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# **Engaging with European Politics through Twitter and Facebook: Participation beyond the National?**

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Our chapter illustrates how citizens can enact varying styles and degrees of political engagement through social media. It also investigates if citizens engage with political content in ways unhindered by national boundaries. We distinguish between three primary types of content styles (factual, partisan, and moral) and four degrees of engagement (making, commenting, diffusing, and listening). Moreover, we argue that differences in Twitter and Facebook's digital architectures encourage certain styles and degrees of engagement over others, and that the two social platforms sustain different levels of transnational activity. Supporting our argument with European cases, we suggest that Twitter is more suitable to fulfill social media's transnational promise than Facebook, which is better adept at stimulating political participation.

## ***The Participatory and Transnational Promises of Social Media***

In Europe as in many other parts of the world, social networking sites (SNSs) have amplified the intensity and broadened the scope of information and communication exchange among citizens. Although the proportion of political content on social media is marginal compared to entertainment, personal lifestyle or local news, in today's mediatised political landscape the contours separating political news from other genres have become increasingly opaque. Especially before elections or in times of social unrest, information about politics is interwoven into the online news feeds of many who are not necessarily interested in politics *per se*. These same individuals may encounter – and subsequently engage with – politics through internet channels that did not exist just ten years ago. Now online-specific forms of engagement, such as 'posting' on Facebook or 'tweeting' on Twitter, are no longer exclusive to the younger generation; social media use has spread to all age groups.

Social media therefore affect how citizens engage with politics. Social media increase citizens' access to political information, either through direct subscription to political and media sources or through exposure to political content published by peers. In addition, SNSs reduce the costs of citizens' interaction with politicians, institutions, journalists and other citizens. These two affordances of social media carry a **participatory promise**: to facilitate citizens' engagement with politics by increasing their access to political information and expanding their repertoires of political activity. At the same time, the increasingly individualised ways in which citizens take part in politics online are firmly embedded in social interactive environments. Within these digital public spheres, geographical borders lose significance, and political content is shared and considered relevant by a community of users that is not necessarily identical to the national community of citizens. Social media may thus also hold a **transnational promise**: to contribute to instantaneous, cross-border flows of political communication. In short, the participatory promise of social media refers to the stimulation of engagement with politics, whereas the transnational promise refers to the potential of this engagement to transcend geographical delimitations.

The participatory and transnational promises of social media are important to consider in theorising the future of European politics. Assessing the fulfilment of social media's participatory promise, by exploring how and to what extent citizens engage with politics online, grants insight into whether SNSs are supporting a politically informed and engaged European demos at a time characterised by apathy and distrust towards national and EU institutions (Eurobarometer 83 2015). Social media and its transnational promise, on the other hand, remains understudied and could indicate the incipient existence of digital European public spheres, where citizens meet to share information and contribute to the politicisation of European issues (e.g. the refugee crisis, economic austerity, or EU-level Internet privacy laws). Both promises holster the potential to alter longstanding power relations among citizens, politicians and the media. The participatory promise may increase

citizens' political awareness and, due to the ease and speed of SNS communication, facilitate grassroots organisation initiatives as a means to exert pressure on political and media elites. The transnational promise, meanwhile, could influence these elites' reactions to issues previously defined as domestic by increasing the voice of 'activists without borders' mobilised in pan-European causes and by reducing the influence of national media filtering on political news.

Inasmuch as social media provides new opportunities for citizens to get informed about and involved with politics, each SNS has its constraints for how users can acquire information and manifest their political interest on the site. The focus of the present chapter is to explore first how citizens can engage with politics, not at the aggregated level of collective action and protest (see Mercea in this volume) but at the individual level of routine interaction with political content online. Social media usage varies, we shall argue, along different content types indicative of three distinct *styles* of engagement. It makes a difference whether users are primarily oriented towards the exchange of factual knowledge, whether they enter opinionated debates or whether they search for a common moral ground. Furthermore, social media usage shows different *degrees* of political engagement in such factual, partisan or moral debates, ranging from the active production to passive reception of political content. In the second section, we aim to demonstrate how the different technological designs of SNSs – what we refer to as 'digital architectures' – influence the styles and degrees of citizens' engagement with politics on social media and affect the aforementioned participatory and transnational promises of social media. Lastly, we provide empirical examples from European cases to illustrate our argument that the digital architectures of SNSs have a demonstrable impact on the styles and degrees of citizens' engagement with politics.

