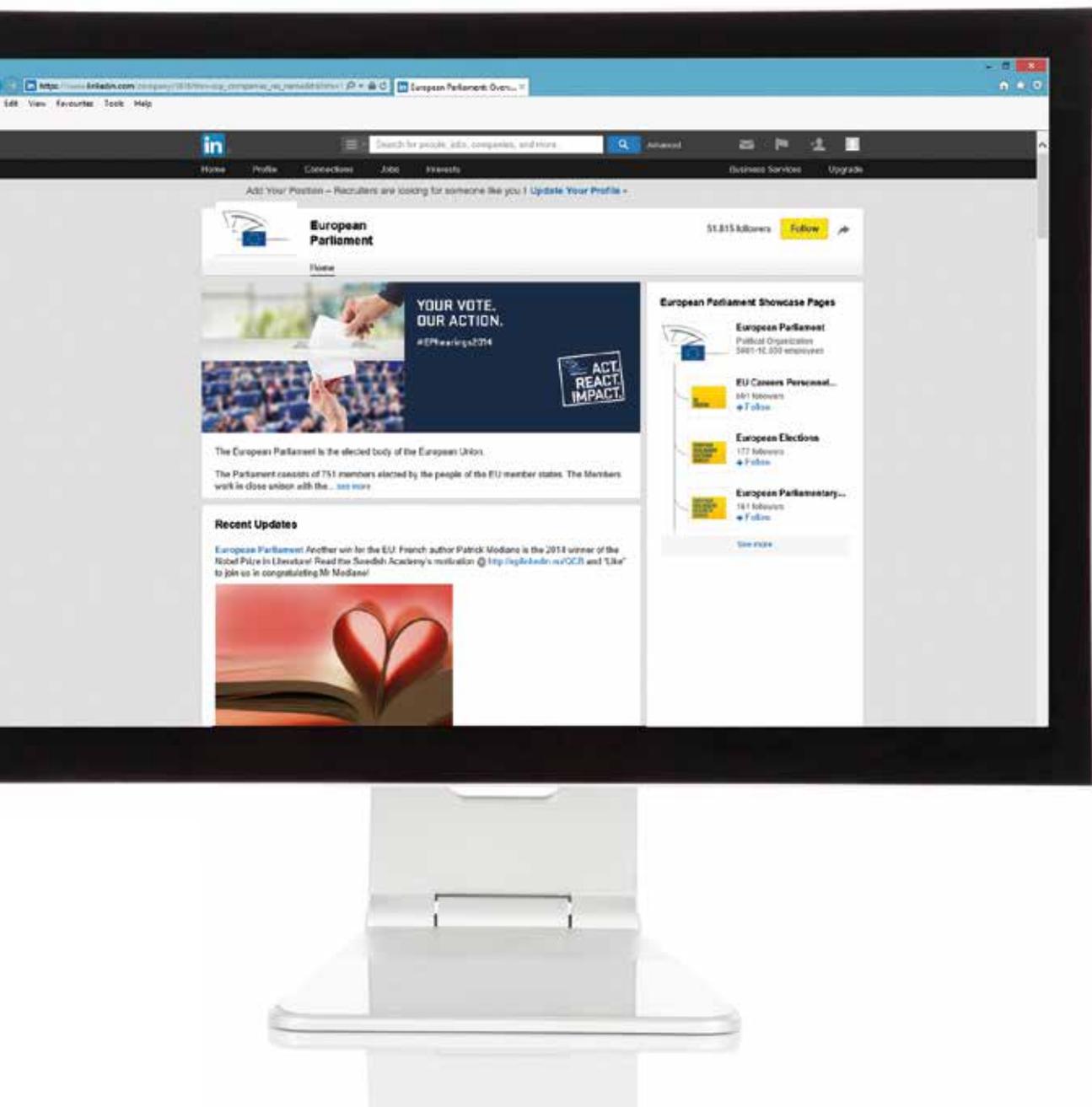# From social media to social activation in the EU

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"The digital economy is growing at seven times the rate of the rest of the economy"; this statement comes from the EU's Digital Agenda for Europe (DAE). The DAE aims to "reboot Europe's economy and help Europe's citizens and businesses to get the most out of digital technologies. It is the first of seven flagship initiatives under Europe 2020, the EU's strategy to deliver smart sustainable and inclusive growth"[1].

