

Use of Social Media by EU Institutions and Bodies

47th DPO Day Online Edition

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Communication and Communication Channels

What is Communication?

Definition (informal)

Communication is when Alice tells Bob something.



What is Communication?

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Communication is when Alice tells Bob something.

Definition (formal)

Communication shall be defined as the act of passing *information* encoded in *messages* from *senders* through a *channel* to *recipients*.



Fun Fact:

Not every message contains information.

Placeholder/Known Text (relative!)

Lorem ipsum dolor sit amet, consectetur adipiscing elit, sed do eiusmod tempor.

Garbage/Random Text

*gZTYz+4rrlohurma1/9XoX7ckEkngIBF5Rn/6yiFClvvh8ffXvBplj-
JOcKF1Voue89cR9YVSjZ*

More on Wikipedia: [Entropy \(Information Theory\)](#)



What is a Communication Channel?

The *channel* is the medium that allows to convey the *message*.

Examples

- over the air 🗣️ (speaking)
- over wire 📡 (LAN)
- radio waves 📶 (WLAN, Bluetooth, Radio, Satellite TV, 5G, smoke signs)



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Examples

- over the air 🗣️ (speaking)
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- applications (Whatsapp, Signal, Twitter, Webex)



What are Channel Characteristics?

Some channels are better than other channels.

Properties

- with and without back channel (*simplex/duplex*)
- audience size (*range*)
- quality
- cost per message
- messages per time and delivery speed
- centralised or distributed (*topology*)
- **audience selection (*targetting*)**



The Evolution of Communication Channels (Essence)

1. everything is small, costly and very distributed
(horse post 🐎, gossiping 🗨️)
2. everything is large, cheap, centralised, but without back channel (TV 📺, radio)
3. everything is large, cheap, centralised, **targetted, with back channel** and in HD! (**social media**)



Quiz

**How much GiB data do you
download when watching 1h
Netflix in HD?**

Quiz

How much GiB data do you download when watching 1h Netflix in HD?



3 GiB

How much GiB data do you need to send every human being the message 'Hello!'?

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3 GiB

How much GiB data do you need to send every human being the message 'Hello!'?



5.3 GiB

1. Sending information is really cheap.
2. Everyone wants to send information.
3. Though, people do not want to read from everyone.

People rely on information **curation/prioritisation and some form of governance.**



Curation as a form to guide personal attention

- order messages (prioritise)
- filter messages (delete)

Impact on

- filter bubbles
- fake news
- opinion manipulations

The curator has the power!



	Mail	Mailinglist	Facebook Page
authorisation	none (filter lists)	moderator	FB user
authorisation granularity	N/A	per list	per page (topic)
prioritisation	ordered by time	ordered by time	FB algorithm (AI)



	Mail	Mailinglist	Facebook Page
authorisation	none (filter lists)	moderator	FB user ¹
authorisation granularity	N/A	per list	per page (topic)
prioritisation	ordered by time	ordered by time	FB algorithm (AI) ²

¹FB Page owners can buy advertisements to bypass authorisation.

²FB Page owners can buy advertisements to be prioritised.



Global Social Media Landscape

Many People use Social Media

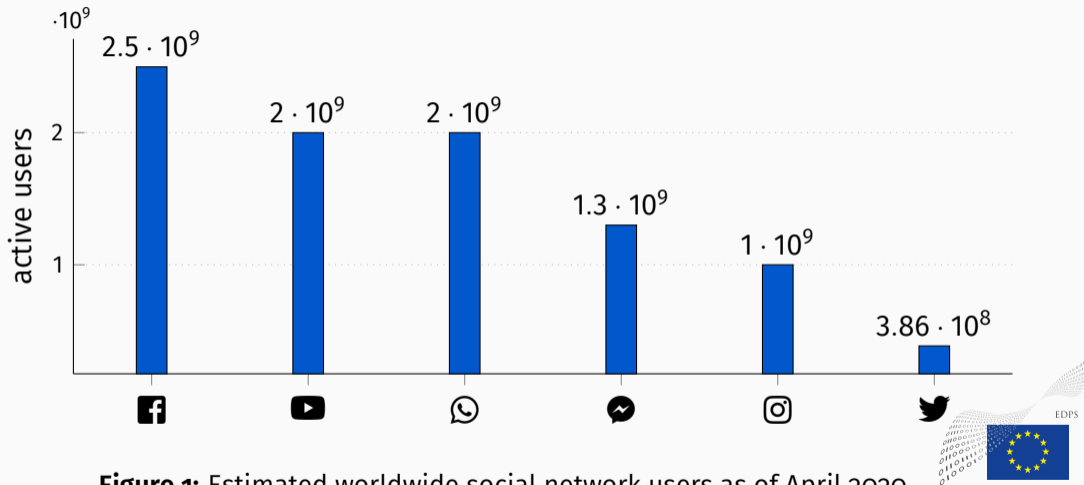


Figure 1: Estimated worldwide social network users as of April 2020.

