the way that people who follow you have an interest in following you, because they are interested in your dossiers, and if they are interested in your dossiers, in general, they are... [Pause] yes, so I was saying... the people who follow an MEP on Facebook, in general, are interested in his/her areas of interest. So either they are political activists who are there for their clear, clear political affiliation, or there are also people who follow an MEP, let's say, for their thematic affinity. (MEP 8)<sup>47</sup>

MEP 16 also showed his awareness of actors who constitute his network:

The vast majority are people involved in politics in the institutions and in the world of trade unionism. I am well known as 'trade union friendly' MEP and so trade unionists at every level, in my own region, branch level, European level are among my friends. (MEP 16)

### *6.3.1. When awareness has an impact on the nature of use of SNT*

In Chapter 4, I made a distinction in defining different categories of SNT. As discussed in Chapter 5, a number of MEPs and/or assistants have mentioned the distinction they make, mainly between blogs and other SNT they use, and we can assume here that it has an impact on the network therefore formed. The nature and the properties of the different tools (i.e. microblogging, blogging, other Internet applications) have an impact on the way MEPs use the tools and consequently, has an impact on their motivations to use one tool over another. First, there is a recurrent idea that microblogging is more dedicated to a network of experts whereas other

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<sup>47</sup> Translated from French to English by the author.

Internet applications such as Facebook are more ‘popular’. When discussing the different usage MEPs make of SNT, an official of DG COMM explained to me that the feeling is that the ‘audience’ (network) on microblogging sites such as Twitter is more ‘professional’ and that Twitter is used more as a professional tool than Facebook (EPO 1). Second, MEP 13 showed that she was sensitive to the differences and properties of each SNT she uses, according to the networks she is part of. Indeed, when I asked her what made her use Twitter more actively at a certain time, she explained that her activity depends on the network and her awareness of who is in the network:

‘That’s when I really got interested in that thing... and in January, yes... because in fact, I had this idea... according to the profiles that followed me, but I might have been wrong to be so selective. Actually, for me, in my mind, I’ve made small categories: that is to say, the ‘red’ profile is really for articles, on Facebook, that’s where I tell a bit about all my parliamentary activity and Twitter, it is rather to spread information, so yes, I put things like ‘is going to Strasbourg’, ‘is going to Brussels’, but rather to spread things that are more controversial or more EU related. For example, I am going to tweet ‘just attended a meeting on EU budgets and national parliaments’. But how do we do that? It might be something sharper, on the basis of 140 signs. It is true that it has been harder to start Twitter and I always thought... well, you need a piece of information because your followers might also... well stop following you if you don’t share information that is a little... incidentally, if they find it on Facebook... and then the followers I have, are rather more specifically from the political arena and in particular from the European microcosm. So I am always selecting THE thing that others have not said yet and so... and therefore, indeed, it takes me longer.’ (MEP 13)<sup>48</sup>

Third, an official of the PETI Committee explained that microblogging and Internet applications constitute distinct networks of actors:

What we’re really satisfied with is our Facebook and even better Twitter activity. We think it serves two different publics... over time, and especially in terms of communicating the... the... the European Union’s

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<sup>48</sup> Translated from French to English by the author.

activities, Twitter has become more specialised in terms of catering to... to... an audience of people already in-the-know, people already in the journalism world or working with European affairs or working with... European issues while Facebook remains an excellent way to actually reach out, to, to regular citizens, meaning students, you know, and families, just regular families, not necessarily interested in the activities of the Union. (EPO 5)

Finally, and as discussed later in Chapter 8, MEPs' awareness of the social structure of the networks, defined in this case as their awareness of journalists as being part of their networks formed via SNT, enables MEPs to create ties with these actors and initiate communication. Thus, being aware of the network one is in, therefore knowing who forms the network (awareness of social structures) plays a role in using SNT for communicative purposes in the context of legislative work.

### 6.3.2. *Belonging to the network vs. communicating via the network*

An assistant made an interesting point when she explained the difference between the different tools her MEP uses (his blog and other Internet applications). She explained that the simple fact that her MEP belonged to the network – when he uses Internet applications such as Facebook – was enough as a (political) statement (i.e. 'being friend' and 'liking' other actors of the network (i.e. associations)). She did not see a need for him to interact with those actors. His awareness and other actors' awareness of him being part of the network are sufficient in this case. Thus, in some cases, belonging to the network is enough in itself:

Just to go back to Facebook, I think that there is this network aspect that is... well as...his blog, it is really about communicating what he does, to explain his work, his work in the parliament on the one hand, in the party on the other hand, it has a great value in terms of accountability, in terms of spreading information. Facebook, it has a value in terms of network *stricto sensu*, that is to say, to be friend with political activists, branches, associations, etc. ... And it is not so much about spreading information but rather about belonging to a network and therefore to show... that he is part

of that universe and that he relates to and that he relates to people... from that universe... political universe. (MEP 14)<sup>49</sup>

This finding goes in line with the cognitive social structure theory I presented in Chapter 4 where, awareness of other people in the network, and the cognitions those people have of other actors are enough, at this stage, that they do not need to act on in communicative terms. This also calls for the more general argument of this thesis that communication in the context of EP legislative work is considered as highly based on a network structure.

#### **6.4. Social structure and the strength of weak ties: expanding MEPs' network awareness to weak ties**

##### *6.4.1. Weak ties in organisational studies: Reminder*

I mentioned a number of organisational studies in Chapter 4 where specific organisational and communicative properties of SNT have been suggested by empirical research. The use of SNT in the workplace has suggested in a number of those studies that it allowed to connect weak ties and to strengthen weak ties among colleagues. Zhao & Rosson (2009) concluded in their exploratory study of people's motivations to adopting SNT in the workplace that open microblogging (Twitter) enabled people to keep contact and be connected to people from their work they are not in close contact with. Skeels and Grudin (2009) also concluded that one of the work-related benefits of using Facebook and LinkedIn in the workplace was the creation, maintenance and strengthening of weak ties among colleagues (2009: 8).

We could therefore assume that, from an organisational perspective, the use of SNT in the legislative context could enable MEPs to connect with weak ties and strengthen the connections. Thus, the network is expanding to new actors who can potentially be involved in the legislative work MEPs carry out. The next sections thus focus on weak ties in networks formed when using SNT and consider the extent to which those weak ties bring an object of novelty to MEPs' communication practices.

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<sup>49</sup> Translated from French to English by the author.

#### 6.4.2. *Weak ties and strong ties when carrying out legislative work:*

##### *Definition*

The analytical framework developed in Chapter 4 considers unconventional theoretical perspectives such as emergent networks and notions such as informality in social exchanges. The social networks that result from using SNT bring together different levels of analysis and are considered here as emergent networks. The analysis of such practice needs to consider other actors and other communicative practices, therefore arguing for a multiplex network analysis that considers the copresence of direct and mediated communication practices. I argue in this section that, as part of their network awareness, MEPs are connected – offline and online – to other actors who can be defined as strong and weak ties when using SNT. Those ties constitute a community with which MEPs have the possibility to connect with and be provided with relevant information and/or policy expertise when communicating for their legislative work.

When it comes to SNT, findings have suggested, as discussed in the previous section, that MEPs have raised their awareness of their networks but have also expanded these networks more broadly. A full analysis of the nature of the connections MEPs have initiated with some of the actors involved in their networks is not intended but attributes of individuals in the network and their characteristics are worth mentioning.

The creation of a profile when using SNT enables users (MEPs) to be part of a network that forms around them. This is what we call *ego networks*. As much as the networks therefore created revolve around the ego (i.e. MEP), the structure of the network and its properties call for the consideration of other actors involved in the network. Besides, not only people who are tied up directly to an ego – in this case, the MEP – is of importance in considering those social networks. Individuals tied up to those who are in direct contact with the MEP are as much important as the first-degree contacts. As Granovetter explains:

“I would argue that by dividing ego’s network into that part made up of strong and nonbridging weak ties on the one hand, and that of bridging weak ties on the other, both orientations can be dealt with. Ties in the former part should tend to be people who not only know one another, but

who also have few contacts not tied to ego as well. In the “weak” sector, however, not only will ego’s contacts not be tied to one another, but they *will* be tied to individuals not tied to ego. Indirect contacts are thus typically reached through ties in this sector; such ties are then of importance not only to ego’s manipulation of networks, but also in that they are the channels through which ideas, influences, or information socially distant from ego may reach him. The fewer indirect contacts one has the more encapsulated he will be in terms of knowledge of the world beyond his own friendship circle; thus bridging weak ties (and the consequent indirect contacts) are important in both ways.” (1973: 1370-1)

Thus, if I want to understand the potential SNT offer to MEPs to expand their network awareness to a broader community, it is necessary to look at networks from a larger perspective.

Here is an attempt to apply Granovetter’s argument to the context of communication networks formed when using SNT, when legislating. Instead of considering friendships as close circles, let me consider networks of actors involved in the legislative process. The application of the strength of weak ties argument in the process of legislating is possible by looking at communication practices mentioned in Chapter 3 and by examining the information flow that allows the exchange of valuable information for the completion of the legislative process. In Chapter 3, we saw that lobbyists based in Brussels play an increasingly important role in providing MEPs with information in the legislative process. We also saw in that chapter that a certain number of internal actors also play a role in the legislative process. Thus, I have shown that certain channels of communication such as face-to-face meetings and emails are strongly established and that networks of information provision are constructed around direct interpersonal contacts. One could assume then that external actors present in the network, actors characterised by their remoteness from and weak relation with the MEP, could be weak ties and could provide the MEP with novel information, information that a close circle (strong ties) would not have been able to provide. In such process, one can foresee that weak ties are actors who are not involved in the traditional network of communication of an MEP in the legislative process. Where those weak ties were typically ‘disconnected’ from MEPs and unable to connect with them via traditional channels of communication – mainly due to the strong establishment of traditional

communication practices such as face-to-face meetings or emails as discussed in Chapter 3 – SNT offer a chance for those weak ties to play a bridging role in communication networks.

#### *6.4.3. Tie strength on SNT: Characterisation*

Granovetter talks about weak ties in terms of the limited strength and intensity of the relation between two nodes. Haythornthwaite (2002: 386) suggests that:

“Strength of a tie is normally assessed by looking at a combination of factors; frequency of contact, duration of the association, intimacy of the tie, provision of reciprocal services, and kinship have been used as measures of tie strength.”

In the case of this study, I consider three elements that would define the limits to tie strength when communicating in the context of legislative work with MEPs. First, and as discussed in Chapter 3, the established channels of communication that exist when communicating with MEPs in the process of legislating – face-to-face meetings, as a prerequisite for establishing the future exchanges via phone or email – play a crucial role in developing the strength of a relation. Second, one could assume that the geographical component of a relation is part of this relative strength. Indeed, MEPs have to deal with policies that have consequences in 27 Member States but they are first and foremost elected at a regional/national level. Thus, their regional implementation, due to the distance generated by the remoteness of their workplace – Brussels and Strasbourg – is limited and one could assume that networks of communication (and exchange of information) that initiate locally are put at risk because of the physical distance. Finally, Bouwen’s study of corporate lobbying practices in the EP, in one committee in particular (Economic and monetary affairs), throws light and confirms the distinction made in this study between European/Brussels-based lobbyists and other organisations (the broader European civil society). Indeed, as Bouwen (2003: 11) concludes:

Another important but less surprising finding is that the degree of access of these two collective forms of interest representation is substantially higher than the access of individual firms or consultants. MEPs clearly prefer to talk to lobbyists from representative organizations. The fact that individual firms have difficulties providing encompassing access goods seriously reduces their capacity to gain access to the European Parliament.

The opposition staged in his study between representatives organisations (supranational and national) and individual lobbyists confirms the distinction made in this study between Brussels-based supranational organisations and more local-based individual organisations.

To summarise, weak ties are characterised here by (1) MEPs' strongly established communication practices, (2) the remoteness of MEPs' workplace from their constituencies and (3) the distinction between organised lobbyists based in Brussels and individual members of the European civil society. It is in this context that I argue that connections with weak ties can be favoured via SNT.

## **6.5. From awareness to acquaintance: democratising EP lobbying?**

### *6.5.1. Lobbying the EP: strong ties vs. weak ties*

There are two aspects of lobbying the EP that are of interest here. First, the type of exchanges between MEPs and lobbyists that I assessed in Chapter 3 is important. Defining the unidirectional or mutual form of relationship MEPs and lobbyists maintain is important if we want to understand the relationship that is established when MEPs communicate with other actors via SNT. Secondly, the media/channels used by lobbyists and MEPs to initiate a relationship is of importance. As discussed in Chapter 3 and as defined in Table 2, the medium used to communicate with external actors needs to be taken into account.

As seen earlier in Chapter 1 and Chapter 3, lobbyists play an increasing role in providing MEPs with information, in an attempt to inform on and translate technical content to MEPs and/or to influence their final decisions on reports. We also saw in Chapter 3 that MEPs and lobbyists have established relationships where personal contacts and face-to-face encounters are essential when establishing strong ties between partners. Thus, I call those lobbyists 'strong ties' as for their



established relationships with MEPs and their constant contacts with them. Those strong ties are in opposition to all other members of the European civil society who do not have an established relationship with MEPs and who, nevertheless, could provide MEPs with valuable information when they carry out their work as legislators. Their geographical remoteness, as mentioned in the previous section, can also be an element of strength of the tie. When it comes to internal actors, MEPs have a close circle of individuals who work together with them in the process of legislating. Their staff, the political group and the committee secretariat can also be considered as potential strong ties. However, it is important to note that not all political group members or committee secretariat officials maintain strong ties with MEPs. As seen in Chapter 3, networks are not generalizable and vary from one MEP to another.

As discussed earlier, the use of SNT has allowed a number of MEPs to connect with individuals or actors who are not necessarily in their close circle of colleagues or acquaintances and who nevertheless evolve in the circle of the European civil society. The localness of these actors as well as their issue-based concentration is of interest here. MEPs have proven their awareness of the network they evolve in by mentioning those actors' existence. Such awareness of a broader network of nodes could enable them to (potentially) consider a broader range of civil society actors when carrying out their legislative work. This broader civil society has been defined earlier as weak ties. If I take this argument a step further, I would argue that, when connections are made between MEPs and weak ties, it could allow the diffusion of valuable information and of ideas in the legislative process, and therefore, it would expand the range of external actors involved in the legislative process to a broader civil society. Such pattern would consequently put into question the normative paradigm of traditional lobbying practices in the EP. Indeed, if communication with weak ties – broader civil society – is facilitated when using SNT, this calls for a reassessment of lobbying practices in the EP. A discussion with one MEP assistant has shown through the potential redefinition of the lobbying paradigm when using SNT:

But more importantly, there is a community of experts, let's say, around us, who is capable of answering our questions, we have to face facts, MEPs are not all-knowing, and influential groups, interest groups, pressure

groups are everywhere in Brussels, and well, we choose whoever gives us... gives us what we need to move forward. It is really... it is, yes, it is about trust as always. (MEP 8)<sup>50</sup>

The connection between MEPs and weak ties can go further than simply raising MEPs' awareness of their existence. MEP 9 for example has been in direct contact with associations via SNT:

And then, there are a few, recently, there are a few associations who contacted me via Facebook or Twitter. I have contacts. It is a direct relationship hum...right, it is funny how this develops (?), [...] So they contact me, they follow me, they like, they send me information.' (FU MEP 9)<sup>51</sup>

She went on to explain that, although first contact is taken via SNT, classic communication practices regain the upper hand at some point:

So they contact me, they follow me, they like, they send me information, and then it has to go through the office, right, there is a time when it comes back in the loop... when it is then a matter of meeting them, it happened, I don't get an appointment with them directly, it has to go through the office in Brussels and then we fit them into the agenda. (FU MEP 9)<sup>52</sup>

the system creates ties and beyond the virtual world, because we meet in real life, and this is the stage that we are discovering nowadays... [...] (MEP 9)<sup>53</sup>

SNT enable MEPs to raise their awareness of a broader community of potential lobbyists (weak ties) and enable them to strengthen connections with those weak ties. The established communication practices discussed in Chapter 3 have however strong implications in the potential of SNT as enabling relationship creation between MEPs and weak ties. Given the importance of sustained face-to-

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<sup>50</sup> Translated from French to English by the author.

<sup>51</sup> Idem

<sup>52</sup> Idem

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face communication and mediated communication via email and phone, I would argue that it is necessary for weak ties to adopt such practices once connection and strengthening of ties have been ensured. This argument goes in line with Haythornthwaite's study on weak, strong and latent ties and new media adoption (2002). She argues that weak ties are in danger when limited to one medium of communication. Multiple means of communication with weak ties ensure sustained communication. My approach follows Haythornthwaite's argument (2002: 385-6) that:

“the use and impacts of media are dependent on the type of tie connecting communicators. The tie determines the ways, means, and expression of communications, and it determines the motivations, needs, and desires for communication. This perspective begins with the social network tie between communicators and the way in which they use all means of communication.”

An EP official referred to encounters between MEPs and individuals who first contacted MEPs via SNT and who eventually met offline:

And they also had a lot of contacts on the real world thanks to the social networks because they were people who contacted them by such a networks and then went to their meetings in the real world, and said ‘hello, I am your friend on Facebook, I would like to introduce myself’. (EPO 2)

So far, I have looked at SNT as enabling tie creation between two nodes (actors). The nature of the content that is exchanged has not been tackled yet but is the focus of the following chapter. Nevertheless, during a follow-up interview with MEP 1, when asked if he could foresee SNT as tools to retrieve expert information that would help him in his legislative work, his answer was nuanced:

I don't think you can use the social networks for that which doesn't mean that you might find groups in a social network which engage with issues, the topics that you as far as I have seen it, they are usually one topic group dealing with, I don't know, technical issues or the discussion on one or whatever [...] (FU MEP 1)

Here, MEP 1 does not consider SNT as a tool that could provide him with technical information or expertise. Even so, the possibility to find actors – or groups as he calls them – who engage with issues, demonstrates the potential that the tool has to offer and that the MEP himself is aware of the possibility to expand his network to weak ties.

During an interview with MEP 2, he explained to me that he was very interested in using SNT to ask people questions and to initiate debates (See Chapter 7). While explaining to me that he sometimes finds relevant information for his work when using those tools, he also mentioned the possibility, when using SNT, to connect with weak ties (in this case, former colleagues):

I had the report on radio spectrum, it's a quite... it's a very technical and difficult area. I worked for twenty years now, also in the XX Parliament in my... an earlier job and that's why I have some colleagues from, at that time who know very much about it and it's very easy for me to send out on the Internet or in my update what should be... and they comment then 'well, the frequencies on that and that are very efficient if you want to use it for this and otherwise you should go higher on the band' and so on... sometimes, it gives me relevant information. (MEP 2)

MEP 16 mentioned the geographical remoteness of a friend as potentially removing him from his 'close circle' but with whom he could still manage ongoing policy issues via SNT:

It is also, one of my friends is in New Zealand. And he is currently down in New Zealand, has just been in Beijing and we were able to keep in touch through Facebook while he was on the move. He is still in the email system anyway... but in a number of things that could also be easily managed through Facebook; coal project in China, food safety issues in New Zealand, meat processing industries. These things are global, and you can easily (?) around the globe. (MEP 16)

Without jumping to the next property of the analytical framework – information retrieval – that is discussed in Chapter 7, MEP 8's assistant admitted that SNT has allowed him to connect with ties that can be characterised as weak as he explained that this information could not have been found otherwise:

It allowed us to meet people... well, virtually, who have given us information that we would not have necessarily found otherwise. Because actually, it is, well... it is a bit the Web 2.0 logic, it is really the, the, the sharing, the networking and... (MEP 8)<sup>54</sup>

The argument that SNT allow MEPs to increase their awareness of the network by allowing them to connect with weak ties is justified by the fact that MEPs recall having contact with local actors (be it citizens or actors of the local civil society) and with individuals who have an interest in their work (issue-based interest). Brussels lobbyists' observations are consistent with my argument. Indeed, Brussels lobbyists themselves – considered in this framework as strong ties – admitted that they were not the ones in contact with MEPs on SNT. It is somehow consistent with the rationale developed here. Thus, when I explained to one Brussels-based lobbyist that I had interviewed a number of MEPs to ask them how and why they use SNT, she spontaneously asked me in return:

So if you can tell me is it true that they are investing in communicating more through social media, they are doing it, so who is their target then? (LOB 2)

When I explained that communication practices as well as the use of social media depended on MEPs as individuals she commented:

They are not talking to us, so who are they talking to? (LOB 2)

I have argued throughout this section that SNT enable MEPs to raise their awareness of a broader civil society (described here as weak ties) and to strengthen connections with those weak ties. The necessity to sustain relationships with weak ties forces the adoption of other communication practices. This finding is validated by observations described in Chapter 3 of the strongly established communication practices when carrying out legislative work. Brussels lobbyists (strong ties) partially validated this argument by admitting that SNT are not part of the communication channels they use to communicate with MEPs in their legislative

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<sup>54</sup> Translated from French to English by the author.

work. Finally, I suggest that such findings calls into question the potential democratisation of lobbying practices in the EP.

