Towards a Virtual Constituency?

Comparative Dimensions of MEPs' Offline-Online Constituency Orientations

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I. ABSTRACT

European Union institutions have been notoriously criticized for their lack of day-to-day linkage with European citizenry. The European Parliament as the only directly elected EU institution is logically one of the 'closest' linkage institutions to the European electorate. However, little is known about how its representatives - Members of the European Parliament (MEPs) - connect, service and cultivate relations with their 'home' constituencies and citizens between two elections points. This thesis attempts to fill in this missing link. Using original data from the author's self-administered 2009 MEP survey (N=145), this thesis empirically traces MEPs' constituency orientations at three levels. It first addresses the attitudinal dimensions of MEPs' constituency orientations - how they think about their constituencies, the importance they attach but also the types of activities they pursue as part of their constituency work. Secondly, as ICTs and the Internet permeate the contemporary reality, in addition to assessing MEPs' conventional constituency outreach offline, the thesis also evaluates how MEPs incorporate ICTs and the Internet in their constituency work. In other words, the second research question addresses how MEPs conduct their constituency outreach online. Could it be that the various interactive, transactional and asynchronous benefits offered by the online platform prompt MEPs to replace their conventional physical, offline, constituency offices with their websites, blogs and/or social networking sites and use them as quasi virtual constituency offices? Lastly, given that a fair degree of variation was expected in MEPs' constituency outreach and orientations both off and online, the third level examines the determinants of MEPs' constituency outreach. The thesis' findings demonstrate that in spite the low institutional and electoral incentives for MEPs to engage in constituency work and outreach, MEPs conduct a wide range of constituency outreach activities both offline and online. Moreover, citizens regularly contact MEPs and request them for diverse forms of assistance. A fair volume of trans-border or pan-European interactions between MEPs and citizens that do not necessarily come from the same electoral (national) constituency was also observed. In the aggregate, however, majority of MEPs still show to prioritize their legislative activities over constituency work. As to MEPs' constituency outreach online, the findings in this thesis suggest that while ICTs and the online platform provide various new outreach and communication capacities for MEPs, overall, they are not replacing but rather reinforcing MEPs' conventional offline constituency outreach. Hence based on the evidence found, it is premature to conclude that the 'virtual constituency office' is replacing MEPs' conventional constituency outreach and offices offline.

II. ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Those with longer life experience commonly profess that life can go by fast and should not be wasted. The PhD experience at EUI was like no other. It was an experience that has marked me forever and for which I am deeply grateful. It was one of those life experiences that is timeless and memories of which will certainly keep me good company when I am eighty plus, rocking away on the porch in my rocking chair and reflecting back on my life.

Three adjectives come to mind when I reflect upon the PhD experience. It was humbling, testing and wholesome. *Humbling* because the more I read, the more I thought, the more I learned, the concept of knowledge and my contribution to it became all the more effervescent. The weighty and layered wisdom of past scholarly giants, the rarity of and groundwork needed to get to those 'aha moments' when things started to make sense (at least for me) was often overwhelming and humbling at the same time. *Testing* because the whole experience took me longer than average and throughout the journey my intellectual boundaries and patience were significantly tested. *Wholesome*, because that's what it was – the privilege of studying in nearly thousand year old monastery, a path to self-development, engaging with engaging minds, the serene and postcard perfect views from the Badia as sunsets descended on Florence, the summer smell of olive orchards and the company of crickets when I walked home after midnight from the computer lab or library, the eternal friendships formed…

The 'w' in the wholesome also includes my eternal gratitude: first and foremost to my family and especially to its inspirational women - my mom and my grandmothers - who stay true to themselves, who lead by example and relentlessly support and inspire me with their strength, wisdom, love for life and integrity. This thesis for the most part is dedicated to them. A heartfelt thank you.

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III. ABBREVIATIONS

ALDE   Alliance of Liberal and Democrats for Europe

CEE   Central and Eastern Europe

CO   Constituency Orientation

CW   Casework

DV   Dependent variable

EP   European Parliament

EPPG   European Parliament party group

EPRG   European Parliamentary Research Group

EU   European Union

ICT   Information and Communication Technologies

IG   Interest groups

IV   Independent variable

MEP   Members of the European Parliament

MNP   Members of the National Parliament

MP   Member of Parliament

NGO   Non governmental organization

PC   Personal computer

UEN   Union for Europe of Nations

IV. TABLE OF CONTENTS

1.   INTRODUCTION

Public representatives hold an important role in parliamentary democracies. They constitute a *live* representational link between electorates and legislative bodies. In the EU context, the European Parliament (EP) is the only directly elected EU institution. After National People's Congress of China, the EP is the largest legislature in the world embedded in a distinct transnational polity of unparalleled 'historical precedent' (Schmitter 1996). Its 736 members (MEPs) *represent* over 490 million Europeans within fifty-five Euro-constituencies spread across European Union's twenty-seven member states. In this context, MEPs hold a unique role in being the direct, *live* linkages between citizens and complex web of EU institutions. In this capacity, in addition to fulfilling their co-legislative roles, MEPs should serve as communication channels between their home constituencies and Brussels, as points of contact for the redress of individual citizens' and group grievances in relation to the EU and as national entry points for citizens' access to European decision makers.

However, though since its establishment in 1952 the EP has significantly evolved as a legislative institution in its powers, electability and visibility and though we have increasingly become wiser about what happens inside EP's chambers and technical committees (Earnshaw & Judge 1995, 1996; Hausemer 2006; Hix 2000; Kohler-Koch & Rittberger 2007; Kreppel 2002), we know relatively little about the external linkages that the EP via its representatives (MEPs) cultivates with those it represents. More in-depth knowledge on how MEPs reach out to and connect with their constituencies on a day-to-day basis continues to be limited (Farrell & Scully 2007).

Gaining a better understanding about this micro-level of political representation is important in the context of the notorious debate about the democratic deficit of EU institutions (Marquand 1979; Majone 1998; Moravcsik 2002; Rittberger 2003; Follesdal & Hix 2005). On the one hand, based on the fact that EP is the only directly elected EU institution and the most trusted according to Eurobarometer surveys, the expectation would be that EP *connects* with EU citizens fairly well. On the other, scholars observe that the electoral connection between the EP via its MEPs and EU citizens continues to be rather weak (Reif & Schmitt 1980; Van der Eijk & Franklin 1996; Norris & Franklin 1997; Rohrschneider & Clark 2009; Farrell & Scully 2007, 2010). The skeptics contend that though EP's legislative powers have grown over time and its members have increasingly become 'descriptively' representative, voter turnout in European elections has been steadily declining (Eurostat 2011; Franklin 2004), MEPs' roles have been poorly defined (Farrell & Scully 2007) while general public knowledge about the EP and

processes of participation continue to lag behind (Katz & Wessels 1999: 6).

Some conjecture that these disconnects are partly attributable to the institutional constraints of EU's limited policy competences that matter to the common citizen, such as education, health and taxation. With EU elections being second order to national elections (Eijk & Franklin 1996) which subsequently lowers their political salience and public visibility, the geographic remoteness of Brussels or Strasbourg and electoral changes introduced in 2002 where all EU member states adopted a proportional representation system (PR) for EU elections have also been seen as inimical to EU citizens' ability to connect with the EP (Farrell & Scully 2007: 9). Consequently, it has been further posited that these electoral and institutional constraints provide MEPs with low incentives to proactively reach out, invest into and cultivate strong linkages with their national constituencies.

Another possible reason why we know relatively little about micro-level linkage mechanisms between the EP and citizens is how political representation has been so far defined in the EU context. Extant research has conceptualized political representation linkage in terms of (i) *historical and normative* considerations about what democratic legitimacy and to some extent accountability in EU context ought to be (Majone 1998; Moravcsik 2002; Schmitt & Thomassen 1999; Rittberger 2003), (ii) in terms of what has been referred to as 'general studies of the chamber' that look at the inner procedures and mechanics of MEPs' work *in EP committees* (Hix 2001, 2002, 2004; Neuhold 2001; Noury 2002; Mammoudh & Raunio 2003; Hausemer 2006; McElroy 2006), as well as in terms of (iii) the degree of *policy responsiveness or congruence* between MEPs' roll call behavior and public preferences (Schmitt & Thomassen 1999; Schmitt 2000; Carrubba 2001).

The role of agent-based intermediaries such as European Party Groups (Pedersen 1996; Hix & Lord 1997; Hix 2001, Bardi 2002), organized interest groups (Wessels 1999; Stimson 2004; Kohler-Koch & Rittberger 2007) and national parties (Norton 1996; Katz 1999; Raunio 2002; Poguntke 2007) has been another stream of research that has tried to identify different levels of linkages between the EU polity and citizens. However, in spite these various scholarly undertakings less attention has been given to the study of micro-level linkages between the EP and citizens.

Some relevant research in this context included studies on MEPs' individual role orientations (Katz 1999; Wessels 1999) while the pioneering *European Parliamentary Research Groups' (EPRG) MEP Surveys* (2000, 2006, 2009) have perhaps come the closest to examining MEP-

citizen linkage at the micro-level (Scully 2005; Farrell & Scully 2007, 2010).   Though the EPRG surveys have become an important milestone in individual level empirical data collection on MEPs' policy positioning, role orientations, and party affinities, they predominantly frame the constituency outreach and MEP-constituency linkage in terms of the role that electoral systems have on the MEP-citizen electoral connection[1]. Yet they tell us less about *how* MEPs develop, cultivate relations and maintain accountability vis-à-vis their constituencies on a more continuous basis *between* two election points when the election cameras are not shining and when MEPs go about their daily business of *representing*.

The bottom-up vector of representation - *how* citizens or constituents perceive the EU electoral connection from their own vantage point - has also been inadequately addressed in existing research.   While some studies and surveys have attempted to empirically measure this dimension (e.g. Eurobarometer surveys; Farrell & Scully 2007; Clark & Rohrschneider 2009) – the focus tends to remain on citizens' attitudes toward EU institutions such as the EU Commission, the European Court of Justice and the European Parliament but less so on their perceptions of MEPs (Farrell & Scully 2007).

As we invest a fair degree of *democratic* promise in the EP to be the institution that legitimately links citizens to the complex EU bureaucracy, it is ironic that we have thus far invested a disproportionate amount of effort to better understand what defines the MEP-citizen linkage at the micro, constituency level where MEPs are closest to the citizens and vice versa. Consequently, this missing link is an instrumental point of departure for this thesis.

Key Research Questions

This thesis thus looks at political representation in the EU by examining *how* MEPs form linkages with their constituencies. However, rather than taking MEPs' constituency outreach during elections as the focal point of citizen-MEP linkage – the emphasis is placed on the day-to-day dynamics of representation. In other words, this thesis deliberately chooses not to focus on the election period. It argues that elections, when political candidates are proactive and 'at their best' to connect with citizens, reveal only a snapshot of how representatives think about, relate, and cater to their constituencies or voters.

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[1]   For example, the 2000 EPRG battery of questions on political representation is limited to questions related to casework and 'time spent on political work in their home country" and fails to be included again in 2006 (NATCEN/ EPRG MEP Survey). This lack of inconsistency but also scope of questions poses challenges for empirical research on the topic of constituency linkage.

Instead, it examines the EP-citizen linkage by focusing on how MEPs cultivate their constituency linkage role between two election points: (i) how they think about their constituencies, ii) the importance they attach to their political work in Brussels and at *home*, in their constituencies, and iii) the kinds of activities they pursue and how they reach out to their constituencies (or not). After establishing what these intension properties of the constituency linkage are, the thesis is also interested in finding out whether some MEPs are more predisposed to be pro-constituency oriented than others, and if so, what determines this degree of variation in MEPs' constituency orientations?

In this thesis, political representation is therefore understood as a dynamic process (Pitkin 1967) comprising myriad communicative acts and responses between representatives and the represented between two election points that are conditioned by numerous institutional, systemic and human personal factors. Constituency linkage in the EU context is then defined as a series of daily micro-representational acts between MEPs and their constituencies that provide two-directional opportunities for citizens' access to information about what happens in Brussels, for mutual exchange of political cues, feedback loops thus accountability and sense of mutual proximity between MEPs and the EU electorate. How MEPs assume and execute these roles in practice is therefore important to understand in order to determine the intension properties and quality of political representation at the EU.

To expand our understanding about the MEP-citizen linkage in the EU context, the thesis pursues four levels or steps of analysis. Firstly, the thesis seeks to outline the key characteristics as well as the magnitude of *MEPs' constituency orientations*. Based on the theoretical premise that how representatives think about their constituencies eventually influences how they act or represent them (Fenno 1978), the first analytical step defines and explores *constituency orientations* in terms of the following two characteristics:

i) *How MEPs perceive their constituencies*. For example, do MEPs perceive their constituencies as territorial units (e.g. as countries, regions or the transnational EU as a whole) or as specific segments or groups in society? Moreover, given that MEPs function in a transnational context, what representational affinities do they have for European constituents beyond their national borders, if any?

ii) *How much importance do MEPs attach to constituency related activities?* Resource allocation – the amount of time and staff that MEPs allocate to their constituency office (versus their Brussels office) are used as two proxies to measure this dimension. They

tell us about the priority that MEPs attach to their constituency work where the more *time and staff* – that representatives allocate to constituency work, the more pro-constituency oriented they are expected to be. To the contrary, MEPs who spend more time on their parliamentary work in Brussels would be expected to be less pro-constituency oriented.

After determining how MEPs think about and the importance they attach to their constituencies, the second level of analysis, looks at what MEPs actually *do* and the types of activities they pursue with respect to their constituency work. For example: *What modes of communication and type of constituency outreach activities to they pursue? Do they receive casework, and if so, what kind of 'cases' do they take on?*

Literature on the subject provides no conclusions as to what is normatively the right recipe for representation and constituency linkage. The EP also places no or very low institutional expectations on MEPs' constituency obligations or their linkage with citizens. Thus given MEPs' various backgrounds, their constituency orientations are expected to vary. At the same time, the PR electoral system for EU elections is known to provide negative incentives for MEPs to be pro-constituency oriented, hence it is expected that *majority of MEPs will tend to (i) have low constituency orientations* (H1) and spend more time in Brussels working on parliamentary, policy, media or interest group activities than working in their home constituencies, and (ii) they will likely allocate more staff to their Brussels than to their constituency offices.

A particularly novel aspect in this second analytical step, is that MEPs' constituency outreach will not only be examined *offline* but they will also be examined in the contemporary context, *online*. As information communication technologies (ICTs) increasingly permeate our worlds, examining how MEPs adapt to these new realities by using online platforms and the Internet in their constituency outreach is important. While already little is known about how MEPs conduct their constituency outreach *offline,* even less is known about how they do so *online*. Therefore, after mapping out how MEPs conduct their constituency outreach conventionally – offline, the thesis questions, given the long-distance relationship that majority of MEPs have with their *home constituencies* and given the distance reducing utility of ICT and the Internet (e.g. 24/7 access to information, tailored applications, asynchronous, flexible one-to-one and one-to-many, expedient, cost-effective communication), whether MEPs move some or potentially all of their constituency outreach functions online?

Once MEPs' constituency orientations both *off* and *online* are mapped, they are then compared.

By comparing MEPs' constituency outreach *offline* and *online*, the thesis empirically explores the extent to which the online constituency outreach is complementing, reinforcing or perhaps replacing the conventional offline means of relating and cultivating relations with constituents. In other words, can it be assumed that MEPs simply emulate the same forms of constituency outreach online as they do conventionally offline? Or, are some MEPs using the online platform (e.g. websites or blogs) more pro-actively for reaching out to their constituencies than they do other forms of offline communication? If so, is there evidence to suggest that the online forms of constituency outreach is replacing conventional offline, face-to-face constituency work? In other words, *is it conceivable that Internet platform is being increasingly used as a quasi-virtual constituency office*? To study the constituency dimension using the comparative offline-online approach is relatively novel as it involves collecting data for both offline and online levels of MEPs' constituency orientations and outreach.

As MEPs come from different personal backgrounds and political cultures, their constituency orientations are likely to vary. The last analytical level then seeks to determine the extent to which *some MEPs are more predisposed to be pro-constituency oriented than others*, *and if so, what determines their predispositions*. OLS multiple regression analysis will be used to test four models of determinants to explain the observed variation in MEPs' constituency orientations. Based on theoretical grounding, while controlling for *demographic* variables – age, gender and education, the four explanatory models for MEPs' *offline* constituency orientations included: the *electoral systems* – Model 1 based on district magnitude and ballot structure; *MEPs' attitudinal or role orientations* – Model 2, *political* variables such as party affiliation, political responsibility, incumbency and former political career – Model 3; and *constituency characteristics* as the fourth explanatory model. For each model, expected hypotheses were established.

Apart from *demographic factors* such as age and gender as well as a country's *Internet penetration* have been known to play a role in determining individuals' ICT usage, little is known otherwise about how representatives use the Internet for constituency outreach. Therefore, for determining variation in MEPs' constituency outreach *online*, in addition to the demographic variables and Internet penetration, other exploratory variables such as *distance to Brussels* and MEPs' *personal attitudes* toward Internet usage will be tested.

The last analytical Step 4 pushes the argument further by comparing.

Because availability of data on this topic is limited, the thesis corroborates three different sources of primary data including: i) an original, self-administered, cross-sectional online 2009

MEP survey (n=159) conducted by the author that targets MEPs serving in the sixth European Parliament session (2005-2009), ii) website/ blog analytics of MEP survey respondent's personal websites ad blogs, and to capture the qualitative dimensions iii) 31 interviews with MEPs in the same cohort were conducted.

Thesis Outline

Overall, the thesis is structured in seven chapters. The first two chapters conceptually situate MEPs' theoretical approaches to *offline* and *online* constituency orientations in existing literature. While Chapter 2 focuses on existing concepts and theories linked to the offline constituency outreach, Chapter 3 examines the potential benefits and implications of Internet usage with respect to constituency outreach. Chapter 4 then introduces the thesis' research design – detailing the operationalization of indicators, methodology used and how data was collected.

The first empirical results on the observed patterns in (2006-2009) MEPs cohort's constituency orientations and *offline* constituency outreach are introduced in Chapter 5 followed by an outline of the MEPs' constituency outreach *online* in Chapter 6*.* Determinants of MEPs' constituency orientations and comparison between the two levels form the basis for Chapter 7 while the last Chapter 8 summarizes the findings and overall draws conclusions about the characteristics and patterns in MEPs' constituency outreach. Avenues for the future research on the constituency dimension both off and online will also be discussed in the last chapter.

By empirically examining the MEP → citizen linkage, this thesis aims to provide new insights about political representation at the day-to-day level which may seem mundane but in the aggregate, form important building blocks of political accountability, representation and legitimacy between the EP and citizens. Findings on all three dimensions are exploratory hence novel. There are no previous studies on MEPs' constituency orientations at this level of detail. Jointly they situate and test the EU representational linkage against the contemporary and evolving normative context of political representation. Politicians' responsiveness and accountability are more scrutinized than ever as voters' expectations and demands from the political establishment have risen. As citizens have become more educated, they have also become more critical and better able to voice their concerns (Norris, 1999; Coleman & Gotze 2001, Wattenberg 2002)[2]. In other words, where before representatives' 'fit-ness' for the job

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[2] Other manifestations of this trend include: decreasing partisan politics and declining party memberships, participatory fragmentation along single-issues, external pressures from social movements and general distrust and public alienation are

was evaluated at election time, the evaluation of politicians' merit to stay in the job between elections has increased (Mansbridge 2001: 517). While these conjectures target national representatives, it is interesting to see the extent to which these contextual factors also effect political representation and micro-level linkages at the EU level between MEPs and citizens.

As a result, this thesis has substantive implications for the study of political representation in the EU. It exposes the quality and daily building blocks of MEP-citizen linkage. Its observations also aim to tell us the extent to which MEPs attach importance to this part of their mandate, or not. This is particularly important given that so far few prescriptive measures exist about the extent to which MEPs should cultivate and prioritize their constituency relationships. As already noted, this reality is particularly ironic as EU scholars have been extensively discussing the polemics of EU's democratic legitimacy and deficit thereof. At the same time, it is a good question whether the EP should impose any guidance pertaining MEPs' constituency outreach expectations or if it should provide MEPs full freedom to interpret their mandate as they wish. By looking at the micro-level representational linkages this thesis hopes to contribute to this debate.