But how about European institutions and their use of social media tools? Do they see social media as traditional media they can use to broadcast key messages? Are they weaving social media tools and interactions into their everyday, global operations? In the context of increasing euroscepticism, can social media contribute towards bringing Europe closer to all citizens? Indeed, given that *"the power of social activation is unleashed when others advocate an organization's message in their own words to their network"*[2], can European institutions leverage social media tools in a way that inspires EU citizens to advocate European institutions' messages in their own words to their peer networks? The latter is particularly important in light of citizens' increasing disillusionment with 'traditional' marketing messages.

To succeed in the years ahead, European institutions will most likely need the right balance of global reach and a local footprint. They will require heightened awareness of problems when they arise and the flexibility to quickly reconfigure their operations in response. Leading European institutions will innovate by collaborating among and with others. An increasing number of senior staff members now recognise that 'social business'— the concept of using social media processes and methods inside traditional business models—offers a promise of progress across all of these dimensions. The European institutions are part of this evolution towards social business, a social media strategy that puts people at the heart of its operations—developing digital communities around important themes, drawing on the knowledge and skills of experts and engaging citizenry on the things that matter.

1 http://ec.europa.eu/digital-agenda/digital-agenda-europe
2 Deloitte University Press (2014). Tech trends 2014: Inspiring disruption: http://d2mtr37y39tpbu.cloudfront.net/wp-content/up-loads/2014/02/Tech-Trends-2014_FINAL-ELECTRONIC_single.2.24.pdf

Beyond this, social media represents a significant data opportunity for European institutions. Mining social data in combination with big data will help institutions understand citizens' priorities and interests, allowing the institutions to become more responsive. But there is more to it than that. Mining internal social data (that is, deriving social data from social media communication among European institution employees, including across different European Union agencies) can offer European institutions deeper insight into their organisational processes, strengths and weaknesses. Which areas are institution employees collaborating on? What type of 'real world' change does this virtual collaboration spur? What silos remain and how are they reducing the institutions' effectiveness? Which of the institutions' employees are engaging with citizens online, how are they doing it and how much of it is effective? By making *"formerly invisible patterns of interaction visible"[3]*, social analytics generate insight that can be harnessed to boost operational performance, identify areas for reform and open up possibilities for innovation both in the way that institutions interact with citizens, as well as in the ways they interact and work among themselves.

Deloitte analysts have noted how in the business world, the *"convergence of social software platforms and big data analytics is creating new avenues to explore the factors driving business performance."* The same is true for European institutions seeking insight into the drivers behind their operational performance and effectiveness.

## What is behind this trend?

The foundational change driving the European institutions' social media strategy is the explosive growth in social media over the past decade, and most recently, on mobile devices. In just one year, between 2012 and 2013, the total global social media audience increased by an estimated 18%, from 1.47 billion to 1.73 billion—meaning that nearly a quarter of the world's population is now online using social media networks[4]. Facebook and YouTube are the largest social media platforms, while China's QZone is in third place[5]. An important consequence of this proliferation is the connection of people globally. North America and western Europe are the regions with the highest social media penetration on a percentage basis. This offers a huge opportunity for European institutions to become closer to their citizens.

## What are European institutions and member states doing right now?

Increasingly, governments are interested in harnessing new social media to increase involvement and participation in policy development and evaluation. Social media is evolving from old notions of 'broadcasting information' to 'contributing and interacting'. The use of web-based and mobile social media to turn communication into interactive dialogue

"There is no separate 'digital economy' today; rather we have an economy that is digital." Neelie Kroes, vice-president and commissioner for the digital agenda at the European Commission