This chapter has developed an argument, on an exploratory basis, on the potential of SNT as to raise MEPs' network awareness. SNT allow them to connect with weak ties. Weak ties are defined here as external actors who can be members of the broader civil society, in opposition with Brussels-based lobbyists and any lobbyist who already has a strongly established relationship with MEPs (strong ties). It is commonly stated that interest groups, mostly based in Brussels, have privileged relationships and contacts with MEPs who revolve in their circle. The distance imposed by the physical remoteness of the institution – Brussels and Strasbourg – as compared to MEPs' local or regional branch contributes to the ideological and physical remoteness MEPs have towards the broader European civil society. From a normative perspective, such findings call for the consideration of the following question as central for further research: to what extent could SNT reshape EP lobbying practices and to what extent could SNT allow a democratisation of lobbying the EP?

Evidence of relationship creation between MEPs and weak ties supports this argument and consequently calls for a re-consideration of lobbying practices in the EP. Lobbying is seen in the literature as a very closed practice, limited to a close circle of interest groups, associations and NGOs based in Brussels. Without an attempt to addressing the efficiency and the potential influence EP lobbyists can have on MEPs' decisions, I question here the opportunity, when using SNT, to democratise EP lobbying practices by expanding the social structure formed by SNT networks to a broader set of actors. I have attempted to show in this chapter that one of the properties of SNT is to allow MEPs to connect with weak ties. Consequently, I argue that a broader European civil society is within MEPs' reach and it calls into question a possible democratisation of EP lobbying practices.

## **6.6. Conclusion**

This chapter has presented the first of the four elements that constitute an emergent model of use of SNT for MEPs. Network awareness, which follows the rationale developed in Chapter 4 on cognitive social structures, is a central aspect of

organisational communication in the context of legislative work. First, empirical findings have shown that the use of SNT has raised MEPs' awareness to a broader network that includes local actors, political party actors, associations and/or experts. Secondly, I have suggested in this chapter that MEPs' awareness is expanding to weak ties. Following Granovetter's argument on the strength of weak ties, findings show that MEPs initiate contacts on SNT networks with weak ties, in opposition to strong ties. If I apply the model of weak ties and strong ties to actors traditionally involved in the legislative process, external actors such as Brussels lobbyists – who already have an established relationship with MEPs – play the role of strong ties and the broader European civil society, characterised by its physical remoteness and limited relations to MEPs, represent weak ties. Therefore, I have raised the question of how SNT can enable a democratisation of EP lobbying practices by allowing MEPs to raise their awareness of a broader network of civil society actors and to potentially strengthen weak ties in the context of committee work. Evidence that contacts have been made once awareness has been raised via SNT validates such argument. The strong establishment of classic communication practices, as discussed in Chapter 3, questions the potential of SNT as communicative tools between MEPs and the broader European civil society. The initial objective of this chapter was to look at MEPs' awareness of the networks they are in when they use SNT. This also means that I have had to look at information flows in order to identify weak ties and strong ties. Even though information that is diffused when communicating via SNT has not been tackled in this chapter, the following chapter (Chapter 7 – Information retrieval) addresses this question. Thus, the following chapter focuses on SNT as tools that allow MEPs to retrieve information when they carry out their work as legislators.

## **Chapter 7 - Information retrieval**

### **7.1. Summary**

This chapter discusses the second component of the emergent model of use of SNT for MEPs: information retrieval. Empirical findings suggest that SNT allow MEPs to raise their awareness on public opinion. Be it solicited or unsolicited, SNT enable MEPs to ‘get a feel of what people think’ and consequently retrieve information. The opposition between individual use of SNT as a way to gather information and organised consultations initiated by the institution is discussed in this chapter. Finally, findings show that the potential of SNT as an expertise retrieval tool is limited to the importance of social structures (who knows who) in committee work. The joint analysis of the argument articulated in Chapter 6 and the findings presented in this chapter allows me to discuss the limitations to expertise retrieval via SNT.

### **7.2. Introduction**

I argue in this chapter that SNT allow MEPs to better appreciate public opinion. In Chapter 4, I discussed the nature of SNT networks and the properties of SNT as enabling information retrieval. Findings suggest that citizens’ inputs into the legislative process, including civil society’ inputs, are an integral part of an ongoing consultation process. The first part of this chapter introduces MEPs’ willingness to listen to citizens. I suggest in this section that the informality of the tool facilitates direct contact between MEPs and citizens as SNT allow the disclosure of a more informal image of politicians. Research in the field has tended to focus on the citizens’ perspective as to exploring what benefits the use of new ICTs could bring to consultation. The approach taken here rather focuses on decision-makers and their motivations to consulting citizens in the legislative process. The second part of the chapter discusses the different levels of information recognition and information retrieval as well as the limitations to expertise retrieval. Finally, I argue here that the notions of ‘who knows who’ and ‘who knows what’ go together and the former is essential to the latter when using SNT to retrieve policy expertise.



### **7.3. Political theory approach vs. organisational approach: public input vs. expertise retrieval**

The theoretical framework discussed in Chapter 4 has introduced the notion of political representation and its model at the EU level. In the case of this study, the notion of political representation encompasses two levels of analysis when it comes to retrieving information via SNT: a political theory approach and an organisational approach.

Coleman and Nathanson's (2005) definition of an elected representative concedes that elected representatives play intertwined roles of which informing and communicating are an integral part when put in perspective with deliberative and participatory model of representation (Mansbridge 2003; Urbinati and Warren 2008). Thus, as the findings of this chapter suggest, SNT allow MEPs to retrieve information, and more specifically to raise their awareness of public opinion. This shows one side of the dialogical communication relationship thus established between representative and represented (the following chapter discusses the other side of this two-way relationship – information dissemination). Therefore, as much as expertise and technical information play a crucial role in information retrieval, MEPs are also provided with citizens' opinions on ongoing dossiers. From a strictly organisational perspective, the accuracy of such information remains to be assessed. However, as observed earlier in Chapter 4, the setting of this research cannot be assessed as a strictly organisational one. It involves actors and processes that require political decisions and it requires therefore the consideration of a democratic rationale in the analysis.

I have suggested earlier in this study that MEPs have been gradually asked to be experts in their areas of legislation, according to the committees they are members of. In order to carry out their legislative work, they are in need of valuable input and sometimes very technical information that will inform their decisions. I also discussed in Chapter 4 the potential of SNT for MEPs to retrieve accurate and valuable information when they carry out their work as MEPs from an organisational perspective. Thus, due to the structure of the network and the cognitions actors have of it, I argued that the network formed when using SNT could be characterised as a cognitive knowledge network where the notions of 'who knows

what’ and ‘who knows who knows what’ allow the recognition of information/expertise. When we look at committee work, expertise retrieval is established in different ways, involving different communication practices. Indeed, as discussed in Chapter 3, internal exchanges between members of the same political group, formal institutional meetings or lobbying practices, just to name a few, allow MEPs to be provided with expert and technical information in their legislative work.

The following sections present the different scenarios that allow MEPs to raise their awareness of public opinion. First, MEPs receive unsolicited public opinion when using SNT but nevertheless welcome it as to ‘get a feel of what people think’ on ongoing issues. The interpersonal and informal components of these tools allow the sharing of information and opinions, with a willingness from MEPs’ end to interact with the people. Second, findings suggest that MEPs have embraced SNT as communicative tools as they allow them to consult and listen to citizens in a two-way communication manner. MEPs’ individual use of SNT for that purpose is seen in light of the institution’s organised consultation. Third, findings suggest that some MEPs consider citizens’ participation in the legislative process as a more constant feature of SNT use. Finally, I reconsider the analytical property developed in Chapter 4 as for the expertise retrieval potential of SNT. In perspective with the argument articulated in Chapter 6 on social structures, findings have shown the strong establishment of traditional communication practices in forming a (cognitive) knowledge network. Therefore, such findings raise the question of the limits to the potential of SNT as a tool for expertise retrieval when MEPs carry out their work as legislators.

#### **7.4. “Get a feel of what people think”: a motto for listening**

##### *7.4.1. Informality as enabling public opinion gathering*

I have emphasised the importance of considering naturally occurring contingencies in communicative actions in Chapter 4 (Garfinkel 1967; Heritage 1984). Indeed, observation has shown that informality, as the setting of a communicative action – plays an important role in communication dynamics occurring in the EP. I therefore took as a premise that informality might play a role in mediated communication via SNT. In this study, I look at the use of SNT as

communicative tools in copresence of other communicative practices. Thus, as an integrated system of analysis, I also consider informality in communication occurring via SNT (Garfinkel 1967; Heritage 1984; Miształ 2000).

Thus, MEPs and their assistants have mentioned informality and the personal aspect of SNT as facilitating contacts with citizens. MEP 12's assistant agrees to the benefit of informality of the tool:

But, what we used to do is that, as we received a lot of messages, requests, inputs, reactions on so and so, or an illegal immigrant who needed help, etc. we used to sum up all messages every week or every other week with all important things that she has received and we also used it as an email inbox and then, and to make it more ergonomic and easier, we used to ask people for their contact details or we used to ask them to contact XX directly by email but we also used it as... as a communication tool because people find that it adds a personal touch rather than sending an email to an email address that they don't necessarily know, to the EP, with a difficult email address to remember when you are not familiar with it. (MEP 12)<sup>55</sup>

As MEP 2 pointed out:

I think people want to have a feeling of the whole, the whole human being behind the politician. (MEP 2)

According to MEP 8's assistant, the perceptions of direct personal ties and closeness to the MEP facilitate communication between citizens and their representatives:

On Facebook, what happens is that on the Facebook account, there are a lot of people, when they are trying to, for example, to contact XX, well nowadays, they are not going to think 'I am going to send her an email on her professional email address', they are going to contact her directly via her Facebook page... being a friend or not, or not... [...] because actually, there is this tie, that is, let's say, informal. It gives you the impression that you are

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<sup>55</sup> Translated from French to English by the author.

close to the MEP, so one thinks ‘well, through this channel, I am going to access directly the person [...] (MEP 8)<sup>56</sup>

The informality described here is less defined as the setting of communication but rather considers the link created via SNT between an MEP and an individual. Politicians have always been seen as an unreachable elite who are remote from everyday people. SNT give space for less structured, less formal communication:

It’s not always ‘well, I am going to plenary to speak about... the economic crisis, is the financial crisis? Is the Euro? Are we for or against Euro-bonds?’ Because people don’t know what this is. So either you educate people, you explain things, but, it is not her intention, she really says... well, she writes as she feels. So sometimes, it can be like ‘Oh, I have a headache’... but as a result, you develop a certain relationship with people. They tell you, that is to say that they tell you: ‘Yes, well done’ or ‘Don’t worry, take this’. It is a different kind of rapport. (MEP 18)<sup>57</sup>

Scholars such as Coleman and Moss (2008) or Jackson and Lilleker (2011) have looked at the use of SNT by politicians by analysing the nature of representation on SNT. Coleman and Moss (2008: 19), in exploring three politicians’ blogs conclude that:

“all three politician-bloggers are seeking to simulate closeness to the citizens they claim to represent by constructing symbolic indicators of their ordinariness, by appearing to communicate spontaneously and simultaneously, and by offering the possibility of interactive dialogue with their readers.”

Jackson and Lilleker’s (2011: 101) study of British MPs’ use of microblogging services (Twitter) also concluded that impression management is an essential part of why MPs use Twitter in their representative functions:

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<sup>56</sup> Translated from French to English by the author.

<sup>57</sup> Idem

“by appearing as human beings, with a sense of humour or everyday interests, they hope that this may influence the perception of followers.”

This confirms the idea that a mutual communication relationship is established via SNT between MEPs and individuals, by on the one hand, having MEPs presenting themselves on a more informal note (information dissemination is discussed in further details in Chapter 8) and on the other hand, individuals accessing their representatives directly, without the need to go through institutional and formal communication means (for example, sending a message via the institutional email address, which can make the communication more formal).

#### *7.4.2. Context awareness and lack of interpersonal exchange as an issue*

We saw in Chapter 4 that findings of organisational studies suggested that SNT allow users to raise their context awareness and their social awareness (P. Meyer and Dibbern 2010; Zhao and Rosson 2009). Even without looking for it, SNT users are kept informed on their professional working context. As Böhringer & Richter (2009: 2) state, one of the characteristics of microblogging is its potential to raise awareness:

“A special characteristic of microblogging is its ability to heighten awareness. Dourish and Bellotti (1992, p. 107) define awareness as “an understanding of the activities of others, which provides a context for your own activity” and stress the importance of awareness when coordinating group activities in different task domains.”

In the same way, MEP 18’s assistant considers SNT as great tools for the MEP to be reminded of ongoing issues that need to be tackled:

So for example, on Facebook when, a lot of people follow us, so for instance, I study all the votes, with my colleague, we look at all the votes because sometimes, we get our knuckles rapped on Facebook as people say: ‘Yes, Sonia, this vote is going to take place, why didn’t you, why didn’t you vote this way?’ and so we have to be perfect all the time. If not, then debates start and then this kind of things is picked up on blogs, so as I told you ‘De

Grilo' [Blog], so we are... Facebook is a bit... the alarm signal: 'watch out, you should follow this thing, be careful'. (MEP 18)<sup>58</sup>

MEP 9 also sees SNT as a good 'alarm signal' on important issues:

It is, it is a way to be alerted on such or such subject, to share... (FU MEP 9)<sup>59</sup>

Thus, MEPs admit that SNT allow them to be notified and be aware of the social and contextual network they belong to.

As discussed earlier, a clear distinction has been made between blogs, microblogging and other Internet applications when it comes to the specific use made of each of them. Blogging and the structure of blogs typically call for information provision, with the possibility for individuals to comment and share links while Internet applications such as Facebook offer a larger range of communication exchanges and functions. When MEPs were asked what functions they use on SNT, functions and formats such as posting information as status or blog post, uploading pictures, creating events, sending private emails, etc. were mentioned. The interpersonal exchange dimension of SNT would not have had a bigger impact on these findings if the interpersonal options of one of the SNT had not played a crucial role in MEPs' exchanges and in the way they were able to collect people's opinions. Indeed, at the time of fieldwork, Facebook had launched a new feature on its platform, offering politicians (and any public figure for that matter), to open a page (fan page) of which functions are slightly different to a typical individual profile page. As Facebook started, users were able to create a profile and befriend their friends, acquaintances or strangers. One of the functions offered on the profiles is the private inbox where users can receive private messages (in opposition to posts or messages published on someone's wall, which consequently are public). The private inbox feature is however absent on the fan page and it seems to have become an issue for some MEPs in the way they used to communicate with individuals with their former profile:

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<sup>58</sup> Translated from French to English by the author.

<sup>59</sup> Idem

So, what happens is that when you are a fan... you can't send messages to the Facebook inbox. You can leave comments. So, the messages you send, it gives you the impression that they are less personal, that it is something that will be public anyhow. So that's the difference between the two I would say. (MEP 8)<sup>60</sup>

As MEP 6 mentioned, the possibility to exchange private messages with citizens offer an additional chance to hear what they have to say:

Yes, yes, I use them but less frequently. I check them less regularly. Which is actually a mistake because sometimes, I find messages that people had sent me and where they ask me questions and as I have... sometimes, it takes me several weeks before I respond because I check the emails on Facebook less frequently... it is a mistake that we are trying to correct. (MEP 6)<sup>61</sup>

Thus, when Facebook withdrew the possibility for MEPs to receive private messages, they perceived the loss as a possible brake to interpersonal exchanges with individuals, who often used that function to share opinions and concerns with their MEPs:

Actually, the fan page doesn't offer this kind of interactive messages. Now, people comment directly and I think it is a shame, this is something we don't have anymore... good or bad, I don't know because we already have the email address... we already have an email address that is... we receive hundreds of emails every day so it is true, it is a bit difficult to manage several inboxes at the same time, but still, it is a shame because people can't contact their MEP that way anymore as they used to. (MEP 12)<sup>62</sup>

One could argue that the interpersonal exchange properties of SNT do not offer anything new compared with traditional emails. And as MEP 12's assistant argued, MEPs already receive hundreds of emails everyday so another platform for

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<sup>60</sup> Translated from French to English by the author.

<sup>61</sup> Idem

<sup>62</sup> Idem

interpersonal exchange might only complicate things. However, the observation made by a number of MEPs and/or assistants on the loss of private messages on Facebook describes a benefit in communicating with individuals and retrieving information. As argued earlier, the form of the communication itself (private message, email) is not informal. However, the platform where communication is initiated (i.e. Facebook) is informal by its nature as it gathers personal and professional information for most users – as MEP 1 explained in Chapter 5. Thus, the entry point of the communicative action – SNT – is informal in its setting and in its definition as a communicative tool, and it allows MEPs to retrieve information – public opinion – on that basis.

The following section discusses the different forms of consultations SNT have enabled.

## **7.5. Seeking input and participation: from ‘e-engaging’ to ‘e-empowering’**

### *7.5.1. Launching discussions and debates*

MEPs’ use of SNT can be passive; they listen to people’s enquiries without encouraging upstream participation. This is what I call here *passive listening*. However, MEPs also raise their awareness of public opinion by asking for it, that is to say, by organising discussions or consultations. Indeed, findings suggest that passive listening is combined with a more active feature where MEPs initiate discussions on ongoing dossiers as to gather opinions and input from citizens who are part of their networks. It is worth mentioning again Coleman and Moss’ (2008) conclusions on politicians’ blogs. The authors see informality as a possible threat to only advertising a more human politician, by depicting a more informal, less conventional picture of politicians, without reshaping the relationship with citizens and suggest two ways in which politicians and therefore elected representatives can use SNT:

“they can adopt communicative styles designed to reduce the *perception* of distance or they can attempt to create new relationships with citizens which reconfigure the *reality* of indirect representation. The first approach, however well intended, amounts little more than a publicity



campaign. The second approach reflects a genuine commitment to change the terms of representation, placing a new emphasis upon communicative efficacy, with inclusive discussion at the centre of the policy process, not only in vertical terms (citizen to politician and vice versa) but horizontally (citizen to citizen).” (Coleman and Moss 2008: 19)

Empirical findings show that both the first and the second approaches politicians could take have been taken by MEPs, and evidence of MEPs’ willingness to get citizens involved in the legislative process validates the second approach.