### ***Styles and Degrees of Engagement on Social Media***

In the context of online networking environments, scholars debate whether social media merely reproduce existing forms of television spectatorship, turning the social media user into the spectating ‘couch potato’ already criticised by TV studies (Livingstone 2003), or if social media encourage meaningful types of engagement with political news. On the least engaged side, that of the user-spectator, SNS users are primarily passive receivers of information. At the most engaged end, the social media user approaches the ideal of a fully sovereign citizen who participates in the forum of public opinion and is constitutive to the legitimation and control of government (Dahlgren 2013). Through social media, users can practice or enact citizenship, which is why in the following we use the terms ‘user engagement’ and ‘citizen engagement’ interchangeably.

Between the user-spectator and the fully sovereign user-citizen, there are various degrees of meaningful engagement with political content. On social media, citizens often get involved in politics in more subtle ways than political participation as traditionally understood (e.g. canvassing, voting, or protesting). SNSs encourage ‘latent’ forms of participation (Ekman and Amnå 2012), such as reading about political information, discussing political issues, or joining groups sharing a politically-related interest. Latent forms of participation, while not necessarily time or resource-intensive, still have a demonstrable effect on citizens' political opinions and behaviour (Boulianne 2009). Therefore, we use the term ‘citizen engagement’ to refer to both the action-oriented forms of political content creation as well as to the more latent and indirect forms of participation.

The growing interest among political actors and institutions to exploit this potential of citizens’ engagement for the purpose of political education and mobilisation is accompanied by a legitimate concern that engagement with political content via social media still does not emancipate and empower the user as a fully sovereign citizen. These deficits of citizen empowerment may be attributed either to group psychology or to legal and institutional structures. Group psychology explains individual behaviour online through mechanisms of social control and perceived social risk

(Sunstein 2009; Keen 2012). The structural, political economy explanation for users' online activity lies with the SNSs' technological design, which is built to further financial gains (Fuchs 2014). Both of these schools of thought are sceptical of the democratising opportunities offered by SNSs since, firstly, the political language of social media is often found to be self-directed, emotional, and subjective to morality and taste. Secondly, critics argue that social media debates often remain detached from formal, decision-making contexts and therefore bear minimal impact on political outcomes.

While we acknowledge the deficits of citizen engagement on social media, in this chapter we also see the potential of SNSs to open new avenues for individuals to exercise their civic duties. To advance the debate on online political engagement through social media, we distinguish between three primary styles through which users can engage with political content: factual, partisan and moral. Succinctly put, users can engage with political content online by contributing with information (the factual style), positioning themselves in debates by voicing an opinion (the partisan style) or taking a moral stance or insisting on a normative standpoint (the moral style).

These ideal types of political content correspond to three roles that can be assumed by the user-citizen on social media platforms: the witness, the advocate and the judge. The user-witness engages with knowledge and factual information, for instance by disclosing facts about political events (the investigative user or the participatory journalist). The factual style is reflected in the neutral and scientifically informed language and the categorisation of content according to criteria of scientific truth (correct-incorrect). The user-advocate takes sides in the interpretation of these events, defends particular interests, advances an ideological position or relies on notions of group belonging. The partisan style is reflected in the use of opinionated language with strong ideological or identitarian components that are used to confront others in a game of power, interests and identities (proponent and opponent, friend and foe, us and them). The user-judge is not only morally engaged

in a cause but also attributes responsibility, appeals to the solidarity of some or blames the wrongdoing of others. The moral style is reflected in the use of normatively-laden language and a form of discourse that strives towards convincing others about the fairness of a particular cause or the necessity to find common ground by reconciling partisan interests for the sake of a higher, universal set of principles (the morally upright and the morally degraded, the good and the bad, the innocent and the culprit). It goes without saying that these roles are not mutually exclusive but can be taken simultaneously by the same (group of) persons who have a voice in the media.