3 Deloitte University Press. From invisible to visible... to measurable: Social analytics extends enterprise performance improvement: http://dupress.com/articles/from-invisible-to-visible/
4 Deloitte University Press. From invisible to visible... to measurable: Social analytics extends enterprise performance improvement: http://dupress.com/articles/from-invisible-to-visible/
5 Cooper Smith, 'The planet's 24 largest social media sites, and where their next wave of growth will come from,' Business Insider, November 29, 2013, http://www.businessinsider.com/a-global-social-media-census-2013-10, accessed January 22, 2014. Back to article
6 Eurobarometer Qualitative Studies (2012). 'Journalists and Social Media.' Aggregated report, pp.5. Available at: http://ec.europa.eu/public_opinion/archives/quali/journsm_en.pdf
7 Eurostat (2011). "Social media in statistical agencies." Working paper, pp. 4. Available at: http://epp.eurostat.ec.europa.eu/portal/page/portal/pgp_ess/0_DOCS/estat/Social_Media_Guidelines_Sep_2011_SpComm.pdf

can take many different forms including internet forums, weblogs, social blogs, wikis, podcasts, photographs or pictures, video, rating and social bookmarking. The most commonly used social media include Twitter, Facebook, Myspace, Flickr and YouTube.[6]

One of the best examples of public sector leverage in this area (though perhaps not one that we might immediately associate with the dynamic world of social media) has been in the area of statistics. According to Eurostat, use of social media by national statistical institutes has been developing quickly in recent years

and will almost certainly continue to evolve in the years to come. The Office for National Statistics (UK) is introducing YouTube videos discussing key statistical publications and explaining them to users vocally and visually to enhance understanding, while the United Nations used various platforms such as Twitter, Facebook and YouTube to raise the profile of World Statistics Day.[7]

The trend is by no means limited to statistical authorities, as the table below shows. Each of these European institutions has active Facebook accounts and all registered positive growth in just one month in 2011.

| Representative | Description | 'Likes' July 2011 | 'Likes' August 2011 | Change (absolute) | Change (%) |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Council of the European Union | 27 EU governments making decisions together | 2,765 | 2,888 | +123 | +4.45% |
| European Commission | The European Commission is the civil service of the European Union | 13,215 | 13,268 | +53 | +0.4% |
| European Parliament | The European Parliament is the only directly-elected EU body | 166,578 | 166,634 | +56 | +0.03% |
| President of the European Parliament | | 42,852 | 42,913 | +61 | +0.14% |
| European Economic and Social Committee | The European Economic and Social Committee (EESC) is a consultative body of the European Union (EU) established in 1958. It is a consultative assembly composed of employers (employers' organisations), employees (trade unions) and representatives of various other interests. Its seat, which it shares with the Committee of the Regions, is the Jacques Delors building on 99 Rue Belliard in Brussels. | 145 | 147 | +2 | +1.38% |
| European External Action Service | The European External Action Service (EEAS) is the EU's independent foreign policy department | 3,210 | 3,298 | +88 | +2.74% |
| Hungarian Presidency of the Council 2011 | Between 1 January and 30 June 2011, Hungary holds the presidency of the Council of the European Union for the first time | 2,342 | 2,561 | +219 | +9.35% |
| EU careers | Career opportunities in EU institutions | 51,289 | 52,874 | +1,585 | +3,09% |

Another social media tool that offers opportunities for stimulating social media is EUTube. EUTube offers itself as an EU channel on YouTube that shares *"the sights and sounds of Europe"* in English, German and French. It currently has over 26,000 subscribers, with a massive 23,000,000 views so far.

Coming back to statistics, the European Union has even found a way to make the key policy statistics accessible, useful and even fun for everyday users. On the Digital Agenda website, citizens can review the complete list of statistics related to the EU's Digital Agenda and create new charts on demand.