In spite its many contributions, this thesis also navigates within a series of limitations. Due to the lack of established, well grounded theories and pertinent data on the subject in the EU context, the research avenues explored in this thesis are for the most part exploratory – particularly for the online constituency outreach dimensions. The cross-sectional approach, using survey data from a single EP session also provides a snapshot rather than a robust time series analysis. Lastly, readers should be very conscious about the fact that the thesis merely places a magnifying glass on one side – the supply (MEP → citizen) side of the representational relationship. Ideally, to provide a full perspective on the inherently two-directional relationship that representation entails, a parallel citizen survey would need to be conducted to additionally establish how citizens perceive and enact their linkage(s) with the EP and MEP. However, due to logistical and time constraints, this level of enquiry was beyond the scope of this thesis but the author hopes that this stream of research will be picked up by future studies. Due to these limitations, this thesis refrains form theory building attempts in political representation. Instead it hopes to fill in a missing link in extant literature on the role of MEPs in the EP-citizen linkage, to contribute to new insights and thereby stimulate new research avenues on political representation in the EU. In a novel way, it also adopts a multi-disciplinary approach that intersects and combines the domains of political representation, political communication and more contemporary Internet studies in the EU context.

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socio-political realities in which the contemporary formal political systems navigate to retain their public value and existential legitimacy (Wattenberg 2002: 21-23).

2. THEORY OF REPRESENTATION: CONSTITUENCY ORIENTATIONS OFFLINE

American political scientist, Richard Fenno, observed that in order to understand legislators' behavior requires to observe them in the "capital city as well as at home, in their constituencies". It is at the constituency level where representatives are in the closest proximity to the voters and where representative - constituent ties are "created, nurtured and changed" (Fenno 1980:3, 1978). Fenno also observed, however, that the constituency dimension in political representation is understudied "up close, in detail and over time" where we may not know *enough about the process by which politicians get recruited and then accumulate (or dissipate) name recognition, reputation, and trust bit by bit, in multiple intra-constituency contexts over time?*" (Fenno 1986: 4).

Fenno's work is useful in i) explaining qualitative accounts of constituency dynamics, and ii) conceptual categorizations through which to measure representatives' constituency behavior and it will be drawn upon in this thesis. At the same time, because Fenno's work derives from the particularities American experience and as theories on the constituency dimension in the EU context are still inchoate, this chapter relies on an eclectic approach in conceptualizing the constituency dimension in the EP context by drawing from a wider range of relevant theories on political representation and linkage in the EU political context and outside it.

Overall the chapter's objective is to conceptualize and center the study of the constituency dimension at the European level. Because the majority of existing theories and empirical work derive from national level experiences, the chapter selects and links relevance of the former to the empirical study of constituency dimension in the EP context. It thereby aims to contribute to analytical innovation and to address gaps in existing literature on European politics.

The chapter is structured in three parts where the first part introduces existing macro-political representation theories relevant for conceptualizing the role of the constituency dimension as linkage while the second part focuses on the operationalization of the constituency dimension and the ways it has been measured. Lastly, the Chapter will discuss relevant theories on the determinants of variation in legislator's constituency outreach.

2.1 Theories of Political Representation

Be it in theory or in practice, democratic representation is not a monolithic concept. In theory, political theorists have grappled with its chimerical properties where no analytic formulation alone has been able to adequately depict the comprehensive characteristics and causal dynamics within the representative relationship between public office holders and constituents (Muller 1970: 1151).   Pinning down the latter has been particularly difficult because the concept does not have "an identifiable meaning applied in different but controlled and discoverable ways in different contexts" (Pitkin 1967: 8).

Moreover, in practice, representation is not referable to a single action by any one participant, but rather to an interactive institutionalized arrangement involving many people and groups, and the patterns emerging from the multiple activities of actors involved within the overall structure and the functioning of the system (Ibid.: 221 - 222).

The multi-dimensionality and dynamic nature of political representation cannot be more true than in the EU context where representatives of diverse national polities, interest groups, civic organizations interact, pursue multiple activities, are subject to multiplicity of institutional and systemic influences in an attempt to 'represent' the interests of 490 million European citizens.

However, even in the complex case of the EU, political representation and its various dimensions can be viewed as different forms of linkage. Linkage theories have been used as flexible theoretical frames enabling the study of the 'how and under what conditions political behavior at one level of aggregation affects political behavior at another and the ways the two levels interact' (Lawson 1980: 5-9). Depending on the direction of the arrow in a selected agent-principal causal dynamic, political linkages under study can vary. Most commonly, however they have referred to the various of intra-system linkages - e.g. parties (Lawson 1980; Mair 1990); in leadership recruitment - campaigning and petitioning within parties (Eulau & Prewitt 1970); expression of performance satisfaction- dissatisfaction of political authorities (Muller 1970); or citizens as the instigators of linkage.

For the purposes of this thesis, the constituency dimension constitutes the linkage mechanism under investigation. The constituency dimension is understood here as a relational link between members of the European Parliament (ds) and their constituencies where representative-voter ties are *created, nurtured and changed* (Fenno 1980: 3).

More specifically, it is defined as the attitudes and activities MEPs pursue to cultivate relations with their constituencies between elections. The extent to which the latter incline in favor (or not) of the constituency as opposed to other activities in MEPs' mandate, reflect a MEPs' constituency orientations.

The sections below discuss different aspects of territorial, normative and systemic considerations that shape the numerous implicit premises built in to understanding the constituency dimension as a linkage mechanism and in how it functions.

i) Territorial dimension of representation

Most commonly, 'constituency' carries a territorial connotation and is associated with the territory or area comprising an electoral district (Rehfeld 2007). The territorial reference is linked to the concept's historical origins as constituencies arose in parallel with the consolidation of parliaments and the process of dividing national territories into smaller parcels to ensure more manageable and equal forms of representation.

It also derives from Anglo-Saxon first-past-the post electoral systems where single members oversee concretely delineated territorial units – their electoral districts.   In practice, this notion however differs with the understanding of the term in PR-systems where elected representatives oversee more abstract notions of constituencies – usually delimited to their 'party voters' which may or may not be territorially concentrated.   As to be discussed in Chapter 4, this conceptual distinction was also reflected during interviews when some MEPs found it difficult to fully relate to the English term – constituency. Moreover, in languages other than English (and most linked to countries with PR-systems) the term constituency translates bearing a more specific political/ electoral connotation – e.g. 'circonscription electorale' (in French), 'circonconscrizione elettorale' (Italian), 'okres' (Slovak) and so on.

Linked to the territory, however, the term constituency implicitly embodies a 'people' and 'relational' component. In other words, a constituency can refer to "a body of citizens entitled to elect a representative to a legislative or executive position", "the residents in an electoral district" but also in more abstract sense as a "group or body that patronizes, supports, or offers representation" of some form or another (Online Merriam Webster Dictionary; Cambridge Dictionaries Online). The *relational* principally implies here the 'constituent' (a

principal) – is the one who authorizes another to act as representative (agent) on his/ her behalf.

As in practice constituencies do not constitute static, single groups nor homogeneous territorial units, the territorial or basic definitions do not account for the relational dynamics and intra-constituency heterogeneity. While voters belonging to an electoral district elect someone to represent them nationally are clearly one example of a core constituency, the latter may be further subdivided into a wider range of grouped interests – e.g. specific group in society such as artists, homeless, customers etc.

In his study on US Congressmen Fenno (1978) also observed that representatives think about their constituencies more strategically, they perceive them as complex mosaics made up of subsidiary publics or clienteles reflecting - three "concentric circles" – the geographic, demographic and political constituencies. While the *geographic constituency* commonly includes standard associations with territorial definitions, the *demographic constituency* refers more to its more particular socio-economic, partisan and religious orientations, ethnicity and residential patterns. The most important in terms of strategic value is are the accounts of the *political constituency[3]* through which representative map out their electoral base of supporters and non-supporters (Ibid.: 885-889).

At the same time, constituencies may also vary by being:

> *" … more or less stable, describing the extent to which their membership changes between elections. They may be heterogeneous…in the extent to which its members share a certain feature such as the same race or profession, territorial location, or political party membership. Each of these features will affect how citizens relate to each other as constituents, the choices they make as voters, and the incentives that representatives therefore face when campaigning and serving in office." (Rehfeld 2007: 7)*

Hence the multiple sources of different constituency pressures demand representatives to straddle and accommodate different audiences (Eulau & Wahlke 1978: 114-115). Moreover, it has been observed that the existing intra-constituency dynamics and the way representatives carve our their constituencies (choose their foci of representation) will affect the way representatives pursue their legislative tasks (Fenno 1986).

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[3] According to Fenno, the political constituency is the most lucrative for Congressmen, and tends to be further broken down into the general re-election constituency, the primary constituency and the intimates. – a secure base of supporters "loyalists" who will elect him/ her regardless who the challenger is; the intimates or the personal "home base" constituency which goes beyond the loyalists and includes individuals, groups such as closest political advisors, confidants expressed by "if you don't keep up your home base, you don't have anything" (Ibid.: 886).

Overall, Fenno's and Rehfeld's accounts are insightful as they provide a more detailed look at how representatives perceive and relate to their constituencies. By acknowledging the realities of internal heterogeneity and intra-constituency dynamics, they dissolve the generic and rather conception of constituencies as static territorial or electoral units. At the same time, these accounts allow for only basic associations but they do not capture the mechanics and micro-processes of how representatives receive appropriate cues to inform their policy position taking and parliamentary decision-making.

ii) Descriptive Representation

Widely debated and contested, descriptive representation falls into the normative camp of representation theory as it introduces moral or ethical considerations to the act of representation. Descriptive representation implicitly underlines the expectation placed on the act of representing and simultaneously on the behavior of representatives. It accounts for normative ideals (or approximations of) between a representative and the represented where the former is expected to "act in the interest of the represented in a manner responsive to them" (Pitkin 1967: 209) but also to resemble the constituency s/he represents. In other words, a representative should reflect a common denominator, or a representative sample of interests, attitudes, socio-economic background within his/ her constituency (Farrell & Scully 2007). Hence the more a representative resembles his/ her constituency, the more s/he is one of "them", the more is he/ she deemed to be representative (Mansbridge 1999).

iii) Substantive representation and congruency theory

Unlike descriptive expectations, *congruency[8]* theories expand on the substantive elements in representation where the agent (the representative) and the principal (the represented) are behaviorally and relationally linked (Eulau et al. 1978: 112). Policy congruency or dynamic representation (Stimson et al. 1995) - the degrees of "congruence" between representatives and their constituencies where representation is assumed to be 'present' when policy preferences of the constituency and their representative's roll-call behavior match (Jewell 1983) – has been perhaps the most empirically studied aspect of representative–constituent linkage.

Issue saliency, the role of intra-district dynamics (homogeneity or skewed-ness) of district aggregate opinion (Fiorina 1974) and electoral considerations linked to intra-district party

competition (Mayhew 1974) were found to be influential determinants of congruency between representatives' positions on policies and constituents' preferences (Kuklinski & Elling 1977). Others found that congruency hence 'representation' occurs under two conditions: i) when representatives think of themselves as delegates and are open to consider constituency preferences; and ii) when constituents provide consistent cues to enable representative(s) to develop a reasonably accurate perception of constituency opinion (McCrone & Kuklinski 1979: 280). Unlike unidirectional, elitist or top-down accounts of representation, the latter understanding of representation understands representation as a reciprocated two-way process, requiring the inputs of both - representatives and the represented.

Though useful in offering a means, for instance, roll call votes and public opinion polls – for empirically measuring representation, congruency theories over-assume the ready made nature of representatives' decision-making and over-rely on the outputs of representation. But they fail to explain the mechanics of how representatives arrive to making decisions and how they determine constituency policy preferences. They side step what happens inside the 'black box' - representatives' own cognitive validation in decision-making processes - and fail to elaborate on how cues on policy issues between citizens and representatives are exchanged. For example, in highly heterogeneous districts, how do representatives prioritize[4] which preferences to represent? By ignoring these dynamics, congruency theories assume behavioral homogeneity among representatives and fall short on demonstrative how representatives match their preferences to those of their constituents (or vice versa).

2.2   Defining Constituency as Linkage

Gaining a better understanding of constituency dynamics can offset some of the limitations of congruency approaches. Rather than assessing the level of synergy between representatives' and voters' policy preferences, linkage at the constituency level refers to how representatives perceive, relate to and service their constituencies (Eulau & Karps 1977). Combined these aspects reflect a representatives' *homestyle*.

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[4] Congruency has also been known as concordance, concurrence (Miller and Stokes 1963; Eulau 1987), policy responsiveness (Hix 2002), competence logic (Schmitt & Thomassen 2002) and on the macro-level as dynamic representation (Stimson et. al 1995).

Though a formal school of thought on the constituency linkage does not exist, three theoretical bodies of work have significantly contributed to it. The first refers to the study of *role orientations* (Fenno 1978; Wahlke & Eulau 1962; Fiorina 1974; Mayhew 1974) which zeros in on how representatives perceive their own roles as representatives and the importance they attach to different aspects of their mandate. *What representatives do* and the types of activities they pursue as part of constituency outreach (Fiorina 1974; Mayhew 1974; Fenno 1978; Johannes 1983; Wilson & Gronke 2001) forms the second area, while research on the *determinants of representatives' orientations* forms the third (Bogdanor 1985; Scholl 1986; Farrell & Scully 2007).

2.2.1 Constituency orientations

What representatives think about their constituencies

As representatives are given a fair amount of freedom in how to interpret their mandate and "represent", a significant amount variation has been observed in their representational styles. The intension properties of this variation have been characterized by two aspects: i) from whom representatives *take instruction* on policy issues (Eulau & Wahlke 1978: 17), and ii) where they place their representational *focus* while serving their term. Legislators can take instruction from different sources – e.g. their political parties, party whips and party leaders, interest groups, citizens or they can follow their own judgment and focus on different activities such as their legislative work, party relate activities, policy advocacy, media relations or constituency outreach.

In the aggregate, the types of tradeoffs representatives make between different activities and whom they are willing to 'listen' to are known to compose their representational styles or what Fenno has called their '*homestyle*'. Theoretically, four classic *role orientation typologies* - the trustee, partisan, politico, delegate (Burke 1774; Wahlke et al. 1962; Pitkin 1967) have been identified.

The *trustee* type relates representatives who act independently and rely on their own judgment and experience. A *trustee* hence seeks minimal instruction and cues from outside sources to informing his/her policy choices. A trustee also tends to be inclined toward

promoting collective – i.e. national rather than (constituents') individual interests[5] when taking policy positions. Under the assumption that a trustee 'knows' what his/her constituencies need and want, harmony of mutual (representative-voter) interests us presumed (Eulau et al. 1978: 118).

The *delegate* type is opposite to that of a trustee. Unlike a trustee, a *delegate* is open to "purposively reflect" and incorporate constituents' preferences on salient issues in his/her legislative work (McCrone & Kuklinski 1979) hence are likely to be more constituency oriented. Arguably, some studies observed that in policy congruency delegates also tend to be more representative (Kuklinski & Elling 1977). This finding, however, has not been widely corroborated in other research.

The third, *partisan* type, more distinct in Western European systems where parties have historically played a dominant role as intermediaries between the electorate and the parliament, refers to representatives who are likely to be loyal and represent their party line on substantive issues in select committees, parliamentary debates, and backbench party meetings (Norris 1999). In other words, *partisans* will be more inclined to take instruction from their party than anyone else (Mansbridge 2003:521)

Unlike the previous three representational types, *politico* is a mix of types. A politico sometimes acts as a trustee and other times as a delegate and has a tendency to focus on representing organized rather than individual or national interests.

Unlike the territorial, descriptive or congruency approaches, the study of role orientations offers a better understanding about what happens inside the 'black box' and how the latter affects the way legislators relate to those they represent (Eulau & Wahlke 1978: 15). In the aggregate patterns in legislators' role orientations hence shape how parliaments work (Katz 1999: 83). At the same time, accurate generalizations about legislators' role orientations and their representational styles are difficult to derive.

Human behavior is complex. Moreover, legislators are requested to satisfy and respond to multitudes of demands and pressures throughout their mandate, delimiting their behavior to a single categorical typology is problematic. Anyone who has spent time in Parliament or has

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[5] In his famous Bristol speech, Burke outlined a normative recipe for representatives' loyalties to be free of external instruction when serving their mandate but to be rather considerate of the "nation, with one interest, that of a whole, where, not local purposes, not local prejudices ought to guide but the general good, resulting from the general reason of the whole" (Burke 1774). This prescription later became associated with the trustee role orientation.

followed a day with a representative can attest to that. The expectation that representatives will focus on a single dominant activity or focus in on a single group is therefore unrealistic.

In practice, all four roles tend to co-exist instead and a fair deal of role-switching where representatives switch from one role to another in an 'on and off' reactive fashion (Eulau et al.1978: 114) in different contexts occurs (Andeweg 1997). While some delegates may overtly seek and "acknowledge their direct dependence on instructions and accept them as necessary or desirable premise for their decisions", others may be more cautious about consulting their constituents for fear of a binding, or 'mandatory effect' on their behavior and what they can deliver (Eulau & Wahlke 1978: 16-17). Similarly, a partisan may also partly share delegate characteristics if s/he is reaches out more to party voters than to senior party officials and parliamentary work. As a result defining parameter boundaries for each typology is analytically challenging. Where does a delegate or a trustee typology 'begin' and where does it 'end'?

Moreover, the conceptual duality of role orientations being both a characteristic and a determinant of legislator's behavior – i.e. potentially acting as both the dependent or independent variable - renders them challenging to use. Role orientations also do not reveal much about the degree of representativeness of different role typologies. Is a delegate more or less representative than a trustee, partisan or politico?

In view of their merits and limitations, role orientations serve as mere behavioral approximations that require wider considerations including scales of propensity and potential conditions rather than indiscriminately categories.   It is therefore no surprise that the four types have been subject to numerous interpretations, revisions, misunderstandings, extensions and critical debates.

The importance representatives attach to constituency work

In addition to what representatives think about their constituencies and how they perceive their own roles, the amount of resources they allocate and the types of constituency activities they pursue between elections has been another important factor comprising legislators' constituency orientations.

Given that legislators have limited administrative budgets and time, the amount of resources

legislators allocate to different activities in fulfilling their mandate is telling about the importance they attach to specific activities. The more resources legislators allocate to a particular activity – e.g. parliamentary work, public advocacy, media outreach, constituency work - the more importance they are likely to attach to it. Or in the words of Fenno, "how a Congressman divides up his time, he in effect decides what kind of a representative he will be" (Fenno 1977: 891).

With respect to the directional magnitude of representatives' constituency orientations – *the extent to which MEPs are pro-constituency oriented or not*, three indicators have been most frequently used for measuring the allocation of resources dimension: i) whether a representative has a permanent constituency office in his/her district; ii) the time spent (usually quantified as number of trips or days spent per week/ month) on constituency work and iii) the amount and seniority of staff employed in the constituency office (Ibid., Johannes 1983). Effectively, the more time and staff a representative allocates to work in their constituency would be indicative of his/her pro-constituency orientation.

2.2.2 Constituency Outreach Dimensions

There are two types of activities that representatives typically pursue in their constituency work: i) they take on and respond to casework; and ii) they explain their work in the capital and communicate (in various forms) with their constituencies (Mayhew 1974, Fiorina 1974; Fenno 1978; Wilson and Gronke 2000).

Casework

Unlike self-presentation tactics and explanation of legislative work which serve as communicative functions, *casework* is the most concrete form of responsiveness and constituency linkage between elections. Cases can be initiated by constituents (individuals or groups) as well as representatives. The great majority tend to involve 'light cases' such as requests for information or light grievances. Light cases are relatively easy to respond to and can be delegated to staff. 'Harder cases', however, involve more difficult and time consuming casework. These may require representative's personal attention, time and specific forms of assistance such as conducting detailed research on regulatory stipulations for an SME or a constituent who runs his/her own business, intervening on behalf of citizens at higher levels of government, lobbying for public funds or - pork - public works projects benefiting developments in a representative's constituency, or pushing forward petitions to influence

legislation or raising an issue which has not yet been considered by Parliament (Fenno 1978:101).

Though casework is known to be time consuming, representatives take it on in response to constituents prompting but also to ingratiate themselves to score 'credit' and political (re-election) support among constituents (Johannes 1983). Representatives' inclination toward being casework oriented can be assessed by the number of cases they receive and subsequently take on or respond to.

Explaining their political work

In addition to casework, legislators tend to consider 'explaining their political work' – especially parliamentary and legislative work, in other words, the work that they do when they are not in their constituencies - as an important part of their jobs. As a result, they tend to explain their positions and the work they do in salient policy areas, the parliamentary committees that they are active in, any proposals or motions for legislation that they author, the speeches they make during parliamentary proceedings and so on (Bianco 1994; Sellers 1998). The 'explaining work' function therefore principally serves as a form of transparency and top-down feedback in order for constituents to keep an eye out on what their representatives do in the capital and the extent to which they are on track in maintaining their electoral promises.

Conventional (offline) explaining work activities include accepting invitations to make public speeches at local organizations (i,e. schools, civic associations, private sector) or during community or local events (ribbon-cutting ceremonies), through local media, or attending and public events. Representatives explain their work in order to provide transparency and accountability over their work as well as to establish a personal link with their constituents through which they aim to be understood during their office term. Constituency outreach, also serves as a means for representatives to maintain public visibility, seek credit and advertise themselves in order to continuously reinforce a positive image in the eyes of their constituencies (Mayhew 1974; Wilson & Gronke 2000). Overall, the extent to which representatives invest - time and the number of events they attend - into constituency outreach is telling about their general orientations as it is an aspect of constituency work that cannot be delegated to staff.