While the factual, partisan, and moral styles refer to the roles adopted by citizens online (i.e. the witness, the advocate, and the judge respectively), the activities they perform in enacting these roles can be categorised along four degrees of political engagement: making, commenting, diffusing and listening. (1) **Making** is the act of creating new political content, whether it contains facts about politics, the expression of a partisan position regarding a political issue, or an offering of moral support to victims of a tragedy. Twitter and Facebook can be used, for instance, to tweet or post original content that is meant to reveal alternative facts (e.g. ‘There were no incidents of violence at today’s manifestation for the victims of terrorism’), to express an ideological standpoint (e.g. ‘I believe that the welfare state is needed to reach equality between men and women on the labour market’), or to mobilise solidarities in the name of moral principles (e.g. ‘Help the Syrian refugees. They are people too’). (2) **Commenting** refers to the act of responding directly to pre-existing factual, partisan or moral content. Comments are conceived here as speech acts that contribute to the collective interpretation and engagement with already existing political content. As such, comments are a key component in driving political discussions online. (3) **Diffusing** is the act of liking or sharing content that provides factual information, is generated for the purpose of political campaigns or is meant to involve other users in acts of political mobilisation and solidarity. Citizens here disseminate pre-existing political content in the form of text, multimedia or hyperlinks to show personal

commitment or as a means for creating awareness. As with commenting, diffusing is often used to support campaigns, and the number of 'likes' and 'shares' is, in fact, often used as an effective measurement of gauging community support for campaigns on social media. (4) **Listening** (a term popularised by Crawford 2009) is the most passive form of engagement and refers to users who read or watch political content without leaving any visible traces on social media. Passive reception is an important precondition for processes of public opinion formation and any future political activity.

Degrees of political engagement				
Styles of political engagement	Making	Commenting	Diffusing	Listening
Factual: the witness	Create own political content – witness political events	Comment, or quote, another user's factual post	Like or share another user's factual post	Read or be exposed to factual post
Partisan: the advocate	Express a partisan position, including mobilising attempts in the name of a shared ideology.	Comment, or quote another user's partisan post	Like or share another user's partisan post	Read or be exposed to partisan post
Moral: the judge	Make a normative statement about politics, calling for action justified on moral grounds	Comment, or quote another user's normative statement.	Like or share another user's normative statement	Read or be exposed to normative statement



The above typology helps categorise the ways in which individuals engage in politics on SNSs and can therefore be used as an instrument when assessing the participatory promise of social media. The typology illuminates how the empirically observable styles and traceable activities of citizens on social media reflect their self-assigned roles in the political process. The user-witness, writing in the factual style, may act as a citizen journalist and invest time and resources to create awareness for the public good. The user-advocate is necessary to encourage public deliberation, where citizens take sides on political issues and justify their positions in ways that are likely to reflect or challenge existing political cleavages. Citizen adoption of the moral style indicates forms of engagement that transcend national social or political interests, potentially pointing to a community of citizens that does not correspond to pre-existing national configurations.

Our typology is meant to encompass the online styles of *meaningful* engagement with politics, that is, content that signals the enactment of citizenship in a way that relates to what Dahlgren (2013; 2016) understands as ‘civic’. Forms of engagement are considered civic as long as rules of conduct are respected, some orientation towards the common good is upheld (for instance, increasing knowledge about a situation or raising awareness for a cause) and communication is not oppressed or disrupted through forceful acts (like hate speech or censorship). User-generated political content may also fall into a number of other stylistic genres: humour, irony, propaganda, strong negativism or expressions of cynicism. While these genres certainly add to political discussions, we do not take them into account here since they do not directly contribute to the deliberative democratic forms of public opinion formation that undergird the participatory promise. We also leave aside the ‘uncivil’ behaviour of users who boycott the rules of social media conduct, e.g. the so-called trolls, who systematically try to disrupt debates by posting off-topic or inflammatory comments. The question of how social media can cope with such ‘uncivil’ forms of users’ activism is left open.

Instead, our interest lies in how civic forms of engagement with politics realise the democratisation potential of SNSs. Part of the participatory promise is the empowerment of citizens to challenge existing political and media power structures, and therefore we consider that democracy and its pendant, political engagement, should not be restricted to mainstream hegemonic discourses. The making of factual content, for instance, could refer to citizens assuming the role of whistleblowers and spreading alternative facts aimed at subverting predominant political and media narratives. The partisan style, on the other hand, may amplify the voice of marginalised groups whose opinions are not heard due to a lack of political representation or media attention. Through the moral style, users can appeal to national elites to respond or take action on an issue that traditionally falls outside the realm of domestic concern and, potentially, influence how politicians and journalists choose to communicate with citizens in the future. At the same time, democratisation through such styles of online engagement does not imply that only pluralist, tolerant views are expressed online. For instance, in Europe social media have served as meeting grounds for extremist organisations, such as the anti-Islamist PEGIDA, which originated in Germany but now has branches in many other EU Member States.