Social Media Channels of EU Institutions and Bodies

Where does our Data come from?

Methodology

1. Get the list of all EUI websites.
2. Scan each homepage with the WEC.
3. Extract links to common social media platforms from WEC results.
4. Filter links for unique profiles (pages).

Results: 962 social media profiles found.



Figure 2: Website Evidence Collector (WEC)



Example Elements from extracted List

```
{
  "parent": "europarl.europa.eu",
  "job": 1188,
  "page": "http://www.europarl.europa.eu/visiting/en/homepage.html",
  "hostname": "instagram.com",
  "path": "/visit_ep",
  "link": "https://www.instagram.com/visit_ep/"
}, {
  "parent": "cor.europa.eu",
  "job": 118,
  "page": "http://epp.cor.europa.eu",
  "hostname": "twitter.com",
  "path": "/epp_cor",
  "link": "https://twitter.com/epp_cor"
}
```



Top 7 Social Media Platforms across EUI

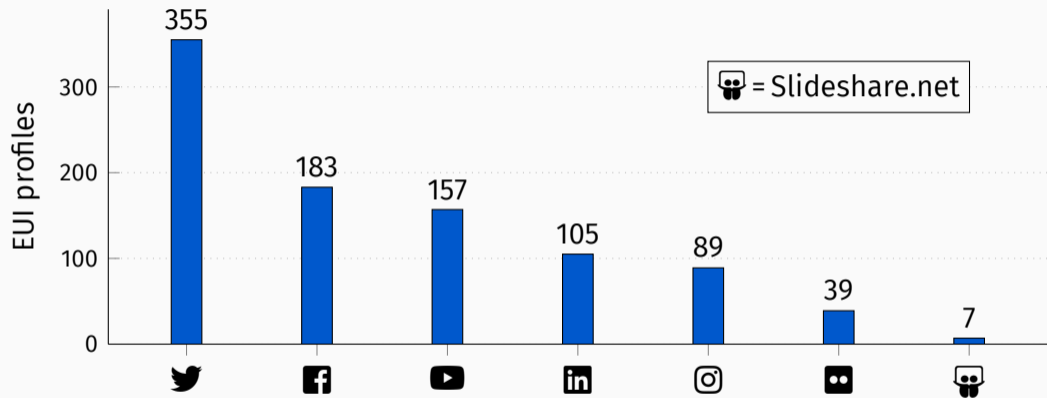


Figure 3: Top 7 social networks by EUI profile numbers.



Social Media Platforms per EUI

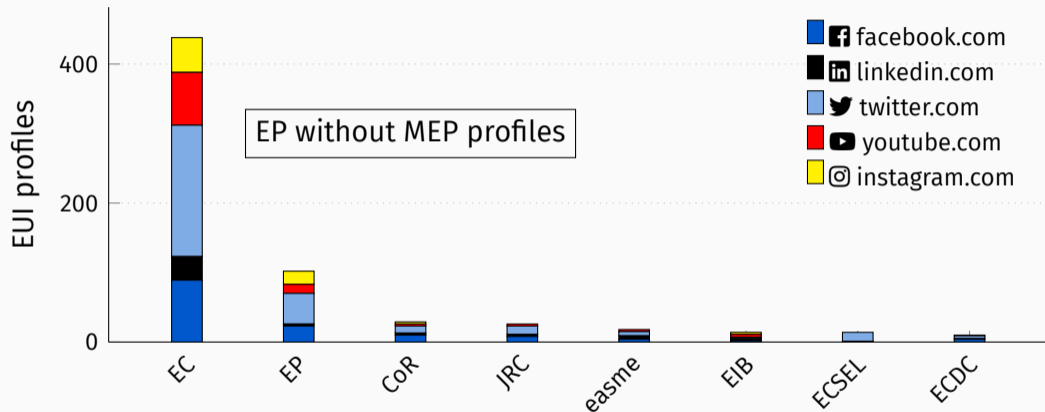


Figure 4: Top 8 EUI by their total social network profiles.