2.3 Determinants of Constituency Orientations and Outreach

Because most parliamentary systems are vague as to how representatives should conduct their constituency work (i.e. no institutional penalties hence socialisation) and as constituency activities are known to be time consuming then *why do representatives invest into constituency work?*

Rational choice theories have been the most dominant in explaining the motives behind representatives' constituency outreach. They posit that representatives are driven by electoral incentives manifested in vote-seeking behavior hence pursue constituency work to gain incumbency advantages (Mayhew 1974; Wilson & Gronke 2000). In fear of losing in the next election, representatives perpetually protect or expand established bases of political support in their constituencies. Therefore, the intensity with which they reach out to and offer constituency services tends to correlate with their desire to be re-elected next time around.

Rational choice perspectives hence attribute the pursuit of constituency outreach to representatives' manipulative motives. Whether it is through manipulative credit seeking by which representatives attempt to craft a favourable public image and strategically position themselves to gain trust in eyes of their constituencies or by ingratiating themselves through casework - representatives pursue constituency work to win credibility and constituency favours in return for political support (Fenno 1977; Bianco 1994; Sellers 1998; Mayhew 2004). Maintaining a good reputation and constituency support has in turn shown to yield greater legitimization of representatives' political positions (Langer 2007) and gains in representatives' legislative freedom even if the vote is at odds with sentiment in the district (Wilson & Gronke 2000).

Mansbridge (2003) also notes *anticipatory* and *prudential* forms of political representation. For the study of constituency orientations, Mansbridge's concept of *anticipatory representation* is interesting for two reasons. Firstly, it recognises representatives ↔ electorate communicative/ deliberative interactions that occur between elections. Unlike most representation theories, anticipatory representation does not see the inter-election period as static when it comes to citizen-representative interactions and their mutual influences. The inter-election period is considered to be continuous and alive comprising multiple properties, influences and processes (Franceze & Noorudin 2002: 2) subsequently pointing to a relational continuity between representatives and the represented. Therefore, constituency outreach in this sense is considered as a space and medium for sending and receiving of political cues among representatives and their constituents.

The second reason why Mansbridge's *anticipatory representation* typology is interesting for the study of constituency orientations is that it presumes a shift to delegate-like characteristics among representatives. It indirectly alludes to the role of *inputs* and *feedback* dynamics. In the proposition that representatives actively solicit constituents' political cues through public opinion polls and outreach to *anticipate* their voters' preferences, a*nticipatory representation* implies that politicians are prompted to continuously 'listen' to those they represent more than is conventionally assumed. Implicitly they seek electorate's feedback.

The role of 'feedback' - reciprocated intra-system deliberative acts - is an important micro-process and normative constituent of political representation (Barber 1984; Dryzek 1990; Habermas 1984; Fishkin 1991). In theory, the feedback function is a catalyst for transparency, accountability and legitimacy. However, the feedback function is often neglected by the dominant congruency and responsiveness theories where over reliance on outputs (policy congruency) and automatic state of representatives' and voters' preferences are assumed. As Muller has pointed out:

> "in contrast to legitimacy sentiments, which are independent of immediate outputs
> from political authorities, citizens' perceptions of representational linkages between
> themselves and the authorities depend on their affective responses to outputs,
> encompassing not only instrumental performance satisfactions, but (and most commonly
> among the membership in general) symbolic performance satisfactions
> as well" (1970: 1149).

At the individual or micro-level of political representation, feedback mechanisms furnish interpretations of stimuli, perform acts of recognition, activate memory and the ability to learn, enable making decisions between conflicting alternatives, follow operating rules and use the latter to derive preference formations (Deutsch 1966: 81). Combined, they constitute responses to new inputs of information that offers opportunities for corrective behaviour, convergence on mutual goals hence continuity of pseudo rewards. If the feedback mechanism functions effectively, it prompts learning hence possibilities for behavioural modification and the reduction of intra-systemic mistakes. On the contrary, if the feedback mechanism is dysfunctional, the mistakes pertinent to the functioning of the system may increase (Ibid: 88-90).

Through the deliberative feedback important civic experiences of role-taking, practical-moral evaluation of rational arguments, reflexivity, sincerity, discursive inclusion and equality are exchanged (Habermas 1984: 22-42). Associational ties between actors have also been observed to strengthen (Pitkin 1981) while basis for distributive justice is formed and participants tend

to make better decisions. In the aggregate, micro-feedback acts become the ether that enables political entities to think and problem solve together, to see together, to act together.

Sceptics would argue however, that all of the above, though theoretically valid do not reflect representatives behavior in practice. Rather than being interested in their constituents' preferences, sceptics argue that motives for representatives' outreach are mostly functional or tokenistic. Representatives are more interested in acquiring general knowledge rather than engaging in intricate learning opportunities about their constituents' preferences (Stimson et al., 1995: 545).

A more recent study on the demand-side that examined changes in public opinion in response to varied sequencing of political cues found that the exchange of political cues between political entities and citizens is more intricate. For example, time lag between receiving competing political messages matters in citizens or voters' policy preference formation (Chong & Druckman 2010). The more time that elapses between competing messages, the more individuals tend to give disproportionate weight to the most recent communication while previous effects decay over time. However, people engaging in deliberate processing of information display attitude stability and give disproportionate weight to previous messages hence showing that people typically form significantly different opinions when they receive competing messages over time than when they receive the same messages simultaneously (Ibid.).

The inquiry in this thesis examines the dynamics observed in MEPs' constituency outreach. By focusing on the constituency dimension specifically, it aims to complement congruency theories that often (Chong & Druckman 2010) fail to demonstrate *how* representatives receive, determine & incorporate cues from their constituencies to establish their own positions, using the constituency level as a space for representative-constituency 'linkage'.

While the above sections outlined how the constituency linkage is perceived in political representation theory and what defines constituency orientations and constituency outreach, the following discussion reviews existing hypotheses about the determinants of variation in representatives' constituency orientations. In other words, what factors prompt some representatives to be more constituency oriented than others?

Previous research has acknowledged that structural and contextual limitations influence the margin of choices open to a representative (Kavanagh 1983: 131). These in turn affect their actions. At the national-level most commonly recognized determinants for representatives'

constituency orientations include: i) the electoral system, ii) representatives' role orientations, and iii) incumbency.

The *electoral systems* theory proposes that electoral system's properties, such as ballot structure and district magnitude, influence the representational style that elected politicians adopt (Cain et al. 1979; Scholl 1986; Wessels 1996; Farrell & Scully 2007). Majoritarian electoral systems with single member districts are known to yield more pro-active cultivation of constituency relations (Cain et al. 1983; Farrell & Scully 2005). While, PR systems characteristics of most European polities with multi-member districts and closed ballot structures show to provide weaker incentives for the maintenance of active constituency relations. In PR systems representatives are expected to behave more like trustees than delegates. Legislators from multi-member districts also tend to place organized groups such as lobby and special interest groups as the primary focus of their representation (Lowenberg & Kim 1978:45).

Role orientations are the second set of strong determinants. *Role orientations* express how representatives relate to those they represent. 'Whom representatives take instruction' from and 'where they place their representational focus are two indicators used to better define representatives' representational style. A representative who takes instruction from and places his/ her focus on 'citizens' would be expected to be more constituency oriented than a representative that bases his/her decisions on his/her own judgment or who focuses large proportion of their time on parliamentary activities.

At the same time, the link between the constituency dimension and role orientations (as an independent variable) has been insufficiently researched and remains inconclusive. Role orientations' predictive power for determining representatives-voter policy congruency has been low. Research has shown that delegate oriented representatives who are proactively engaged in their constituencies do not necessarily know their constituency opinion any more accurately than trustees nor are their constituencies' preferences better reflected in their votes (Miller & Stokes 1963; Friesema & Hedlund 1974: 417). At the same time, Kuklinski and Elling (1977) argued that though this may be true, issue saliency serves as an important intervening precondition for the formation of perceptual accuracy and policy agreement. They found that delegates are more representative in terms of policy congruency when policy issues under study are salient.

Role orientations in this sense only "estimate probabilities of behavior germane to the

particular relationship; that is, the person's actions and doings that are in performance of a given role and that derive their meaning and significance from the relationship expressed in the roles of player and counterplayer" (Eulau & Wahlke 1978: 16–17). Therefore rather than being robust determinants, role orientations are mere approximations of certain behavioral outcomes.

Incumbency has been known as the third predictor of representatives' constituency orientations.   In previous research, incumbency and members' level of seniority (number of office terms) has shown to be negatively correlated with representatives' pro-constituency orientation (Cox & Katz 1996; Erikson 1971; Gelman & King 1990) According to rational choice vote-seeking theories, incumbents are more "safe" and established in their constituencies hence less needy to chase votes.   Moreover, throughout their term, as incumbents gain more experience in legislative skills they turn to devote more time on parliamentary work as oppose to constituency duties. To the contrary, because rookies or junior representatives enjoy lower visibility, are less established in their constituencies and inexperienced in legislating, they tend to spend more time on stabilizing their constituency support base hence on constituency outreach than on legislative work in the capital (Mayhew 1974; Fiorina 1977; Fenno 1978).

In addition to the electoral system, role orientations, and incumbency*, intra-district dynamics* are another factor known to influence representatives' propensity for being pro-constituency oriented. Heavier investment into constituency outreach has been particularly observed among representatives from districts where constituents' policy preferences were not fully formed (Mansbridge 2003), where the predecessor has left a strong legacy or where representatives' re-election was heavily contested (Fenno 1977: 889).

2.4 The Constituency Dimension in the EU Context

While the above pieced existing theories and conclusions on the conceptualization, measurement and determinants of the constituency dimension, most of the observations derive from national level experiences. The relevance of national level theories for the study of MEP's constituency orientations in the transnational European context, however, is questionable. Can we assume that MEPs' representational styles are similar to those of their national counterparts?

Moreover, is there a large variation in MEPs constituency orientations? Are some MEPs more constituency oriented, than others? And, what determines the types of activities and the direction of MEPs' constituency orientations? Are the classical determinants – role orientations, incumbency and electoral system significant[10]? Or do the particularities of 'representing' in the European context – MEPs being remote from their constituencies, the high MEP-constituent ratios, MEPs' general low public visibility and political salience - affect the way MEPs think about and act in their constituencies?

As established earlier, the EU is a relatively young, complex, multilayered polity with no historical precedent. Though literature on the subject has been growing, our understanding about the way its representation mechanisms function at different levels is still limited. Though normative and macro-institutional discussions on political representation in the EU have received a fair amount of attention (Marsh 1997; Schmitt & Thomassen 1999; Katz 1999; Farrell & Scully 2007; Mair & Thomassen 2010), MEPs' individual-level behavior has been underexplored (Katz 1999; Hix 2002; Farrell & Scully 2005, 2007, 2010). Even more limited is our knowledge about how MEPs relate to and cultivate ties with their home constituencies. By framing the constituency dimension as a form of linkage, this thesis aims to precisely look at these missing links – individual level behavior of MEPs - in existing literature.

Territorial Constituency in the EU context

In several ways European constituencies differ from the national level constituencies. Arguably, these differences have implications for political representation in the EU context. Some of the key particularities will now be discussed.

The first concerns territorial representation. Though territorial borders intra-Europe have ceased to exist in economic terms, they have not ceased to exist politically. Political representation in the EU remains to be territorially bound where official European political constituencies and electoral contest for EP elections are *confined to national borders*. With the exception of Belgium, France, Ireland, Italy, Poland and UK's regionally bound EU constituencies (see Table 2.1 below), majority of European constituencies are national. In other words, at the EU level, an electoral district for the majority of EU members states comprises the entire country. Transnational electoral contest, where European citizens could vote for trans-national EU parties and/or representatives outside of their national electoral districts has so far not been possible.

The fact that most EU constituencies are national means that MEPs oversee much larger constituencies with higher MEP-constituent ratios than their national counterparts. For example, on average an MEP represents a constituency of 448 000 people (see Table 2.1), while a British MNP represents a constituency of 89 000; a Spanish MNP a constituency of 115 000; 136 000 in Germany; 102 000 in France. Consequently, the larger constituencies and higher MEP-constituent ratios imply higher intra-constituency heterogeneity hence the likelihood of higher volumes of constituency demands - lobbying, casework requests and outreach, thus possible foci of representation.

Adding to the representation of a larger national constituency is also the question of how European representatives factor in the added layer of representing pan-European constituencies and their interests? In other words, do MEPs take on cases and do they reach out to 'constituencies' outside of their respective national or regional territorially bound electoral districts? And in reverse, do citizens contact MEPs from 'constituencies' other than their own? In other words, is it conceivable that a Swedish constituent would contact a Polish MEP with a request for assistance? If so, how do MEPs deal with requests coming outside of their national constituencies?

As noted earlier, little is known about MEPs' attitudes about their constituencies, the kinds of constituency work they take on, and what determines the variation in MEPs' constituency orientations. At the same time, it is conceivable that the large constituency and the superimposed pan-European constituency dimension affect MEP's workload (e.g. increased number of demands, casework and requests) and the range of foci of representation.

EP's institutional expectations of MEPs' role orientations

Some clues about MEPs' expected conduct are expressed in the *European Parliament's Rules of Procedure.* At the same time, apart from ethical considerations about restraints from illegal activities and second mandates the Rules of Procedure stipulate very few expectations about the way MEPs should conduct their constituency duties. The only interpretable reference to MEPs' expected role orientations is made in *Rule* 2 *'the Independent mandate'.* *Rule 2* stipulates that MEPs are expected to act in a way as "*not to be bound by any instructions regarding their mandate in order to preserve their independence and trustworthiness*" (www.europarl.europa.eu).

Table 2.1 European constituency characteristics

Country	NO MEPs	Constituency size (millions)	MEP: Constituent ratio	Type of Constituency	Electoral system
Greece	24	11	828,000	National	PR
Spain	54	44	815,000	National	PR
Germany	99	82	803,000	National	PR
Poland	54	59	731,000	National(x13)	PR
Romania	35	22	628,000	National	PR
Netherlands	27	16	593,000	National	PR
Sweden	19	9	473,000	National	PR
Hungary	24	10	458,000	National	PR
Austria	18	8.3	455,000	National	PR
UK	78	60	442,000	Regional (x12)	PR
Portugal	24	10.6	442,000	National	PR
Czech Republic	24	10.3	430,000	National	PR
Bulgaria	18	7.7	428,000	National	PR
Belgium	24	10.5	401,000	Regional (x3)	PR
Slovakia	14	5.5	393,000	National	PR
Denmark	14	5.4	386,000	National	PR
Finland	14	5.3	370,000	National	PR
Ireland	13	4.2	300,000	Regional (x4)	STV
Slovenia	7	2	285,000	National	PR
Lithuania	13	3.4	277,000	National	PR
Latvia	9	2.3	255,000	National	PR
Estonia	6	1.8	216,000	National	PR
Cyprus	6	0.8	133,000	National	PR
Italy	78	59	108,000	Regional (x5)	PR
France	78	8	102,000	Regional (x8)	PR
Luxembourg	6	0.5	83,000	National	PR
Malta	5	0.4	80,000	National	STV

Source: www.europarl.europa.eu, Farrell & Scully 2007

Interestingly, *Rule No. 2* prescribes MEPs to adopt a trustee-like representational style by upholding independent judgment, to rely on their individual competences and to act unrestricted from external influences when carrying out their duties as MEPs. From this it can be deduced that the according to the EP, MEPs' are not expected to act as delegates, in other words to actively seek instruction from their constituents, nor to act as partisans by being loyal to their parties. They are to act as 'independent' representatives. Moreover, *Rule No.2* remains mum about any normative references pertaining to MEPs' accountability or responsibility to cultivate active relations with their constituencies.

In practice, however, similarly as in the case of national MPs, research has shown that MEPs' role orientations tend to vary. A comparative study on MEPs' and national MPs' (MNPs) role orientations confirmed Rule No. 2 where most MEPs exhibited a trustee role orientation. The same study also observed that MEPs tended to emulate representational styles those of their national (MP) counterparts (Katz 1999). When asked whom they take instruction from, 75 per cent MEPs compared to 72 per cent of MNPs, ranked their own judgment in the first place while taking instruction from party voters came in second - 37 per cent MEPs claimed to do so[6] (Ibid.: 63-65). Thomassen & Schmitt's results (1997) also confirmed the partisan proclivities among MEPs.

Other studies, however, suggest that partisan role orientation at the European level though to be expected – i.e. predominance of PR systems and Maastricht treaty's (Article 138)[7] is unlikely in practice due to EP party groups' instability, incohesion and low salience (Anderweg 1995; Hix & Lord 1997; Hix et al. 2005[8]) hence providing few incentives for MEPs to be EP party group oriented. Additional research on the role of national parties also show MEPs to be less loyal to their national parties' instructions than expected and their inclination to act as independent trustees instead (Scully 2000; Poguntke et al. 2007).

When looking at MEPs' foci of representation, however, Katz' (1999) earlier study also found that MEPs tend to place their representative focus more on interest groups than on any other group

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[6] The survey question read: "In many cases people have different views concerning matters that the (European Parliament/ National Parliament) must decide upon. On which one of the following would you base your decision in such cases?" The choices offered were: "your own judgment," "the view of the voters of your party," and "the view of your national party;" while MEPs were also given the choice of "the view of your EP group" (Katz 1999: 63).

[7] Article 138 stipulates the expectation that EP party groups are to play an important intermediary role in the' expression of peoples' political will' in the European polity.

[8] Hix et.al (2005) posited that though EP party group cohesion remains low, it has risen over time, thus the study of EP continually being in a state in flux.

such as ordinary citizens, public opinion in general and the media; MNPs tend to spend more time on the latter (Katz 1999: 66). Katz attributes this finding to the their remoteness and the multi-layered complexity of the EU polity which prompt "MEPs to require intermediaries between their (distant) constituents and themselves, whereas MNPs, can interact with their constituents more directly" (Ibid.: 68).

MEP's expected allocation of resources to constituency work

Another official reference by the EP to MEPs' constituency conduct is made in the European Parliament's annual calendar. The EP calendar structures MEPs' annual work schedule into twelve four-day sessions in Strasbourg (i.e. one 4-day week per month) and six additional two-day sessions in Brussels. Within those, the Calendar expects MEPs to spend two weeks per month on parliamentary committee meetings and inter-parliamentary delegation work, as well as one week for political group meetings. According to the Calendar, in total, MEPs are expected to spend only four weeks on constituency work and delegation trips combined per year (www.euparl.europa.eu).

In other words, the four week slot is shared time between MEPs' constituency service and their delegation work (most of which includes trips to other countries). Then if calculated on the basis of a 45-48 work week year, the expected 28 days (4 weeks based on a full calendar week, or nearly six weeks if working week is considered – the EP doesn't specify), on average, the EP expects MEPs to spend less than half a day per week in their constituencies. This is even more reduced when delegation commitments are counted in this time slot[9]. The Calendar also does not specify whether the half day per week spent on constituency work is a minimal standard or a satisfactory standard expectation.

Based on the above discussion, three observations can be inferred: a) that the EP provides wide discretionary power as to how much time MEPs spend on constituency activities; b)

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[9] As part of their mandate, MEPs are allowed to select to sit/ serve on one committee and up to one delegation. The latter includes work on the promotion of parliamentary ties with parliaments in the international community that are not members of the EU. In total there are 34 delegations divided into four categories, each made up of about 15 MEPs: i) inter-parliamentary delegations; **ii) j**oint parliamentary committees; iii) EP's delegation to the ACP-EU Joint Parliamentary Assembly focusing on relations with African, Caribbean and Pacific States; iv) the European Parliament delegation to the Euro-Mediterranean.

proportional to other activities, the expected 0.5 days spent on constituency work is significantly lower hence revealing the low priority attached to constituency work by the EP; and c) the implicit institutional expectation derived from the former is that the EP expects MEPs to focus more on their Brussels/ Strasbourg based activities than on their constituency work.

When it comes to the allocation of financial resources to constituency activities, the EP remains equally vague. While MEPs receive a general administrative budget for expenses related to their office management costs - 4202 EUR per month[10]; and for personal staff (a flat rate of 17540 EUR per month) whom they may recruit and allocate freely [11] (www.euparl.europa.eu), In theory, an MEP can have a minimum of three offices – one in Brussels, one in Strasbourg and one in their constituency. However, because no empirical research has been done on this topic, how MEPs distribute financial and staff resources among different offices in practice is unknown.