So far, we have focused on how citizens can engage with politics online in terms of what types of content they can produce as well as what types of activities they can perform in light of social media's participatory promise. While the participatory promise is concerned with how citizens acquire information about and subsequently engage with politics, the transnational promise focuses on the reach and effects of political engagement online. In Europe, social media has been used to mobilise domestic anti-austerity protests in Greece and Spain through the creation of Facebook groups, promotion of events and the spreading of information indexed via specific hashtags on Twitter. However, similar concerns are shared not just on a national but also a European level (e.g. anti-austerity protests, solidarity with refugees or resistance to Europeanisation/globalisation). A

focus on how online political engagement goes beyond the national is therefore timely and important; social media have become an integral part of political communication not just within, but also across, European democracies.

Transnationalisation and Europeanisation are related concepts because both of them imply flows of information and communication that go beyond national affiliations (Zürn 2000: 187; Sifft et al. 2007: 130; Trenz 2015: 1-30). If transnationalisation is global in scope, Europeanisation has a more restricted, regional focus in terms of the topics discussed and the publics involved. Social media may be facilitating both processes by allowing citizens to easily engage with content beyond the national. In order to accurately access the transnational promise (and therefore the Europeanisation potential) of social media, a closer inspection into the digital architectures of individual SNSs is required. A major claim of this chapter is that the technological designs of social media platforms influence the styles and degrees of citizen engagement to an extent that is often overlooked by the existing scholarship. In order to accurately assess the impact of social media on European politics, we first need to understand how the particular aspects of an SNS digital makeup support - or obstruct - the participatory and transnational promises of social media. In the next section, we consider how the digital architectures of two predominant SNSs, Facebook and Twitter, affect the styles and degrees of political engagement enacted by citizens.

### ***Digital Architectures: The Technological Differences between Facebook and Twitter***

The technological design of an SNS significantly impacts the information and communication flows that take place within it. SNS providers ultimately set the parameters of content creation and distribution, as they generally encourage users to engage with the site to maintain a steady flow of traffic and interaction with the content on the platform.

We chose to focus on Twitter and Facebook specifically because they are the most widely used social networking sites with global coverage and thus have the highest likelihood to connect users beyond national borders. Moreover, Facebook and Twitter are the most political social media, with other SNSs like Instagram or YouTube having a more apparent entertainment profile. Like other SNSs, Facebook and Twitter are both faced with the challenge to develop online navigation, communication and interaction tools that are universally applicable, i.e. are functional to the demands and needs of very different groups of users across the globe. At the same time, Facebook and Twitter are competitors on the market and need to develop different profiles and products. Not surprisingly, they therefore display significant differences in their digital architectures: the technical back-end operations that both facilitate and constrain user behavior on the site through governing its user interface and functionality.

We identify four major differences in the digital architectures of Facebook and Twitter: 1) the nature of the connections between users; 2) the reach of posts; 3) the level of algorithm filtering; and 4) user demography. The table below summarises how the two SNSs vary along these four elements.

	<b>Facebook</b>	<b>Twitter</b>
<b>Network Topography</b>	Reciprocal	Unidirectional
<b>Algorithmic Filtering</b>	Heavy (EdgeRank)	Light
<b>Reach of Posts</b>	Restricted (Friends of Friends)	Broad (Indexing through hashtags)
<b>User-Demography</b>	More Representative	News interested, politically motivated

The first difference regards the network topography supported by the two sites. On Facebook, connections are established between two users only after both parties agree to initiate a relationship as Friends; therefore, a user’s Facebook network is comprised of reciprocal ties. Typically,

Facebook's dyadic Friend structure leads to an online network that, to a more or less degree, mirrors one's personal relationship's offline (Ellison et al. 2007). On Twitter, however, connections between accounts do not need to be reciprocated: one can 'follow' an account without that account necessarily following the other in turn. Twitter's network topography can thus be either unilateral or reciprocal, the latter occurring when two users mutually follow one another. As a consequence, Twitter networks are composed of users who, more often than not, have no real-life connection (Huberman et al. 2009).