*Source: EuTube, http://www.youtube.com/channel/UCMPaviJxybo1RTdzvYcU91A*
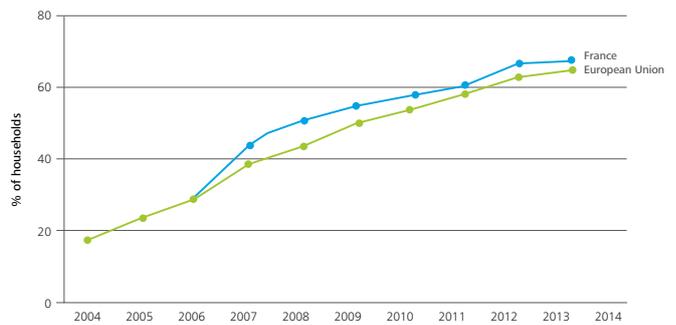
## To make progress, organisations will need to institute a strategy, a governance structure and an education process for aligning their social media efforts

**Households having a broadband connection, by all households**

European Union
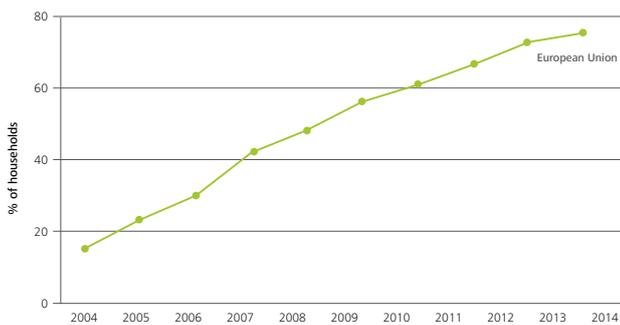


*Source: Reuters, Bloomberg*

European Union and France



*Source: Reuters, Bloomberg*

## A process of maturation

Despite the explosion of social networking taking place all around them, it takes time for European institutions to adapt as the traditional structure and hierarchy does not always foster or accelerate innovative trends. Meanwhile, however, ordinary people have embraced the full range of activity available through social media networks. They have used them to engage in rich interaction, to share content from others they like, to deepen relationships, to express themselves, and to take collective action. Despite having excellent global coverage, the European institutions still have room to exploit social media in a major way. Cumulatively, the European institutions have some of the world's largest human networks and the deepest histories of interaction through traditional communication channels such as in-person, telephone, email, and web, yet at the same time (just like other large organisations) are still outpaced by their own employees and citizens in terms of tapping social media networks for value.

In a recent global study, Deloitte and MIT researchers concluded that organisations progress through three stages in their use of social media tools:

- **Early stage:** organisations have established a social media presence, such as a Facebook page, a Twitter account, and/or participation in other platforms, and use it to share marketing messages or basic product information and respond to customer concerns and complaints. Over 50% of the organisations surveyed fell into this category

- **Developing stage:** organisations monitor the social media networks in which they participate, listen to their audience's conversations and compile data to identify patterns. They measure returns on their social investments and identify new ways to address business problems and improve processes with social media tools and approaches. About 30%of the organisations surveyed were at this stage

- **Maturing stage:** organisations build social capabilities into many aspects of their operations. They not only track what is being said, but actively engage with ongoing conversations about their products, partners, industries and issues. Their approach ensures that the marketing group is not the only part of the organisation engaging with outsiders via social media. Of the organisations surveyed, 17% fell into this category

In a nutshell, most organisations experience a social evolution from 'listening' to 'conversing' to 'collaborating', getting better at managing each of these activities along the way.

## Increasing levels of collaboration

The jump in enthusiasm, and more expansive thinking about the power of social media networks, is likely the result of managers and leaders gaining more experience from participating in them.

A growing number of EU citizens are active on social media networks. The European Commission therefore uses social media platforms to reach out and connect with citizens and stakeholders in addition to the communication taking place through more traditional channels, such as written press, broadcasters and EU publications and websites.

Most organisations began their social journey by using the new toolkit in limited, linear ways. By now, many have graduated to connections that are more rich and creative. In most European institutions today, there are innovative leaders whose experimentation with social media is paying off, and with every smart, social move they make, their following grows. The European Commission, for example, is present on several social media platforms. As stated on the DG Communication website, *"you can keep track of the latest policy developments and what the European Commission and its Spokespersons, the President, Commissioners and Representations are doing"[8]*.

8 http://ec.europa.eu/dgs/communication/services/journalist/social-media_en.htm

The European Commission distinguishes social media use for the following purposes: communication on political priorities, stakeholder and campaign communication (with the purposes of this type of communication varying from informing citizens, sharing experiences, promoting policies or campaigns and engaging with stakeholders) and use of social media in staff members' own capacity.