Because MEPs have set budgets and finite time for their activities, it is possible to examine how MEPs allocate and trade off time and staff between duties and offices. In determining the amount of staff and time MEPs allocate to constituency should ultimately enable us also to determine MEPs' propensity to be pro-constituency oriented (or not). In view of previous research and the lack of clear (EP) institutional guidelines, it is expected that MEPs' allocation choices will vary.

What MEPs do in their constituencies?

The types of activities that European Parliamentarians *pursue as part of their constituency work is* once again sparsely documented. Previous findings suggest, though that MEPs do take on casework such as petitions[12] to influence legislation or raise issues which have not been considered by the EP (Scholl 1986). Because MEPs serve large, heterogeneous constituencies, they conceivably receive a wider range and greater amount of casework requests than their national counterparts. In addition to individual citizens, MEPs' constituencies comprise much

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[10]These include phone, postal charges, the purchase and maintenance of computers and travel costs.

[11] Travelling expenses, social security contributions and tax paid on behalf of the assistant(s) may also be reimbursed directly to the Member upon presentation of duly receipted invoices (www. europarl.europa.eu).

[12] An example of a petition involved UK fishermen and lifeboat crews lobbying their MEPs about the effects of new EU emission rules on the machinery they use to launch their boats. Respective MEPs took on the petition and were successful in amending the legislation which made the specific machines exempt.

larger array of different groups or sub-constituencies (e.g. the national government, regional authorities, national associations and organized interest groups) that may approach MEPs with casework. At the same time, given that MEPs work remotely from their constituencies and given that the policies over which EU presides and would be of concern to an ordinary citizen are limited, it is equally conceivable that MEPs' casework loads may be low as citizens likely find few reasons to turn to MEPs for potential remedies.

A more recent study also observed that MEPs do spend considerable amount of time in their constituencies and consider maintaining contacts with individual constituents important. 80 per cent MEPs respondents indicated that they spend at 'least some time' or 'weekends' in their constituencies every week and maintain most regular contact – "at least once a week" - with ordinary citizens, national party members and journalists (2006 MEP Survey, European Parliamentary Research Group). Ordinary citizens topped the list of whom MEPs are likely to reach out to while personal consultations via a permanently staffed office featured as the most preferred form and place of contact.

Determinants of MEPs' constituency orientations

As indicated earlier, the *electoral system* is considered to be one of the strongest determinants of representatives' role orientations. At the EU level, the electoral systems theory is expected to hold as well as to play a significant socializing role[13] (Farrell & Scully 2007, 2010). As EU elections are conducted under the PR system in all member states (since 2002), it would be expected that MEPs develop either a *trustee* or *partisan* orientation (Bowler & Farrell 1993). As a result, MEPs are expected to be more Brussels or party rather than constituency oriented.

At the same time, because no two national PR systems are identical and as MEPs undergo primary political socialization at national level, it is also possible that MEPs' constituency

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[13] Until 1999, MEPs were elected through a mixed method – PR and majoritarian systems. The *Uniform Electoral Procedures* (UEPs) legislation, caving in to calls for uniformity, in 1999, the EU standardized the electoral method for EU elections in all member states into PR-system of al. As of the 2004 elections, all MEPs were elected through the PR model. In 2002, the formerly pluralistic a electoral systems approach where each country could choose its own electoral systems formula for EU elections was abolished and a universal electoral - PR system – rule was introduced for all members states was introduced.

orientations will be strongly shaped by their national political culture.   The intermeshing strong social cleavages in Belgian and Dutch multiparty systems (MacMullen 1985), for example, the influential role of interest groups and mixed-member PR system in Germany and Austria (Burkett 1985), different candidate selection processes across the EU, the role of patronage and clientelist networks in Italy, the unique (authoritarian) communist legacy of EU's new member states where participatory roles of citizens and ties to political elites were non-existent – are some examples of different political culture specificities that may intervene and distort certain electoral system effects.

Extant research confirms this where in spite the introduction of an uniform electoral system, MEPs from Ireland and UK have shown to continue spending comparatively more time in their constituencies than the rest of their MEP peers (Farrell & Scully 2007).   It therefore remains to be seen whether Irish and British MEPs will be socialized by the EU party-oriented system or whether they will stay true to the national political and electoral cultures.

When it comes to incumbency, because the turnover of MEPs from session to session in the EP is known to be high - ranging between 40-50 per cent (Corbett, Jacobs et al. 2003: 40), following the incumbency theory, at least 40 per cent MEPs should spend significant amount of time in their constituencies. The incumbency logic, however, makes one assumption - that MEPs are motivated by the same electoral incentives and career paths as their national counterparts. As it turns out, it may not be the case.

Due to European polity's complexity and because representatives' pro-constituency propensities tend to be highly individualized and dependent on myriad of contributing factors (Fenno 1978: 5; Johannes 1983: 538), it is conceivable that in addition to the usual suspects – electoral systems, role orientation and incumbency – other factors will impinge and influence the direction of MEPs' constituency orientations.

MEPs' geographic remoteness (i.e. distance to constituency), high MEP-constituent ratios, low public visibility and perceived low political salience of MEPs are likely to negatively influence MEPs' constituency orientations. On the one hand, MEPs' remoteness, low public visibility and voters' general disinterest in MEPs' work could prompt MEPs to sink into their trustee roles and to invest little time and resources into constituency outreach between elections. At the same time, the opposite could also be true. Precisely because MEPs enjoy significantly lower media

exposure than their national counterparts, they may try to compensate by seeking alternative opportunities to gain exposure and to invest more time into outreach activities. Moreover, the shifting extraneous paradigms such as the rise of the "common citizen", shrinking party support base(s) and the personalization of politics (Hallin & Mancini 2004) may be additional external factors influencing MEPs be more pro-constituency oriented that would be popularly assumed.

Without a doubt, the study of political representation at the EU level is complex. Conclusions on the direction of MEPs' constituency orientations are very limited and mixed. The relevance of national-level theories and conceptual constructs is also at question here. Are the characteristics and mechanics of political representation in the EU true to its hypothesized *sui generic* uniqueness or do they follow very similar patterns to those at national level?

2.5   Chapter Summary

In summary, Chapter 2 situated the concept of constituency dimension in existing literature on political representation. It examined a series of theoretical considerations – territorial, normative, behavioral – in order to frame the *offline* constituency dimension as a micro-parliamentary linkage mechanism between elected representatives and their constituents.

The chapter's conclusive reflections suggest that the constituency dimension has been understudied at the national but even more so in the EU context. Fenno's (1978) work on US Congressmen and various approaches to the study of representatives' role orientations come perhaps the closest to putting the constituency dimension on the map.

In the EU context, empirical evidence on the intension-extension properties of MEPs' constituency orientations - how they think about, the importance they attach, the types of activities they pursue as well as what determines some MEPs to be more constituency oriented than others - is negligible and patchy. The few studies that do steer in this direction observed that trustee or partisan rather than delegate representational style prevail among MEPs with a representational focus on interest groups and citizens. However, as noted, the body of research is too sparse to draw robust conclusions, hence the need for more extensive research on this topic.

The chapter also observed that the trustee or mixed representational typologies among MEPs should come as no surprise given that the EP's rules of conduct tend to be vague on how MEPs should relate to their constituencies between elections. There is no e x p l i c i t mention of the constituency linkage in EP's *Rules of Conduct.* The vague allusions that are made expect MEPs to assume the trustee role orientation and to allocate proportionally less time to their constituency activities than to their parliamentary and committee priorities in Brussels.

At the same time, it is also a fair to ask, *should MEPs be pro-constituency oriented?* And if so, in what proportion to their other representative duties? Is there a normatively 'right' recipe for how much constituency work and outreach is 'enough' to satisfy the principles of representative accountability and legitimacy? Though this thesis aims to primarily address empirical questions, these questions run as an undercurrent and in parallel with future intentions to implement the Lisbon treaty.

Moreover, several implicit risks and limitations to this inquiry have also been listed. The first involves the inexistent theoretical and empirical paradigm linked to the constituency dimension at the EU level which prompts theoretical over-reliance on national level literature. It is not certain, however, the extent to which the latter is relevant for the EU context. If not relevant, the use of theories derived from national level experiences could lead to the misspecification of conceptual constructs and measures of the constituency dimension at the EU level.

The second risk is the multi-layered complexity of the EU polity which renders the teasing out of intricacies difficult. At the EU level, the range of possible institutional and contextual influences is potentially doubled. Insert also individual level behavioral dynamics that comprise a medley of cognitive predispositions, institutional and contextual influences – e.g. being members of their EP party groups, EP committees, but also being nationals of their countries, members of national parties, some with previous political careers, activist or strong leadership abilities, and the study of MEPs' behavior and their determinants becomes more challenging.

Thirdly, largely due to time and operational constraints, this thesis' predominantly focuses on the top-down MEP → represented and less on the citizen → MEP vector. Because the constituency dimension is in principle a two-way street constituting a relational

representative represented   reciprocity,   the   approach   provides   a   'supply'   focused perspective while perspectives from the 'demand' side are not empirically explored.   The danger in the one-sided approach, is that it may over assume and simplify the symmetry of motives (interest) among representatives and those they represent hence subject citizens' preferences to those of MEPs.

One thing on the demand side is known, and that is that not all citizens are equally interested in maintaining an active relationship with their representatives.   Though Eurobarometer surveys confirm that voters across the EU show reasonably clear and broadly common preferences as to what they want from their European representatives, the linkage with MEPs is not necessarily a high priority for EU citizens (Farrell & Scully 2007: 18). This has to be taken into account as not to overestimate the importance of the constituency dimension under study here.

3. POLITICAL COMMUNICATION ONLINE

When observing the Internet induced mass protests in the Middle East in the spring of 2011, Obama's high-tech and highly successful online Presidential campaign in 2008, politicians' use of websites and ever increasing presence on social networking sites,   political institutions' use of online tools or e-voting mechanisms in national elections, it is hard to ignore the ubiquitous application of the Internet in the political sphere of our lives.   However, while e-enthusiasts are quick to ascribe positive effects of Internet on political behavior, the more skeptical question whether the Internet has in reality enabled political actors to do anything differently? In other words, they ask, does Internet usage contribute to new forms of political behavior or do political actors merely use the Internet to replicate (online) that which they already do offline?

While Chapter 2 focused on the theoretical aspects of what representatives do in their constituencies *offline*, Chapter 3 looks at the *online* dimensions of constituency outreach. The core questions it asks: i) do MEPs use the Internet (e.g. email, websites, blogs, social networking sites, and live podcasts) in their constituency outreach functions, and ii) is the Internet platform, if used, enabling them to do anything new or different when connecting with their constituencies between elections? For example, due to its expediency, distance reducing and one-to-many communication capacity, could the Internet platform prompt MEPs to shift some of their offline constituency activities online and thereby to use the online platform as a quasi virtual constituency office? Or is MEPs' use of the Internet merely symbolic or as some (Coleman 2001) have claimed it - tokenistic?

The Chapter is divided into two parts. The first part evaluates leading concepts and existing literature on ICTs and o n l i n e political communication. What are Internet's presumed utility benefits and caveats as a political communication tool, how different is it from other forms of communication and what are some of the expected theoretical implications of Internet's use in the European Parliament context. The Chapter's second part zeroes in how we can effectively measure and operationalize online constituency outreach.

3.1 Anticipated Benefits of the Use of the Internet in Political Settings

Internet's anticipated utility benefits for political communication can be grouped into three categories: i) its contribution to the quality of political communication, (ii) innovative functional/ technical applications and (iii) political participation. Before discussing the three categories, however, the pervasiveness and political uses of ICTs need to be placed in the wider context of developments in political communication[14].

Entry of the Internet as a channel of political communication was greeted by an already mediatized environment heavily reliant on popular 'catchallism' and pursuit of powerful techniques of visual representation and audience creation. These trends emerged in the 1980s and 1990s, prompted by the commercialization of the media and subsequent mediatization of the political domain (Hallin & Mancini 2004). To navigate and prevail in this new environment, political actors responded by adopting more mediatized and personalized political strategies of self-presentation (Langer 2007) by placing a greater emphasis on their personal attributes to gain greater personal publicity, to legitimize their political positions but also to reinforce their power capital in dealings with the party and the cabinet (Hallin & Mancini 2004: 268, 278, Ibid.: 2007). Consequently politicians spending less time in neighborhood canvassing, rallies, and other direct contact activities in lieu of devoting more of their attention to media oriented public outreach were observed (Dalton & Wattenberg 2000: 11-12). In this sense, the Internet and new use of ICTs became new additions to the arsenal of politicians' tools for self-promotion, wider, more sophisticated and customized public outreach (Sunstein 2001).

Quality of Communication

Unlike traditional print and television media which act as intermediaries in mass communication, ICTs were also considered to facilitate more direct forms of interactivity and enhanced mutuality (Margolis & Resnick 2000). Because online individuals simultaneously become authors, dispatchers, receivers and controllers of their communicative interactions,

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[14] See Blumler and Kavanagh (1999) for a more elaborate contextual analysis of developments in political communication in the postwar period. Briefly, they argue that trends in political communication need to be viewed as responses to a wider socio-economic context which they are a part of. Among such factors include modernization, individualization, secularization, economization, anesthetization, rationalization and mediatization processes in post-industrial societies (1999: 210).

proponents argue, the Internet is seen to reduce or altogether remove the storyteller or the middleman hence contribute to the *disintermediation* of communication (Bentivegna 2002).

Unlike the mass media that resort to powerful framing (and mainstreaming) techniques, personalized use of ICTs enables political actors to present themselves to their publics directly, uncensored. Via their websites or blogs, representatives can personalize their outreach, craft their own public image, tell their own stories, claim credit for the things they have done, target more specific constituencies and introduce the issues/ policies they stand for, or provide more personalized accounts of their 'days on the job'. The German Chancellor Angela Merkel, for example, not only has her own blog but also a specialized political sub- website for children while Hillary Clinton and Barack Obama in the bid for the 2008 democratic Presidential election used highly personalized websites for diversity of constituency outreach activities such as campaigning, fundraising and reaching out to potential voters.

Where the conventional media are limited to one-to-many public outreach from a centralized source, the Internet provides more flexible and pluralized forms of communication by enabling multi-level   one-to-one,   one-to-many,   many-to-on   and   many-to-many communicative interactions.

Additional attributes of the Internet, some argue, also include the faceless interface in online communication (prior to YouTube and podcasting) that allows for the elimination and reliance of visual social cues present in face-to-face settings.   Online, one is predominantly judged on the content value of one's written presentation which reduces participants' reading of social context clues and thereby reduces the potential for various forms of inter-personal discrimination which are seen to negatively affect the quality of communication (Gastil 2000). Online communication is further seen to reduce the 'inhibiting effect' of awkwardness andshyness that otherwise prevents some people from speaking in public (Wallace 1999; Dutton 1996). These aspects, proponents argue, increase the quality of communication and potentially include people to politically participate that otherwise would not.

Functional and innovative communication applications

Perhaps the most concrete benefit of ICTs is their transactional expediency, cost effectiveness and time flexibility. Though an email or websites fulfill similar communicative function as a letter, for example, emails' and websites' instant and potential 24/7 access reduce the send- response lag time, lower transaction costs and enable one-to-many and higher frequency or volume of interactions. The choice of 24/7 synchronous – in real time (e.g. chat rooms or discussion forums) or asynchronous (e-mail, websites, blogs etc.) access also provides users the convenience to virtually 'visit' government departments, seek information, reflect, respond and directly communicate on their own time.

In addition to the convenience, speed and facility of communication, the advent of the Internet platform enabled various *entrepreneurial* (Tolbert & Mossberger 2006) or *functional* (Löfgren et al., 1999:137) applications. Provision of faster, 24/7 access to government information, e- services[15], and the creation of 'one-stop shops' based on efficiency, expediency and cost effectiveness (Tolbert & Mossberger 2006) has enabled government administrations to provide improved public services and interface with the public hence more transparency and accountability.

In other words, the 24/7 Internet platforms provide free and open access to government information and services where citizens no longer have to wait or physically search archives and libraries for information, stand in line for administrative forms and applications, or wait months to get their tax returns filed or driving licenses renewed. Online, public service delivery is intended to be a matter of a click of a mouse. Same level and convenience of access to information would be more cumbersome or impossible to obtain through offline channels (e.g. travel/visits to the local government office, making appointments, waiting, spending time etc.). The extent to which online 'convenience' affects citizens' attitudes and 'linkage' with the government, however, has been less obvious.

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[15] With the intention to adopt a private sector – client/ customer service mentality, the entrepreneurial approach dates back and has gradually evolved from early intra-governmental administrative uses of ICTs in the 1970s (Coleman 1999). *E-government* and *e-democracy*, though often used interchangeably as single concept, are different from each other. E-government places focus on achieving intra-government operational expediency, efficiency (i.e. sharing of databases, files etc.) and the provision of online public services (i.e. facilitating the filing of tax returns, license renewals and access to information). *E-democracy* refers to the use of ICTs and strategies by democratic actors (governments, elected officials, media, citizens, NGOs etc.) to increase opportunities for citizen participation and involvement in public decision-making processes (Coleman and Gotze,2001). But also, through the use of different techniques — i.e. increasing the transparency of the political process, improving the quality of opinion formation by opening new spaces of information and deliberation — to enable citizens to hold politicians accountable for their actions (Trechsel et al., 2003:3).

Direct Participation and Civic Empowerment

In addition to the many functional benefits, the advent of the Internet has been also linked with a strong "civic engagement" agenda. Proponents of participatory democracy have been perhaps the most vocal linking political benefits to the Internet. As democratic governments have increasingly come under pressure (e.g. decreases in political participation, low voter turnout, decreasing party memberships and citizens' rising distrust in political institutions - Wattenberg 2001) to adopt new ways of engaging citizens in political processes, ICTs have been seen as potential new tools for increasing both *vertical (top-down/ bottom up)* and *horizontal (peer-to-peer)* civic participation.

Where logistical challenges stood in the way of maximizing citizens' political involvement, advantages of modern technologies provide the means of removing such obstacles and make direct civic involvement in political processes possible (Budge 1996: 7). Government hosted public policy e-consultations, live podcasting of parliamentary sessions, political actors' personalized websites, blogs and direct e-mail access to government representatives, online public opinion polls and interactive feedback features on government websites are some examples of new forms of *vertical* political outreach and participatory opportunities facilitated by ICTs.

In this context, the German Bundestag, for example, has used synchronous *Diskussionforen* – where a select group of MPs in real time interact online and answer questions posted by the public (www.bundestag.de/forum/index.htm). Since 2006, the UK's Prime Minister's office hosts an e-petitions website with over 29000 petitions and over 5.8 million signatures registered (www.pm.gov.uk), while series of public e-consultations (e.g. in Canada – Canadian Foreign Policy Dialogue 2003; EU Commission – *Your Voice* portal; European Parliament – *Agora,* the *Ideal-EU* project (2008-2009)*;* the 2004 *Madrid Participa* project launched by Madrid municipality[16]) are new ways of engaging citizens in decision-making processes.

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[16] The Ideal-EU project comprised a synchronous, in real time three-region (Tuscany – Italy, Poitou Charentes – France, Catalunya – Spain) Virtual Town Meeting with implications for EU policies on climate change, while the Madrid Participa project creatively combined different ICT applications – onsite e-voting and mobile phone technologies enabling the Madrid City Council to carry out more user-friendly citizen consultations on various local issues while avoiding the costs of traditional voting; to date 22 such citizen consultations were held involving more than 3.5 million citizens (www.madridparticipa.es).

In addition to new vertical engagement with politicians, the online platform, especially with the onset of Web 2.0 applications such as social media, blogs and platforms for co-creation has prompted an expansion in *horizontal, many-to-many communication leading to* political mobilization and social activism (Kahn & Kellner 2004; Ferguson & Griffiths 2006; Lilleker & Jackson 2008; Chadwick 2009). Providing attractive spaces for the establishment of virtual communities and networks across geographic borders and based on common interests, particular visions of the world and specific political projects, the Internet has enabled citizens to become active in collectively interacting, gathering and processing of information, organizing forms of pressure, or protesting against decisions deemed unjust or harmful" (Bentivegna 2002: 54).

Through such activities, citizens not only exercise their political right to wield influence, act as checks and balances to the system and ensure that their preferences are heard and met, but their participatory experience can contribute to civic education. Increased political attentiveness – learning about public issues and social capital (Putnam 2000), and deliberation on public issues (Habermas 1984; Gutmann & Thomson 2004; Dryzek 1990; Fishkin 1991) has been known to contribute to the accumulation of civic knowledge and skills that spur further forms of participation. Such social networking interactions further contribute to a sense of involvement and empowerment which transforms participants into de Tocqueville's *better citizens* and thereby forming prerequisites of associational fabric necessary for healthy democracies (Mansbridge 1991: 360; Putnam 2000).