To illustrate this point, I now consider MEPs’ initiatives to get citizens involved in the legislative process. Macintosh defines e-engaging as:

“e-engaging with citizens is concerned with consulting a wider audience to enable deeper contributions and support deliberative debate on policy issues. The use of the term ‘to engage’ in this context refers to the top-down consultation of citizens by government or parliament.” (2004: 3)

First, findings show that engaging people into discussions or debates on ongoing issues, as a way to gather opinions and inputs, can take different shapes. As seen earlier, MEPs raise their awareness of public opinion by allowing (unsolicited) interpersonal exchange with actors who form their network. By allowing interpersonal exchange of private messages (or public on an MEP’s profile) MEPs give way to people asking questions on ongoing dossiers and it also allows them to respond to those enquiries:

It depends. In most cases, I try to respond. But then, it depends on the time I have available and then... for example, I got a question last week on geo-engineering... humm... and dryness... and... I can’t spontaneously respond to that, because, on the one hand, I did some research, we looked up with my team what geo-engineering was, and I haven’t had the time, well at least up until today, given other ongoing dossiers, to plunge into it, to assess the issue and to get an idea of... and so, as long as I don’t get an idea on it, I don’t have... so yes, I don’t have an answer, I don’t have instant answers to all questions I am asked, there is a certain number which... well at least, I need to think about it, I need, at least, before I respond, to have had been able to, yes, get an idea on such and such issue. Sometimes, I immediately

give an answer because, because these are issues, well, that I have been thinking on, dossiers, dossiers... dossiers that I know. (MEP 9)<sup>63</sup>

Second, some MEPs have shown a willingness to actively seek people's input, by launching discussions or debates. Some MEPs, like MEP 2, ask questions to their networks and initiate debates:

I often ask questions on my updates. 'We are discussing this and this, what should be my opinion?' mostly I know what my opinion would be but it's interesting sometimes... I don't know but it's interesting to see... that there is always someone who knows exactly about a thing about this or that and... so I often use it as... to ask people questions. (MEP 2)

He explained upfront:

And I actually use it a lot for debates. Because it's a good way to have a kind of interactive with your constituency... So I never, never tell people what I am doing, I'm telling people what I think of certain issues and then I let them debate and I intervene in the debate... (MEP 2)

He then went on to explain what benefit comes out of launching debates when using SNT, in comparison with traditional public debates:

I think it's funny because I like to have these discussions with people. You know, specialised in EU politician it's almost impossible to get people out there in the... if you invite or making a public debate, they... well ten or twenty people will attend the meeting and they are almost already convinced about me or EU. So that's not that interesting, it's more... this is my kind of debate house where I can actually reach a lot of people. (MEP 2)

He concluded by explaining why it was important for him to initiate such debates when he uses SNT:

I really think you have to provoke people a bit, to make them have their own stand or position on things that they feel they have to

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<sup>63</sup> Translated from French to English by the author.

communicate, so they participate in the debates. And if then you can make them laugh sometimes... (MEP 2)

MEPs have launched discussions (or what they call 'chats') with citizens on their own initiative:

Every month, in addition to the newsletter, I use to organize a public chat to which everybody can freely participate and ask questions concerning the topic chosen. (MEP 10)

MEP 4's assistant also considered chatting as part of his MEP's use of SNT:

I don't know if it is directly relevant but just to inform you, when he logs in to his Facebook account, often his chat is also open, and sometimes, constituents chat to him through that. It's not... it's not very regular, but... (MEP 4)

From a committee secretariat's perspective, SNT are seen as a potential platform for discussions and consultations on ongoing issues discussed in committee:

And I think that... that this Facebook page, what we have now, really we use it on a minimum level which means that they are a lot of opportunities and once our members [MEPs] will discover it, I mean most of the members, then it will give it a big boost. So for example, to have discussion, for example to have questions, we can have a lot of things. (EPO 4)

To summarise, SNT enable MEPs to gather unsolicited opinions on the one hand, and enable them to actively seek input on the other hand by launching debates and discussions via SNT. This observation brings me back to the political representation paradigm introduced in Chapter 4. Indeed, MEPs' use of SNT as a way to launch debates or simply to listen to public opinion describes a model of representation that considers the role of a representative as an ongoing communicative role, where citizens are not solely spectators of political life, and in this specific case, of the legislative process, but in the contrary, are included in the process. The initiatives seen here are individual (i.e. relying upon an MEP's will to do so) but they are also organised by the institution. As explained in the research

design of this study, the adoption of SNT is explored from an organisational perspective and therefore, it is important to include the institution as an organisation into the exploration of SNT use. The EP as an institution plays an organisational role for the good functioning of the legislative process but also plays a communicative role towards the outside of the EP, together with MEPs or independently from MEPs by always remaining politically neutral.

It is worth mentioning here online consultations around legislative issues that have been launched by the EP via Facebook, since 2009. The EP has been present on social media since the 2009 elections. First launched as a campaigning tool (in the case of the official institution's presence on SNT, it was a matter of raising people's awareness on the existence of the EP and its activities rather than political campaigning *stricto sensu*), the tools soon became an integral part of EP communication practices. So far, the EP has launched 33 official chats<sup>64</sup> with MEPs via their Facebook page (See Table 6). A special platform has been created on the EP Facebook page to allow interactive chats where, for a maximum of one hour, individuals can join a discussion with an MEP on a given issue (i.e. report to be voted or general EU affairs), via the EP Facebook page.

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<sup>64</sup> Figures corresponds to the number of online chats on the EP Facebook page from 2009 to April 2012 when the gathering of empirical data was completed.

**Table 6 EP Facebook chats, November 2009 to April 2012**

MEP	Date	Subject
Emilie Turnen	17.11.2009	General questions: Pilot exercise
Catherine Trautmann	24.11.2009	Telecom package (Rapporteur)
Karl-Heinz Florenz	16.12.2009	Climate change
Eva-Britt Svensson	09.03.2010	International Women's Day
Gianni Pittella	28.04.2010	Evolution of EP powers after Lisbon
Morten Lookkegaard	04.05.2010	Journalism and new media (Rapporteur)
Isabelle Durant	08.05.2010	General questions, Open Day
Sidonia Jedrzejewska	12.05.2010	EP budget priorities (Budget rapporteur)
Heidi Hautala	15.05.2010	Chair Human Rights subcommittee
Carlos Iturgaiz	05.07.2010	Annual petitions (Rapporteur)
Jerzy Buzek	30.09.2010	-
Stavros Lambrinidis	27.10.2010	-
Malcolm Harbour	18.11.2010	-
Jo Leinen	23.11.2010	-
Zita Gurmai	10.11.2010	-
Joseph Daul	01.12.2010	-
Simon Busuttil	24.03.2011	Migration issues, Frontex
Herbert Reul	07.04.2011	Nuclear debate (chair ITRE)
Marian Harkin	07.05.2011	European year of volunteering
Ana Gomes	31.05.2011	Libya and Arab Spring
Martin Schulz	15.06.2011	General questions to President of the Group
Jerzy Buzek	27.06.2011	General questions to President of EP
Guy Verhofstadt	12.07.2011	EU and the crisis
Judith Sargentini	19.07.2011	Delegation in Tunisia
Sylvie Goulard	15.09.2011	European Economic governance package
Diogo Feio	15.09.2011	European Economic governance package
Diane Wallis	21.09.2011	Transparency and accountability of MEPs (Code of Conduct)
Jan Zahradil	26.10.2011	A new EU paradigm?
Gabriele Albertini	10.11.2011	What role for the EU in democratic transition of Tunisia?
Daniel Cohn-Bendit	29.11.2011	Economic Crisis
Jerzy Buzek	11.01.2012	Eurocrisis, economic governance and the Arab Spring
Mikael Gustafsson	08.03.2012	International Women's Day
Martin Schulz	26.04.2012	ACTA (Anti-counterfeiting agreement)

The EP Facebook chat initiative resulted from simple curiosity as an EP official explained:

The only thing I didn't mention is the chats, maybe it's interesting because we started these a bit by game with the youngest MEPs which is 25-year-old, of course she is XX and very connected and tatata... and... and we saw that it was very well that people really love to talk to politicians and to have this impression to be somehow in a dialogue, in a conversation, and... (EPO 2)

4 MEPs I interviewed participated in those Facebook chats. MEP 4's assistant's comments were in line with EPO 2's remarks:

There was one specific time, those initiatives organised by DG Presidency, DG Communications, to be exact, whereby the EP was launching its platform, a new platform for... to facilitate website chat for MEPs... and my boss was the first one to do it, he was invited to do it, and... [...] it was a very successful initiative which he really enjoyed

because he had direct contact with constituents, not just constituents, but citizens from all over Europe [...] (MEP 4)

In an internal brochure of the EP discussing the benefits of Facebook chats with citizens, the WebComm Unit (DG COMM) concludes that:

‘Without exception, the Members who have undertaken a Facebook chat have expressed enthusiasm for the exercise. They appreciate the informal tone, the rapid-fire questions and answers, the direct contact with Facebook fans from all over Europe, and the opportunity to explain their views on political subjects they know well. Most Members have asked to be able to repeat the exercise, some on a regular basis.’<sup>65</sup>

The following section discusses the opposition between individual (spontaneous) consultation initiated by MEPs and consultation organised by the EP.

#### *7.5.2. Individual public opinion seeking vs. organised institutional consultations*

Thus far, findings have suggested that SNT offer various ways to gather public opinion, lifting simple awareness (by passively listening) to actively seeking input from individuals present in the networks formed when using SNT. But those various options combined with the institution’s initiative to launch consultations describe possibly conflicting initiatives. Whereas MEPs initiate individual debates and/or discussions on their own networks, committee secretariats see the committee’s SNT network as a perfect platform to launch debates on ongoing committee issues as discussed in the previous section. In parallel, the institution as an entity launches consultations with MEPs on a one-to-one basis on specific issues. As EPO 3 points out, the responsibility for organising consultation remains an issue:

In the EP, we work on a system of rapporteur. How do you present the data when working as a rapporteur when you use social networks? If you are not part of the main four parties, it is hard to break through. Therefore, how do you do it? [...] It also sets the following question: should the group

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<sup>65</sup> Private communication with a WebComm Unit officer, email dated 6 October 2011. ‘Facebook Chats: Bringing MEPs into the conversation’, internal document, July 2010, page 11.

organize this? Or the institution [i.e. committees]? Who should organize discussions on social networks about a specific report? (EPO 3)

DG COMM (WebComm Unit) is committed to generalising MEPs' presence on SNT and the relative success of its Facebook chats has encouraged them to do so:

'Facebook chats were originally conceived within the context of the need to use Parliament's Facebook page as a space where internet users could interact directly with MEPs. They are thus only a part of a wider strategy whereby the web team is encouraging and inciting MEPs who are active on Facebook (currently 55% of Members) actively and spontaneously to engage with fans on the page.'<sup>66</sup>

But the difficulty of defining who is in charge of launching discussions was emphasised by the fact that a number of MEPs I interviewed had never heard of the official EP Facebook chats that DG COMM had been organising for the past three years. When I asked MEP 1 during a follow-up interview if he had participated in those chats, the exchange went on as follow:

*Q: Finally on a different note, have you participated in the European Parliament Facebook chats?*

A: There exists one?

*Q: Yes, via the EP Facebook page...*

A: Ohh!!...

*Q: They organise these chats. So clearly you haven't participated...*

A: I must admit I wasn't even aware that this exists probably because it has been poorly advocated... or poorly, no, advertised in... in... in even on Facebook it has been poorly advertised. I don't know at least I wasn't, at my knowledge that it exists. (FU MEP 1)

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<sup>66</sup> Note that this document was published internally in July 2010, page 14: 'Facebook Chats: Bringing MEPs into the conversation'. Private communication with WebComm Unit officer, email dated 6 October 2011.

MEPs' lack of awareness of ongoing organised initiatives is 'symbolic' of the opposition that exists between organized/institutionalised consultations via SNT and informal individual consultations initiated by MEPs themselves<sup>67</sup>. From MEPs' perspective, this opposition is characteristic of the properties SNT have to offer for informal/non-institutionalised consultations. This finding can also be put in perspective with the way MEPs consider their role as legislators and therefore as elected representatives. The success, from MEPs' point of view, of spontaneous consultations comes from the fact that they are informal and launched by MEPs themselves (or their staff) as opposed to institutionalised consultations. This can be seen as partial evidence of a change in representation where intermediaries (i.e. institution, political parties) do no longer play a crucial role when it comes to inform and communicate. MEPs initiate a direct relationship with citizens.

### *7.5.3. Seeking participation: submitting amendments*

A number of eParticipation tools have been developed in the past few years that have been especially designed for the purpose of engaging citizens into democratic processes. But as MEP 1 has mentioned, the democratisation of SNT, with an ever-growing number of users, calls for a reflection on the potential benefit of the tool as engaging and empowering citizens:

I think we can learn from the possibilities these social networks have shown us, be it like open discussions, chat rooms, nothing actually super new, because already existed before there were social networks but now since people have become more familiar with it maybe there is some sort of lower resistance towards it. (FU MEP 1)

Where some MEPs passively listen to citizens' opinion, some actively seek their participation. Indeed, findings suggest that a number of MEPs foresee in SNT a chance to get citizens involved upstream in the legislative process. In chapter 3, I discussed the role of actors involved in the process of legislating at the committee level. Citizens tend to play a minor role in the legislative process, due mainly to the technical and highly specialised nature of legislation, and also due, to a certain

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<sup>67</sup> The success and efficiency of EP Facebook chats is not at stake and therefore it has not been assessed from the citizens' perspective.



extent, to their remoteness from the decisional process. Besides, Chapter 3 and Chapter 6 have shown the commitment and involvement of the European civil society in the process and to a larger extent, the role of lobbyists. Nevertheless, MEP 1 suggested during his first interview in June 2011 that he was willing to get citizens involved in the legislative process:

I just have developed, we are working on it, where we want to engage public much much more also via the social networks that people actually will be able to hand in amendments to direct us and we will then see what ideas are coming out of the public. So, in mind, but not yet implemented is the idea to involve, via these networks, citizens much much more into the political process. (MEP 1)

By the time I conducted a follow-up interview with him in December 2011, the idea of amendment submission had gained ground and was to be implemented as soon as MEP 1 would be rapporteur. The specificities of SNT are not at the origin of the implementation of such initiative, but rather, is seen as a stepping stone for participation:

[...] I might have told you the idea we had here to develop a software that would actually allow different interactions between citizens and their elected representatives. And this is something... well, we have developed it and we are waiting actually now just to put it out in public and to see how it, how it is accepted because we are waiting actually until I have a sort of a report in my responsibility where we can use, or see if such tool works. And it's not so complicated in the end it is... we provide the...how do we say... the technical and formal frameworks saying that there are certain templates for amendments you have to respect when you hand it in... so we provide public (?) template, they receive the report, they can see it online, if they want to do an amendment, there are sort of five-steps guide how to do this, and just on the formal (?) the content and they hand it in. Our software should generate that... these amendments are put in the right place in the original document to see how the changes would actually look like, we have a list of those who handed in the amendments and what we want to ensure is that as citizens not only have the possibility to hand things in but then also if this sort of survives certain rounds of committee votes, there is a monitoring that they can see 'does my personal action actually make a

difference?’ Can I, as a let’s say a normal citizen, bring my ideas into the political arena and would it sort of carry and survive and make it into a legislative document at the end? (FU MEP 1)

MEP 8’s assistant mentioned his willingness to get citizens involved upstream in his MEP’s committee work:

But there is something I wanted to do, and this time it is really... communicating upstream and not downstream because political communication, in general, is downstream communication, it is only once things have happened, and what I would like to do, really in the long term, is to anticipate the legislative agenda to say: ‘well, I have been appointed shadow rapporteur or rapporteur on such dossier, it deals with this, here is the Commission proposal, please don’t hesitate to give us your inputs, well, your amendment suggestions’, because actually, there are, be it the average citizen, who is going to think ‘oh well’, he will be curious, he will read the thing and think ‘well, I am offered to participate directly’, I think that it is very interesting in that perspective [...] (MEP 8)<sup>68</sup>

These two examples (MEP 1 and MEP 8) depict a more deliberative and participatory model of representation. Besides, MEP 8’s assistant’s rationale for getting citizens involved in the legislative process by submitting amendments is justified by a further reflection on the potential benefit of allowing a specific audience to take part in the process, an audience who could provide MEPs with accurate and valuable information for the completion of legislative work, in opposition with an influential Brussels-based lobbying community (See quote in Chapter 6, under ‘Lobbying the EP: strong ties vs. weak ties’ section). Thus, MEP 8’s assistant sees the submission of amendments via SNT as a possible stepping stone for a selected expert community who could provide MEPs with valuable information. This argument drives me to the following section where I want to discuss the limitations of SNT as a tool for retrieving expertise.

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<sup>68</sup> Translated from French to English by the author.

## 7.6. From e-empowering to expertise retrieval: limitations

When I first came to the EP many years ago, a rapporteur producing a report basically just wrote a report that was based upon his or her prejudices, there was no consultation to the outside world. I changed that by setting up in the mid-1980s a network of health and safety offices, trade union health and safety offices who gave me input to the health and safety legislation we were producing at that time. I think this [SNT] would make that sort of networking far easier. You wouldn't need to physically hold together 12 national health and safety representatives in XX on a monthly basis, you can do it on a virtual daily basis. (MEP 16)

### 7.6.1. *Potential for expertise retrieval*

I have discussed so far in this chapter the possibility for MEPs to be aware of and retrieve public opinion on ongoing dossiers as well as their willingness to encourage such opinion sharing via SNT. This finding calls for a classification of the information retrieved when using SNT. Indeed, as discussed earlier, people's input inform MEPs' understanding of what people think and what their concerns are. I argued in Chapter 4 that the network formed by actors involved in the legislative process can be characterised as a cognitive knowledge network where the notions of 'who knows what' and 'who knows who knows what' are suitable. Such knowledge network facilitates the retrieval of valuable information for carrying out legislative work for MEPs. A distinction needs therefore to be made between public opinion retrieval and expertise retrieval, although the two may be intertwined in the information flow.

Evidence of the retrieval of expertise or at least of useful information in the legislative context has emerged in a limited number of cases. Indeed, MEP 2 explained, as seen in Chapter 6, that using SNT has allowed him to retrieve useful information when he was working on a specific report on radio spectrum:

A: [...] sometimes, it gives me relevant information.

Q: *That you may not have found otherwise?*

A: Yes... But mostly it is from experts. (MEP 2)

Evidence of expertise retrieval in this example is nuanced. As much as MEP 2 was enabled to retrieve expertise from weak ties – old colleagues – as opposed to strong ties as defined in Chapter 6, he was enabled to do so because the social structure (of the SNT network) was known. Indeed, in this specific case, because MEP 2 knew the weak ties as old colleagues, information retrieval (recognition and allocation) has been possible.

That being said, MEP 8's assistant has shown a strong commitment to exploring the potential of SNT at the expertise retrieval level. As seen earlier, he stated that, thanks to SNT, he has been able to receive complementary information on dossiers or issues relevant to him (and consequently to his MEP), information that he might not have found otherwise. He also explained in his own terms what I have characterised so far as cognitive social structures and cognitive knowledge networks and where, according to his understanding, both are intrinsically linked and necessary for the exchange of valuable information:

[...] and yes, this is what we call, well I don't remember if this is how it is called but it is 'the economy of trust' in the end, as we are in a rational system, where one follows people who are in their network because they know that they can trust them. So one is not even going to have a doubt before clicking, as they will think: 'Well, if he sends me this, that means that there is a point for me to look at it. (MEP 8)<sup>69</sup>

As much as expertise retrieval is theoretically conceivable in this case of study, a number of limitations puts into question its achievement. Indeed, the following section discusses limitations – theoretical and empirical – that bring me to reconsider the limited potential of SNT as a tool for expertise retrieval when MEPs carry out their legislative work.

### *7.6.2. Limitations to expertise retrieval*

I suggest here that there are a number of obstacles that limits the potential for SNT to be used for expertise retrieval. First, limits of organisational studies

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<sup>69</sup> Translated from French to English by the author.

presented in Chapter 4 are discussed as they have a direct impact on the limitations of this case of study. Second, the realities of the field and more specifically the strongly established communication practices when forming a knowledge network and the importance of the notion of *trust* in establishing these communicative practices are seen as a brake to the retrieval of expertise when using SNT. Finally, I discuss the potential of combining network awareness with expertise retrieval when using SNT as a prerequisite for retrieving valuable information necessary for carrying out legislative work, bringing therefore the argument articulated in Chapter 6 together with the findings presented in this chapter.