Secondly, the algorithms governing the selection and sequence of information displayed on Facebook and Twitter's feeds, i.e. their primary broadcasting features, are programmed differently. Twitter's algorithms mostly follow a chronological order: messages are shown on a user's feed in the order they have been generated or commented on. Facebook has a much more advanced feature, guided by the EdgeRank algorithm, where posts are filtered and listed on the News Feed based on a set of complex measures aimed at predicting the relevance to an individual user (Berg 2014). Facebook users are exposed to content that is automatically tailored to their interests, enticing them to engage with posts.

A third difference is that the reach of a post, the distance a post 'travels', is generally much shorter on Facebook than on Twitter. Facebook's restrictive Friend network and high level of default privacy settings lead to content being distributed primarily in local circles of Friends or one iteration further, to Friends of Friends. A notable exception is the Facebook 'Pages' feature, i.e. public accounts belonging to organisations, politicians, public figures, or NGOs. Pages resemble the dynamics of Twitter by supporting a unidirectional follower structure and disseminating content to a large audience of followers. Any Facebook user can subscribe to a Page, whose public posts typically generate more intense commenting and wider diffusion than those of a personal Facebook account. Tweets from personal accounts on Twitter, by contrast, are public by default. Moreover, tweets can be pushed outside one's follower network and into larger, thematic conversations through the use of

Twitter’s hashtag feature. Due to privacy settings, the unidirectional follower structure and the hashtag feature, Twitter messages in general have the potential to reach a wider audience than Facebook posts.

Lastly, the user demography of the two social media is different. Facebook has a massive audience worldwide: as of March 2016, Facebook had 1.65 billion monthly active users compared to Twitter’s 310 million (Facebook Newsroom 2016; Twitter 2016). Because of its size, the Facebook public tends to reflect offline demographics more accurately. Thus, we would argue that Facebook’s demography is more diverse and representative of the general public while, in contrast, the average Twitter user is more interested in politics than the Facebook user (Perrin 2015). Twitter is dominated by English-speaking countries, with the United States representing about 65 percent of the Twittersphere, followed in the second place by Great Britain with 7 percent. The closest EU country, Germany, makes up only 1.5 percent of Twitter users (Sysomos 2014). Regarding European politics, this seems to suggest that Twitter suffers from an Anglo-Saxon bias, where issues and opinions from the UK are likely to be overrepresented in the Twittersphere vis-a-vis those from other EU countries.

These four differences have direct consequences for which styles of content and degrees of engagement citizens enact when using the two SNSs, as illustrated in the table below.

	<b>Facebook</b>	<b>Twitter</b>
<b>Content style</b>	Moral	Factual (‘Breaking’) and Partisan
<b>Degree of Engagement</b>	Commenting	Listening

Both Facebook and Twitter encourage users to make fresh content, but they do so in different ways. Facebook asks users the subjective question ‘What’s on your mind?’ when a user logs onto the site, whereas Twitter asks the more objective: ‘What’s happening?’ The two slightly different questions

point to the niches that each platform tries to maintain in an increasingly competitive social media marketplace. While Twitter reigns as a platform for sharing breaking news (Osborne and Dredze 2014), ‘Facebook functionality predisposes it to be more a discussion and opinion forum than an objective news reporting vehicle’ (Pentina and Tarafdar 2014: 220).

The strong social ties supported by the Facebook Friend structure discourage users to post their political opinions *sui generis*; however, already existing content, presumably filtered by EdgeRank, is designed to be relevant, enticing and ‘socially-safe’ for the user. We can therefore expect that Facebook users’ engagement with content on the site will be primarily in the form of *commenting* on pre-existing posts. Twitter users, we suggest, are less likely to comment on political content than Facebook users, because their networks are held together by weak social ties and the content presented to them via Twitter’s algorithms is largely based on chronology – not probabilistic relevance. Instead, Twitter satisfies its users’ ‘need for cognition’ (Hughes et al. 2012: 567), suggesting that they can be considered primarily *listeners* seeking out the latest information. While Twitter is seemingly less participatory than Facebook, the hashtag feature and Twitter’s loose network topography (and the associated lower social risk) make Twitter more conducive to transnationalisation.