Use of Internet platforms in the constituency context

In the constituency outreach context, the Internet also offers various potential benefits, though empirical evidence supporting the latter is short in supply. Online politicians can provide access to their speeches and votes taken in Parliament, they can explain the issues they work on, hold online consultation hours and send out en masse e-newsletters and updates issues related to their constituencies. Online consultation forums or networking via social networking sites (SNS) have further widened the possibilities for a customized one-to-many but also one-on-one constituency outreach and interactions previously less possible. In a sense, via a personalized website, a representative's door is open 24/7 to his or her constituents.

As one MEP put it, being online:

> *"…is an effective method of communicating with constituents and informing them of my activities. With such a vast constituency it is impossible to see as many constituents as I would like but the website and blog attracts over 900 unique visitors a week. There is obviously no substitute for meeting people in person but I am able to communicate with far more people in the region through my website than I possible could only with visits, talks and meetings."*

By enabling citizens to gain 24/7 access to government information, to their representatives, to an increasing range of online public services as well as enabling them to engage in public policy making, the Internet and the online platform thus provide new forms of political accountability, responsiveness and greater transparency hence a new channel for strengthening democratic legitimacy (Barber 1984; OECD 2000).

3.2 General Trends: Internet Usage in Political Settings

Though studies and different perspectives on the political uses and benefits of the Internet have mushroomed in the past decade, empirically substantiated impact of Internet usage on political behavior has been more difficult to trace; results on its magnitude have also been mixed so far, ranging from the skeptics (Boulianne 2009; Chadwick 2006; Chadwick & Howard 2009; Coleman & Gotze 2001; Dahlgren 2005; Hindman 2008; Margolis & Resnick 2001) to its proponents (Coleman & Blumler 2009; Ferguson & Griffiths 2006).

The skeptical perspective: Functional vs. participatory uses

On the one hand, while e-enthusiasts maintain that the Internet has revolutionized the way we do politics, skeptics argue that Internet has brought nothing new to politics. The virtual space, they say, has not become the locus of revitalized citizenship and democracy that its proponents had hoped for. Instead the skeptics argue that *political tokenism* (Margolis & Resnick 2000:19; Coleman & Gøtze 2001; Coleman 2004) or *normalisation theory* are the likely explanations for Internet's (non)impact on political behavior where instead of the Internet revolutionizing the status quo, ordinary politics in all their complexity and vitality colonize the virtual reality by making it "resemble the real world" and perpetuate the top-down *politics as usual* (Margolis & Resnick 2000; Lusoli et. al 2006; Hindman 2008). According to this view, politicians' behavior online simply emulates their already existing behavior offline, hence the Internet not contributing

behaviorally to too much novelty.

Politicians' adoption of all kinds but merely tokenistic e-initiatives are based on observations that though political institutions' online presence has become more sophisticated over time[17], the quality of meaningful government citizens interactions and social learning *online* has remained low (Löfgren et al. 1999; Coleman & Gøtze 2001). Entrepreneurial and 'visual, showcase presentations' rather than the interactive and participatory uses tend to dominate online applications in the political context.

The latter has been also confirmed by Trechsel et al. (2003) and Tolbert & Mossberger (2006) whose research found that online applications promoting government/ political actors-citizen interactivity (e.g. e-consultation, e-forums) were disproportionately lagging when compared to those promoting efficiency and 'doing more for less'. Other studies show that though the functional benefits of online interactions contributed to improved transaction efficiency, information sharing and cost-effectiveness by enabling policy makers to analyze responses faster (when compared to mail-in replies) (Defra UK: 2004), officials' participation in interactive, e–policy consultations was poor (Coleman & Ross 2002). Moreover, civic inputs generated during consultations showed to be vaguely (if at all) integrated into policies they intended to inform (Hurrell 2005: 644-645).

As a result, the above observations have lead some to hypothesize that politicians' motive for going online is merely a status symbol and an indicator of modernity (Bentivegna 2002:58) or attempts at 'political correctness' (Tomkova 2009) rather than a genuine interest to change the way politics is done. Or as Jenkins and Thornburn (2003) have insightfully pointed out though the volume and diversity of communication since the advent of the Internet has increased and the world is increasingly "watching", the question remains - who is effectively listening?

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[17] A 2003 UN survey has shown that only 14 percent of UN member states offered on-line consultation facilities on their official websites but only 13 countries (8%) of those with web presence had a clear policy statement on their website encouraging citizens to participate in the process of decision-making (UN, 2003: 20).

The incremental and soft impact hypothesis

Another impact variation of Internet on political behavior is the more *transitional, incremental and soft impact* rather than the revolutionary impact hypothesis. The incremental impact hypothesis suggests that as availability, skills and familiarity with new technologies will increase over time so will arguably the gradual distribution of their impact (Bimber 1999). In other words, it proposes that the Internet's impact on political behavior is likely to vary over time as a cumulative aggregation of small or mutative effects than manifesting in immediate, revolutionary - 'big bang' behavioral changes.

The onset of e-government applications, for example, initially lacked the widespread availability of required skills among their primary users (administrators, politicians, citizens). The latter were in the hands of few technocrats and computer specialists.

The rapid technological advances in the ICT industry and insatiable consumers' taste drove the diffusion of ICTs much faster than the politicians who were responding belatedly to these autonomous trends (Trechsel et al. 2003: 10). At the same time, even if an MP would be interested in interacting with his/her constituents online at the time, they would be unable to as such tools may not have been available at the time nor did they possess the adequate skills to use them.

Over time, however, pervasiveness of Internet penetration, increasing user-friendliness of Internet applications caught up with users' ICT skills. ICT usage hence became more mainstreamed and diversified also in political settings. Politicians increased use of social networking sites – namely Facebook and Twitter (Vergeer, et al. 2013, Towner 2013), e-voting (Alvarez & Hall 2004) and voter advice applications (VAA) such as the EU Profiler used in 2009 European elections or Kiescompass (Fivaz & Nadig 2010, Ladner A. & Pianzola J. 2010, Trechsel & Mair 2011) are gradually changing the voting experience.

Evidence also shows that online consultations are enabling to integrate civil societal groups with bureaucracies and legislatures, while Web 2.0 applications are contributing to the internal democratization of the public sector itself, to the involvement of users in the design and delivery of public services and to open-source collaboration within public organizations (Chadwick 2003). The use of blogs (Ferguson & Griffiths 2006) and social media such as Facebook and Twitter

has also become easier, inexpensive hence more popularized. Moreover, where earlier studies evidenced a gender gap in ICT usage – a prototypical ICT user being white, higher educated, younger male - (Norris 1999) over time, greater PC and Internet penetration and reduction in PC costs have dispelled some of the digital divide based on gender and access to resources concerns.

The mentioned developments provide examples of the evolutionary nature of ICTs over time which due to their availability may prompt new forms of communication and political behavior that did not exist before. A good example is the emerging use of Voting Advice Applications (VAA) such as the Swiss *VAA Smartvote* and the novel *EU Profiler* (2009) that enabled both 270 political parties in Europe to self-position themselves on thirty policy dimensions but it also provided an opportunity to citizens to assess their own political positioning and self-matching with existing political parties prior to the European Parliamentary elections in 2009 (Trechsel & Mair 2011; Fivaz & Nadig 2010; Ladner, Felder & Fivaz 2009).

Relative novelty of research field

The relative novelty of the research field contributes to the lack of established theories and methodological inadequacies that in turn has affected researchers' ability to effectively pin down Internet's impact(s) on political behavior. As technological innovation constantly evolves, longitudinal data collection and research on Internet related behavioral phenomena are rendered difficult as a result (Chadwick 2009). In other words, validity of Internet related behavior yesterday, may not be tomorrow. It is therefore no surprise that Internet research has been compared to chasing a moving target (Trechsel et al. 2003).

Development of systematic and reliable conceptual tools with which to navigate in this new research field has also lagged behind the speed of public and academic debates about Internet's potential benefits (Whyte & MacIntosh 2002). This has resulted in the prolific production of descriptive research with empirical work grossly lagging behind. The few empirical attempts that do exist tend to be mutually unrelated and patchy which provide poor foundations for the discipline's theory building; reliable longitudinal analyses are rare. Overall, these dynamics have so far been detrimental to making Internet impact studies an inchoate

connect-the-dots game.

Users' perspectives on the utility value of ICTs

While the above sketched out existing hypothesis on the impact of Internet in political settings, when the above are matched to *actual* practice, the results show to be equally mixed.

When looking at the *demand* citizen side, two paradoxical trends emerge. On the one hand, public opinion surveys have shown that citizens expect political representatives to use online tools 'more', on the other, citizens show to be rather passive users of government websites – using them mostly for information seeking and e-services but least so for interacting with their MPs or the government. A UK Politics Study (2005), for example, showed that 45 per cent respondents thought that their MPs did not reach out via the Internet enough (BBC, March 2005) while a US study on citizens' Internet usage revealed that out of 78 per cent Americans using government websites, 63 per cent used them to access information and 23 per cent for e-services. Other earlier studies confirmed citizens preferences for using e- government websites for personal development and civic education purposes the most (Mambrey et al. 1999). However, a German public opinion poll found that use of e- government services by citizens has risen sharply over the years (Tolbert & Mossberger 2006).

At the same time, the extent to which government's e-initiatives positively affect citizens' perceptions about the government show to be mixed. Several studies show that though respondents positively equate e-government initiatives with government's improved capacity to solve problems and their satisfaction with the government in doing so, such initiatives did not necessarily increase respondents' trust in government (West 2004; Tolbert & Mossberger 2006). Trust in government showed to be more significantly linked to other factors such as age, partisanship, gender and ethnicity. Increases in trust, were also observed at local rather than state level. The studies then contend that government's online accessibility is an issue of perceived utility than it affecting citizens' attitudes about the government (Tolbert & Mossberger 2006: 365-366). Another study however, did find positive correlation between government's provision of online information via websites, citizens' satisfaction with the new initiative but also greater trust in government. However, the study also found citizens' dissatisfaction with the facility of transactions and interactivity of websites (Welch & Hinnat 2005).

The foreseen benefit of using the Internet to *stimulate inclusiveness and greater equality* was also shown to be unsubstantiated as perceptions of (socio-economic) status tend to be reinforced when participants reveal their offline identities while interacting online (Dahlberg 2001:15). Effects on political participation are also mixed. While some studies observed no significant effects of ICT usage on the increases in *political participation* as those politically engaged offline tended to similarly engaged online (Bentivegna 2002: 59, Vassil 2009), a UK study that explored the relationship between Internet use and online-offline political participation among UK voters found that controlling for political interest and previous political engagement, for groups that received e-stimuli did lead to higher online political engagement. At the same time, the effect failed to affect offline engagement (Gibson, Lusoli & Ward 2005).

More recently though attention has been pointing to the significant use of social media on election campaigning and collective political mobilization and social movements (Van Laer 2010, Vissers et al. 2012, Bennett & Segerberg 2012). The phenomenon is largely attributed to the cost-benefit ratio (low transactional costs versus proportionally larger benefits – e.g. gaining additional contacts at marginal costs) of using social media being more favorable for online than face-to-face social mobilization (Ibid.)

On the supply – elected representatives' side, empirical mapping of legislators' use of ICTs for constituency outreach at the national level have been scarce, and at the European – MEP level even more so. The few studies that do exist have tended to focus on two dimensions. Recognizing the Internet as a new platform for politicians to present and promote themselves, the first set study patterns in MPs' online self-presentation and self-promotion. Gulati (2004), for example, looked at the extent to which US Congressmen (and women) present themselves as (Washington – Capitol Hill) 'insiders' or 'outsiders', while Andre et. al (2008) examined Belgian and Dutch legislators' online self-presentation in terms of five typologies: ingratiation, self-promotion, exemplification, supplication and intimidation but conclusively categorizing them as either 'committed to local issues' or as 'policy specialists'.

The second set of studies assesses the functional value that the Internet mediated communication tends to bring to both MPs and citizens. Here observations show mixed results of online communication bringing both advantages and detriments to constituency outreach. Internet's expediency seems to act as a double edge sword. On the one hand, ICTs

increase politicians' accessibility and transparency over their work (Löfgren et al 1999; Tolbert & Mossberger 2006).   On the other, the speed and volume of online communication has shown to increase demands for instant responsiveness (Welch & Hinnant 2005) but lower the quality of communication by producing more frequent and less reflective and "chatty" communication patterns (Carter 1999, Dahlgren 2005).

When it comes to functionality, e-mail tends to be the most commonly used channel for constituency outreach by both MPs and citizens. From the demand-citizens' side email offers direct access and one-on-one contact with a representative. For a representative it enables one-to-many interactions when sending personalized e-newsletters or messages. At the same time, constituents' tendency to e-mail several times a day "whenever some idea hit them", often with time-consuming requests or anonymous spamming pose new challenges and responsibilities for representatives. The necessity to manage the increased volume of emails but at the expense of constructive content and 'real' issues being raised make legislators hesitant in taking advantages of ICTs without being overwhelmed by them (Carter 1999: 113-114).   Though a slightly outdated quote, but still very much relevant today, one Danish MP explained:

> "my working day is not adjusted for me to go and check all different electronic conferences and newsgroups that are up and running...there is currently electronic discussions going on both within my own party's debate fora, as well as debate-fora on the national constitution [...] I cannot follow everything"   (Löfgren et al. 1999:139).

Some observers have therefore argued that the exponential increases in the volume, diversification and fragmentation of communicative origins brought about by online communication has lead to dispersed *polyvocality* which may endanger political effectiveness (Dahlgren 2005: 51). But due to lack of empirical evidence, strong causal links between the use of Internet and changes in political behavior be it on the side of political institutions, representatives or citizens have been slow to emerge (Margolis & Resnick 2000; Schuler 2003).

MEPs and Internet Usage

While the EP has an elaborate general website, in the EP Rules of Conduct, no stipulation on MEPs' expected ICT usage for constituency purposes is listed.   Each MEP, however, does receive a personalized e-mail address and a generic space to upload personal profiles (with basic

information such as domestic/ EP political affiliation, committee/ delegation work, education, age, previous political work etc.) and desirable links on EP's general website upon his/ her arrival to the EP. In the 6th EP (2004-2009) on EP's official website[18] that should have in principle listed all 785 serving MEPs' websites, only 76 per cent MEPs showed to be online at least via an email, 57 per cent included an additional link to their personal website, while 9 per cent had a blog.

The few existing studies suggest that MEPs mostly use the Internet for intra institutional and research purposes related to their work while their primary reason for establishing a website has been to communicate with and receive feedback from their constituents (Scholl 1986; Dai 2006). But the extent to which MEPs' Internet usage varies and is distributed, the determinants that influence this variation and the extent to which ICTs affect their existing offline constituency work is currently unmapped.

This missing link forms an opportune point of departure for the investigation in this thesis. Due to the lack of established theories and data on ICT usage by MEPs, the analysis in this thesis is pioneering and to a great extent exploratory. The comparative offline-online approach used introduces a more comprehensive empirical approach to the study of Internet's impact on political behavior and MEPs' constituency orientations. Whereas other approaches tend to be descriptive and merely capturing the online dimensions of political actors' behavior, the offline-online approach used here aims to take the analysis further.

The offline-online approach is novel in that it defines Internet's *impact* as the observed behavioral[19] differences between the way MEPs' behave - conduct their constituency outreach *offline* and the way they do so *online*. In other words, the offline-online approach uses a comparative method of the two levels to derive impact dynamics.

Moreover, the thesis departs with the assumption that the expediency, cost-effectiveness and interactive communication facilities offered by the Internet platform are likely to affect MEPs' constituency outreach.   The impact hypothesis will investigate whether the various anticipated utilities of the Internet listed in this chapter prompt MEPs to shift some or

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[18]   The EP website lists a complete set of MEP's standardized profiles which include personal information such as age, (domestic and EP) party affiliation, key EP activities (committee and delegation membership), overview of speeches, voting record and forms of contact.

[19] Behavior has been defined as the action, response or reaction of something/ someone to another something/ someone under specified circumstance.

majority of their constituency activities online or alternatively lead new forms of constituency outreach. In other words, with Internet's increasing pervasiveness, is it conceivable that MEPs use the online platform as a *quasi* virtual constituency office? Or is Margolis and Resnick's (2000) politics *as usual* hypothesis confirmed – does MEPs' online constituency outreach merely emulate their existing constituency behavior offline - therefore contributing to no behavioral changes hence no impact?

Chapter Summary

In summary, Chapter 3 concludes that Internet mediated communication brings both opportunities and potentially new challenges to political communication. For both citizens and their representatives, the online platform offers a more cost-efficient channel of communication and 24/7 asynchronous access. For citizens this has reduced waiting times in waiting for various applications or having their grievances heard while for political representatives the Internet offers a new space for disintermediated self-presentation, to become more transparent as well as to reach out to their constituents en masse but also on an individual basis more efficiently.

At the same time, managing the high volume, frequency of communication and expectations of 'instant responsiveness' that come with it has become somewhat of a challenge for political representatives. The negative effects on the quality of communication are also being questioned. Moreover, the jury is still outstanding as whether the Internet with all its facilities contributes (behaviorally) to anything new when it comes to the citizen – representative rapprochement? Both e-optimists and e-pessimists have been making their cases though seemingly without a consensus. Empirical research on Internet's impact on political behavior, and particularly related to MEPs' constituency outreach has been scarce and under explored. In this sense, this thesis is an opportune endeavor providing a new opportunity to empirically contribute to the evolving study of MEPs' online (as well as offline) behavior at the individual level.

4.   RESEARCH DESIGN

In order to contribute to a more nuanced analysis about the micro-dynamics of representation between MEPs and their constituents, this thesis places a magnifying glass on four specific dimensions of the constituency linkage. These will be examined in the form of four analytical steps:

>   Step 1:   MEPs' constituency orientations and constituency outreach OFFLINE
>
>   Step 2:   MEPs' constituency orientations and constituency outreach ONLINE
>
>   Step 3:   The variation and determinants MEPs' constituency orientations and constituency outreach both on and offline; and
>
>   Step 4:   In an explorative way, the comparison of intensity with which MEPs conduct their offline versus their online constituency outreach.

This Chapter 4 proceeds to introduce the research design and operationalization of key variables for the four steps of the empirical analysis. As a result it will be structured in four main parts followed by a brief conclusion that discusses the value of the approach for future research and some of its main limitations. The *first* part will begin by elaborating the operationalization of MEP's *offline* constituency orientations and outreach: introducing operational definitions and indicators for the main concepts, key hypotheses, data collection and sources and methodology while the *second* part will do the same but for MEPs' *online* constituency orientations and outreach. The methodological contribution of this second part is potentially significant as it attempts to conceptualize 'constituency outreach' in a relatively new space, previously non-existent hence behaviorally unexplored. Given the novelty of the Internet studies as a research field and lack of consequent theoretical grounding, this means, that analytical proxies for how to measure constituency outreach online needed to be conceptualized and created in a way from scratch.

This Chapter's *third* part, linked to Step 3 of the analysis, seeks to identify variation patterns in MEPs' both off and online constituency outreach as well as what determines those patterns. In other words, answering the question, whether MEPs' constituency orientations vary and why are some MEPs more predisposed than others to be more constituency oriented than others; this means outlining the parameters of the dependent and independent variables and explaining the objectives of the multivariate regression analysis to be used. The last, Step 4 then proceeds to detail the methodological underpinnings of the offline-online comparative approach and to reflect

on the merits, challenges and limitations of the triangulation approach chosen. The following sections will elaborate each of these analytical steps in some more details.

4.1 Step 1: Determining MEPs' Constituency Orientations & Outreach OFFLINE

Overall, the thesis concerns itself with determining the quality of linkage between MEPs and their constituencies. Though the linkage mechanism is in principle two-directional MEP(s) → citizen(s)/ constituent(s)/ voter(s), and citizen(s) → MEP(s), this thesis limits its analysis only to the former, to the linkage prompted by MEP(s) → citizen(s). Another specification particular to this thesis is that it examines the MEP(s) → citizen(s) linkage in the every day context between two election points.

The first step of the analytical process empirically aims to observe two descriptive aspects of the constituency linkage: MEPs' *constituency orientations* and their *constituency outreach* OFFLINE. Both form constitutive parts of the MEP(s) → citizen(s) representational linkage mechanism. While the former refers to the attitudinal elements and the importance MEP attach to constituency work, the second examines different types of activities pursued with respect to constituency outreach.

4.1.1 Definitions & Operationalization of OFFLINE Constituency Dimensions

Before proceeding to define and operationalize the two (offline) dimensions, it is perhaps useful to define first how the concept '*constituency'* is being used here. A constituency is understood here as a *heterogeneous* geographical unit or electoral district that an individual MEP represents. It is heterogeneous in the sense that in addition to classical geographic delimitations, the term can also refer to a group of people that an MEP perceives to represent or which may seek MEP's representation or assistance. Such groups can include civic or organized interest groups, or sub-national political entities such as local, regional administration bodies that would typically come from the MEP's geographic district.