#### 7.6.2.1. Organisational studies

The introduction of organisational studies that looked at the adoption of SNT in the workplace (Chapter 4) have informed my understanding of the potential of SNT in the legislative work context, bearing in mind the systemic differences that exist between a business-like workplace and the EP. Four systemic differences can be acknowledged. First, the scope of those studies was fairly limited, and hardly comparable to a context of research such as the EP. Second, the studies explored the adoption of different tools at different scales and levels. The biggest limitation here relates to the study of private SNT adoption – SNT limited to the network of employees of the workplace looked at (Riemer and Richter 2010) and the adoption of public SNT in the workplace (P. Meyer and Dibbern 2010). Thus, findings could hardly be compared, as the scope and the scale of such adoption are profoundly different. Thirdly, most of the studies on adoption of SNT in the workplace considered IT companies' employees (DiMicco et al. 2008; Riemer and Richter 2010; Skeels and Grudin 2009) consequently bringing biases in defining users' IT literacy. Finally, the early stage of research on SNT and the small number of studies available are seen as a limitation. These differences in characterising the use of SNT in the workplace have to be kept in mind when analysing the adoption of SNT in the context of the EP.

#### 7.6.2.2. Established communication practices and trust

A second limitation lies in the fact that classic communication practices are strongly established when it comes to retrieving information from a cognitive knowledge network in the EP. The notion of *trust* has come as a sensible element in

deciding where to get information. When I asked MEP 1 if he ever received policy expertise via SNT, his answer demonstrated the limits of potentially forming a cognitive knowledge network via SNT:

I am not sure how realistic that would be. Thinking about a question who would somehow assure that what one receives is truly a policy expertise... I mean... Who would, who would actually define, especially on something as huge and vibrant as a social network, 'who is an expert on what issue?' I mean of course you can, and I always say, well, there is a certain (?) intelligence which can go up with a proposal and that... therefore I think it is a little bit... (FU MEP 1)

The notion of trust plays an important role in choosing sources of information. This should be linked back to the argument on social structures articulated in Chapters 4 and 6 and the importance of 'who knows who'. Trust relies on the possibility to relate to someone, to an existing knowledge of the person or of the relationship. Ignoring the social structure of the network via SNT is a problem:

So, on a practical point of view, I don't know how to deal with it, and then on the other hand, from the expertise point of view, I... people who actually call themselves experts should not be trusted [laughs]. So... if somebody else gives you the title whatever. No but I am a little bit, as a follower of blogs, and the Internet into social platforms, communication users whatever, people are very quickly call experts on stuff, maybe they wrote one or two articles and then... and then suddenly everybody on the Internet who is able to type in its own name is an expert this is where I was become a little bit hesitant to ... (FU MEP 1)

A lobbyist confirmed the necessity of trust in creating a relationship with an MEP and its importance as a prerequisite for sharing information:

I think if you want to convince MEP, you, they really need to, they need to trust you, you need to make a case, you know, I think there is a huge value in personal contact, especially when you don't know the MEP, we cannot imagine to influence MEP or to make su... to make, to change his/her mind through social media, I cannot imagine. (LOB 2)

Such evidence is confirmed theoretically by research on trust in the field of organisational studies:

“[...] the perfect form of trust occurs when we come to develop shared values with our partner at the same time as a shared sense of interdependence. When an individual comes to feel that his/her interest is best met by achieving the partner’s interest, trust follows.” (Shapiro et al. 1992: 373)

Stronger accounts of rejecting SNT as an expertise retrieval tool was mentioned by MEP 18’s assistant who could not see how valuable and trustworthy information could be retrieved when using SNT:

Because you, well, it is very peculiar, it is very technical, highly specialised, and you have to face the facts, I have nothing against it, I am happy to ask Internet users, in general terms, so on Facebook, Twitter and others, to help you with a report on net neutrality for example, but because in this case, you will get a lot of geeks, geeks, people like this, so they know about it, but for the rest... (MEP 18)<sup>70</sup>

An official of DG COMM mentioned, when first interviewed in January 2011, that MEPs did not remember retrieving expertise when they use SNT:

I have never heard a member saying that they get direct input on legislative work [from SNT]. (EPO 1)

But he also admitted that the feeling was that feedback was worth getting from lobbyists and gave the example of the European Citizens’ Initiative where the rapporteur recognised the names of lobbyists on SNT networks. This statement confirms the argument developed in Chapter 6 of SNT enabling network awareness and in this case, enabling the recognition of strong ties (lobbyists) in their network.

MEP 18’s assistant’s recalcitrance to considering SNT as an expertise retrieval tool was again confirmed and explained by the strong establishment of classic communication practices when it comes to sharing expertise:

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<sup>70</sup> Translated from French to English by the author.

A: No. No, but you really have MEPs who told you that citizens were sending them inputs for their reports?

*Q: No, no, not citizens but experts... interest groups.*

A: Why didn't they send an email or...?

*Q: Well, that's what is interesting; this is what I am interested in, in the end. So...*

A: I am curious. So, really, I have serious doubts about that. Because I think that that's the exception that proves the rule. I have serious doubts because it is so... you just call the guy, you take your phone and you call him. (MEP 18)<sup>71</sup>

The combination of both established communication practices and the necessity of trust in retrieving expertise brings me to the following section where I discuss the intrinsic correlation between cognitive social structures and cognitive knowledge networks when using SNT.

#### 7.6.2.3. The prerequisite of the combination of 'who knows who' and 'who knows what' for expertise retrieval

I suggest in this chapter that expertise retrieval is limited in its scope for two reasons. First, in order to ensure the retrieval of valuable and accurate information for legislative work, I argue that the coexistence of cognitive social structures and cognitive knowledge networks is necessary. The creation and the maintaining of a cognitive knowledge network when using SNT goes hand in hand with the creation and maintaining of cognitive social structures. Network awareness and therefore the recognition of the actors present in the network is necessary for expertise recognition and retrieval. The recognition of the social structure and its attributes has been translated empirically by the recurrence of the notion of trust. Second, empirical findings show that classic communication practices such as face-to-face meetings and the sustained exchange of information via phone and emails play a

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<sup>71</sup> Translated from French to English by the author.



braking role to the adoption of SNT as a tool for expertise retrieval. Lobbying practices, as discussed in the previous chapter, can be affected by the use of SNT to the extent of strengthening ties between MEPs and members of the civil society who are nodes in the network and who have been characterised so far as weak ties. The stage that follows the 'who knows who' in this argument is 'who knows what', which allows the exchange of valuable information. Established communication practices and trust as prerequisites raise objections to the fulfilment of this second stage. If I apply the strength of ties argument in this chapter, I would argue that the exchange of expertise with weak ties is limited via SNT. This goes in line with findings presented in Chapter 6, which pointed towards the creation of a relationship with weak ties – first sequence of communication – to then switch communicative actions with the latter from SNT use to more classic means of communication – second sequence of communication when for example, MEP 9 explained that once she had made contact with associations (weak ties) via SNT, she then asked them to contact her via email to meet face-to-face, establishing therefore a strong tie relationship. Thus, SNT enables MEPs to expand their network to weak ties who can potentially provide MEPs with expertise, this expertise being shared however through the adoption of other communicative practices (i.e. emails, phone calls).

### **7.7. Conclusion**

This chapter has presented the second element of the analytical model developed throughout this thesis: information retrieval. Findings have thrown light on the notion of political representation and the role of citizens in the legislative process. When first understood as a tool that could provide MEPs with technical and specialised information that would help their legislative work, SNT have turned out to be a public opinion awareness tool that could have a use in the legislative process. Indeed, different purposes of use have been observed, from passively listening to what people think, to actively asking for citizens' opinions and finally, to be willing to make them participate in the legislative process by submitting amendments. A large number of tools and studies on eParticipation have looked into the role and the potential of new ICTs in shaping participation in representative democracies. However, no study has focused on MEPs' perspective at the European level by questioning the potential benefit of using SNT (and ICTs in general) for them as tools that allow them to listen to citizens. MEPs' strong commitment to listening

(passively or actively) to their constituents and European citizens in general, describes characteristics of their act of representation in the EU legislative process. The importance of MEPs' role as legislators has been reflected in this chapter in their commitment to seek opinions and information on a policy/expertise basis during the legislative process.

The retrieval of public opinion as a motivation of use is to be seen in perspective with expertise retrieval. A number of MEPs have shown their awareness of the potential of SNT as to find useful information for their legislative work and some of them have even recalled finding expertise. Even so, I argue here that there are limitations to finding expertise when using SNT in the context of EP work. The first limitation comes under the structural components of SNT. As discussed in Chapter 4, it was assumed that the use of SNT would raise MEPs' network awareness, raise their awareness of the cognitive social structure they are in when they use SNT. This was confirmed in Chapter 6 where I suggested that SNT could allow a democratisation of lobbying practices in the EP by broadening MEPs' awareness of their networks to a broader expert community. It was also assumed that, theoretically, the use of SNT could constitute a cognitive knowledge network where expertise is retrieved on the basis of 'who knows what' and 'who knows who knows what'. The recognition of expertise, which is a crucial stage before retrieving and using such expertise, is a complex task when using public SNT. I suggest in this chapter that, when using public SNT, the combination of network awareness and expertise retrieval is necessary. In other words, expertise retrieval is limited to the combination of the recognition of the (cognitive) social structure an MEP is in (i.e. recognition of actors in the network) with the recognition of the information shared as expertise. This notion was defined empirically by the necessity of trust. Only then expertise retrieval is possible. The second limitation to expertise retrieval comes under the considerably strongly established communication practices when it comes to finding information for legislative purposes. The following chapter discusses information dissemination.

## **Chapter 8 - Information dissemination**

### **8.1. Summary**

This chapter discusses information dissemination. Findings suggest a reconfiguration of the relationship between MEPs and journalists via SNT. Whereas the EP (and EU institutions in general) has lacked traditional media's attention at national regional and/or local levels, SNT have allowed MEPs to disseminate information to journalists and establish a relationship with them via SNT. I argue here that informing upstream on the process of activities (as opposed to informing on the content of legislation) via SNT has enhanced the 'MEP-journalist' relationship, putting into question a broader coverage of MEPs' activities in traditional media. Findings also suggest that SNT enable MEPs to disseminate information on the content of legislation (non-mediated) by educating and democratising legislative activities. Finally, I discuss the opposition between strengthening relationships with journalists and bypassing traditional media as a possible complementary way to disseminate information via SNT.

### **8.2. Informing as usual? Informing on the process of activities**

The immediacy of the information society we live in nowadays and the communicative properties that SNT offer describe a new avenue for MEPs to inform on their activities and on ongoing legislative business. Classic information dissemination tends to take place downstream, once an event (i.e. committee meeting, votes) has taken place and once the content of the communication has been synthesised to be disseminated to the greater audience. The instant property of SNT offers new ways to share information on ongoing work. The possibility MEPs have to disseminate information on their legislative work as it happens contrasts with the slowness of the European legislative process and the slowness, to a certain extent, of classic information dissemination channels, be it direct or mediated. MEP 15 and MEP 9 explained how they use SNT to instantly inform their audience on ongoing activities in the EP:

If it is in the plenary session, then, then I will communicate, or if there is an important report, I work, then ok, 'today was the votes on report

X Y Z and the result was' or 'today something interesting on the agenda of the ENVI committee or INTRE committee', some things I post... hummm. (MEP 15)

So this morning, we voted, well, sometimes I tweet on reports, this morning we voted three reports in the Environment Committee, very very important reports... it is true, well at least for now, because if more of us could manage this [in the office], in the end we would manage it differently, so I did not tweet about them. I tweet on reports I'm shadow rapporteur for or when I am a rapporteur actually. (MEP 9)<sup>72</sup>

So today for example, I was very very happy but... the tweet on my page... it's a picture of two petitioners who, well, who came for the committee of Petitions this morning [...]. (MEP 9)<sup>73</sup>

The instant sharing of events as they happen depicts a new form of information dissemination for MEPs. When I asked MEP 13 whether she used microblogging to inform on her activities, she admitted that she has started to use it more and more often:

*Q: Do you, do you use hash tags when you are seating in committees or in plenary?*

*A: More and more often. I did not do it before. But I have started to do it, I did it several times to say 'the EPP has rejected' tatata... and I was then in the hemicycle. Yes. At noon today... earlier I tweeted on the Budget Committee... I was there. (MEP 13)<sup>74</sup>*

The benefits of instant, non-processed information dissemination would need to be assessed when it comes to EP activities. But findings have shown that there is an audience for information on the process of activities on the networks formed via SNT. Thus, a member of the civil society suggested the usefulness of SNT immediacy when MEPs use them to inform on their ongoing activities:

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<sup>72</sup> Translated from French to English by the author.

<sup>73</sup> Idem

<sup>74</sup> Idem

[...] I think it's good you know, good source of information to see what is happening, for example what I would appreciate for example, source of information when you have Twitter after the vote, I would really appreciate to see how the MEP voted, if he, if he communicates for example now there was a vote about the minimus fishery stated in Fisheries which would mean more bl... more support to, for fuels, something which we would, we have been arguing against as NGOs so, I would be interested to see if MEPs tweets 'I voted against because I don't think this is the right thing' and this thing of information which is helpful, so this is the way, this is the thing I would appreciate to see from MEPs [...] (LOB 2)

The key finding on informing on the process of activities relates to a specific audience on the networks formed when using SNT: journalists. Indeed, as discussed in the following section, informing on the process of activities via SNT is beneficial for MEPs as far as journalists are key receptors of such information.

### **8.3. Reshaping relationships with journalists**

#### *8.3.1. Current state with traditional media*

The relationship politicians keep up with traditional media is crucial in political communication. Blumler and Gurevitch (1995: 33) argue that:

“Politicians need access to the communication channels that are controlled by the mass media, including the hopefully credible contexts of audience reception they offer. Consequently, they must adapt their messages to the demands of formats and genres devised inside such organizations and to their associated speech styles, story models and audience images. Likewise, journalists cannot perform their task of political scrutiny without access to politicians for information, news, interviews, action and comment [...]”

The EP suffers a low coverage of its activities in traditional media, in parallel with a communication deficit that is perceived as a democratic deficit. The complexity of the European legislative process and EU procedures and the remoteness of the institutions have certainly contributed to the limited coverage of EU affairs in national, regional and/or local media (De Vreese 2003; Morgan 2004;

Statham 2008). Statham (2008: 418) considers a number of external constraints as impacting media coverage and media performance on EU related news:

“[...] current communication deficits are due partly to external constraints, over which journalists have virtually no influence: the limited and national-focused sources of information they receive; the feeble efforts of EU institutions to communicate to their citizens as general audiences through the national press; and the low communicative qualities of EU politics, which is high on technical information, but extraordinarily lacking in the substance, such as personality conflicts, which citizens recognize as ‘politics’.”

From MEPs’ perspective, they see the lack of media coverage of EP legislative work and activities as a concern:

As a member of the European Parliament, normally nobody would quote me for anything. They [journalists] don’t even read the press releases, that’s the feeling, I think, most... (MEP 2)

An EP official explained the feeling most MEPs have when it comes to media coverage of EU affairs:

It is very difficult to be a visible politician as an MEP because media don’t talk of European politics and because you spend most of the week far away from your constituency [...] (EPO 2)

The shared feeling that traditional media lack interest in MEPs and EU stories in general on the one hand, and the lack of coverage in national, regional and/or local news on the other hand have been explored from the traditional media’s perspective. Indeed, Statham’s study (2008) of journalists’ view on their role and media performance when covering European news shows the complexity of a shared responsibility between traditional media’s low coverage of European news and European institutions’ highly technical and technocratic language:

“Journalists may experience difficulties in finding adequate ‘news values’ within European politics. Europe may be difficult to fit within existing news values and formats, as a complex, technical issue, as an event

with a remote or transnational scope, or because it lacks charismatic spokespersons or clear political cues.” (Statham 2008: 410)

The complexity of the legislative process – and EU affairs in general – is seen as a serious brake to media coverage. EU institutions, including the EP are often accused of using a complex ‘jargon’. MEPs, as political figures, might face less incomprehension as they form the elected political body of the EU. But when it comes to communicating with traditional media via SNT, communicating the process of activities in an informal and concise manner enables the creation of a relationship. This format clashes with the highly technical and therefore long and complex traditional communications that can take the form of press releases for instance. This point is discussed in the following section.

### *8.3.2. Process of activities as an entry point: sequence in communication and media use*

Here is an attempt to understand how and why the longstanding perceived communication deficit of the EP, due to its lack of transparency and the poor coverage of EU affairs in the news can be challenged by the reshaping of the relationship between MEPs and journalists. The exchange of information on ongoing activities, as seen in the previous section, must be seen as opposed to the slowness of the legislative process and in opposition with the complexity of legislation.

MEPs admit that SNT have allowed them to initiate relationships with journalists. There is a shared feeling that, from MEPs’ perspective, thanks to their direct ties with journalists via SNT, the latter cover their stories more often. When MEP 2 explained that traditional media hardly ever cover MEPs’ stories in the national news, he also explained that:

I have a lot of journalists on my [SNT] profile and they actually read what I am saying, so they don’t have to read a whole press release so they quote a lot of my updates in the newspapers, or make a story about it so that’s the way I use it. (MEP 2)

There is a shared awareness that SNT are potential tools for disseminating information to journalists, thanks to their own use of SNT. When MEP 11 was asked whom he was willing to reach when using SNT, he replied:

Usually fans, sometimes journalists too. (MEP 11)

MEPs manage to disseminate information to traditional media via SNT by catching journalists' attention, something that has been difficult to achieve for long. MEP 14's assistant sees SNT as efficient tools to get journalists' attention and to potentially put forward MEPs' stories:

And by being present on Twitter, it allows him to know, for instance, that political journalists are really going to read his press releases and it allows him... well, sometimes, he gets in contact with journalists in reaction to a tweet that he posted, a tweet that drew journalists' attention on a specific topic. (MEP 14)<sup>75</sup>

Chapters 3, 6 and 7 have shown that communication between actors involved in the legislative process interact at different levels, using different media. SNT have been characterised as an entry point for democratising EP lobbying practices by raising MEPs' awareness on actors present in the network. Thus, communication can be conceptualised in terms of sequences where a medium can correspond to a sequence of communication. For instance, to get back to Chapter 6, the first sequence of communication corresponds to raising network awareness via SNT. The second sequence corresponds to MEPs meeting with external actors face-to-face or pursuing communication via phone or email, actors who first established contact via SNT. The same scheme can be applied to communication with journalists. SNT are considered here as an entry point. The second sequence of communication can happen face-to-face as the following example shows:

And... finally, when we organise press conferences, sometimes we have had journalists who came to the press conference saying 'yes, so I heard via Twitter that this conference would take place'. Either because they

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<sup>75</sup> Translated from French to English by the author.



follow XX, or because they typed in a keyword and from that, when they realised that an MEP was active, they started following him/her. (MEP 8)<sup>76</sup>

The first sequence of communication – via SNT – corresponds to informing on the process of activities. In some cases, the second sequence of communication corresponds to informing on the content of legislation:

I have journalists who... so local journalists but also... yes, not only local who tell me: ‘So, you are working on fisheries but you have not necessarily well communicated on that, would you take stock of the situation...’ so yes. But even local journalists, even though they see me often and it happens quite often that on my Facebook messages I get: ‘could you take stock of your last report? What is up in Brussels?’ We have informal chats and then... they cover, they don’t cover the story... (MEP 13)<sup>77</sup>

MEP 2 goes on the same line and emphasises the opposition between sharing information on the content of legislation (i.e. press releases) and informing on the process of legislative activities:

I have a lot of journalists on my profile and they actually read what I am saying, so they don’t have to read a whole press releases so they quote a lot of my updates in the newspapers, or make a story about it so that’s the way I use it. (MEP 2)

As a way to emphasise the efficiency of informing journalists on the process of activities via SNT, MEP 14’s assistant emphasises the difference between traditional communications – press releases – and communications via SNT:

In terms of work efficiency, between posting on his blog, which will actually get read by the way, and sending press releases to the whole world and which will not be necessarily interesting to people, and which will not be covered... which will go straight to the spam inbox... which will not be interesting and not read... it is more interesting to post something... and again, his blog is most covered and shared, all press dispatches, they will all

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<sup>76</sup> Translated from French to English by the author.