Relating to the typology presented above, we expect that *factual* content will be the predominant style that is produced and diffused on Twitter, as Twitter users tend to be motivated by the reciprocity of information exchange (Syn and Oh 2015). Since Twitter is more impersonal in terms of network topology and its demography is on average more politically interested, the content generated there will also be *partisan*, and the engagement among users will reach across the ideological cleavages that reflect the dominant national configurations (Barberá et al. 2015). The social risk of publicly engaging an adversary on Twitter is lower than on Facebook, where one’s posts could appear later on a Friend’s feed via EdgeRank.

Due to the strong social ties that characterise Facebook's network topography, users may feel less inclined to enact the partisan style to avoid social stigmatisation or exclusion by their peers (Ellison et al. 2007). Facebook posts will tend to motivate users more to engage in *moral* questions of justice as opposed to publish witness accounts or to become polemical over political decisions or events. Moral questions are often more universal in scope and less divisive than partisan political issues, and therefore moral content appeals well to a less politically motivated demographic such as the one on Facebook.

### ***European Politics on Facebook and Twitter: Factual, Partisan and Moral Content Illustrated***

Taking into account the degrees of citizen engagement as well as their transnationalisation potential on Facebook and Twitter, we now illustrate how the factual, ideological, and moral styles have been exhibited in concrete European cases. *Factual* content related to European politics is difficult to attribute to citizens on social media since they rarely have access to new information before journalists or institutional representatives make it public. Citizens can, however, use both Facebook and Twitter to create and share alternative facts about politics, although groups with high resources offline bear the most influence on the political discussion online. For example, leading up to the 2014 elections the European Parliament (EP) invested heavily in a nine-month information campaign on Twitter to educate citizens about the powers and current issues facing the EU's democratic organ. The EP has enacted similar outreach programs on Facebook, albeit to a lesser extent, where citizens can engage directly with MEPs to acquire factual information about the Parliament's functions (see also Tarta in this volume). On Twitter, media outlets and individual journalists contribute news and analysis about European politics regularly. Factual content is primarily generated by traditional media elites and by established institutions, while it is diffused, commented on, and listened to primarily by user-citizens.



*Partisan content* typically manifests in the context of electoral campaigning. Social media have become important campaigning tools for European political parties and their candidates (Jackson and Lilleker 2011). At the same time, citizens across the EU can contribute new content encouraging others to support their preferred parties, diffuse intermediary election results or comment on the outcome of the elections, either deploring or applauding the results. Sometimes national consultations on European issues, such as the UK membership in the European Union, can give rise to pan-European debates. Discussions on the so-called ‘Brexit’ referendum have included the voices not just of British citizens but also of concerned Europeans from other Member States. Moreover, partisan debates on Twitter can signify polarisation along new ideological cleavages that are reflected in ‘hashtag wars’. For example, the hashtags #voteleave and #strongerin reflected opposing sides of the Brexit debate and lead to heated discussions that bolster the participatory promise of social media by encouraging deliberative debates about politics online.

Facebook is less prone to become a platform for partisan ideological showcasing or contestation, due to the nature of the Friend network. Because Facebook relationships are more personal and reflective of offline social ties, users are less likely to provoke, and more likely to agree, with others in their network as a means of mitigating social risk. Politicians, parties, and NGOs, all have established public pages and in some cases, thematic pages connected to specific positions on political and politicised topics. User engagement with partisan content takes place on these specialised community pages, where content is generated, interpreted through comments, and diffused through liking and sharing. Such ideologically motivated pages are, for example, those connected to the anti-austerity movement across Europe: SpanishRevolution or TaketheSquare in Spain (Micó and Casero-Ripollés 2014) and the Aganaktismenoi in Greece (Lu et al. 2012; Michailidou present volume). Even though these are national pages, connections and crisscrossing references bind them together in a pan-European wave of protests (Della Porta and Mattoni 2014).

Non-electoral partisan campaigns with a European scope have also taken place on the two social networking sites. A good example is the effort to stop the Anti-Counterfeiting Trade Agreement (ACTA) from being approved by the European Parliament in 2012. Activists mobilised on social media as well as on blogs and websites and acted in a coordinated fashion across Europe to block the agreement. The ‘Stop ACTA’ campaign stands for a successful partisan citizen mobilisation campaign (Mercea present volume) as ultimately the EP rejected the text of the agreement.