Moreover, because MEPs serve as representatives in a transnational, pan-European Parliament, this contextual specificity was also factored into the survey question that explored how MEPs conceptualize and perceive their constituencies. Because extant research on EU representation and

corresponding surveys (e.g. EPRG) typically or by default confine the 'constituency' to a territorial unit, the rather open definition adopted in this thesis goes beyond this prescriptive measure and allowed MEPs more choices. And as it will be explained in Chapter 4, this openness proved to be insightful as MEPs tend to have fairly heterogeneous ideas about whom they conceive their constituencies to be with the transnational – European dimension playing a strong role.

Offline. As the first level of analysis concerns the mapping of MEPs' constituency orientations and constituency outreach *offline*, o*ffline* is defined here as MEPs' use of non-Internet mediated communication channels including face-to-face contact during office consultations or public events, telephone, mailed newsletters, or the use of traditional media such as radio, TV and printed press.

Constituency Orientations Offline. Because it has been observed that *how* representatives *think about* their constituencies tends to influence how they *represent them* (Fenno 1977, 1978), *constituency orientation* provides insights about their attitudinal predispositions as to: (i) w*hat or whom (MEPs) consider their constituencies to be*, and (ii) *the importance they attach to constituency work.* While the first dimension describes more cognitive aspects the second dimension measures the direction or intensity of MEPs' constituency propensities, in other words, enabling us to determine the *degree to which* MEPs are pro-constituency oriented or not. Both are considered as composite parts of what is referred to in this thesis as constituency orientations.

To address this dimension in the form of survey questions, MEPs were asked *what or whom they considered their constituency to be* (Question #1 on the survey, please see Appendix). As part of their answer, MEPs could select the electoral geographic unit they represent (either national or regional), their personal or party voters, a specific (interest or civic) group, but also given that they work in a pan-European context, the choice of representing wider a 'European constituency' and its people was also provided.

To measure *the importance that MEPs attach to constituency work* four resource allocation proxies were used (please see the Codebook in Appendix 2):

  (i)   *whether MEP(s) have a constituency office*   (var. **ConstOffice**)
  (ii)   the *amount of time (no. of days/ week) MEP(s) spends in the constituency*   (var. **DaysConst**)
  (iii) the *amount of staff* they allocate to constituency work   (var. **Staffhome**)

(iv)   the *proportion of time they spend on constituency work compared to other responsibilities* (e.g. parliamentary, committee work, maintaining media relations etc.) (var. **Timecasework**)

The key reason why several proxies were chosen is because little is known how MEP conceptualize their constituency work.   Hence the question was asked from several different angles before correlations between the different variables were drawn.

Constituency Outreach. While the constituency orientation provides insights on how MEPs *think*, MEPs' constituency outreach determines what MEPs actually *do* as part of their constituency work and outreach. In this sense, it is argued here, that it is through constituency outreach t h a t   t h e linkage mechanism and inter-election relational continuity between the EP and European citizens is maintained (or not).

In theory, representatives are known to pursue two types of constituency outreach or constituency work. They explain their own political work to their constituents and they take on casework. For the purposes of this thesis, an *interactivity dimension* was added to see the extent to which MEP pro-actively solicit or invest time into two-way interactivity with their constituents.

The three sub-dimensions of MEPs' constituency outreach were operationalized in the following way:

Casework OFFLINE. Very little is known about the types and the amount of casework that MEPs receive. Typically, representatives' pro-constituency orientation is measured in terms of their *responsiveness to casework* (Fenno 1978; Johannes 1983).   However, MEPs' responsiveness to casework tells only half of the story. Because casework involves a two-directional relationship, MEPs':

   (i)   *Proportion of time spent on case work* (in comparison to other activities) (**Timecwrk**)
   (ii) *Casework responsiveness* - percentage of cases that MEP responds to (**Cwrkrespond**)
   (iii) *Casework received* - average number of cases MEP receives per week   (var. **Cwrkreceive**)

were examined and serve to describe both the 'supply' and 'demand' dynamics, or representative-constituent reciprocity in the casework dimension. The *casework responsiveness* further specified and was subdivided into different groups *(e.g. interest groups, civic organizations, individual citizens,*

regional governments etc.)[20]. When it came to determining MEPs' constituency orientations, MEPs that devote more time to casework than to other activities would be considered to be more pro-constituency oriented.

Explaining work OFFLINE refers to unidirectional and top-down (MEP(s) → constituency) modes of communication or outreach that MEP(s) pursue as part of their outreach. It is uni-directional because conventional means of outreach such as communication via radio, TV, newspapers, mailed newsletters do not necessitate feedback or (two-way) deliberative interactivity. They merely involve MEPs speaking or informing their constituencies without soliciting a response. Consequently, MEPs' preference and frequency - *how often MEPs use telephone, office consultations and public meetings, to communicate with citizens outside of the election campaign* (Survey Question #12) were used as an offline indicator for this dimension. A dummy variable for respondents who use these channels 'often' or 'most often' was considered as a proxy for identifying MEPs with pro-constituency orientations.

Interactivity OFFLINE. The third interactivity dimension was added to capture the extent to which MEPs pro-actively and directly interact with those whom they represent. Unlike in the explaining work dimension, the interactivity measures two-way interactions, feedback and solicitation of deliberative exchanges of political cues with their constituents between elections.   Greater interactivity would be expected to reinforce the delegate orientation while non-interactivity is likely linked to the trustee role. The offline *interactivity* v a r i a b l e is an added dimension of MEPs' constituency outreach. Unlike the explaining work which depicts a one-way, top-down form of outreach and provides n o o r v e r y limited opportunities for reciprocity, the *offline* interactivity refers to forms of constituency outreach that solicit two-way dialogue, feedback and deliberative exchange of political cues.

4.1.2 Step 1: Hypotheses linked to MEPs' OFFLINE constituency orientations, outreach

In addition to determining basic characteristics of MEPs' constituency orientations and constituency outreach, the objective of this first analytical step is to also determine any aggregate patterns in MEPs' pro-constituency orientations. As explained in Chapter 1, due to the EP providing

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[20] Please see Survey questions # 6, #9 and #11, also please see Codebook in the Appendix 2: *Vars - Respondnatig, Respondzitizen, Respondcivassoc, Respondreggov, Respondig* (Appendix 4 – copy of the survey questionnaire).

low institutional incentives and the PR system not being favorable for MEPs developing pro-constituency orientations - the null hypothesis expects that:

(H*0*): *Majority of MEPs have low pro-constituency orientations and prefer to use one-directional constituency outreach.*

A *low pro-constituency* orientation is defined as MEPs attaching proportionally *less* importance to constituency related activities than to others by:

(H*0*a)   *not having a constituency office*

(H*0*b)   *spending 0.5 days or less in the constituency* (as expected by the EP Calendar)

(H*0*c)   *allocating less staff to his/her constituency office than to their Brussels office*, and

(H*0*d)   *spending proportionally less time on constituency work than on their other duties* (e.g. parliamentary, committee work, media relations etc.).

While for H*0*a – *0*c a predetermined value determined a pro-constituency orientation (e.g. a score of '1' on constituency office dummy variable, >0.5 days for *H1b*), for *H1d – H1f* a standard value that determined whether MEP is pro-constituency oriented or not was created - and based on MEP scoring above his/her respondents' cohort mean value (for that variable). If an MEP responded above average only two out of the three indicators, s/he would receive a score of 2 and so on.

After assessing results for each of the four hypotheses separately, an aggregate 'pro-constituency' ordinal variable (**Proconst)** measuring all four aspects was also constructed by first creating four dummies where a score of '1' was given for each indicator favoring pro-constituency orientation. Using additive scoring, the four values - with maximum possible score for a pro-constituency orientation being '4', and the lowest '0' for minimum/ non pro-constituency orientation (please see Codebook in the Appendix 2).

While the above established the attitudinal dimensions of the importance that MEPs attach to constituency work, when it comes to **constituency outreach and** the expected low pro-constituency orientation, MEPs were expected to spend:

(H1e)   Proportionally less time on casework in comparison to other activities; and to

(H1f)   Prefer to use uni-directional rather *than two-directional, interactive modes of communications.*

An alternative to the null hypothesis, it was also expected that *MEPs' constituency orientations and outreach will be more heterogeneous and vary* (H1) – with some MEPs being more pro-constituency oriented than others without a dominant pattern.

4.1.3 Data collection for OFFLINE Constituency orientations and outreach

For the offline constituency orientations and outreach, a combination of the author's self-administered, online 2009 MEP survey (n=159) and 31 semi-structured face-to-face interviews with MEPs served as the two key data sources. Online surveys were sent to all 785 (at the time) MEPs in the form of an email with an embedded direct link to the survey. MEPs from 2007 accession countries - Romania and Bulgaria - were included in the survey sample. Please see more details concerning the set up and administration of the survey in the Appendix.

Content-wise, altogether the survey included 16 survey questions, split into 4 modules or sections. Questions relating to MEPs' offline constituency orientations were included in Module 1 (Questions 1-3) that targeted MEPs' perceptions, attitudes and role orientations toward their constituencies while Module 2 targeted questions (4-7) on the importance that MEPs' attach to constituency work, while Module 3 - questions (8-13) focused on different aspects of the constituency outreach. The remaining Module 4 and three questions focused on the online dimensions of MEPs' outreach.

4.2 Step 2: Constituency Orientations and Outreach ONLINE

The objective of Step 2 in the analysis is to examine how MEPs use ICT and the Internet platform to conduct their constituency work.

In order to determine MEPs' online constituency orientations and outreach, *'online'* refers to the use of ICT and Web 1.0 Internet-mediated forms of communication such as email, personal website, blog (and the various features that the latter contain) and Web 2.0 interactive social networking sites such as Facebook or Twitter. 'Not being online' therefore means not having a personal website/ blog or an e-mail address. To facilitate the comparison between MEPs' constituency outreach offline and online in Section 4 below and Chapter 6, the analysis of MEPs' online

constituency orientations and outreach will follow a similar sequence that was introduced for measuring MEPs' offline constituency orientations and outreach, first introducing the indicators used for online constituency orientations and then followed by the operationalization of online outreach. For nearly all the online variables, a combination of responses to dedicated survey questions related to the online dimension as well as website analytics – the coding of MEPs' websites - were used as the primary data sources.

4.2.1 Definitions and Operationalization of ONLINE Constituency Orientations

Constituency Orientations ONLINE. The offline indicators for constituency orientations included several measures about how MEPs identify their constituencies, how much time they spend in their constituencies and how much time they devote to constituency work. To the extent possible, the online indicators tried to align with these. While it was assumed that the online constituencies were not necessarily different than the offline ones, for *online* constituency orientations the main proxies included first whether an MEP is online or not and a set of online attitudinal indicators – operationalized as dummy variables – that related to MEPs' motives for creating a website. The assumption here was that MEPs' motives indicated their intended use of their websites. MEPs' motives were derived from their responses to question #14 in the survey – please see below.

(i) *whether MEP is online or not – by having a personal website, a blog or neither* (**Online**)

(ii) *Reasons for creating MEP website – having direct contact with constituents* (**Webcitizens**)

(iii) *Reasons for creating MEP website – receiving feedback from constituents* (**Webfeedback**)

(iv) *Reasons for creating MEP website – offer educational information aboutEU* (**WebinofEU**)

(v) *Proportion of time spent on website management versus other activities* (**Timewebsite**)

4.2.2 Constituency Outreach ONLINE

For the *online* constituency outreach, corresponding proxies for the three types of activities typically pursued by MEPs - casework, explaining work and interactivity were operationalized in the following way.

Casework ONLINE. Though actual casework likely cannot be conducted on-line as it in many cases may require offline interventions, the *online casework dimension for MEPs' constituency outreach* comprised two variables: MEP's listing 'casework' as a survey response to the 'motive for creating his/her website' **(webcasework)** question and secondly as MEPs *soliciting or taking credit for* casework on their websites. To trace the latter, a dummy variable **(casework)** was created to track whether MEPs' websites or blogs contained a feature that advertised 'casework', 'services' or 'assistance' to constituents. As no standard measure (to the author's knowledge) for *online* 'casework' exists, the measure introduced here is exploratory. Thus in addition to the coding criteria mentioned, other references to casework such as: online forms for EU subsidies or listing of e-procurement opportunities for specific constituency groups (i.e. farmers, SMEs etc.), online invitations to workshops conducted by MEPs on various EU policies, or links to practicums and other EU institutions were also included.

Explaining political work ONLINE. While the offline indicators for explaining work referred to MEPs' preference for the use of one-directional conventional offline media, the **online indicators for explaining work** included MEPs' preference to use one-directional online features. One-directional refers to modes of communication that do not facilitate feedback and interaction, but enable the MEP to control the communication flow and typically entail 'sending out information' that the MEP deems important for his/her constituents to know. The three indicators for this dimension therefore included:

i) *Reason for creating a website - providing transparency over work*   **(webtransparent)**

ii) *Preference for using one-directional online features - e-newsletters*   **(mepnewsltr)**
iii) *Presence of 'explaining work' website feature* **(explainingwork)**

Interactivity ONLINE. Unlike the online explaining work dimension, online interactivity enables two-way interactions: the solicitation of feedback (opinion poll, comment box, SNS) asynchronously (not in real time) but also synchronously (in real time) such as e-forums or consultation hours[21]. Therefore, the two proxies for this online dimension included an attitudinal measure of:

i)   *MEP's preference for using two-directional online features - e-mail.*   **(mepnewsltr)**

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[21] Because the primary interest is to map out representative-constituency interactivity, interactive horizontal communication features – e.g. online post-it boards providing thematic interactive spaces among citizens to network – that sometimes politicians tend to provide were omitted from analysis.

ii) *MEP's cumulative score on the presence of website features: website, email, e-petition, feedback form, e-forum, Facebook, Twitter.* **(interactiveonline)**

The more of these features appeared on MEPs' website, the more pro-constituency inclined online s/he online was considered to be. The cumulative scoring was also weighted where an added weight (score of '2') was also attached to the two highly interactive features – email, SNS and e-forums[22]. Therefore a minimum score of '0' (those not online or without a single interactive feature) or a maximum score of '11' was possible – please refer to codebook.

One of the key caveats with measuring online interactivity is that website's level of 'interactivity' depends not only on whether MEPs have certain features or not but also how actively they and the end-users – constituents – actually use them. My survey measured only MEPs' usage and their estimates of constituents' reciprocity. Ideally, however, a constituent survey and website traffic (via RSS feed statistics) would be also assessed in order to obtain a measure of the reverse constituent → MEP vector. Though potentially cumbersome and costly to operationalize, this dimension of interactivity would significantly enrich the analysis and should be explored in future research.

4.2.3 Hypotheses related to MEP's ONLINE constituency orientations

Because relatively very little is known about how MEPs behave *online*, most of the expected hypotheses in Step 2 of the analysis are exploratory and deductive. In general, as elaborated earlier with distance, time cost reducing, and one-to-many outreach attributes of ICT and the Internet, the online platform appears to be a potentially attractive tool for MEP's constituency outreach. Therefore the *null* hypothesis for the online dimension expects that:

(H2null): Great majority of MEPs will be online – have a website or a blog.

Due to the effect of various factors such as demographics, personal predisposition to use ICT and the role of Internet penetration, the *alternative hypothesis* (H2) suggests that MEPs' online constituency outreach will vary. With respect to the three dimensions of online constituency outreach – MEPs'

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[22] Though email would be considered as highly interactive as well, unlike email, e-forums are typically held in real time and are an explicit invitation for two-way interaction by an MEP, whereas email may also be a response to a citizen initiated communicative act.

propensity for soliciting and taking on casework, for explaining his work and promoting interactive outreach online, it is expected that out of the three dimensions, MEPs are most likely to use their websites for top-down, one-directional and non-interactive communication. In other words, according to the skeptics (Coleman & Gotze 2001; Bentivegna 2005), MEPs will likely:

> *(H2a): use their websites for self-promotional activities, for explaining their work or disseminating information about the EU; and*

> *(H2b): will downplay the solicitation of casework and interactive two-way engagement on their websites.*

4.2.4 Data Collection for ONLINE Constituency Outreach

Two sources were used to collect data for determining MEPs' online constituency orientations and outreach. The first was the author-administered 2009 MEP survey and the second was the coding and analysis of MEPs' websites.

The survey responses were mostly used to derive MEPs' orientations and attitudes toward ICT usage, their perceptions about the impact that ICT and Internet have on their work and estimates of how citizens or constituents use their websites. Hence, as noted earlier, the picture about MEPs' online constituency orientations and outreach provided is biased in favor of MEPs' perspectives. A more balanced perspective would have been received if citizens were also surveyed but which was beyond the scope of this thesis.

To determine the basic question, whether MEPs were online or not, all 785 MEPs' profiles on the EP official website were screened. For the more detailed website analytics, however, only survey respondents' websites were examined. As indicated in Appendix 1, among those who answered the survey, 76% had a website or a blog while 24% did not. In the actual MEP population, however, only 57 per cent provided a link to 'their' website (bloggers excluded) hence survey respondents showed a slight bias in favor of Internet users. In addition to determining MEPs' online status, the detailed website analysis then screened and coded for the different constituency outreach features that MEPs' websites contained. In total, twenty website/ blog features (please see Appendix 1) were explored where ten were specifically related to the three constituency

outreach dimensions. Please see Appendix 1 for full survey administration and website coding modalities.

4.3   Step 3: Explaining Variation in MEPs' OFFLINE – ONLINE Constituency Orientations and Outreach

Because the thesis concerns itself with the quality of the constituency linkage between MEPs and their constituents, once the primary characteristics of MEPs' constituency orientations and outreach were determined, the core question to be answered in Step 3 is what factors prompt some MEPs to be more pro-constituency oriented than others?

4.3.1 Determinants for OFFLINE Pro-Constituency Orientations and Outreach

Using multivariate OLS regression analysis, the dependent variable for the third Step of the analysis referred to MEPs' pro-constituency orientation which was operationalized as a constructed additive variable **(Proconstituency)** of three dimensions/ original variables:

i)   *Above (MEP respondent cohort) average no. of days spent in constituency* **(Daysinconstituency)**

ii)   *Spends above average time on casework in proportion to other duties* (**Timecasework)**

iii) *Preference for using 'constituency office hours' as a means for reaching out to constituency* **(Mepoffice)**

For each of the original variables, a mean tendency for the respondent group was calculated following which a dummy variable was created with value '1' for MEPs who scored above the mean. The three variables were then recoded into a new additive variable **(Proconstituency)** where the maximum possible value was '3' and the minimum '0' for MEPs who scored below average on all of the variables.

Controlling for MEPs' age, gender and level education, four different sets or models of independent variables were tested to determine the existing variation in MEPs' offline pro-constituency orientations.

4.3.2 OFFLINE Pro-constituency determinants

OFFLINE Model 1: Electoral systems

Based on rational choice theories which contend that formal rules shape incentives to which politicians respond to (Norris 2003), the electoral systems theory is among the most researched determinants of legislators' orientations, even in the case of MEPs (Bowler & Farrell 1993; Powell 2000; Farrell & Scully 2007, 2010). *District magnitude* and *openness of ballot structure* are considered to be strong predictors of representatives' constituency orientations where legislators from PR-systems with multi-member and closed ballot systems have been observed to be less constituency oriented than those from first-past-the-post, single member systems (SMD) with open ballot structure. Therefore:

> (H3a) *MEPs from electoral systems with closed ballot structure will be negatively correlated with pro-constituency orientations while MEPs from systems with open, STV, and ordered ballot structures[35] are more likely.*

Table 4.1   Ballot structure

Ballot Structure	EU Member States
Closed	Britain, France, Germany, Greece, Hungary, Poland, Portugal, Spain
Ordered	Austria, Belgium, Cyprus, Czech Republic, Latvia, Netherlands, Slovak Republic, Slovenia, Sweden
Single Transfer Vote	Ireland and Malta
Open or open inclined	Denmark, Estonia, Finland[23], Italy, Lithuania, Luxembourg

Source: Farrell & Scully (2007:130), which exclude new EU members Bulgaria & Romania.

As to the second variable - *district magnitude* which is typically defined in terms single member or multi-member constituencies and depicting the 'level at which seats are allocated to the parties and candidates', Farrell and Scully (2007:127) refine the distinction in the case of MEPs by considering and merging both district magnitude and ballot structure as part of a single measure. However, for the purposes of this thesis district magnitude is operationalized as two dummy variables - 'regional' and 'national' district magnitude (M). 'Regional' or 'national' M here refers to any regional considerations that factor into the electoral recipe, in the way EU primaries (e.g. in

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[23] Though in Finland was originally in Farrell & Scully's 'Quasi list' intra-party dimension category, it was included in the 'open or open inclined' category (Farrell & Scully 2007:127-130).