<sup>77</sup> Idem

get together but first it will be on his blog, or in the dispatch, his tweets, some have been picked up and shared so... this is what journalists and the press follow... it is complementary... (MEP 14)<sup>78</sup>

These findings meet Wright's conclusions (2009) on the analysis of politicians' blogging where contacts between politicians and journalists have emerged as a practice:

“It is common for journalists and other political parties to read politicians' blogs looking for stories. Many of the bloggers reported that they contacted journalists to alert them to potential stories on their blog.”  
(Wright 2009: 163)

This takes me to the journalists and their use of SNT in the context of their work environment.

### 8.3.3. *Journalists' use of SNT*

Thus, findings suggest that MEPs use SNT to share information with journalists. Their perceptions on the efficiency of the tool for this purpose is that journalists tend to cover more often their stories and tend to show more interest in their activities than they used to. Although this study did not include journalists into the set of actors directly involved in the legislative process, the overarching context of political communication of this study have led me to consider journalists' use of SNT. With the emergence of new technologies, and more recently the emergence of SNT, a number of scholars have argued that journalism is facing systemic transformations. In the case of the adoption of social media, Nic Newman<sup>79</sup> (2011: 14) has explored changes brought by SNT as a newsgathering source for journalists:

“Journalists are making increasing use of Twitter as it gains critical mass as a tool for key sources and media elites to share information. In this sense it is also important for wider distribution, because newspapers and

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<sup>78</sup> Translated from French to English by the author.

<sup>79</sup> For further reading on the subject, see Nic Newman, 'The Rise of Social Media and Its Impact on Mainstream Journalism', in Reuters Institute for the Study Of Journalism (ed.), (Oxford: University of Oxford, 2009), Nic Newman, 'Mainstream Media and the Distribution of News in the Age of Social Discovery ', in Reuters Institute for the Study Of Journalism (ed.), (Oxford: University of Oxford, 2011).

broadcasters use Twitter as a source, instantly picking up and amplifying comments from the network.”

Besides, Ahmad’s study (2010) on journalists’ SNT adoption suggests that Twitter is used in newsroom as a collaborative tool to write stories and to gather evidence. Hermida’s exploration of journalists’ use of microblogging suggests the emergence of a new kind of journalism: *ambient journalism* where microblogging allows journalists to raise their awareness of the information available out there:

“I see new media forms of micro-blogging as “awareness systems”, providing journalists with more complex ways of understanding and reporting on the subtleties of public communication. Established journalism is based on a content-oriented communication, whereas Twitter adds an additional layer that can be considered as what has been referred to as connectedness-oriented communication (Kuwabara et al., 2002).” (2010: 300-1)

Others like Chadwick (2011: 7) talk about a ‘hybridized news system’ where the news cycle has become a ‘political information cycle’, that includes professional journalists and citizens in the process.

Going back to the context of this study, a lobbyist has suggested changes in journalism practices in the context of EU activities:

What surprised us, indeed, is that even journalists we work with, and others... the rest of the media are increasingly using especially Twitter, more than the other tools, we also use Facebook, but we see that Twitter is really the tool that at least is the most efficient in terms of communication and that is the fastest and the most interactive I would say and... a lot of journalists are essentially using Twitter and follow a number of structures and they won’t even make the effort of going on a website or things like that anymore... filtering is almost entirely done via Twitter. (LOB 1)<sup>80</sup>

Findings suggest that, from MEPs’ perspective, there is a reconfiguration of the relationship between journalists and their political sources when communicating

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<sup>80</sup> Translated from French to English by the author.

via SNT. This could imply, from the journalists' perspective, a possible transformation in information gathering practices. Besides, the literature mentioned above suggests that journalists have embraced the use of SNT in their daily work. Therefore it allows me to raise the question of the possibility of a mutual relationship and mutual benefits of using SNT when communicating with political sources.

#### 8.3.4. *What impact does it have?*

The impact of informing on the process of activities can be seen in two instances. First, MEPs consider that the use of SNT has offered them a new way of getting journalists' attention as regards their parliamentary activities. Their perception is that, due to this new relationship, their stories are put forward:

And we also see the impact on the press... on communication, I can see that from the beginning of the year, we released very few press releases: because we didn't have enough time but I have short articles on my blog... as to explain... so it's very factual and some of these positions on my blog are picked up and covered. (FU MEP 9)<sup>81</sup>

MEP 7 explained that in her case, her active use of SNT and traditional media's increasing use of those tools have allowed her to be more covered on national news during the 2009 EP elections:

There are two main reasons why I use social networks. First, it is a good way to contact the constituency. Secondly, using these tools has an impact on traditional media. For example, during the elections campaign in 2009, I used Twitter a lot and it got me on national media. You can get attention of traditional media by using social networks. (MEP 7)

MEP 8's assistant consider journalists' activity on SNT as a crucial asset:

And the point with Twitter, today, is that journalists have understood that a lot is going on on Twitter and they start to understand how

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<sup>81</sup> Translated from French to English by the author.

it works, and today Twitter is a great information seeking tool [...] (MEP 8)<sup>82</sup>

As discussed previously, where traditionally MEPs perceive that traditional media do not pay attention to their activities and fail to cover EU affairs in national, regional and/or local media, SNT have enabled MEPs to initiate a new kind of relationship with journalists. The use of SNT for that purpose is an entry point. Informing on the process of activities is seen as a first sequence of communication, followed then by a second sequence on the content of legislation, in the perspective of a broader coverage of EP affairs in traditional media.

Second, informing on the process of activities has an impact on accountability. Beyond the representation paradigm and the theoretical and analytical discussion around it (Mansbridge 2003; Pitkin [1967] 1972), the need for accountability can be explained by different factors in the EP. First, it has been argued for decades now that the EU suffers a democratic deficit, pointing out principally to its non-elected executive bodies: the European Commission and the Council. The EP has not always been an elected body<sup>83</sup> and its consistent limited powers as an elected chamber have fuelled academic and non-academic debates on the democratic value of EU institutions (Follesdal and Hix 2005; Majone 1998; Moravcsik 2002). Second, the remoteness of MEPs' constituencies as compared to their workplace contributes to the potential perceived lack of accountability. From the citizens' perspective, accountability is a central concern and SNT are seen as a good way to address the distance that has set in. A study conducted by the Hansard Society on Parliament 2020 confirms this argument (Allen and Williamson 2010). The international comparative study of the same report with Australia, Canada and Chile suggests the potential of SNT and the Internet as tools to increase representatives' accountability in the eyes of citizens but also from the elected representatives' perspective (See Table p. 30 in (Fallon et al. 2011)). In the case of this study, empirical findings suggest that informing on the process of activities via SNT is used to share information for greater accountability. As MEP 14's assistant

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<sup>82</sup> Translated from French to English by the author.

<sup>83</sup> First universal suffrage elections took place in 1979.

suggested, the information shared on SNT is an attempt to be accountable to voters and citizens in general:

On his blog, there is factual information on what he does, on explaining his work, his work in the Parliament but also in the party, it has an interest in terms of accountability, in terms of disseminating information. (MEP 14)<sup>84</sup>

When discussing his MEP's participation to the official EP Facebook chats (See Chapter 7), MEP 4's assistant emphasised the accountability dimension of the representative's communications:

[...] my boss was the first one to do it, he was invited to do it, and...it was a very successful initiative which he really enjoyed because he had direct contact with constituents, not just constituents, but citizens from all over Europe, but, I mean, we especially encourage constituents because at the end of the day, Facebook is a means of him communicating with the people to whom he is, for whom he is responsible, to whom he is answerable. So that's direct channel of communication... is very very positive in that sense. (MEP 4)

An EP official also explained that, when she was asked whether MEPs had shared with her the benefits they perceived from using SNT, accountability came as a serious motive:

I mean we did even an article asking them why they were using and why they were all, the ones we interviewed were all very convinced that it is... useful for them as politicians to be... to fulfil their role as of elected, to be accountable, to be reachable... (EPO 2)

When MEP 6 was asked whether she could stop using SNT as part of her communication practices, she shared a reflection on her own role as representative that goes beyond the simple use of SNT as information dissemination tools:

And I consider, as a European citizen from XX, I consider that... I don't get enough information on politicians and I consider that our

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<sup>84</sup> Translated from French to English by the author.

politicians are often sparing with sharing information on what they said, on what they did... and I think, I would think, I think that it is important that we, politicians, get to learn to inform better our constituents about our activities, our thoughts, or political stances. (MEP 6)<sup>85</sup>

#### **8.4. ‘Cutting out the middleman’: informing and educating**

##### *8.4.1. Bypassing traditional media via SNT*

The lack of media coverage discussed earlier comes as a justification for MEPs to inform citizens on their activities by bypassing traditional media, by offering direct, first-hand information on their activities to their constituents and to European citizens in general. SNT are therefore seen as a useful tool to disseminate direct information to a wider audience. As argued by an EP official:

This is a way of communicating very directly. It cuts out the middle man [journalists]. There are no more intermediaries. (EPO 1)

Wright’s (2009: 163) analysis of politicians’ blogs mentioned earlier suggested the same conclusion as using SNT as a way “to circumvent mediation of political messages by journalists”. When asked whether SNT had brought anything new to his communication practices, MEP 1 mentioned the role of SNT in allowing a more direct information dissemination that does not need to rely on traditional media coverage:

It’s sort of the cherry on top and of course you could develop it to be much much more useful, it is not an essential part of working here, although it would be true that communication, especially if you are not like the top chop minister or whatever, makes it more, it makes it more difficult because you have less classical media attention. (MEP 1)

MEP 1’s observation goes in line with Blumler and Gurevitch’s (1995: 43) argument on the relationship between politicians and journalists:

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<sup>85</sup> Translated from French to English by the author.

The system gives a rather privileged position in political communication output to the views of already established power holders. Of course, many others get a say as well, but only the activities and statements of those in well-entrenched positions tend regularly to be relayed to electoral audiences as a matter of course.”

In the same way, MEP 18’s assistant sees in SNT a way to bypass traditional media. More than that, according to him, the media do not play the core role they used to play as information disseminators:

The only thing is that you... you... it is easier to inform, which means that today, you don’t need the press, you still need the press but... if they don’t cover your story, it is not a big deal [...] and if your story is not covered, you can rely entirely on Facebook, it is wonderful. (MEP 18)<sup>86</sup>

And to conclude:

Hum... I see it [SNT] as a... an alternative to the press. [...] My MEP has never got access to the media and still, she is very popular because she has only used social networks... Internet. (MEP 18)<sup>87</sup>

As a result, and as a means to bypass traditional media, MEPs use SNT to disseminate information directly to citizens, as a way to educate them on the legislative process. Such use of SNT is seen in light of the political representation paradigm in the following section.

#### 8.4.2. *Educating by informing*

When MEP 5 was asked how he used to communicate his activities before the emergence of SNT, he stated:

Actually, we did not communicate. In my town, I release an institutional newspaper, 17,000 printed copies. When I became the mayor ten years ago, we used to publish it four times a year, five times a year. Little by little, we increased releases to once a month. So it was 150-page

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<sup>86</sup> Translated from French to English by the author.

<sup>87</sup> Idem



long and now, it is only... I don't know, 40, 42 or 45 pages but it's released every month. So I think that in the end, with the emergence of all these things, traditional printed communication, in particular, has had to adapt and it is shorter and published more often. I mean that it would be silly to have an MEP newsletter four times a year. I really don't see the point anymore. That is why you have to do it monthly. We got people used to get posts on Facebook everyday so it makes no sense to have a newsletter released every three months, so that is why... everything goes faster, even with traditional media. (MEP 5)<sup>88</sup>

The EP legislative process is complex and slightly different from most European member states' parliamentary systems. Therefore, it is difficult to identify and recognise processes and specificities of the legislative system. That is why informing on parliamentary activities and the legislative process also corresponds to explaining the process and the consequences and outcomes of European legislation at national, regional and/or local levels. Informing in a way to educate citizens comes as a motivation to disseminate information directly to constituents and European citizens at large. MEP 13 explained clearly that her use of SNT as an information dissemination tool was strongly related to educating people on EP activities. When I asked her if she used SNT to communicate with the Brussels civil society for instance, she replied:

This, no... it is more about democratising European Parliament's activities... (MEP 13)<sup>89</sup>

MEP 9 also agreed that the information she shares on SNT is content related and simplified for a better understanding of EP processes:

The information is very factual, because of a lack of time to be honest, so it is a lot of things we write on the briefings we prepare, before the committees and then we change that... into information that is as simple as possible... (MEP 9)<sup>90</sup>

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<sup>88</sup> Translated from French to English by the author.

<sup>89</sup> Idem

<sup>90</sup> Translated from French to English by the author.

Educating in the case of the EP means explaining every stage of the legislative process. As far as MEPs are concerned, explanations are restricted to their work in the EP and more specifically in committees, once European Commission proposals are discussed in the EP, up until the votes in plenary. Thus, a number of MEPs inform their constituents on their activities in Brussels and the impact of EU legislation at the regional level:

So it is mainly a general presentation of her activities, so any voter... any voter can potentially consult her page and find there what is of interest for them. But when it comes to presenting information, it is targeted to the constituents. The citizens. There is not much political information... it is really information about the European Union, the XX [region] or the impact... European policies that have an impact in the constituency. (MEP 3)<sup>91</sup>

EP officials find themselves with the same mission of informing EU citizens on EP activities and on committee issues in general<sup>92</sup>. For example, an official from the FEMM committee stated:

As we, we have regular activities every month, but not constant activity, the committee, what we do, we try to publish, of course every month, before the committee meeting, we post several posts and we publish several articles on our webpage and it also goes on our Facebook page. And in the meantime, the gaps are filled with any other information, which is relevant to gender. (EPO 4)

Some MEPs replicate press releases and disseminate them via SNT:

Actually, the main use we make of it is to share her press releases and her activities. (MEP 12)<sup>93</sup>

Actually, that's mainly this type of information... well, quite often and generally, I tweet or I post on Facebook positions from the press, columns, and... and it is about my parliamentary activity. (MEP 9)<sup>94</sup>

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<sup>91</sup> Idem

<sup>92</sup> The Secretariat of the EP has however the obligation to remain neutral in its coverage of EP activities. This includes communications from committee secretariats and DG COMM for instance.

<sup>93</sup> Translated from French to English by the author.

Others explicitly describe the legislative process as it goes:

But once again, it is more informative... the different stages are typically: announcing that she got... that she got appointed rapporteur, what the report is about, what is at stake. Then, she presents the report, its content. Then the votes... votes in the committee, votes in plenary. So, we inform on each stage. (MEP 3)<sup>95</sup>

Finally, an EP official mentioned feedback from MEPs who saw in SNT a good tool to explain their activities and responsibilities:

We interviewed some of them and yeah, they were saying that, explaining the European system to people who might be far away and not really connected to this world was very useful, that they receive questions on Facebook or Twitter and they answer... and they think it's very useful. (EPO 2)

### **8.5. Process of activities vs. content of legislation in information dissemination via SNT**

We are facing a conflicting rapport to traditional media when using SNT. On the one hand, SNT are used to open an entry point to create a relationship with journalists and on the other hand, to bypass those same traditional media to inform citizens by educating them on the content of legislation. This opposition raises the question of the complementarity of informing on the process of activities and informing on the content of legislation. The conflicting use of SNT as creating a relationship with journalists and bypassing their influence in communication depicts a systemic communication issue that has been suggested over the years as resulting in a communication deficit. What is seen here as conflicting – bypassing traditional media vs. ‘befriending’ journalists via SNT – may result in a complementary approach to addressing the communication deficit of the EP. Indeed, the fact that MEPs inform via SNT in two ways – on the process of their activities and on the content of legislation – can be seen as complementary. These two approaches to

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<sup>94</sup> Translated from French to English by the author.

<sup>95</sup> Idem

informing via SNT do not conflict and do not put into question their efficiency as regard communication with traditional media. Informing on the process of activities has its own purpose and has shown that it allows a reshaping of the relationship between MEPs and journalists. Besides, MEPs do not see SNT as a substitution tool when it comes to communicating. Rather, SNT are seen as complementary tools. When MEP 13 was asked whether it would be difficult for her to stop using SNT, she replied:

For me, yes. Yes. And it is complementary and it is not a reason for... it is not a reason for 1) I keep communicating in a classic way. I communicate a lot via local press... I have the town and intermunicipal magazines, we have the four-page newsletter that you saw on European activity, so we communicate with all available tools, but I consider that this one [SNT] is complementary. (MEP 13)<sup>96</sup>

Thus, when looking at the use of SNT and the communication deficit of the EP, befriending journalists and bypassing traditional media should not be seen as conflicting practices but rather should be looked at as regard the type of shared communications – process of activities and/or content of legislation.

### **8.6. Conclusion**

Empirical data suggests that MEPs use SNT to reshape their relationship with journalists in order to get their stories put forward in national, regional and/or local news. Traditionally, there has been a shared feeling that on the one hand, the media do not cover EU affairs enough and on the other hand, EU institutions, including the EP, lack to make their ‘stories’ more accessible to the average citizen, an inflexibility that is due to the slowness and the complexity of the legislative process. Informing on the process of activities via SNT appears as enhancing the creation of relationships between MEPs and journalists. MEPs see in SNT the possibility to disseminate information to journalists by creating a relationship with them. Communication happens in sequences with SNT as an entry point. Further dissemination of the content of legislation occurs in a second sequence, with

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<sup>96</sup> Translated from French to English by the author.

possible consequent media coverage of MEPs' stories. Blumler and Gurevitch (1995) conclude their analysis of the relationship between politicians and journalists on a nuanced note on the chances to innovate in political communication by pointing out the systemic brakes that would go against innovatory practices. The findings suggested here show that the systemic brakes observed by Blumler and Gurevitch are challenged in the context of communication via SNT. Innovatory communication may be facilitated by the use of SNT, including a chance to reduce the communication deficit discussed earlier.

Moreover, findings suggest that MEPs have embraced SNT to disseminate information in a way to bypass the control that traditional media has over information dissemination when it comes to covering EU affairs and EP legislative activities in particular. The media, which traditionally control information dissemination, are challenged by the more direct connection SNT offer between elected representatives and their constituents, and EU citizens in general. The direct dissemination of information via SNT depicts a willingness to educate citizens as part of the process. This finding needs to be seen in light of the discussion initiated earlier on cross border representation in the EU. Educating citizens as part of informing is evidence of a more deliberative model of representation where citizens are not put aside but rather educated for potentially taking part in a two-way relationship of informing and communicating, as seen in Chapter 7 for instance.

Finally, instead of looking at the opposed practices of creating relationships with journalists via SNT and bypassing those same journalists by informing citizens directly via SNT, I argue here that we should rather look at the type of communications that MEPs practice via SNT – informing on the process of activities or on the content of legislation – which allows me to look at them as complementary ways of disseminating information in the process of legislation.

## Chapter 9 - Coordination

### 9.1. Summary

This chapter discusses coordination via SNT. Coordination is defined here as the property to organise information, interests and support in the framework of the legislative process. I argue in this chapter that the role that MEPs play in this context is challenged by an ever-growing self-authorised group of representatives (the European civil society) who have embraced SNT as part of their communication patterns. The reflection on the representation paradigm presented here draws upon changes in legitimate representation combined with the role of the European civil society as representatives and their respective use of SNT. Therefore, I argue here that the use of SNT by both MEPs and European civil society as means to coordinate in their representative capacities suggests changes in representation, changes that could lead to a networked model of representation.