Today's European institutions have hundreds of different forms of social media presence comprising multiple blogs, platforms and sites. This large digital footprint presents challenges in terms of striking a balance between image consistency and practical value. Institutions may not be getting the right information to the right audience or may lack the resources or infrastructure to monitor the social interaction effectively.

### Implications

European institutions will encounter common barriers as they venture further into social business. These challenges will include developing a more specific strategy, security concerns and training employees and management in the possibilities and risks of social media. Understanding how to accurately measure the effectiveness of social campaigns and to determine the true return on their social media investments will also be necessary.

To make progress, organisations will need to institute a strategy, a governance structure and an education process for aligning their social media efforts.

There are already some key opportunities which could be pursued. The European institutions could envisage capturing the information gained from social media conversations between citizens and civil servants—from personal interests to experiences with other institutions' offerings to usual habits and expectations—and link it to the enterprise data contained in Customer Relationship Management (CRM) systems. When the dots are connected, a dedicated force can gain the insight it needs to anticipate citizens' needs, enhance service and support and even automate the delivery of tailored content.

In HR, social media can be very practical as a network of connections to talent markets as opposed to citizens. Social media tools are now used heavily by recruiters in the private sectors and also play an increasingly important role in employee engagement and retention. How about its application by European institutions and Member States to assist in finding the best candidates for projects, positions and expert roles?

### Measures of success

What should European institutions be doing in order to effectively harness the opportunities of social media? The European Union at least appears to be doing quite well in terms of its global communication, but what about the different institutions and their specific needs? The best return on effort that can be envisaged is when social media progresses beyond interactive communication and evolves into satisfying more functional needs of the organisation, i.e. social media becomes part of the organisations' day-to-day productivity. Taking the three stages mentioned above (early, developing and maturing stages), we can see how an institution can evolve from reactive, proactive through to professional in their social media strategy.

*Source: Youtube video on the Digital Agenda, http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=R24Tk69hr6Q*

| Early stage | Developing stage | Maturing stage |
|---|---|---|
| | Objectives | |
| • To establish a presence<br>• To attract an 'audience' of followers and members<br>• To commit to developing interesting content and messages | • To maintain interaction<br>• To measure usage<br>• To start addressing organisational challenges | • To embed social media directly in business processes<br>• To solve rather than support organisational challenges via collaboration such as crowd sourcing |
| | KPI areas | |
| • Presence on platforms<br>• Number of followers<br>• Growth of followers<br>• Interaction (likes, posts and re-posts)<br>• Engagement (discussions)<br>• Time investment | • ROI tracking based on time spent vs interaction gained<br>• Number of basic business needs supported by social media (e.g. recruitment, tendering, event management, FAQs, etc.) | • Business challenges solved by social media<br>• Process formally utilising social media (customer service, issue resolution, etc.)<br>• Research and data received from social media (CVs, data, expert opinions) |

## Conclusion

There are ever mounting expectations in our society for engagement, transparency and accessibility. Leadership hierarchies featuring rigid roles and relationships with stakeholders will be re-examined with a focus on the need for greater flexibility and communication. Although all organisations will need to define appropriate governance structures for managing their social activities, the European institutions will find this challenge to be even greater, since they experience the most significant challenges in terms of scale, culture, language and business processes due to their work across countries and regions.

We anticipate that the European institutions will continue to find ways to work more effectively as social businesses. They will likely become more collaborative and open in their innovation, more empathetic and responsive in their citizen service, more adept in crisis response, more transparent in social responsibility and more directly engaged with member state citizens, even on controversial matters. For example, the President of the European Commission recently posted that he had spoken to Vladimir Putin on diplomatic issues.

Social business encourages transparency and distributed innovation, where anyone is empowered to create value. By breaking down functional, organisational and global barriers, it will upend the nature of work. Interactions no longer involve bilateral conversations with co-civil servants or citizens, but rather entities with an ongoing dialogue with the world. In the years ahead, social business will likely lead to remarkable shifts in how we define European institutions, their productivity and even their future place in the world.