Germany) are run; or the way party votes are aggregated (on a regional basis) but party seats are nationally allocated in the combined complex Italian system; or the regionally drawn (but running on closed list) constituencies in France and Belgium. Consequently, it is expected that due to the 'proximity to voters':

> (*H3b*) *MEPs from constituencies with regional M would be expected be more pro-constituency orientated than MEPs from constituencies with national M. Countries falling into the 'regional' category include Germany, Poland, Belgium, France and Ireland.*

OFFLINE Model 2: MEP's role orientations

The second model to be tested incorporates MEPs' role orientations. Representatives' cognitive self-perceptions - how they interpret their own roles as representatives has been observed to influence how they represent (Wahlke 1967; Eulau et al. 1978). Consequently, it is conjectured that MEPs' role orientations have a "significant impact on the way in which the EP works internally" (Katz 999: 83).

Role orientations are typically measured in terms of: *representatives' representational focus* (e.g. citizens, interest groups, national party, EP party group etc.), and *whom they admit to take instruction* from when voting in Parliament. Though empirical results have not been overly robust, it is generally hypothesized that representatives who prioritize taking instructions from, and place their focus on 'citizens' are more likely to be pro-constituency oriented than those who take instructions from and focus on their party or on their own judgment.

Due to the lack of guidance in the EP's *Rules of Procedure*, institutionally, MEPs are provided wide discretion as to where they place their representational focus and whom they take instruction from - be it their parties, individual citizens, organized interest groups or civil society organizations. Prior research, however, shows two tendencies in MEPs' role orientations: a proclivity to act as *trustees* – in other words, to act 'independently' and basing their decisions on their own judgment rather than on other sources (Katz 1999; Scully & Farrell 2005); and, secondly, the prevalence of party orientation as MEPs depend on their national parties' apparatus to gain favorable position on the ballot. As to the *focus of representation,* according to Katz (1999), MEPs show to predominantly focus their representation on interest groups. However, more longitudinal and consistent validation needs to confirm this past research which provides an opening for this thesis.

In the context of this thesis using the existing theoretical grounds - **whom MEPs take instruction from** was used as a proxy for measuring MEPs' role orientations. This role orientation was operationalized in the form of a survey question, where MEPs were asked on a 5-point scale (ranging from 1-never to 5 – on almost every vote):

> (H3c) *How often do they rely on recommendations from the following sources - national party leaders; EP party group; national party delegation of MEPs; EP committee leaders; national government; your country's regional authorities; Interest groups; policy experts; citizens; your own independent opinion - on which way you vote in the EP?*

MEPs' answers were then coded as individual continuous variables for different 'sources of instruction'. MEPs who listed citizens as their source of instruction were expected to be most pro-constituency oriented.

OFFLINE Model 3: Party affiliation, political responsibility, incumbency and former political career

The third model combined what could be considered as 'political set' of variables that included: MEP's party affiliation in the EP; level of political responsibility in Brussels, incumbency and whether MEP held public office in his/her own country.

Party affiliation. Because there are no formal hypotheses established about *party affiliation* and constituency orientations, the party affiliation variable is exploratory and open-ended – as no party is theoretically known to promote MEPs constituency orientations than other.

The political responsibility (in Brussels) variable such as committee chairmanship, holding a senior position within party group or simply belonging to more than one committee/ delegation all suggest that the MEP taking on such responsibilities would have less time for constituency outreach as his/her related work would take up more of his/her time. As a result the, political responsibility (measured as *a dummy variable 'holding chairmanship or vice-chairmanship in EP committees, delegations, or party groups*) is foreseen to be negatively correlated with MEPs' pro-constituency orientations *(H3c)*.

Two considerations should be noted, however, when using the political responsibility determinant. The first is that though an MEP may personally spend more time in Brussels, s/he

can still be constituency oriented if s/he allocates resources and delegate constituency related duties to constituency based staff; and secondly, the political responsibility variable may be also correlated with *incumbency.* As MEPs spend more time (are re-elected) in the EP, gain more experience and become intra-institutional savvy, they are more likely to be selected or bid for leadership positions. Therefore the incumbency variable will also be added into this category.

Incumbency or representatives' seniority (number of office terms served) is known to be negative correlated with representatives' constituency service. Because first-timer or rookie MPs are inexperienced in legislative matters, enjoy lower name recognition and visibility hence a less stable electoral position among voters (Mann & Wolfinger 1980) they tend to spend more time securing their popularity by reaching out to constituents and accepting casework (Mayhew 1974; Fiorina 1977; Fenno 1977; Franklin & Scarrow 1999). Conversely, incumbent and senior legislators, after becoming more skilled in legislating, tend to devote more time on parliamentary work and less on constituency service[36]. As a result, the *incumbency hypothesis suggests that first time MEPs rather than incumbents will spend more time, resources and maintain closer ties on their constituencies (H3d*).

The role of **previous political career or public visibility** (e.g. domestic political careers, national sports personalities, actors, news anchormen/ women, astronauts etc.) is an exploratory variable and an insight gained from conducting interviews with MEPs. MEPs who previously held domestic political office or were frontline national public figures explained that they are contacted and/ or receive more casework from people due to their visibility as previous public persona at the domestic/ national level. As a result, those previously active on anti-abortion, aerospace industry or human rights issues at the national level tend to continually receive casework on related topics. Given this possibility,

> *(H3e): MEPs with a previous political career or MEPs with a previously high domestic visibility would be expected to be more pro-constituency oriented.*

Data for this dimension was found on MEP's official profiles on EP's website where 'past experience and political career' are a standard feature and was coded as a basic dummy variable with the value '1' ascribed to MEPs who held prior political office (at any level) in their own countries.

OFFLINE Model 4: Constituency characteristics - MEP-constituent ratio, distance to constituency, political culture

The fourth set of variables has been adapted from existing (national level) theories related to district heterogeneity and intra-district electoral dynamics (Fenno 1974; Mayhew 1974; Kuklinski & Elling 1977). Constituency characteristics therefore simplified here to mean: the size of the constituency in terms of the MEP-constituent ratio; distance to constituency; and political culture - being from East, West, South, and Northern Europe, though admittedly a 'gross' categorization.

MEP-constituent ratio. Majority of MEPs represents constituencies that are very large in *size* with a high *citizen - MEP ratio.* For example, the German speaking community of Belgium is the most represented with one seat for its population of 71 000 while the people of Sardinia and Sicily are the least represented, with only one seat per 943 000 people. With respect to the MEP-constituent ratio, it is expected that higher the ratio the more difficult it will be for MEPs to attend to individual constituents. Instead, MEPs might opt for focusing on interest groups or on parliamentary activities in order to wield influence on a wider or macro rather than micro (individual) representational scale.

> *(H3f): therefore expects MEP-constituent ratio – coded as a continuous variable ranging from 0 to 99 million – to be negatively correlated with MEP from constituencies with higher constituent-MEP ratio.*

Distance to constituency is another possibly negatively correlated factor preventing MEPs from developing pro-constituency orientations. This reality was emphasized by a Cypriot MEP who explained that during a regular working week he sees more security gates at airports than he does my constituents. The postulated expectation here is that:

> *(H3g): the longer the distance between Brussels and the constituency (e.g. compare Belgian or Dutch constituencies versus Romanian, Estonian or Finnish) the less constituency oriented MEPs may be expected to be.*

Political culture. This insight and subsequently variable was conceived during interviews with MEPs where MEPs from new member states – the 2003 and 2007 wave (most from Central and Eastern European countries) tended to have more pro-active attitude toward their constituency outreach and work than members from the older, more establish member states. Some explained

that it was their role to ensure that their constituents benefit from EU accession, the resources and opportunities that it offers. This sense of urgency or duty was experienced in a more ad hoc manner among MEPs from 'older EU member states'. Therefore, in order to capture this dimension, four dummy variables were created dividing the EU member states into four groups 1st group - 'old members', 2nd wave (1980s Greece, Spain, Portugal), 3rd wave (Finland, Sweden, Austria) and latest, CEE new members (from 2004 and 2007 enlargement).

For a summary overview of all the independent variables and their corresponding indicators for offline constituency orientations are listed in Table 4.2 below.

Table 4.2 Determinants for OFFLINE – ONLINE Constituency Orientations and Outreach

Dimension	OFFLINE Pro-constituency orientation	ONLINE
Model 1: Electoral system	▪ Ballot Structure: Closed, Open, Ordered ▪ District Magnitude – regional vs. national	*Same as for offline.*
Model 2: Role Orientations	▪ Whom MEP takes instruction from	To 'increase direct contact with citizens' as a motive for creating a website.
Model 3: Political	▪ Political Responsibility ▪ EP Party Group Affiliation ▪ Incumbency ▪ Previous political career	*Same as for offline.*
Model 4: Constituency Characteristics	▪ MEP-Constituent ratio ▪ Distance to constituency	*Same as for offline*
Model 5	N/A	▪ Demographic factors ▪ Internet penetration

4.3.3 ONLINE Pro-constituency determinants

With respect to what defines the dependent variable - MEPs' pro-constituency orientation - online, three composite factors were considered:

> *i)   Cumulative online score on interactivity* **(onlineinteractive)**

Theoretical underpinnings specific to MEPs' online constituency orientations and outreach are in short supply. However, popular earlier works posited that access to the Internet and its benefits are conditioned by socio-economic and demographic factors (Bimber 2000; Norris 2001). A prototypical Internet user at the time (be they politician or otherwise) was considered to be an adult male, higher educated and younger (Norris 2001). Though validity of this typology has eroded over time, Internet penetration and age continually show to be a significant determinant of Internet and ICT usage where younger cohorts are much more likely to use the latter than older cohorts (ONS Internet Access Quarterly Update 2011)[24]. Hence, demographic factors continue to matter when it comes to Internet usage.

Therefore, in addition to the determinants used for offline constituency outreach, the three sets used for determining MEPs' constituency outreach online included: i) an attitudinal variable - t*o 'increase direct contact with citizens' as a motive for creating a website* **(Webcitizen)** - which is in effect an attitudinal proxy for MEPs' constituency orientation *online*, ii) the second set of variables - *demographic factors as already mentioned* – age, gender and educational attainment; and lastly *iii) Internet penetration* **(ITpenetration)** – defined as citizens' access to and usage of the Internet (in country that an MEP represents) and measured as per country percentage – hence with a minimum value of '0' and maximum value of '100'.   While in the Western European countries Internet penetration has to a large extent equalized hence with low variation between countries, among new entrants and Southern countries some variation in Internet penetration still remains.

The basic set of hypotheses for MEPs' online pro-constituency outreach therefore suggest that *pro-constituency oriented MEPs online will be younger (40 years old and younger), higher educated males with propensity to have created their websites to increase their contact with citizens (H3f)*. A *negative relationship between MEPs' online pro-constituency orientations and low Internet* penetration is also expected (H3i).

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[24] For 2010, the ONS Internet Access Quarterly Update shows that in the UK 16-24 age group form 98.8% of Internet users (www.ons.gov.uk).

4.4   Step 4: Towards a Virtual Constituency Office?: Comparing MEPs' ONLINE and OFFLINE Constituency Outreach

In addition to finding out the key characteristics and trends in MEPs' constituency outreach both on and offline, and what determines them, the last research question posed was whether it is plausible to expect that the increasing use of ICT and the Internet in our society is prompting MEPs to adapt to this new reality by increasingly enticing them to use the online platform as a virtual constituency office. If so, it would be expected that MEPs increasingly attach more importance to their online constituency outreach and transfer some (*partial effects hypothesis - H4a*) or all of their constituency outreach functions (*full effects* or *virtual office*) from the offline (face-to-face and use of traditional media) to online (to their websites).

Unlike the partial effects and the full effect hypotheses, the null hypothesis (*H4null*) would expect that MEPs maintain their constituency outreach offline, in its conventional forms or what Margolis & Resnick (2001) refer to as *politics as usual*. In other words, the null hypothesis expects MEPs to emulate similar types of constituency outreach behavior online that they pursue conventionally offline. Therefore MEPs' outreach online would be as a means to replicate or reinforce that which MEPs do already offline.

Table 4.3. Indicators use for OFFLINE – ONLINE comparison

Dimension	OFFLINE	ONLINE
Constituency Orientations	▪ Has constituency Office ▪ Considers 'communicating with citizens' as very/ important ▪ Proportion of time spent on Casework ▪ No. of staff in constituency office	➢ Has website, blog or SNS ➢ 'To communicate with citizens' as reason for creating website ➢ Proportion of time spent on website management ➢ N/A
Constituency Outreach	▪ Casework ▪ Explaining Work ▪ Interactivity	➢ Casework website/ blog feature ➢ Explaining work web/ blog feature ➢ Cumulative interactivity variable

Table 4.3 shows the set of proxies that were used to operationalize the three comparative dimensions of MEPs' offline and online constituency outreach. In the case of the null hypothesis MEPs would have both a website and a constituency office (or neither); s/he would spend similar amount of time on his/her offline constituency outreach offline as they would online and would

have similar preference for both or even more so for offline constituency outreach activities. For the validation of the alternative *virtual office hypothesis (H4a)*, MEPs would be expected to:

- *have a website or blog instead of a constituency office*

- *spent proportionally more time on website management than on other duties*

- *showed preference for using online (website, email, blog etc.) rather than offline modes of communication for constituency outreach (radio, TV, phone, letters).*

While for the virtual office MEPs were expected to satisfy all of the above conditions, it was also conceivable that MEPs would satisfy one or two out of the three conditions and for the *partial effects hypothesis (H4b)* MEPs to hold true.

4.5   Strengths and Limitations of the Research Approach

In its research design, the thesis makes series of contributions to the existing research agenda on political representation in the European Parliament but also to the emerging studies on political communication with a focus on the role of Internet mediated communication.

Firstly, it provides a more narrow conceptualization of the constituency linkage dimension in the EU context and has collected original data on it. In other words, it has built on but further elaborated the on the constituency aspect of the EPRG MEP Surveys. Therefore, the added concepts could enrich existing empirical research on MEPs, the constituency linkage dimension and political representation.

The second unique contribution made by this thesis is that it provides ways of conceptualizing the constituency dimension in the online context. Internet and its rapidly expanding applications are likely going to be a continuous constant in the future of politics. Yet though Internet research has mushroomed over the last decade, empirical studies on its various applications and effects in the political domain are still limited; at the EU level even more particularly. This fact that this thesis focus on this dimension is hence fills an existing missing link in political representation literature in the EU.

Thirdly, the online-offline comparative approach is methodologically novel. In order for it to

become methodologically a more powerful tool, further conceptual refinement and testing will be required in the future. Nonetheless the online-offline comparison used in this thesis did take the earlier and many of the existing Internet studies approaches a step forward. It went past the techno-deterministic tendencies that not only tend to over focus on the online dimension without its proper contextualization, but they also potentially tended to all to rapidly adopt and over-exaggerate conclusions about Internet's effects. This was largely due to the novelty of the research field but also due to the lagging attempts to properly theorize on and operationalize concepts and then by empirically testing them. The offline-online approach introduced in this thesis tried to attend to these prior methodological gaps by attempting to: i) conceptualize and operationalize the applied concepts - constituency linkage - for online political behavior, ii) to ground them or compare them against existing offline behavior by using the latter as a behavioral baseline; and lastly iii) to test them among a real population of MEPs.

This being said, there are several limitations of the proposed research design that should be taken into consideration and could be improved in future research.

Cross-sectional versus time series approach. The research design would have been significantly more robust, especially with regards to the comparative dimension of MEPs' uses of Internet, by using a time-series as opposed to the cross-sectional approach. The latter merely provides a snapshot of the 2006-2009 MEP cohort rather than trends in the evolution of MEPs' Internet usage over time. However, this limitation was unavoidable given the non-availability of specific data on MEPs' constituency orientation and outreach at different time points. While data from some of the EPRG questions could have been used, they were only available for a limited number of questions and time points as different and new questions were added to the surveys over time. Data on the complete set of questions for the scope of analysis on constituency linkage introduced in this thesis were simply not available; hence the dependence on a cross-sectional approach.

One sided – MEPs' – perception of constituency linkage. As noted earlier, the concept of a constituency linkage is a priori two-directional. It comprises both the MEP $\rightarrow$ citizen vector of linkage as well as the reverse citizens $\rightarrow$ MEP vector. Both parties through different ways in effect maintain the linkage alive. In order to gain a holistic account of the linkage mechanism, one would need to understand the motivations, actions and contextual limitations of both MEPs and citizens

alike. However, due to the time and human resource limitations, this thesis places a magnifying glass only on the former, the MEP → citizen vector. Moreover, the survey targets MEPs' perceptions and estimates which carry with them a one-sided bias and views of the constituency linkage (relationship). By surveying both the constituents or citizens and the MEPs at the same time, would provide a more balanced perspective. Documenting these bi-directional accounts would be highly useful to gain in future research on this topic.

Survey response rate. Though 19-20% representative response rate (N = 159 or the 147 fully used responses), for a self-administered survey by a PhD student on a limited budget and human resources was respectable, in the future, the robustness of the survey results presented here would require validation in future research.

Conceptualization of comparative offline-online concepts/ variables – potential sources of measurement error. Because the online dimension is empirically fairly novel and the offline-online comparison even more so, there was a limited existing theoretical framework – both in the case of MEPs' offline but more so for the online constituency dimensions against which the research design but also the validation of its findings could lean on. As a result, several of the online (and some offline) variables were exploratory in nature while others were potentially difficult for respondents to quantify hence resulting in potential measurement errors.

For example, it was likely difficult for MEPs to quantify with precision, the time or staff they allocate to online activities.   Though some formal division of duties among MEPs and staff members exists, in reality, during interviews MEPs revealed that with their staff they share doing different duties and often in an ad hoc manner. In a typical MEP office most staff are 'jacks of all trade' doing MEPs' scheduling, website management and preparatory work for press releases in addition to managing constituency relations. At the same time, MEPs can also take on various roles in micro-managing their daily duties. While some may delegate the design of their websites to a website designer and the daily maintenance to their office staff, most MEPs felt very strongly about directing and providing written inputs for the website content and 'staying on top of what is happening on their websites'.

As a result, to tease out the exact staff numbers responsible for website versus offline constituency work was less possible and therefore not included as a comparative indicator[25]. Similarly, for '*time*' spent, though number of days spent in the constituency (for the offline indication) was fairly easily quantified, an online proxy was more challenging to find as the number of days devoted per week to website management is difficult to estimate. A challenge faced in the conceptualization of the casework dimension was again in disassociating the off and online effects given their interdependence – though an MEP may receive a casework request though his/her website, s/he may likely have to resort to offline means to solve it. Though it was not possible to disentangle this dynamic in this thesis, readers and future research should be aware of this and potentially, through more empirical inquiry, refine these measures.

Capturing (and disentangling) the complexity of the online and offline dimensions in a multilevel EU polity. Because the thesis adopts a multidisciplinary approach that combines two research fields – political representation and political communication offline as well as online – already opens doors to complex conceptual and methodological intersections. Yet studying these two dimensions in the complex multi-level EU context where a wide-range of factors potentially influences MEPs' constituency orientations and outreach further humbles the possible explanatory power that this thesis can provide. On a note of self-reflection, there is always a tradeoff for a researcher to cast the conceptual net wide with the hopes of proportionally wide explanatory returns, or to focus on a more delimited set of concepts and covering them in depth rather than in breadth. Trying to fit the multi-layered and multi-dimensional puzzle pieces of political representation of the EU polity – national political cultures, the particular EP institutional modality, MEPs' personal idiosyncracies, citizens' perceptions among others – is complex and this thesis recognizes its limitations in containing them to series of insights rather than theoretical contributions on the constituency linkage in between MEPs and their constituents.

In spite of the limitations mentioned, this study is pioneering and the approach introduced novel. To sum up, its core objective is to test the various hypotheses set out in the proposed research design, to fill in missing links in existing literature on MEPs' constituency behavior both off and online and to serve as an exploratory stepping stone for future similar studies. While

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[25] Survey responses confirmed this dilemma as on the question "How many staff do you have in you in constituency or Brussels office?" where several MEPs provided 'half (a staff)' values; this potentially meant that 50 per cent or potentially 'part' of (one of their) staff's time was allocated to the Brussels or the constituency office.

contributing to a better understanding of MEPs' constituency outreach, the inquiry also attempts to identify factors that affect behavioral variations in the latter. In doing so, the patterns in MEPs' constituency behavior observed will tell us more about the types of homestyles that MEPs adopt and indirectly the extent to which established theories on constituency behavior - largely derived from national level – resemble those at national level and whether they can be used in the European parliamentary context.

5. MEPs' CONSTITUENCY ORIENTATIONS AND OUTREACH OFFLINE

As noted in an earlier chapter Fenno (1978) has argued that how representatives think, the intensity with which, and the types of constituency activities they pursue not only determine representatives' *homestyle* but they shape how relations between representatives and constituents are "created, nurtured and changed" (Fenno 1997: 883). Hence the constituency outreach function forms the ether of representative-constituent linkage or electoral connection.