### 9.2. Representation as coordination

#### *9.2.1. Defining coordination in the context of legislative work*

Coordination translates in the legislative context of the EP into gathering information, interests and support from different parties and making sense of it in order to make decisions. This gathering of information occurs via SNT, as seen in Chapter 7 for instance, as SNT allow MEPs to raise their awareness on public opinion and generally allow them to retrieve information necessary for their work as MEPs. It occurs also offline, via all communication and information sharing patterns discussed in Chapter 3. Coordination as defined in organisational studies (See Chapter 4) tends to see communication from an internal perspective, as to explain how people coordinate their work in the same workplace. The use of SNT by MEPs is not limited to internal use and strongly relies on communication with external actors. Therefore, I take the notion of coordination in a broader sense where coordinating information, and organising interests and support are considered as part of the practices necessary to conduct their role in the legislative process. This role is challenged by the role of the European civil society and its coordination practices.

### 9.2.2. *The European civil society and representation: Definition*

The main line of argumentation of this chapter is that the traditional conception of political representation that only considers legitimate representation – elected representatives – is to be reconsidered. Actors such as civil society organisations are playing an increasing role in democratic processes and therefore deserve closer attention as representatives. Given the uniqueness of the European institutional system as discussed in Chapter 1 and the challenging concern of legitimacy and democratic value of those institutions (Schmitt and Thomassen 1999), further reflection on representation needs to be tackled. The European civil society is seen here as qualifying as representative and three levels of complexity need to be acknowledged as part of this qualification.

First, political theories on representation have progressively shifted towards more flexible and more accurate conceptions of representation of today's democratic societies (Dryzek and Niemeyer 2008; Mansbridge 2003; Urbinati and Warren 2008). This constitutes the basis to argue that the European civil society is part of the political representation of the EU.

Urbinati and Warren's claim (2008: 403) motivates the reflection articulated in this chapter:

“Dalton (2007) argues that new generations of citizens are voting less but engaging more. They want more choice; they want more direct impact. These are goods that electoral representation cannot provide. This fact alone should spur us to think about representation more broadly, including nonelectoral venues – not necessarily as competing forms of representation (though they can be), but possibly as complementary forms (Saward 2006a,b).”

Second, what is meant by European civil society is sometimes blurred and contradictory, depending on the entity defining it. I have defined external actors involved in the legislative process – actors who communicate with MEPs – as lobbyists. The choice of term has been motivated by the denomination given by the European Commission and the EP to organised interest groups and lobbyists registered to them (See Chapter 3). But the European civil society encompasses a broader range of organisations that are spread across EU Member States. From a

conceptual perspective, Kohler-Koch and Quittkat (2009: 14) suggest that the conceptions of civil society are numerous and sometimes difficult to bring together:

“The image of civil society varies with context and normative theoretical orientation. Whereas EU institutions put civil society and “organised civil society” in the context of EU governance, political theorists rather see it from the perspective of normative theories of democracy.”

Based on an empirical study of how civil society organisations define themselves, Kohler-Koch and Quittkat (2009) suggest four essential functions they carry out – representation, public discourse, self-constitution and public well-being – and distinctly oppose representation to the sphere of social interaction that civil society organisations can be found in (which includes public discourse, self-constitution and public well-being).

Finally, and following the argument developed in this study, the notion of representation needs to be tackled when discussed at the level of the European Union. What does it mean to represent in the framework of EU governance? Political representation should not be seen as limited to institutionalised/legitimate government representation at the European level: the European civil society also plays a role. This type of representation deserves closer attention when it comes to coordination as the independent role of the European civil society as ‘representatives’ and their strong involvement into MEPs’ communication dynamics can play a role into the decision-making of the EP. The European civil society’s role is complementary to the elements of representation already existing in the EU. Thus, Trezz argues that:

“Representation needs to be reconstructed from a hidden agenda to an explicit one, by deconstructing the justificatory discourse of participatory governance. Only by disentangling the participatory conundrum that has developed in relation to EU-governance over the last two decades can we arrive at a normatively adequate and practically satisfactory clarification of the role of political representation in relation to organised civil society and EU-governance. Representation is then no longer seen as a form that lies outside participatory governance and to which civil society should relate in one way or another, but, as a key mechanism that shapes civil society from inside, and accounts for its dynamic unfolding.” (Trezz 2009: 38)



Thus, going beyond the aggregative notion of representation, and by looking at the different models of representation suggested by Mansbridge (2003) – promissory, anticipatory, gyrosopic and surrogate representation – Trezn suggests an integrative mechanism of representation for the European civil society (Trezn 2009: 39):

“The conceptual link between civil society and political representation postulates a two-directional process, in which the linear principals-agent relationship is replaced by a non-linear dialogical relationship. Accordingly, the representativeness of an actor is not determined as a zero-sum relationship through elections, which establish who is elected (and therefore representative) and who is not (Saward, 2006, p. 299), but as a positive sum relationship, which involves represented and representatives in a continuous process of collective will formation.” (Trezn 2009: 41)

Besides, Bach and Stark (2002: 5) justify the representative role of the organised civil society by arguing that:

“NGOs have developed into major societal actors primarily because they meet real political and material needs: they serve as a source of political legitimacy for the system by providing the function of voice beyond electoral participation.”

To summarise, it is important to look at representation at the European level from a broader perspective, setting aside the traditional principal-agent model and admitting new, less ‘legitimate’ models of representation where self-authorised organisations (Urbinati and Warren 2008) can pretend to the role of representatives. Contemporary conceptions in political theory as well as models of EU governance encourage me to broaden the concept of representation so far studied.

The next section discusses MEPs’ use of SNT as an issue-campaigning tool. Coming under the coordination of information and the support that they sometimes need for their legislative dossiers, this section is articulated around evidence of changes in representation.

### 9.3. Issue-campaigning via SNT

#### 9.3.1. Coordinating by issue-campaigning

Findings suggest that MEPs use SNT to coordinate support on their legislative dossiers. So far, I have approached legislative work and communication around it from an organisational perspective where creating ties with key players – internal and external actors – and retrieving valuable (and technical) information are essential parts of the communicative process. Chapter 3 has shown that European citizens do not necessarily play a key role in these communicative actions during typical committee and political group meeting weeks. However, Chapters 6 and 7 have shown that MEPs seek their participation in the process. What I call *issue-campaigning* in this chapter refers to the coordination of support initiated by MEPs as to organising communication via SNT around an issue or a dossier that is currently discussed in committee. Issue-campaigning depicts a dialogical but also participatory model of representation that, once combined to civil society's representative actions could lead to a new form of representation at the European level, as discussed later in the final section of this chapter.

For example, MEP 1 sees the potential to campaign for issues via SNT, by then having an impact on other media:

Electronically, you can easier trigger a campaign or highlight a certain issue which then might be carried from social network to a blog, to an online paper, into the real world media let's say than other ones. (MEP 1)

The recombinatory and multiplier potential of SNT is seen as an efficient property for that purpose:

But twitter I must admit we have also used to try to trigger campaigns because you, of course, can incorporate via tiny URLs, you can incorporate press releases and stuff like that, and then you have the retweets and then you just sort of see, 'can you create a sort of a wave where actually people can just pick it up and then just redistribute it all the time'. (MEP 1)

An EP official gave examples of what she considers past successful issue-campaigning that an MEP initiated via SNT:

The case that was a bit, the case example for us, was the SWIFT... I don't know if you heard of it but it was this rejection of... treaty on bank data exchange with the US, there was a big mobilisation on the net like they were groups coming up and tweets and the MEPs who were more active on this dossier and in that case, the rapporteur was XX [...] but she was very very like on, on, on... active, tweetering from the hemicycle, all the small steps of this procedure and, really creating a buzz online, and creating the support for the position of the Parliament. And a bit, I mean... the more I think that there is a kind of strange relation between when, when... when issues concern privacy, Internet access, net neutrality, these issues are very, are very... sensitive for the users and I think that this kind of multiplier users associations, yea... bloggers, who are able to mobilise somehow... critical mass to create a buzz on the Internet, [...] (EPO 2)

The example given here relates to Internet policy, which might be a bias in terms of participation but it nevertheless lets us catch a glimpse at the reorganisation of political representation and ways MEPs incarnate their roles. This online coordination of public support for an MEP's legislative dossier shows that representation can be conceptualised differently from the principal-agent model by MEPs themselves. This re-conceptualisation is embedded in the use of SNT as a way for MEPs to reach and coordinate support at a greater scale.

The organisation of events and their advertisement via SNT, as a way to raise people's awareness on on going issues discussed in the EP, is also part of the coordination dimension of SNT. The example presented by MEP 18's assistant on the web streaming of a conference on organised crime suggest the multiplier role of SNT when it comes to raising awareness:

We had a conference on organized crime as part of the votes on her report last wee... two weeks ago and we web streamed the event and we communicated via Facebook. 987 people, with different IP addresses, followed the web streaming. It's quite something! Even the guys in Strasbourg, that we outsourced, they couldn't believe it. At the beginning, they said about 80 people would follow and I said, and they said 'did you advertise it?' and I said: 'no, but don't worry, we only use Facebook'... they

couldn't believe it, actually, there were more people following the web streamed event than the people in the conference room. (MEP 18)<sup>97</sup>

Coordinating different institutional bodies' activities by linking and advertising each other's events as a way to show coordinated action on a specific issue also comes as part of the coordination dimension of SNT use and contributes to a broader definition of representation:

For example now... for the International Women's Day, 8<sup>th</sup> of March, the Parliament organises events here in Brussels but they also try to organise under the same theme events in the, out in the 27 Members States. So, what we will do this year, because we are... we are connect... I mean yeah, these offices are here when I see that they will... create an event for some kind of activity on their FB page, we will... share that amongst our fans and then it goes to... you see these people [showing me a document]. (FU EPO 4)

Coordinating support via SNT is possible by raising people's awareness on specific issues or dossiers by means of information dissemination. Coordinating citizens' mobilisation is complementary to the latter and aims to influence political decisions in the EP by supporting MEPs' positions on issues.

### 9.3.2. *The European civil society's coordinated action*

The dual role of the organised civil society is of interest here. On the one hand, they create privileged relationships with decision-makers – as lobbyists for instance – and on the other hand, they maintain direct contact – as self-authorised representatives – with citizens. Bach and Stark (2004: 108) argue that:

“NGOs occupy a particularly strategic position in this regard: they work upwards with governments and corporations (e.g. through lobbying, media campaigns, protest and participation in policy processes) and downwards with local and marginalized populations (e.g. through in-country projects, training, re-granting and consciousness-raising).”

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<sup>97</sup> Translated from French to English by the author.

A distinction has been made in this study between the European civil society at large – characterised in Chapter 6 as weak ties for instance – and lobbyists or any interest group registered as such to the Transparency Register, who maintain strong communicative relationships with MEPs during the legislative process (strong ties). Whereas Brussels lobbyists have suggested that they do not use SNT to communicate with MEPs but rather use established communication patterns such as face-to-face meetings (See Chapter 3), they see in SNT a potentially influential way of indirect communication with MEPs by coordinating citizens' support on specific issues. When asked whether he uses SNT to communicate as a lobbyist with decision-makers, LOB 1 gave an alternative use of SNT that they have made:

No, today, no. We explored this year, for one of our clients, the possibility to use online social networks, indeed, for a campaign to raise public awareness, I would say, it was more in that spirit... social networks but it was a... the aim of the campaign was quite complicated, it aimed to mobilise a number of... of people on a specific issue and in the end we thought it might be a better idea to use social networks to do that. (LOB 1)<sup>98</sup>

LOB 1 went on to explain and analyse the potential of indirect 'influence' on decision-makers via SNT:

[...] some realise the importance of social networks indeed as a mean to mobilise and to raise awareness and therefore inevitably to lobby, with a target that is not necessarily a target in terms of direct lobbying, in terms of the structure, of lobbying decision makers but well, and truly, the use of... of the vector that social networks represent as, so, as a way to raise public opinion's awareness, who should consequently then raise decision makers' awareness. (LOB 1)<sup>99</sup>

LOB 1 considered that, as lobbyists, they do not use SNT to directly communicate with MEPs in the legislative process. But the idea is taken from the bottom, by looking at public opinion coordination as a tool to influence MEPs' decisions. Thus, rather than direct communication with MEPs via SNT, those tools

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<sup>98</sup> Translated from French to English by the author.

<sup>99</sup> Translated from French to English by the author.

are used to coordinate support from the bottom and take it back up to decision-makers:

[...] everyone is well aware that it is very useful, potentially very useful but... how can we find the, the time and resources to implement, indeed, a real and efficient campaign... a lobbying campaign by tweeting, unless, indeed, it is to launch public opinion campaigns, where frankly, it's double-sided, the target is the public, made in order for the public to react, that is to say to create a social movement which in turn will inevitably have an impact on the way decisions are made, hoping that things go the right way. (LOB 1)<sup>100</sup>

Early studies on the adoption of new technologies by NGOs and the organised civil society in general have revolved around the networked structure of online communication, be it the Internet or new technologies in general (Bach and Stark 2002, 2004; Cammaerts 2005). Such focus justifies the reliance on such literature for the purpose of this study. Bach and Stark (2004: 101) state:

“Within this encompassing environment of extended connectivity and near-ubiquitous computing, the new media do not simply allow organizations to communicate faster or to perform existing functions more effectively, they also present opportunities to communicate in entirely new ways and to perform radically new functions. Especially because these are interactive media, their adoption becomes an occasion for innovation that restructures interdependencies, reshapes interfaces and transforms relations.”

As observed in an EP report of the Science and Technology Options Assessment Unit - STOA (2011: 71):

“They [Civil Society Organisations] started to use the web mainly for organising themselves; followed by first approaches to initiate campaigns, mobilising engaged individuals in terms of political activism and raising public awareness for different political issues. [...] On one side, NGOs use the Internet for organisation, coordination and acquisition of

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<sup>100</sup> Idem

resources for their activities; on the other for political mobilisation, agenda setting and campaigning to engage their constituency (Lindner 2009).”

When we look at the use of SNT made here, the intermediary role of the European civil society (between decision-makers and citizens) is fading and drifting from an intermediary role to a coordinating role that opens the floor to citizens as key players in the decision-making process.

An EP official saw a parallel between MEPs’ action when initiating issue campaigns via SNT and civil society’s actions in the same domain:

I would like to see I mean... I would be interested to see if the next environmental big dossier would, would somehow create a big buzz on the Internet. I would... It would be interesting to see wheth... if the climate package was negotiated on the 2.0 era something would have, would... but I am pretty sure something would have happened in this domain as well because there is environment, environmental NGOs are also quite active and able to create... a mobilisation on the Internet. (EPO 2)

A Brussels lobbyist saw the coordinating potential of SNT as regard specific dossiers or issues from a bottom-up approach:

Maybe social media can be used to make a pressure to show that there is a kind of massive outcry for something, you know, you know to show that there is a kind of huge support behind us maybe if we ask our members to... yeah to make an impression on, especially from the constituency of the MEP, they might be kind of affect the way how to show, I think the, you need this... (LOB 2)

Coordinating support for (or rejection of) a dossier from a grassroots approach contributes to a bottom-up dimension of SNT as an issue-campaigning tool. The same Brussels lobbyist gave a more specific example of how she would foresee the successful use of SNT for issue-campaigning:

Massive support, to say for example, I am working on the seabird bankage, that means bird are caught as part of the fisheries, it’s a really serious problem, because many birds are dying and it’s against environmental legislation so we think we are kind of (?) campaigning

against, campaigning to stop it, so I can imagine that we would, kind of ask our members to make it clear to MEPs that this is outrageous and the EU policy has to find tools to stop this so I think social media can be used to kind of, you know, to make MEPs aware that many people care about a problem, which is easy to communicate, you wouldn't be able to communicate details of technical policies, like for example CAP, Common Agri Policy things which is really detailed, you wouldn't be able to do it through network, but some things very easy 'Stop this' or 'Make sure this doesn't happen', I don't know, 'Make a ban' or something, I think a message from us would need to be very very straightforward [laughs]. (LOB 2)

The combination of both MEPs' and civil society's coordination via SNT in the ACTA case suggest the role of SNT in re-discussing representation and the role of each actor (representative and represented) in the legislative process:

And then, the ACTA case was also quite... I mean that was not legislation but was a resolution of the Parliament opposing the Commission on the negotiations of this ACTA, which is Anti-Counterfeiting Agreement and that was in 2010, the Parliament made a resolution because it didn't like the Commission was negotiating this in secrecy with other partners like Japan, the US and Australia, bla bla and then, there was a fear that this treaty could contain some provisions on the Internet, somehow, something related to cutting the Internet for, for illegal downloading after... Yeah. And... the Parliament did, made this resolution, kind of pressuring the Commission until the Commission revealed the document and shared it and came to the plenary to explain what was being negotiated and so on. And on this, there was a big mobilisation from the MEPs and equal, let's say on the, on the net. (EPO 2)

Such coordination is further discussed in the following section.

#### **9.4. Towards networked representation? Co-representation via SNT**

This section of the chapter is an attempt to question current use of SNT by MEPs and the European civil society and the intersection of their communicative actions in the legislative process. The use of SNT by MEPs and the organised civil



society were discussed separately in the previous section. The main argument of this chapter has been based on the need to think of representation in a broader sense than the traditional principal-agent model and to think further the definition suggested in Chapter 1 by considering other actors in representing. Within this framework, SNT use and motivations of use have shown that citizens could be included to a certain extent as part of the process, calling therefore for a conception of representation that relies on participation and deliberation. At the same time, the European civil society plays a dual role. First, they play the role of expertise providers to the European Commission when drafting proposals and an increasing role in lobbying MEPs in their decision-making process. Second, the European civil society plays a role towards the public, and has been characterised as playing a role in the “sphere of social interaction” (Kohler-Koch and Quittkat 2009: 21). Civil society’s use of SNT and their attempts to coordinate support and mobilisation on issues to support their role as representatives constitute a crucial point in reconceptualising representation.

Therefore, I have argued here that SNT are used and could further be used by MEPs as tools to initiate issue-campaigning. This top-down approach should be seen in light of organised civil society’s activities via SNT. Their issue-campaigning initiatives describe a bottom-up mobilisation that aims at going back up to MEPs in order to influence their decisions. In this context, it is interesting to raise the question of the intersection of both practices and their combination via SNT as a way to rethink representation.

As argued by Pitkin, changes in representation are hardly agreed on and it justifies new avenues for conceptualisation:

“The modern representative acts within an elaborate network of pressures, demands, and obligations, and there is considerable disagreement among legislators about the proper way to perform their roles.” (Pitkin [1967] 1972: 219)

Thus, I want to question here the potential of conceptualising representation around the notion of network. The role MEPs play as legislators has been defined in this thesis as a policy-based representation of interests, which consequently implies a cross border representation in the EU. Besides, the active role of the European civil society in the legislative process and the potential they see in SNT as allowing

coordination in their representative functions calls for a discussion around the combination of all types of representation. There is a need to go beyond the vertical top-down/bottom-up dichotomy and to rather consider representation as networked where representatives (both legitimate and self-authorised) and represented constitute a network in communicating and coordinating in the process of legislation. Two empirical examples presented thereafter allow me to begin to see a new emerging type of representation at the European level, a model of representation that combines and re-designs top-down representatives' actions and bottom-up enterprises.