Instagram Followers per EUI profile

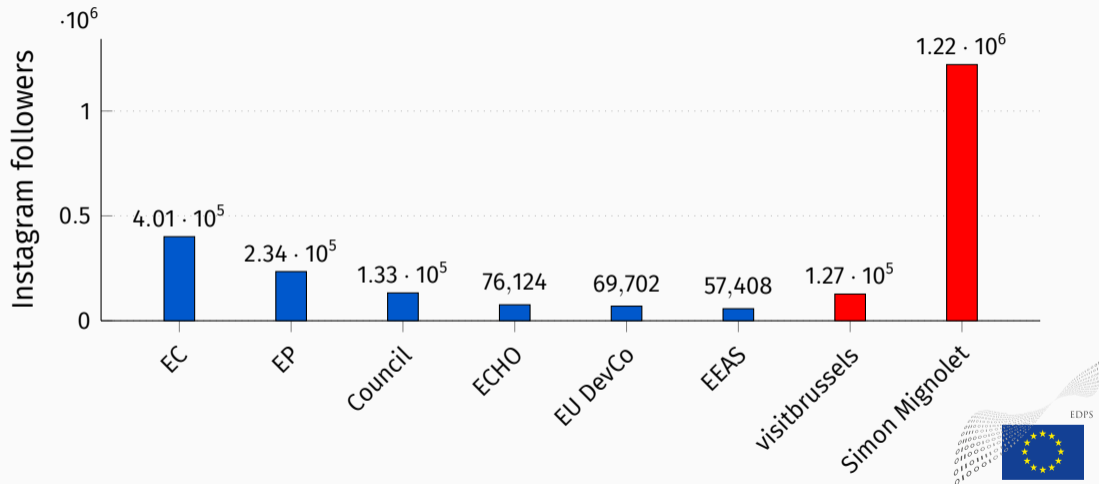


Figure 5: Top 6 EUI Instagram profiles by their followers (without MEPs).

Twitter Followers per EUI profile

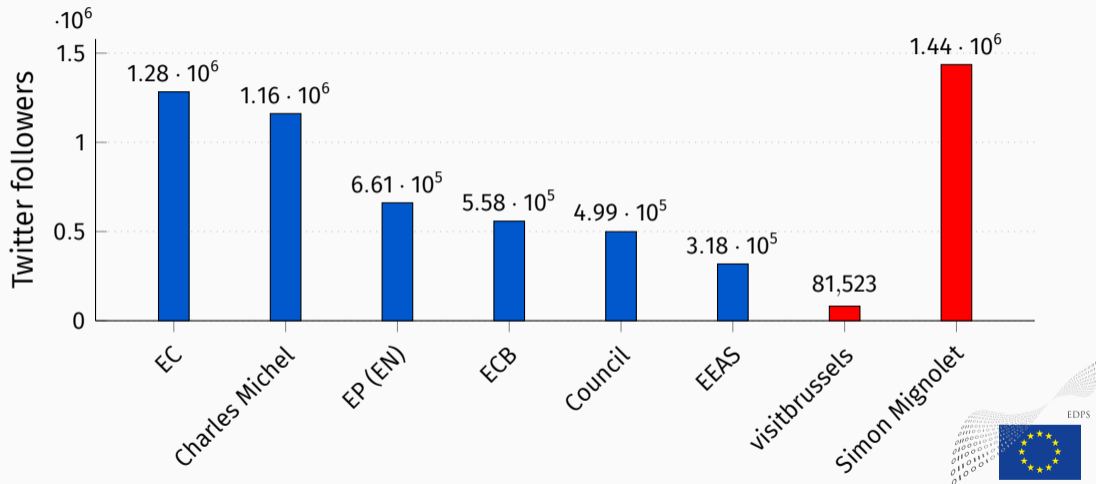


Figure 6: Top 6 EUI Twitter profiles by their followers (without MEPs).