*Moral content* is likely to be present on both Facebook and Twitter. As Twitter is an effective medium for fast reactions to world events, it has been used to show solidarity with various moral causes in the immediate aftermath of natural or man-driven catastrophes as well as to launch and drive moral campaigns with specific political goals. In the category of moral reactions, Twitter citizen-users have been sharing support via hashtags. One example of pan-European moral reactions is #JeSuisCharlie, expressing solidarity with the victims of the January 2015 terrorist attack against the French cartoon weekly *Charlie Hebdo*. Even though the event took place in Paris, the reactions came from across the globe (demonstrating that drawing borders on social media is not possible). The same event gave rise to an expression of solidarity on Facebook, where users spontaneously changed their profile picture to a black square including the words ‘Je Suis Charlie’.<sup>1</sup>

Another moral campaign, Refugees Welcome, took place on both Twitter and Facebook in response to the increase in migration flows to Europe from the Syrian war; however, the campaigns took different forms that correspond to the digital architectures of the two SNSs. On Twitter, the hashtag #RefugeesWelcome was used across the globe to express moral support with victims from the conflict as well as to call local, national, and supranational governmental institutions to take action. The #RefugeesWelcome example highlights the importance of language for the transnationalisation process. English was used as a global indexing label together with hashtags in national languages to target local audiences. This differs from #JeSuisCharlie, where the French

hashtag was maintained, most likely because #JeSuisCharlie refers to a national incident, whereas the refugee crisis is a transnational issue of public concern.

On Facebook, the Refugees Welcome campaign took a much more localised scope through the grassroots creation of local public pages without a main organising hub. For example, the student union at University College London created their own Refugees Welcome page, another Refugees Welcome page was created in Iceland to exert pressure on the government, and yet another page helped place refugees in homes across Germany. The abundance of localised Facebook pages, in contrast to Twitter's transnational hashtag #RefugeesWelcome, can be attributed to the difference between Facebook's enclosed networks versus Twitter's ability to transcend follower networks via hashtags. Facebook campaigning seems to be more fragmented than Twitter, with national borders and language maintaining a significant influence. On Facebook, there can be coordination and information exchange about an issue, but the structure of campaigns is anchored in local, regional or national environs, supporting our argument that Facebook is highly participatory but not very transnational.

One possibility in need of further exploration is whether forms of social media engagement beyond the national have a systemic bias towards forms of moral campaigning. In engaging with international or foreign news, users have only limited possibilities to produce self-reported factual information (they are rarely eye-witnesses) or to position themselves along partisan lines. Traditional partisan cleavages like 'left' and 'right' and national party affiliations do not often apply in moral campaigns, and the exchange of ideological arguments often requires more sophisticated and durable interactions than those supported by social media technologies. This might explain the popularity and success of moral campaigns, which many online users are inclined to join. Moral engagement can be shown by defending the 'we group' against others or by expressing strong emotions of support or pity with victims, solidarity with like-minded or indignation with perpetrators. In witnessing distant

sufferings (be it earthquakes, famine or wars in other parts of the world), users engage, for instance, in a ‘politics of pity’ on how ‘we the lucky’ publically show our benevolence against the ‘unlucky’ in remote places (Boltanski 1999). Such forms of ‘global moral spectatorship’ are typically non-offensive and socially low-risk to social media users. Thus, moral campaigning occurring simultaneously on both Facebook and Twitter have good chances to transcend personal networks and, by becoming viral, are easily listened to and diffused across national borders.

In all these examples there is strong evidence for routinization. Europeanisation of political engagement on SNSs is not exceptional but takes place regularly. The patterns we find are this process can be: event-driven (such as the European refugee crisis), opportunity-driven (such as the European Parliamentary elections) and supported by institutional environments (such as the institutional framework of EU cooperation). Apart from this clear focus on Europe and the EU, SNS users’ forms of political engagement also regularly reach out beyond the geographical scope of Europe and embrace transnational and global concerns (such as migration).