This first example puts into perspective grassroots mobilisation, an MEP's involvement in such mobilisation and the role SNT have played in showing a change in representation. Indeed, MEP 16's experience of SNT in their coordination dimension suggests that bottom-up coordination on specific issues has been possible via SNT and the MEP's awareness of the grassroots coordination has only been possible thanks to SNT:

[...] for example, number of meetings have been arranged around the cuts and ... the austerity measures that the government is introducing and would not have been aware of a number of those meetings if I hadn't seen the information on Facebook. So I was able to attend, even a meeting in my own town, I wasn't aware one had been organised and it was organised on Facebook. Nobody yet knows who organised it and just spontaneously all these people turned up at the appointed time and the appointed place... another one equally fascinating was at ... out of the public library. Some anonymous person again organised this. At the event, the director of the library services said "who is the person who organised this event please identify themselves". Nobody [laugh] there were like 200/240 people again, all organised on Facebook, so extremely useful on that point of view. (MEP 16)

Two main observations can be made from this example. First, the use of SNT both by citizens and MEP 16 have allowed on the one hand, the organised coordination of people on a specific issue and the coordination of events to discuss those same issues. On the other hand, the exchange of information depicted in this example comes under the MEP's willingness to listen to public opinion, as discussed

in Chapter 7 and a willingness to take part in grassroots organised mobilisations. This point takes me to the second observation that is the shift from top-down information dissemination that aims to coordinate support on an issue, where the representative plays a communicative and informative role, to a reversed allocation of roles, where the citizens are the ones mobilising their representative via SNT in order to attend their meetings. Representatives and politicians in general – including political parties – traditionally play this organising role. In this case, we see the leadership role shifting from traditional political bodies to citizens. The bottom-up organisation of political meetings is not new in itself but the mobilisation of political bodies via SNT can be considered new and original to the traditional notion of representation.

The second example takes a case of ePetition mentioned by both a lobbyist and an MEP assistant. ePetitions are not specific to SNT use and have been seen as eDemocracy tools long before the emergence of SNT. However, the networked structure of SNT and the growing use of the latter, combined with successful ePetition initiatives, have encouraged LOB 1 and MEP 8's assistant to mention a successful and influential use of SNT in this context. LOB 1 and MEP 8's assistant have given the example of Avaaz<sup>101</sup>, an online community that is well-known for its viral online petitions:

Avaaz is a network of, they are bringing together people who, who support their campaigns and they have various campaigns on various issues and they always ask people to support or to, to, yeah, they are collecting support for various things and they can, they range from something on EU, for example they helped, they worked with Greenpeace and they collected million signatures for, against GMOs so they've done it through these networks, [...] they in very short time, they are able to collect an enormous

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<sup>101</sup> “The Avaaz community campaigns in 15 languages, served by a core team on 6 continents and thousands of volunteers. We take action -- signing petitions, funding media campaigns and direct actions, emailing, calling and lobbying governments, and organizing "offline" protests and events -- to ensure that the views and values of the world's people inform the decisions that affect us all.”, retrieved on 12 August 2012, at [www.avaaz.org](http://www.avaaz.org)

amount of signatures and support because the network is growing, they have now several millions of supporters and they send this thing around and people they trust them and they know that most of the things they are kind of pursuing of something good so I think they are really effective in collecting signatures and they have enormous results in getting, getting what, what they want on many things so it might be worth looking at their campaigns, I think it's really worth [...] (LOB 2)

MEP 8's assistant's observed the networked dimension of Avaaz' ePetitioning, but most importantly, the impact of such online initiative on today's representation at the EP level:

And this, actually it is via websites like... petitions.com or 'mes opinions' or I don't know what, where information spreads very quickly on social networks, a lot of people will sign the thing, without even reading the article, because they precisely trust the people who ask them to sign, and... and it gets carried away and so, on those sites, a list of all MEPs' email addresses is provided, you don't even need to look for them, you copy-paste, there was even a basic text that you could add. Sometimes, some people customise the message a little, but it's really e-campaigning at its best... well it's... precisely websites such as Avaaz and all, it's... they count on the fact that they have databases of millions of people and that by sending emails.... Every week on a different topic, they will manage in one or two months to gather a million signatures. So it's true that... I'm not, I'm not convinced about petitions, and I know it allows, precisely, well, you see for example, we got mobilised on that topic because of that petition. (MEP 8)<sup>102</sup>

MEP 8's assistant admitted that their office's mobilisation on a specific issue had been a consequence of Avaaz' widespread networked mobilisation. The cause and effect relationship is reversed here in terms of traditional representation. Public mobilisation on specific dossiers via SNT redefines the agenda and forces MEPs to take (political) action. This is in slight opposition with the traditional model of agenda-setting where policy-makers, decisions-makers, or political parties set the agenda and intermediaries such as interest groups, advocacy groups (or traditional

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<sup>102</sup> Translated from French to English by the author.

media), who claim to represent citizens' interests, try to influence the agenda-setting. Citizens themselves had little or no role to play in such model.

### **9.5. Conclusion**

This chapter has discussed the final category of the emergent model of use of SNT characterised here as coordination. I have chosen to adopt a political theory lens to articulate the argument of this chapter, an argument that overarches the categories discussed in Chapter 6, 7 and 8. The unique institutional, organisational and political context of the EP allows an exploration of the changes in representation in the SNT era. The argument discussed in this chapter is two-fold. First, I have restated the choice to define representation in a broader sense than the traditional principal-agent model or the simply legitimate (elected) representation conception. The unique supranational context of the EU and its active civil society call for a characterisation of its role in the legislative process, a role that goes beyond the expertise provider and participatory role that the European Commission has tended to give it in its definition of EU governance. Second, I have argued that the European civil society's use of SNT as an issue-campaigning tool, combined with elected representatives' use of SNT for the same purpose should be seen in light of the networked dimension of those activities. The use of SNT as described in this chapter has depicted changes in representation, in the paradigm itself and in the role each actor has traditionally played. The logic of relationship between the elected representative, the self-authorized and/or intermediary representative (European civil society) and the represented are called into question as the findings suggest. The vertical vector of relation (i.e. as to inform and communicate) between those actors needs to be reconsidered in the light of all parties' use of SNT. Thus, the following question comes to mind: to what extent could we characterise representation at the EU level for its networked form? The connection between actors and their shifting roles in today's society can be seen as describing a networked form of representation. The examples discussed in this chapter catch a glimpse at what a networked representation would translate in. The intersection of the key findings presented in Chapter 6, 7, 8 and 9, and their implications in the work MEPs carry out in the EP, is discussed in the final chapter of this thesis.

## **Chapter 10 - Emergent model of use and Conclusions**

### **10.1. Introduction**

This chapter summarises the key findings developed in Chapters 6, 7, 8 and 9. Findings of this study are discussed here in accordance with the notion of representation suggested in Chapter 1. Through MEPs' perceptions of use of SNT, it has been possible to observe specific communicative features that re-state the need to balance the different roles MEPs play as representatives at the EU level. MEPs' motivations and perceived benefits of their use of SNT have given space for further reflection on the notion of political representation at the supranational level. The implications of this research and the suggestive ways of using SNT (emergent model of use) are therefore discussed in the second section of the chapter. The third part of this chapter discusses the contribution made by this thesis to the overlapping fields of political communication and organisational studies. Finally, the limitations of this study and the opportunities for future research are discussed in the final part of the chapter.

### **10.2. Key findings**

In this thesis, MEPs' adoption of SNT has been approached from an organisational and exploratory perspective as a way to understand communication patterns of actors involved in the legislative process. This study has aimed at answering the following research question: *to what extent could MEPs incorporate SNT as part of their communication resources in engaging with other actors when carrying out their work as legislators?* This research has favoured a cognitive approach by assessing MEPs' motivations for using SNT and perceptions of the benefits of using those tools when carrying out their work as legislators. The analysis of communication content has not been the object of this study.

In the course of conducting this organisational study, the democratic implications of communication via SNT have led me to focus on the political representation paradigm as regard to communication. Indeed, it was important to bring in the notion of political representation early on in the theory building process and it was important to grasp the uniqueness of representation at the EU level and its

potential implications in communication practices. Thus, by combining an original definition of MEPs' representation with an exploration of their communication practices and perceptions on SNT use, this thesis has thrown light on communicative patterns and has helped to explore characteristics of political representation from an organisational perspective. This study has encompassed multi-layered aspects of MEPs' work and roles and it is due to the complexity of the role of MEPs as European cross-border representatives.

The key findings of this exploratory research suggest ways in which MEPs could use these tools in their work and address the research question stated above. The four categories designed as an a priori model – network awareness, information retrieval, information dissemination and coordination – have constituted the basis for understanding MEPs' motivations and benefits of using SNT as part of their communication resources. The key findings are discussed below in relation with the definition of representation suggested in Chapter 1. The following sub-sections present suggestive ways in which MEPs could further use SNT when they carry out their work.

*10.2.1 EU representation as policy-oriented representation: reconsidering lobbying practices and limitations to expertise finding via SNT*

In relation with the legislator role MEPs play, findings have shown that by expanding MEPs' networks to weak ties, the use of SNT has the potential to allow a democratisation of lobbying practices in the EP. The network angle taken to study communication in the legislative process of the EP has given me the possibility to consider social structures and dynamics of interaction that require a less bureaucratic and more flexible framing of communicative practices. The large set of actors involved in the process of legislating (at the committee level) has been identified in Chapter 3 and the role of internal and external actors have been discussed. Findings have suggested that SNT have allowed MEPs to create ties with actors who are usually not involved in MEPs' communication practices. SNT have allowed MEPs to expand their network awareness to a broader range of external actors – be it policy experts or non-experts. I have articulated my argument around Granovetter's rationale of the strength of weak ties, where actors who are traditionally involved in

the legislative process (i.e. internal actors such as assistants, political groups, and committee secretariats but also external actors such as Brussels-based lobbyists) were defined as strong ties when they are identified as communicating with MEPs in the legislative process and actors who have no traditional role in such process (the broader civil society) were considered as weak ties. The adoption of SNT as means of raising MEPs' awareness of actors present in their networks is emerging as a use and has the potential to be further developed.

Following on from cognitive social structures, findings have suggested that SNT allow MEPs to retrieve public opinion and to raise their awareness on the latter as ways to identify and question the potential of cognitive knowledge networks as discussed in Chapter 4. SNT enable MEPs to 'get a feel of what people think' and to consequently retrieve information. MEPs' motivations to use SNT have also shown that there is a strong commitment to listening to what people think, by actively seeking input and by being willing to get people involved upstream in the legislative process (e.g. by submitting amendments). The retrieval of information is essential for MEPs' required expert role in order to carry out work in committees. Even though findings have shown that expertise retrieval remains limited via SNT, such tools have the potential to be used by MEPs to raise their awareness of public opinion and coincidentally allow the retrieval of valuable information.

#### *10.2.2 Cross border representation: informing on EP activities and reconsidering roles in representation at the EU level via SNT*

Disseminating information via SNT has proven to be a key component of the communicative properties of these tools for MEPs. The immediacy of communication occurring via SNT has allowed MEPs to disseminate information outside of the EP directly and/or mediated via traditional media on two levels: to inform about the process of legislative activities and to inform on the content of legislation. The two approaches – mediated dissemination of information and direct dissemination – should be seen as complementary in the context of the EP, with the undeniable role that traditional media still play in communicating Europe. A special emphasis needs to be put on one aspect of this finding where SNT are used by MEPs to reshape their relationship with traditional media (i.e. journalists). Where traditionally the EP has lacked media attention and coverage in national, regional



and/or local news, SNT enable MEPs to create ties with journalists, as a way to potentially get more coverage of their parliamentary activities in the media. It constitutes a property that can potentially be further developed in order to address in part the communication deficit of the EP. As discussed earlier, the communication deficit of the EP appears as a more complex notion than traditionally put and is not solely due to a lack of direct/indirect communication between MEPs and citizens. I would argue here that when it comes to the EP communication deficit, failing to inform and to communicate in the first place on EP activities as a 'prelude' to communicating the content of EU legislation constitute a limitation to transparent and efficient communication. The findings presented here suggest that some MEPs have embraced the use of SNT to address this limitation.

Finally, coordination has constituted the final component of the emergent model of use of SNT. Whereas the a priori model described the internal property of coordination for communication in a workplace, the political and democratic dimensions of MEPs' workplace have raised two specificities of the studied context: the importance of the role of external actors in the legislative process, shifting therefore internal coordination to external coordination and the importance of policy-oriented communication as required by the ever growing expert role MEPs play in the EP. Activities that MEPs and the European civil society conduct via SNT as ways to coordinate are to be put in perspective in order to raise the question of the extent to which coordinated activities via SNT can bring to light a new networked model of representation. I therefore have argued that MEPs consider using SNT to initiate issue-campaigns, online campaigns built around an issue or an on going dossier, as a way to raise citizens' awareness and coordinate support for their dossiers. By coordinating such actions with the European civil society's activities and by redesigning given roles in the process (representative role and represented role), the use of SNT has shown the potential to further put into question the notion of representation at the EU level and to consider a networked model of representation. Where the scope of representation was limited to elected representatives in the EP in this thesis, this finding makes room for discussion on a more complex and more layered model of representation at the European level.

### 10.3. Research implications and emergent model of use

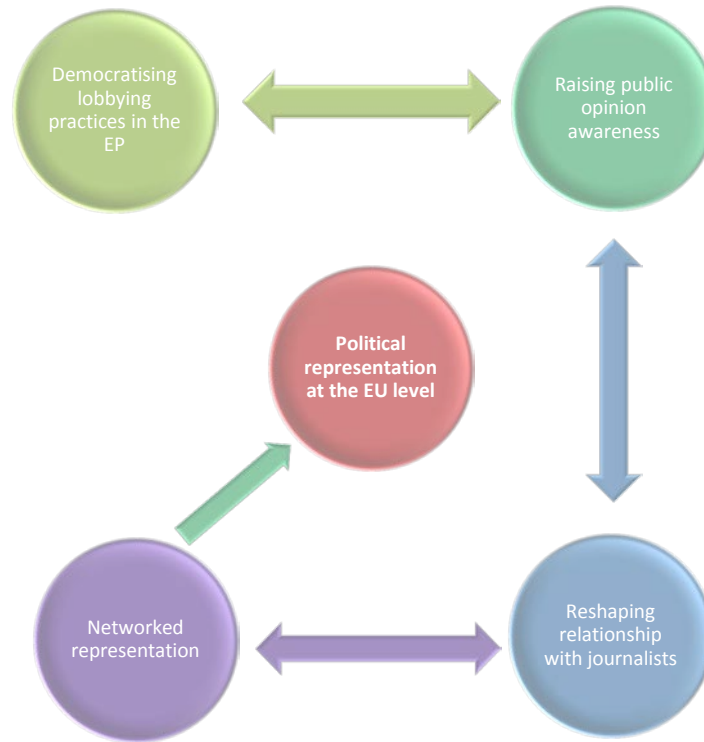
The findings of this study have shown that a reflection on what we mean when we talk about political representation at the European level is needed. This is the focus of discussion of this section. The previous chapters have shown that the role that representatives embody goes beyond the principal-agent model, and the promissory model of representation. Communication practices have therefore been considered in the broader sense of representation, which has allowed me to consider alternative conceptions of representation as presented in Chapter 1 and to define in original terms representation in the EP. Indeed, I have argued that by looking at the role MEPs play as legislators in their day-to-day representative functions, practices of representation at the EU level differ from classical notions of political representation. What we know as the represented-representative relationship and the communication that results from it needs to be refined at the supranational level of the European Union. I have argued in this thesis that the problematic does not lie so much in the lack of communication between representatives and represented at the EU level but rather that there is a need to refine the notion of representation in the EP in order to understand communication in such context. Indeed, the classical notion of political representation is limited when applied to European representation. The emphasis has gradually been put on the representative role of MEPs whereas part of the difficulty to grasp the complexity of the communication dynamics and potential communication/democratic deficit reside in the inadequate ways that democratic theorists and/or political scientists have conventionally described MEPs' role as representatives. MEPs' motivations to use SNT and their perceived benefits of using them have offered an opportunity to put into question the representation paradigm at the EU level<sup>103</sup> and to further discuss its meaning in light of communication practices in the digital era. Based on the key findings discussed in

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<sup>103</sup> It is important to mention here the role that political parties traditionally play in the framework of representation. The arguments developed here do not intend to undermine the role of political parties. It is believed that political parties, and more accurately, political groups in the case of the EP, certainly play a role in the power relationship MEPs have within the institutions and with their respective governments and play a role in the decision-making. The main focus of this study was neither on power relationships or decision-making *per se*. Rather, I was interested here in the communicative process that precedes and leads to making decisions. As this study strongly relies upon a grounded theory approach, results of observation and interviews have ruled out political parties' role in these communicative processes. Their absence in interview findings as for their role in communication via SNT has motivated the choice to maintain their absence in this discussion.

the previous section, the following diagram summarises an emergent model of use of SNT for MEPs:

**Figure 3 Emergent model of use of SNT for MEPs when carrying out their work as legislators**



#### **10.4. Advance in knowledge of research topic**

This thesis constitutes an original piece of research that fills a knowledge gap in interdisciplinary fields of research. Chapter 1 presented the knowledge gap that exists in researching this topic and identified at least three gaps: first, MEPs have tended to be seen, in political science and political communication research, as mainly representatives, focusing therefore on the representative-represented relationship, leaving aside their party actor and legislator roles. I have argued throughout this study that, due to the increasing powers the EP has secured and the growing expectations that MEPs become experts in their committees, their legislative work, and consequently the organisational dimension of their work, should be focused on and studied from a communication perspective. Even though

the nature of legislation and the relationship between the organisational and institutional components of representation are inseparable from the accountable/democratic prerequisites of representation, I have argued that a refinement of the definition of representation for MEPs is needed. Second, and once again directly linked to the argument presented previously, research on SNT adoption by parliamentarians (be it MEPs or national members of parliament) has tended to focus on the potential of SNT as tools to reconnect with constituents. This study has argued that the role MEPs carry out as representatives needs to be refined at the European level. Communicating in order to 'connect' with constituents does not strictly reflect the role MEPs play as representatives. Because of the increasing role they play as policy experts and because of the organisational communication taking place in the context of legislative work, I argue here that communication in the context of legislating needs to be studied from an organisational perspective. This argument takes me back to the gap that exists between political scientists' studies in which MEPs are looked at at the macro-institutional level of the EP or where they are studied from a normative democratic theory perspective and organisational studies in which institutional constraints would be disregarded. The strength of this study resides in syncing a political analysis of the EP into an organisational study of MEPs' communication practices and vice-versa. The political and organisational are tightly intertwined here. Finally, research in Internet studies has been limited with regard to exploring people's perceptions of using new technologies and the Internet in particular and rather has focused on the content of communication exchanges. This study constitutes an original contribution as it has proven that focusing on users' perceptions and cognitions is a valuable approach to understanding SNT adoption and their potential as communicative tools. Furthermore, the observational study of the EP has allowed a better understanding of internal dynamics and a clearer characterisation of communication patterns in the process that precedes decision-making. Observational studies of European institutions remain limited and this research, although limited in time and scale, has contributed to a sharper analysis of internal dynamics that has strongly relied on an analysis of social interactions as they happen.

When it comes to the adoption of SNT, this study has taken an object of study – MEPs – that remains little studied. An assessment of eParticipation initiatives<sup>104</sup> has concluded that research in the field has tended to focus on regional and local level initiatives. Supranational initiatives have been left aside and this study comes as an original contribution to the field by looking at a supranational and transnational adoption of SNT. Moreover, this thesis contributes to the field of research on eParticipation by shifting the focus of research from citizens and the potential benefits for them to using SNT, to representatives and their cognitions on using SNT in their workplace.