Facebook Likes per EUI profile

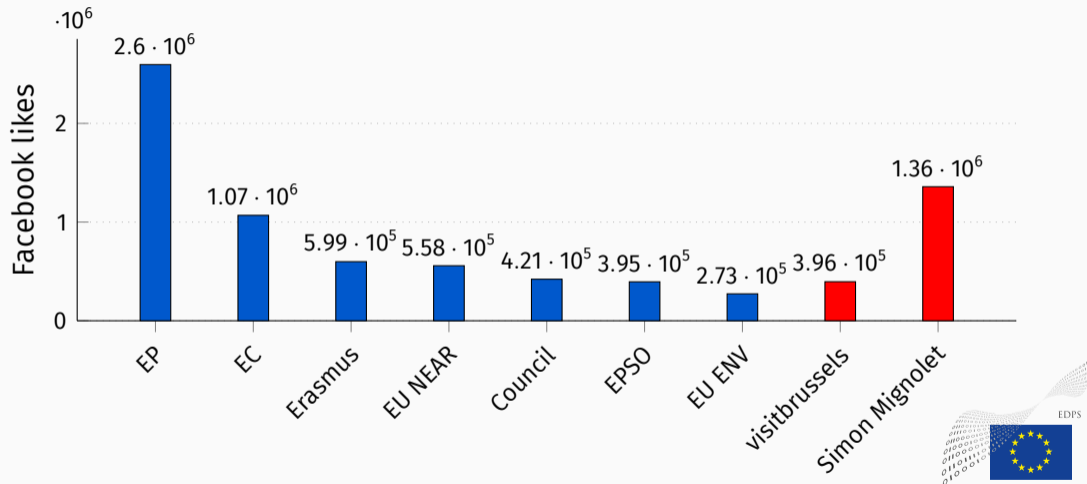


Figure 7: Top k EUI Facebook profiles by their likes (without MEPs).

The Journey of a Message to Social Media Followers

1. Profile owner submits message to social media.
2. Social media places message in feed of some most active followers.
3. Some followers scroll down in feed long enough to read the message.
4. If a message leads to engagement, the social media algorithm may deem it interesting and display it later to more people (organic grow).
5. Owner can pay to enlarge audience (advertisements).

In no case, all followers get eventually the message!



To keep in mind

- The EUI are present on most social media platforms.
- The EUI have **hundreds** of social media **profiles**.
- The EUI have together **few million followers**.³

³Though, much less may receive any EUI messages.

Data Processing on Social Media Platforms

1. behavioural tracking and profiling for various purposes including personalisation, advertisements, (covered) research, machine learning
2. large-scale processing of many sensitive data
3. data sharing practices with various third-parties
4. targetting by third-parties using e.g. *custom audiences*
5. linking and aggregation of profiles after company mergers
6. processing of information outside of the EU



Lookback

- foreign electoral intervention (US election)
- Cambridge Analytica (Brexit)
- Attention Economy
- Influencer Marketing

Complex processing activities of global companies pose often challenges to transparency and efficient enforcement/exercise of data subject rights.



Risks arising from Communicating on Social Media Platforms

What could potentially go wrong for EUIs?

- EUI might be a co-controller and responsible for data processing on social media.
- Social media might block or delete profile unilaterally.
- EUI might pay for advertisements without chance to verify delivery (*fake views*).
- EUI might communicate mostly with bots.
- Normalisation of official messages on Social Media.



What could potentially go wrong for Followers?

- Profile enrichment when following EUI profiles.
- Third-parties target followers based on their EUI interests (e.g. third countries send ads to all who follow ECHO).
- Followers confuse official and fake profiles.
- Followers are nudged to social media for a better service (usability, design, response time)
- Followers send sensitive data (political affiliation) to EUI profiles on social networks.



- trainings (EUI staff) on  LinkedIn Learning
- click-through adventures for kids like  The Portal Diaries
- prize competitions like  #beActive or  #IamEurope
- influencer marketing 



Mitigation Ideas

- transparency, access to privacy policy and DPO contact
- avoid nudging people to use EUI social media channels
- offer data protection-friendly alternatives that include
 - same content at the same time 🕒
 - same level of interactivity (sharing, rating, commenting 💬)
 - same level of usability (across devices 📱 🖥️)
 - same chance to win prizes! 🎲

EP Initiative: 🐦 mirror epnewshub.eu



Free Software can help to offer data protection-friendly alternatives:

Examples

- Video Portal [PeerTube](#)
- Short Message Blogs  [Mastodon](#)

Early Adopters

- MEP Patrick Breyer on  [echo_pbreyer](#)
- Government of Baden-Württemberg on  [RegierungBW](#)
-  Mastodon test server of [French administration](#)



- [1] *New Guideline on the use of social networks by public authorities issued by the State Commissioner for Data Protection and Freedom of Information of Baden-Württemberg*. 6th Feb. 2020. URL: https://www.baden-wuerttemberg.datenschutz.de/wp-content/uploads/2019/12/Richtlinie_Nutzung_soziale_Netzwerke_%C3%B6ffentl_Stellen_EN.pdf.
- [2] *Terms of Service: Didn't Read*. 7th May 2020. URL: <https://tosdr.org>.



Questions and Answers