The cross-border capacity of SNSs has the added complication that online one cannot ascertain who participates in public debates with complete confidence. Thus, it is difficult to isolate transnational (global) from European (regional) discussions. Even though the topics of a given conversation may be European in nature (for example, economic austerity or the future of Schengen), the participants joining that conversation can hail from anywhere with internet access. As long as they have an opinion, Turks, Russians, Americans, or Malaysians are able to make, comment, diffuse or listen in on European political discussions. Europeans can, in turn, participate in the debates about American or Brazilian politics. This implies that we cannot isolate Europeanised from transnational social media engagement. However, for analytical purposes, we took Europeanised political content on social media to refer to issues and events that pertain to EU politics as well as those that are being examined in several European national public spheres.

## ***Conclusion***

In this chapter, we explored the potential of social media to engage citizens politically beyond the national. We developed a categorisation of social media usage that distinguishes between three styles of engaging with political content: the witness who provides information and contributes to disclosing facts, the advocate who expresses partisan opinions based on particular interests, ideologies or identities and the judge who seeks for moral justification on common grounds. Users can engage with each of these content styles in more or less active ways: from making (writing one's own posts) to commenting (responding to pre-existing content), diffusing (liking and sharing posts and messages) and listening (passive reading). This typology of user engagement is generalizable enough to be applicable to various social media platforms in different cultural, national and institutional environments. Moreover, our typology is sufficiently broad to encompass the various site-specific, technological features offered by different social media providers and is therefore conducive to cross-platform comparative studies of online political engagement.

As a corollary to the facilitation of online participation and in line with the overall topic of this volume, we also investigated the transnational promise of social media. We used European examples to illustrate how transnational flows of political communication depend to a large degree on the availability of institutional opportunities and incentives (e.g. the European Parliament in the context of EP elections); however, such cross-border communication can also spontaneously intensify around viral content (like images or videos) merging into popular campaigns in support of a transnational cause, such as support for helping refugees. Our categorisation allows us to establish how some types of content are more conducive to transnationalisation than others. In general, factual information in the form of political news spreads easily across the globe but does not engage users in meaningful interactions across spaces. In turn, content presented in a partisan or moral style increases user engagement through commenting and diffusion. Partisan debates, however, are often context-

bound and linked to the polarisation of actors within a particular arena of politics. Normative debates about shared concerns (e.g. global justice), on the other hand, typically overcome traditional partisan distinctions and can more easily bridge otherwise disparate national contexts. Moral campaigns, in particular, have a potential to spread transnationally because they are easily communicable, help to overcome frictions through solidarity and allow users' identification with a common cause beyond the national.

A key tenant of our argument is that online political engagement is intimately intertwined with the digital architecture of an SNS. Our categorisation allows us to explore possible links between the degree of participation or transnationalisation of users' engagement and the specific social media platform used for interaction and networking. Twitter is *the* forum for 'breaking news' and instant access to world events with many contributions from the user-witness. Facebook began challenging Twitter's dominance by profiling itself as a news platform but primarily relies on traditional journalistic input from national news providers. The primary form of engagement on Twitter is diffusing, with commenting typically low since Twitter's algorithms do not award the user any direct benefits for interacting with content. Facebook, by contrast, reigns as discussion/opinion forum, with commenting as its main activity – particularly on the public Pages of mainstream political, media, and institutional actors. Facebook users are rewarded for actively posting and engaging on the site by Facebook's algorithms, which push relevant content on users' feeds and entice them to interact further. Although the precise workings of algorithms are undisclosed by SNS providers, scholarly work should strive to conceptualise how these protocols – and their future versions – are influencing the ways citizens engage online with political content.

Future research can, moreover, apply our typology to concrete cases of citizen participation online on issues of relevance to European politics. For example, one could examine how individuals promoted the Refugees Welcome campaigns across Facebook and Twitter or mobilised anti-Islamic

or anti-immigrant communities in connection with the spread of PEGIDA. When undertaking such endeavours, we encourage scholars to incorporate multi-platform comparisons of the same empirical case in order to expound the idiosyncrasies of each SNS and their implications for online political engagement. Lastly, as political and media elites seemingly harmonise their online communicative strategies through the borrowing of best practices, we suggest an analytical focus on the actions of individual citizens on social media as a fruitful avenue for enhancing our knowledge of online political engagement.

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<sup>1</sup> This is not the same as the campaign launched by Facebook to change one's profile picture in the French national colours after the terrorist attacks of November 2015. In comparison with #JeSuisCharlie, which was a grassroots campaign, the solidarity with the victims of the November terrorist attacks was a top-down idea.