### **10.5. Implications for further research**

Throughout the study, other knowledge gaps have emerged as the theory building process unfolded. Three paths for future research can be taken from the findings of this study. First, findings presented in Chapter 6 and the rationale structured around them has provided material for further reflection on social structures when MEPs use SNT. The focus of the study has not been on an analysis of social networks *per se* but inevitably, as argued in Chapter 4, the considerations of cognitive social structures has forced me to consider social network analysis elements that, at this stage of the research, could have only been seen as exploratory. It is important to remember here that Chapter 6 has looked at a particular aspect of using SNT, an aspect that depends on the network structure. The structure of the network came as a peripheral but nevertheless important object of study. Thus, users' motivations and perceived benefits of using SNT have informed my understanding of the social structures that emerge from these networks. A deeper analysis of the structure of networks that are formed when using SNT as well as further analysis of the strength of weak and strong ties are necessary. The data gathered have given an opportunity to open discussion on the potential of weak ties to connect with MEPs when using SNT. Further research that would focus on social structures would allow a better understanding of the relations that emerge between MEPs and weak ties in the copresence of different communication tools. Deeper

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<sup>104</sup> For a full assessment of eParticipation initiatives across Europe, see Eleni Panopoulou, Efthimios Tambouris, and Konstantinos Tarabanis, 'Eparticipation Initiatives: How Is Europe Progressing?', *European Journal of ePractice*, 7 (2009).

analysis and further theorising on social structures created when using SNT call for further research in the field of information diffusion and weak ties when using SNT. In the same way, the analysis of MEPs' relationship with strong ties and their implications in the diffusion of information, ideas, innovation and influence would also constitute a strong object of research.

Second, the information dissemination property of SNT, discussed in Chapter 8, threw light on the relationship between MEPs and traditional media via SNT as a field of research that needs to be tackled. Indeed, MEPs' adoption of SNT has questioned the complex dynamics of communication between MEPs and traditional media. Findings have suggested that the turbulent relationships MEPs maintain with journalists could be reshaped with the introduction of SNT as part of their communication resources. An exploration of journalists' perception on the potential of SNT as to reconfigure their relationship with their political sources is needed. This finding announces a promising field of research as it brings together political communication paradigms and changes in journalism, as we know it. Understanding the reasons why MEPs on the one side, and journalists on the other side, use SNT to communicate with each other on legislative matters is essential for a better understanding of today's communication dynamics between EU elected representatives and traditional media. Further research could explore the extent to which the longstanding and multi-layered communication deficit of the EP could be addressed with the use of SNT. In addition, the level of analysis of MEPs' perceptions has informed me on the creation of ties with journalists via SNT. What results from such ties – beyond their perceptions – has not been assessed and calls for further research. The impact that relationships created via SNT between MEPs and journalists have on journalists' coverage of EU affairs needs to be explored. It would allow a more general understanding of an on going and future reshaping of relationships with traditional media. Finally, research on political communication should further explore the copresence of traditional media and new technologies as a way to assess current and future – possibly changing – practices.

Finally, a multi-level analysis of communication patterns that include different sets of actors and different communication tools is needed for future research. The copresence of interpersonal tools and document repositories is necessary to get the bigger picture of information flow and communication practices

from an organisational perspective. From a political theory perspective, future research on SNT adoption should on the one hand, consider the multi-level analysis suggested above and on the other hand, consider the copresence of different forms of representation and the resulting communication practices.

### **10.6. Conclusion**

The ever-growing number of MEPs using SNT has proven that SNT are not temporary communication tools. I have argued throughout this thesis that SNT could play a crucial role in a sometimes under-studied function MEPs play in their day-to-day work: their work as legislators. This thesis has looked at the potential of introducing SNT into MEPs' communication resources when they carry out their work. The analysis of their motivations and perceptions on the benefits of using such tools in their daily communications and the observational exploration of their communication practices has led me to conclude that SNT are considered to be used and could be further developed in four instances: to democratise lobbying practices in the EP by raising MEP's awareness of the expanded range of actors present in their networks; to retrieve and expand their awareness of public opinion and to actively seek people's input into the legislative process; to reshape their relationship with traditional media; and finally, to coordinate support around their legislative dossiers, potentially leading to a networked model of representation where the European civil society and European citizens are integral actors. Such findings have consequently thrown light on the role MEPs play as European representatives, characteristics that have been supported by MEPs' motivations to use SNT as communicative tools.

## Chapter 11 - Appendix

### Appendix 1 – Information Sheets and Consent form (Interviews)



**UNIVERSITY OF LEEDS**

### Information Sheet

Research project title:

*Introducing social networking in Members of the European Parliament's communication patterns: organising or engaging?*

You are being invited to take part in a research project. Before you decide it is important for you to understand why the research is being done and what it will involve. Please take time to read the following information carefully. Ask me if there is anything that is not clear or if you would like more information. Take time to decide whether or not you wish to take part. Thank you for reading this.

*What is the project's purpose?*

Online social networks have become an important research subject in social and political sciences. Communication tools have changed and communication patterns have evolved. The legislative process of the European Parliament is affected by these changes. Drafting legislation involves a number of actors who reach final consent after communicating, negotiating and debating. In the process, interaction, communication and networking (if different in substance) are all essential elements and they need to be re-assessed and redefined in today's network society.

This research aims at studying jointly the process of amending draft legislation in parliamentary committees of the EP and the communication patterns of the actors involved in such a process in a digitalised world. Through interviews with actors involved in the drafting of European legislation, I aim at answering the following question: "to what extent could Members of the European Parliament incorporate social network tools as part of their communication resources when engaging with other actors involved in drafting and amending legislation?" To



answer this question, I need to assess the current use and purposes of such use by the actors involved in the legislative process.

*Why have I been chosen?*

Members of the European Parliament are the main actors in legislating. They make political decisions on numerous issues that concern millions of European citizens. To do so, they need to interact with other actors in the process, for instance the other two institutions (European Commission and Council) and in the specific context of committees we can add internal actors – members of the Committee Secretariat (civil servants) and more generally members of the Secretariat General (DG Expo, DG Ipol, DG Comm, etc.) – as well as external actors such as members of the European civil society. Thus, actors of each of these groups (MEPs, civil servants, civil society' actors) have been chosen to be interviewed for this study.

*Do I have to take part?*

It is up to you to decide whether or not to take part. If you do decide to take part you will be given this information letter to keep and be asked to sign a consent form and you can still withdraw without it affecting any benefits that you are entitled to in any way. You do not have to give a reason.

*What will happen to me if I take part and what type of information will be sought from me?*

Your participation to the study will be short and will consist of a in-depth interview. I will be asking you a set of questions for duration of a maximum of one hour, face to face, or on the phone, to your convenience. The questions will regard your current use of online social network sites in the professional context. Questions will aim at understanding the purposes of such use. They will be related to the duration and frequency of use as well as the advantages and/or disadvantages of the introduction of such tool in your communication patterns.

*What are the possible benefits of taking part?*

Whilst there are no immediate benefits for those people participating in the project, it is hoped that this work will throw light on the changes and evolution of

communication patterns with the introduction of new tools such as online social networks sites and forge ahead academic research in political communication.

*Will my taking part in this project be kept confidential?*

All the information that will be collected about you during the course of the research will be kept strictly confidential. You will not be able to be identified in any reports or publications resulting from the interviews. Electronic documents derived from this information (audio files) will be maintained on a University secure networked computer and password-protected. Your data will be retained for a period of five years.

*Will I be recorded, and how*

*will the recorded media be used?*

Interviews will be recorded to allow a better transcription of information. The audio recording of the interview will be transcribed into text and used only for analysis, completion of the doctoral thesis as well as possible conference presentations and academic publications. No other use will be made of them without your written permission, and no one outside the project will be allowed access to the original recordings.

*What will happen to the results of the research project?*

The results of this research project will be valuable material for the completion of the researcher's doctoral thesis. The data collected will be used for academic purposes only. Additionally, the data will be presented in conferences and possibly published in academic publications in the form of articles and papers.

*Who is organising and funding the research?*

This research is part of a doctoral project and is self-funded by the researcher. No external private funds will be received by the researcher during the duration of the project.

*Contact for further information*

Should you need to contact me at any stage of the research project, please use the following contact details:

Kheira Belkacem  
Institute of Communications Studies  
Clothworkers' Building North  
University of Leeds  
Leeds, LS2 9JT, UK  
Email: [cskb@leeds.ac.uk](mailto:cskb@leeds.ac.uk)  
Phone: +44.787.060.9846



## UNIVERSITY OF LEEDS

### Participant Consent Form

**Title of Research Project:** Introducing online social networking in Members of the European Parliament's communication patterns

**Name of Researcher:** Miss Kheira Belkacem

*Initial the box if you agree with the statement to the left*

I confirm that I have read and understand the information sheet dated ..... explaining the above research project and I have had the opportunity to ask questions about the project.

I understand that my participation is voluntary and that I am free to withdraw from the project without giving any reason and without there being any negative consequences. In addition, should I not wish to answer any particular question or questions, I understand that I am free to decline. The researcher can be emailed at [cskb@leeds.ac.uk](mailto:cskb@leeds.ac.uk) at any time to express concerns or withdraw from the project.

I understand that my responses will be kept strictly confidential. I give permission for members of the research team to have access to my anonymised responses. I understand that my name will not be linked with the research materials, and I will not be identified or identifiable in the report or reports that result from the research.

I agree for the data collected from me to be used in future research.

I agree to have my interview recorded.

I agree to take part in the above research project and will inform the principal investigator should my contact details change.

Name of participant

Date

Signature

Kheira Belkacem (Lead Researcher) Date

Signature

## **Appendix 2 – Interview Questions**

### *Interview with MEP*

Which online social networks do you use?

What tasks do you perform when you use social networks?

How often do you use these social networks?

Who uses these tools in your office?

Why do you use these tools?

Who do you want to reach when using these tools?

Have you ever made use of online social networks when being a rapporteur?

Would you work without social networks now?

### *Follow-up interview with MEP*

How do you generally communicate with other people involved in committee business (other MEPs, secretariat, civil society)?

How do you use online social networks in the context of committee work?

To what end?

Have online social networks changed in any way the way you communicate with other people involved in committee work?

Do you receive policy expertise via social networks that helps you in your work as committee member?

If yes, who provides you with this expertise?

Have you participated in EP Facebook chats?

If yes, can you describe the experience?

Why did you decide to participate? Has it been beneficial in any way?

In the future, how do you see social networks having any use in your committee work?

*Interview with EP officials*

What kind of social networks are used across the EP?

Why?

How often?

What about MEPs?

From your experience and your knowledge of the practices in the EP, to what extent would you say that MEPs use these tools themselves?

Do you have any requests by MEPs and/or assistants on why to use social networks tools? Any technical support asked for?

What do you think MEPs and/or their assistants use social networks for? What are their purposes?

Have they indicated that they get any benefits from using them? Can you give me an example?

Some studies have shown that elected representatives have used social networks to reconnect with their constituents. Is it the case in the EP? Can you give me an example?

I am especially interested in the legislative role of an MEP. There are not many studies that have looked at the use of social networks in the legislative role of an elected representative. Is there any kind of benefit you can think about?

If MEPs do not use such tools, do you think they should be encouraged to use them?

For what benefit? For what purpose?

*Interview with committee secretariats*

What online social networks do you use?

Why did you create this page?

Who manages your network presence?

Who do you reach when you use social networks? Who do you communicate with?

How often do you use these tools?

What benefit do you gain from using online social networks?

Has it made a difference in the usual/traditional communication that occurs during the legislative process?

## Appendix 3 – EP Powers and Composition

### Increasing powers

Since its creation in 1958, the European Union has been the scene of important changes. After a number of enlargement and reforms over the years, the set of institutions that the European Union works with is unique, even though it has been strongly modelled on national democratic institutions with an executive body (the EC), a legislative body (the European Parliament with the Council as co-legislator) and a separate judicial body, the European Court of Justice<sup>105</sup>.

The European Parliament has seen its power increased with the revision of treaties. Since the adoption of the Lisbon Treaty that took effect on 1 December 2009, the EP has a full-fledged co-legislator power with the Council of the European Union on ordinary legislative procedure, a procedure that gathers most of legislative matters. Its legislative powers used to be limited on issues related to security and defence for instance and it still has a consultative role on a number of issues such as taxation. The EP also has budgetary powers and supervisory powers over other European institutions.

### Composition

The EP gathers 736<sup>106</sup> elected members from 27 Member States. Three main “bodies” constitute the institution and work together: elected members (MEPs), political groups, and the Secretariat. The 7<sup>th</sup> parliamentary term – which started in June 2009 – counts seven political groups: Group of the European People’s Party (EPP), Group of the Progressive Alliance of Socialists and Democrats in the European Parliament (S&D), Group of the Alliance of Liberals and Democrats for Europe (ALDE), Group of the Greens/ European Free Alliance, European

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<sup>105</sup> The European institutions are not limited to these three bodies and a number of other agencies and bodies work in parallel: the European Council, the Presidency of the Council, the European Court of Auditors, the European Central Bank, the European Ombudsman, the European Data Protection Supervisor. There are also financial bodies (i.e. European Investment bank), Advisory bodies (i.e. Committee of the Regions), EU agencies (i.e. European Institute of Innovation and Technology). For the purposes of this research, the focus of the research is on the European Parliament and therefore, other institutions are only briefly be mentioned.

<sup>106</sup> 754 MEPs in December 2011



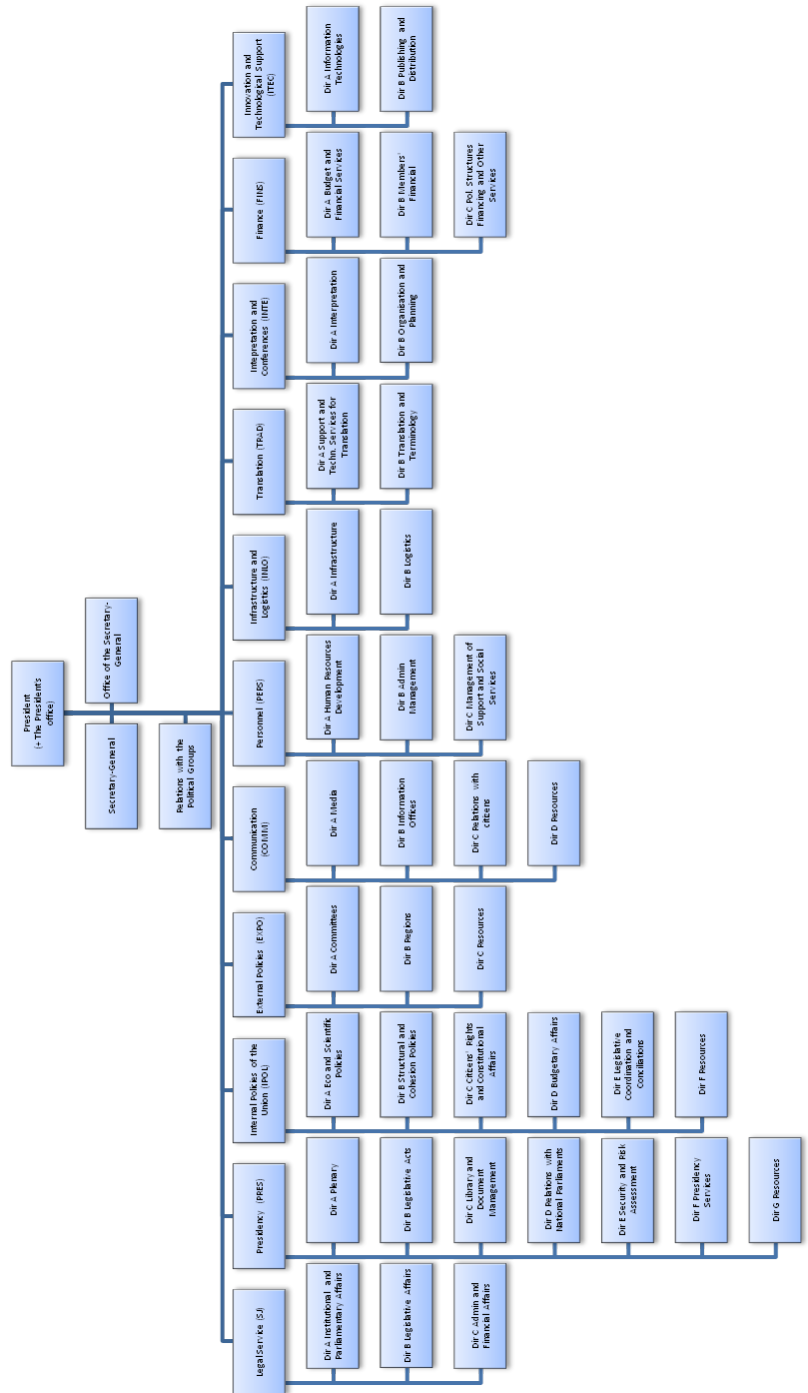
Conservative and Reformists Groups, Confederal Group of the European United Left – Nordic Green Left and finally, Europe of Freedom and Democracy Group.

MEPs and political groups are supported in their work by the Secretariat, which gathers approximately 6,000 officials selected via open competition from every country of the EU. As for 2011, EP Secretariat is divided into ten Directorate-Generals: Presidency, Infrastructure & Logistics, Internal Policies, External Policies, Translation, Interpretation & Conferences, Communication, Finances, Personnel and Innovation & Technological Support (See Appendix 4). The legal service is an additional department to all Directorate-Generals, which provides legal assistance for the EP's political bodies and especially to parliamentary committees. The Secretariat as a whole supports MEPs' work during the legislative process.

### **Activities**

EP activities mainly take place in Brussels, where committee meetings, political group meetings and 'mini-sessions' are held. EP's second location is Strasbourg, where once a month, the whole Parliament meets for a one-week plenary session (Rules of procedure specify that the Parliament should meet 12 times a year but as August is, in practice, a month where there is no activity, two sessions are generally held in September). Travels to Strasbourg once a month have always been controversial as it generates enormous expenses for the Union. It has become very common for MEPs to raise the issue during question time when sitting in plenary. The majority of the legislative work is conducted however during committee and political group meeting weeks in Brussels.

Appendix 4 – EP Secretariat – Organisation<sup>107</sup>



<sup>107</sup> This diagram has been adapted from Richard Corbett, Francis Jacobs, and Michael Shackleton, *The European Parliament* (8th edn.; London: John Harper Publishing, 2011). Figure 6 *The European Parliament Secretariat*, p.227.

## **Appendix 5 – Ordinary Legislative Procedure and institutional actors’ role**

The overall procedure in the EP is well described by Benedetto (2005: 69-70):

“The committee chair and the co-ordinators of the different political groups responsible for the committee agree the agenda and nominate rapporteurs for upcoming reports, which can be legislative or non-legislative. [...] As the issue is discussed in committee, the rapporteur incorporates any amendments in the text which is sent on to plenary. The rapporteur presents the committee’s recommendations to the full plenary meeting of the Parliament and guides the process as it is voted through”.

If agreement is reached in plenary and the Council accepts the report with its amendments, procedure ends at what is called first reading. If the Council does not approve the report as amended, a second reading is initiated in committee. The second reading can take up to three months until agreement between the Parliament and the Council is reached. Finally, in case of disagreement on the second reading procedure, a conciliation procedure applies.

### *Inter-institutional work: the role of the Commission and the Council*

The Commission initiates the legislative process by introducing a proposal to the EP. Once a committee has been given a proposal, a report is drafted. The Council has a co-decision power on most matters with the EP, forming therefore the legislative bicameral authority of the EU. The Council and the EC are commonly consulted at this stage of the procedure for negotiation on amendments. But the Commission and the Council play a background role in the specific process studied here. They are both present at committee meetings and do communicate in the process (mainly with the rapporteur) but at this stage, work is mainly done within the EP. The role of the Council is more significant once amendments have been agreed on in the committee and plenary.

### *National parliaments: a novelty introduced by the Lisbon Treaty*

With the adoption of the Lisbon Treaty, national parliaments have a greater role in the European legislative process than they used to. Their allocated time to scrutinise draft legislation has been extended and national parliaments are invited to

sit in EP committee meetings. However, their formal intervention in the process takes place before the drafting and amending of draft legislation in the EP, when the Commission initiates a proposal.

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