Given that little is known about how MEPs create and nurture linkages with their constituencies during the inter-election period, Chapter 5 contributes to fill this missing link in literature. Using responses from the original MEP survey (2009), Chapter 5 first identifies MEPs' *offline constituency orientations* and *constituency outreach*. While the former explores MEPs' attitudinal dimensions of how they think about, whom they perceive their constituencies to be and the importance they attach to their constituency work, the *constituency outreach* looks at what MEPs actually do and the types of activities they pursue with respect to constituency work. Moreover, as the thesis generally aims to gain a better understanding about the quality of linkage between MEPs and citizens, the extent to which MEPs are pro-constituency oriented (or not) and what influences some MEPs to be more pro-constituency oriented than others is of particular interest.

Based on existing studies and given the low electoral and institutional incentives outlined in Chapters 2 and 4, the *null* hypothesis expects that MEPs' *offline* constituency orientations and outreach will be low. In other words, MEPs are expected to attach more importance attitudinally and through allocation of resources – time and staff – to their parliamentary and party duties than to their constituency duties. With respect to their constituency outreach, it is also expected that MEPs will prefer to engage in low intensity one-directional forms of constituency outreach rather than the more interactive, two-directional forms of constituency outreach.

A competing hypothesis (H1) argues that MEPs' constituency orientations and outreach will vary. Therefore, after establishing the offline characteristics of MEPs' constituency orientations and outreach, the second part of the Chapter explores the existing variation as well as the determinants of that variation. For this purpose, using multi-variate OLS regression analysis, while controlling for *demographic* variables – age, gender and education, four explanatory models are tested – the *electoral systems* – Model 1; *the attitudinal or role orientations* – M o d e l 2, *political* variables such

as party affiliation, political responsibility, incumbency and former political career – Model 3; and *constituency characteristics* as the fourth explanatory model.

By explaining the chief characteristics of MEPs' constituency orientations, the types of constituency outreach they pursue and what determines the variation in Chapter 5 intends is to contribute to a better understanding about how MEPs incorporate, cultivate and keep the constituency linkage in their representative mandate alive between two election points. Findings in Chapter 5 also serve as the *offline* baseline for the comparison between MEPs' offline - online constituency orientations to be elaborated in Chapter 7.

5.1   MEPs' Constituency Orientations OFFLINE

5.1.1 How do MEPs think about and whom do they perceive their constituencies to be?

Typically, role orientations in political representation are addressed in two ways: i) what role orientation (e.g. delegate, trustee, partisan etc. – Table 5.3) representatives themselves perceive to fulfill and ii) whom they take instruction from (Table 5.2). Before these two classical questions were asked in the author's MEP survey, a more experimental formulation of a question targeting whom MEPs conceived their constituencies to be was asked first (see Table 5.1. for its exact formulation). Though very similar to the classical 'focus of representation', this first question differed slightly in that it sought to better understand whether MEPs perceive their constituencies in the classic territorial-electoral sense (as they are almost by default expected to) or whether other aspects factor into their perceptions of a constituency. By enabling MEPs to select more than one response also steered away from a uni-dimensional concept and allowed room for more heterogeneous accounts, an observation that was made during interviews.

Table 5.1 MEPs' constituency perceptions (N=147)

As a member of the European Parliament, when you think of 'your constituency or district' it is composed of: (tick all that apply)

European Union and all its people	51%
The national territory and all people of your member state	44%
A sub-region in your member state	38%
People who voted for your party	12%
People who voted for you	9%
Others please specify	4%

The results in Table 5.1 reveal several insights. First, they confirm that MEPs perceive their constituencies as heterogeneous and dynamic rather than uni-dimensional entities where their notion of a constituency comprises several different 'constituencies'. This particularly observed when examining the frequencies of MEPs' responses (not pictured), where 68 per cent MEPs chose one categorical response but one-third considered 'their constituency' to be composed of two or more sub-constituencies. The most common combination, among 26 per cent MEPs, was Europe and their national territory, region or their party's voters. The tendency to represent multiple sub-constituencies is logical given that in comparison to national MPs, for MEPs the number of possible sub-constituencies multiplies. In principle, MEPs may be approached by national as well as European interests groups, by regional as well as national governments, national party or their EP party group, by their nationals but also non-national 'constituents' from other European countries.

Secondly, the findings reveal that the pan-European constituency - *'European union and its people'* features strongly in whom MEPs perceive their constituencies to be. 51 per cent MEPs list Europe in combination with other constituency categories while one in every four MEPs lists the EU exclusively as 'their constituency'. 'My nation and its people' and 'region' ranks second and third respectively while party and personal voters ranks the lowest. The less than 4 per cent of respondents who choose to specify their constituencies as part of an open ended response either specify the names of their constituencies[26] or specific sub-groups such as "citizens of Luxembourg and foreigners", "artists" or "vulnerable groups in society".

Observation made during interviews also confirmed MEPs' strong representational loyalty to the pan-European constituency but also their multi-layered composition. The following illustrate examples of these reflections:

> *"Officially, my constituency is the Spanish territory and its people, but also the Catalan people. On the other hand, I am a European legislator who was elected to look at Europe through the eyes of a Catalonian – but to work towards and act on behalf of a common project – the EU" (Spanish MEP).*

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[26] Majority re-qualified their reference to the sub-region they represent either by stating its specific name 'East midlands', 'South West of England and Gibraltar – my constituency!', 'the four regions in my constituency' or in the form of more abstract references '*comme un découpage arbitraire du territoire*' (*trans.* an arbitrary division/part of a territory). Other group of answers tended to included 'people/ citizens' in general or 'people in and outside of Europe' or 'my local electoral constituency where I am also a local representative'.

"Though my official role is to represent the French speaking part of Belgium, I was also elected to strengthen EU integration and to represent European rather than national interests. The promotion of national interests and representation of Belgian people is the job of national Parliaments and [their] members, not mine" (Belgian MEP)."

"German nation but mostly European interests, then party, then region. But I personally decided to focus on European (and not on national/ local) issues since being an MEP is a full time job... (German MEP)."

On the one hand, the dominance of Europe in MEPs' constituency perceptions is on the one hand to be expected. After all, MEPs function in a 'European' environment, the core of their work concerns EU issues which explains their pronounced loyalty to the pan-European constituency. From the rational electoral perspective, however, it is less sensical. Because MEPs are nominated by their domestic parties and are elected to represent national or regional (Belgium, France, Ireland, Italy and the UK) constituencies, their loyalty to the pan-European electorate does not bring them electoral rewards. Instead it would be expected that MEPs conceive their party's voters or their respective electoral districts as the dominant logical constituency.

Interestingly, however, when answers to this first question – which simply asked whom MEPs think their constituencies are – were compared to MEPs' survey responses concerning questions about their 'representational focus' and 'whom they take instruction from', the role of Europe became less dominant. Its importance was slightly demoted – see Table 5.3. This seems to suggest that though at the cognitive or ideological level Europe features strongly in MEPs' perceptions about whom they represent, at a more functional level, perhaps where concrete interests are at stake MEPs *represent* their sub-national and national – or classic electoral constituencies. Yet, at the same time, when voting in the EP, MEPs report to rely mostly on their 'own opinion' but also on their national MEP delegation and EP party group.

Table 5.2   Whom MEPs take instruction from

Takes Instruction from[27]	Mean	N
Own opinion	4.2	134
National MEP delegation	3.9	141
European party group	3.6	142
Citizens	3.5	136
EP committee	3.1	139
National party	3.1	140
Political experts	2.9	113
National government	2.8	141
Interest group(s)	2.6	139
Regional government	2.5	137

5.3 MEPs' Representational focus

Represents in the EP	Mean	N
Region	4.4	138
National state	4.3	142
National party voter	4.1	138
Europe	3.9	142
National party	3.9	137
European party group	3.7	137
Specific social group	2.9	105

These various observations imply that MEPs' 'own judgment' is the gate keeper when they make decisions. In other words, MEPs consider themselves as free agents, relatively free from the pressures of their national parties. In this aspect they differ from their national counterparts from Western democracies with PR systems, where strong party pressure is a pronounced feature. At the same time, in practice, it is more likely that a complex web of factors ends up influencing and informing MEPs' decisions as well as to prompt them to represent diverse 'constituencies'. In MEPs' day-to-day realities, their acts of representation are conditioned by various pressures, interests (EU, national, sub-national, societal sub-groups) and personal idiosyncracies. These dynamically interact, advance and recede from MEPs' foreground of internal decision making.

The multi-dimensionality and dynamic interplay of factors that influence MEPs' acts of representation confirm past studies (Pitkin 1967, Norris 1999, Mansbridge 2003) as well as Fenno's (1978) work who observed that representatives strategically sub-divide their constituencies into 'concentric circles of influence'. Similarly, MEPs' interview testimonies revealed that MEPs consciously drew distinctions between and sub-divided the 'official' - classic electoral and more workable constituencies 'in practice'.

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[27] The values expressed in both tables refer to mean scores per response category when using a 1-5 Likert scale with (1) never, (2) rarely, (3) sometimes, (4) often, (5) very often - values.

When in an interview MEPs were asked *when you think of your constituency who do you think of?* – an interesting pattern in the answers emerged. MEPs commonly distinguished between their 'official' constituencies and those they represent 'in practice'. Almost instinctively the 'official' constituency included geographic references - "*well of course, people of Germany*", "*my national constituency*", "*in theory, every voter in Scotland*", "*the whole of Spain*", the "*10 million people, 9 different counties in my Southeast region of England*". However, the initial 'instinctive' answers were usually followed by more refined specifications referred to as the 'real' constituency or 'my constituency in practice'.

The 'constituency in practice' typically referred to combinations of smaller sub-constituencies, targeted subgroups or foci of representation. These further tended to be ranked in some sense of a hierarchical order such as: "*my region, national Dutch people but also all Dutch speaking people in Europe*" (Dutch MEP); "*my voters, women's organizations, and given my own professional background as a medical doctor, doctors and health care practitioners also*" (Slovak MEP); "*Italy and Europe but most importantly the general public since I need public opinion to support the issues I advocate*" (Italian MEP); "*National constituency – Estonia, my party and my very close district Tartu*" (Estonian MEP), or the more abstract "*my constituency is my national state but when I vote, I prioritize human values and the general interests of society as such, and then European citizens*" (Slovak MEP). Other more intricate explanations included:

> "*People of Ireland, my Labour party and also Dublin. You see, we have only one Labour (party) MEP from that area, also in Ireland the urban-rural constituency cleavage is very important to represent…*" (Irish MEP)

> "*My constituency is the Labour party but also the trade union movement and my party voters, and those who voted for me. At the same time I am free of obligation in a representative sense since I was directly elected by my voters to best decide on issues of value to them*" (UK MEP)

> "*In a sense, what I do (as an MEP) is importantly influenced by the reality that I actually have three jobs: I am an MEP, I represent the Partito Radicale (of Italy) and I am also a Secretary General on the Ethical committee on Stem Cell research in my country. …however, at some level I am also constituency-less since more than anything my duty is to bring awareness to the general public on issues …*" (Italian MEP).

These testimonies show that though the classic territorial considerations do feature in MEPs' perceptions of their constituencies, in reality, they are overshadowed by a medley of subsidiary and more defined foci of representation or constituencies.

The selection process shows to be subject to pragmatic considerations, an attempt to simplify

MEPs' complex realm of (possible) constituencies into more 'workable constituencies' and more narrow representational focus such as representation of select 'flagship issues' or issue-based interest groups. This process, however, is not always simple for MEPs. As one German MEP explained '*I don't know how my colleagues do it, but it is not possible to represent and do everything satisfactorily with the complexity of the work we have".* Or as another UK MEP noted "*it is difficult to represent these counties and people in them in terms of classical constituency ties because they were constructed rather then forming organic, cohesive units - their needs, preferences and themes are too diverse-heterogeneous and it is difficult to find what is specific to them and how to bridge them to Europe*".

Observations about how MEPs think about their constituencies show that whom MEPs perceive their constituencies to be and whom they focus on in practice are not necessarily the same. MEPs' foci of representation tend to be splintered rather than focused on a single uniform group. In practice, a complex web of dynamics factors into MEPs' selection making process on which constituency they will focus on during their mandate, but relatively little is known about this process.

When looking at the determinants of variation in MEPs' constituency perceptions, being from a new EU member state, ballot structure and pro-constituency attitude played the strongest role. MEPs from open ballot systems and regional districts were more likely to consider their region rather than Europe as their constituency, while MEPs from ordered or closed systems were more inclined to consider their 'country' hence wider notion of a constituency. All British MEPs (except one) exclusively perceived their region as their core constituency while some countries showed some intra-country variation. 55 per cent Italian respondents, for example, chose nation or region in combination with Europe while nearly two-thirds of French MEPs chose Europe exclusively. Among the six Belgian respondents, Europe rather than regional constituency was chosen as the main choice.

Being from a new EU member state and MEPs' pro-constituency role orientations also showed to influence the way MEPs think about their constituencies. With the exception of all (four) Slovenian MEPs who chose Europe, MEPs from CEE member states were more prone to consider their 'national territory and its peoples' as their constituency. Also, MEPs who attached attitudinal importance to 'being active in their constituencies' were less likely to think of Europe as their constituency while those who valued 'advancing EU policies in the world' in

their work as European representatives were more likely. Incumbency usually associated pro-EU integration hence possibly favoring a pan-European constituency base (Franklin & Scarrow 1999) showed to be insignificant when it comes to MEPs' perceptions.

5.1.2   The importance that MEPs attach to Constituency Work OFFLINE

In line with the null hypothesis that expected for the great majority MEPs to have low pro-constituency orientations, MEPs were expected not to have a constituency office (H0a), or if they had one they would spend less than 0.5 days being present in their constituencies (H0b), would employ proportionally less staff in their constituency office than in their Brussels office (H0c) and would proportionally spend less time on constituency work than on other activities (H0d). In addition to the above four indicators, MEPs were also asked (Table 5.4) to what extent they attach importance to being active in their constituencies.

With respect to (H0a) results, 94 per cent MEP survey respondents stated that they have a physical office in their constituencies or home countries while only 6 per cent reported that they do no have one at all. This leads to the conclusion that having a constituency office is a standard feature among the greatest majority of MEP respondents.

Starting with the more general question, maintaining citizen relations and educating the public about EU issues top the charts as the perceived 'most important' activity in MEPs' mandates. Moreover, 78 per cent MEP respondents considered maintaining an active presence in their countries as important or very important (Table 5.4). All three activities comprise constituency outreach activities. At the same time, the results also show that MEPs still find parliamentary and committee work as more important while pursuing pork – advantages for their constituencies (also a constituency related activity) – scores the lowest in terms of importance.

Table 5.4   Attitudinal importance attached to various activities pursued by MEPs (%)

	Not (1)	Somewhat (2)	Moderate (3)	Important (4)	Very Important (5)	Mean	N
Parliamentary and committee work	1	1	9	25	64	4.5	140
Public education about EU	0	1	6	32	60	4.5	139
Active presence in home country	0	3	19	34	44	4.2	137
Active media relations	0	10	21	40	29	3.9	126
Advancing EU policies	6	6	19	40	29	3.8	139
Porc-barrel politics	11	25	24	18	22	3.2	139

Time Allocated to Constituency Work

As mentioned in Chapter 3, while EP's Rules of Conduct do not stipulate any constituency obligations for MEPs, the EP's official calendar formally assigns 28 days, or 0.5 days per week for constituency presence.   The (H0b) therefore expected that a great majority of MEPs will on average spend 0.5 days per week in their constituencies. While the results (Table 5.5) are consistent and confirm that on average MEPs spend more time on parliamentary work than on communicating with citizens, casework or media relations, 85 per cent of MEP respondents reported to spend between 1 to 3 *working days[28],* an average of 2 days in their constituencies. Only 4 per cent MEPs admitted to spend less than one working day per week in their constituencies while 11 per cent showed to spend more than 3 days per week.   These indications thus suggest that MEPs are showing to be spending significantly more time in constituencies than expected. With the response rate being statistically significant, leads to the rejection of the H0b.

Table 5.5 Number of days spent in the constituency

On average, as MEP how much time do you spend on political work in your home country? (N=139)

1 day per month or less	0%
More than 1 day / month but less than 1 day / week	4%
1 day per week	24%
2 days per week	43%
3 day per week	18%
More than 3 days per week	11%

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[28]   The 'working days' specification is important as most surveys (including the EPRG MEP survey) merely state 'days' which can include weekends (spent with family) hence inaccurately reflect 'working time'.

In addition to the number of days spent in the constituency, another time related indicator asked MEPs to estimate on a scale 0-100 (%) how much time they allocate to different activities. This was a slightly different measure than the previous since it tries to establish the relative importance of constituency work vis-a-vis other activities that MEPs pursue in their mandate.

Table 5.6 results show that when looking at single activities, MEPs spend most time (on average 40%) on parliamentary work while citizen relations come closely second (at 30%). On other constituency outreach activities such as casework and media relations, MEPs show to spend approximately 20 per cent of their time while attending to interest group activities and website management appear to be lowest on MEPs' priority list.

Given these results, at first glance, the null hypothesis (H$0c$) where MEPs were expected to spend more time on parliamentary and other activities than on constituency outreach, was accepted. At the same time, while the results show that parliamentary activities do dominate MEPs' schedules and attention, in effect, when the different constituency work and outreach related activities (e.g. communication with citizens + casework + media relations) are added together, the survey responses also show that MEPs do end up spending, on average, 50 per cent or more time on these activities. This would lead us to reject the H$0c$ hypothesis. While more refined analysis would be beneficial in teasing out the exact proportions and even when acknowledging potential sources of pro-constituency (survey) bias, this is an important finding as it reinforces the fact that unlike what was expected, MEPs do end up spending a significant proportion of their time on constituency and citizen outreach activities.

Table 5.6   Time spent by MEPs on various activities

In your overall workload, about what proportion of time do you personally dedicate to the following activities? (tick one box per line, the total value in boxes ticked should not exceed 100%)

Type of activity	0%	10%	20%	30%	40%	50%	60%	<70%	Avg.	N
Parliamentary work	4.5	51	27	7	15	15	2	4.5	40%	135
Website Management	3	52	8	15	4	15	1.5	1.5	10%	131
Citizen relations	15	21	24	33	6	15	2	8	30%	135
Media relations	4	51	27	7	1.5	1.5	2	6	20%	135
Interest group relations	11	55	17	8.5	1.5	1	2	4	15%	130
Casework	10	47	19	10	3	2	1.5	7	20%	131

Values in the table represent % of total MEP respondents.

Constituency Office and Staff Allocations

When it comes to constituency versus Brussels office allocations, all MEPs receive 'general (office) expenditure allowance' of EUR 4202 per month (2009 figure)[29] and EUR 17 540 maximum for staff. But similarly as in the case of time allocation, there are no set rules as to how many assistants or offices MEP can have. How MEPs spend allocate their office and staff allowance is therefore entirely up to them and has been a source of controversy in the past[30]. Still, because MEPs receive the same amounts for office and staff, the distribution of staff between MEPs' Brussels office versus their constituency office is a good proxy for the level of priority they attached to each. In line with the low pro-constituency orientation and outreach ($H0d$) expected that the great majority of MEPs will allocate more staff to their Brussels offices than to their constituency office.

The first observation with respect to this dimension is that majority of MEPs tends to hire more staff in Brussels than in their constituency office, yet the (survey sample) mean suggests that MEPs employ the same number of staff in Brussels as in their home constituencies; two in each office. Proportionality in hiring similar numbers of staff for both offices was also consistent among both, low and higher ends of the sample. MEPs employing below average number of employees in Brussels were also likely to employ below average number of staff in their (CO) while the same was true for those hiring staff above the sample's mean. This leads this thesis to conjecture that MEPs' work at *home* in their constituencies as well as in Brussels occupies similar amount of staff time.

At the same time, it was also observed that MEP respondents were less likely to have no staff in their Brussels office than in their constituency office, and more MEPs tend to employ an above average number – three or more staff - in their constituency office (see Graph 5.7) than those employing the same amount in Brussels, a trend present among one third of MEPs. Assuming that MEPs hire staff in proportion to the degree of their political engagement and activities they pursue, it is conceivable that the one-third MEPs who have more staff in their constituencies will engage in more constituency outreach activities.

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[29] This allowance officially covers expenditure in the Member State of election, such as Members' office management costs, phone and postal charges, the purchase and maintenance of computer and telematics equipment, and the cost of travel. The allowance is halved in the case of Members who, without due justification, do not attend half the number of plenary sittings in one parliamentary year (www. europarl.eu).

[30] 'MEP expenses row taints Tory Election' (April 30, 2004) *www.timesonline.co.uk*; 'How to make a million in five years (become a Euro MP)' 22 February 2009, *www.timesonline.co.uk* MEPs award themselves £91,000 tax free expenses a year' (13 December 2010).*www.telegraph.co.uk*.

Graph 5.7 Staff Allocations: Brussels/ Constituency
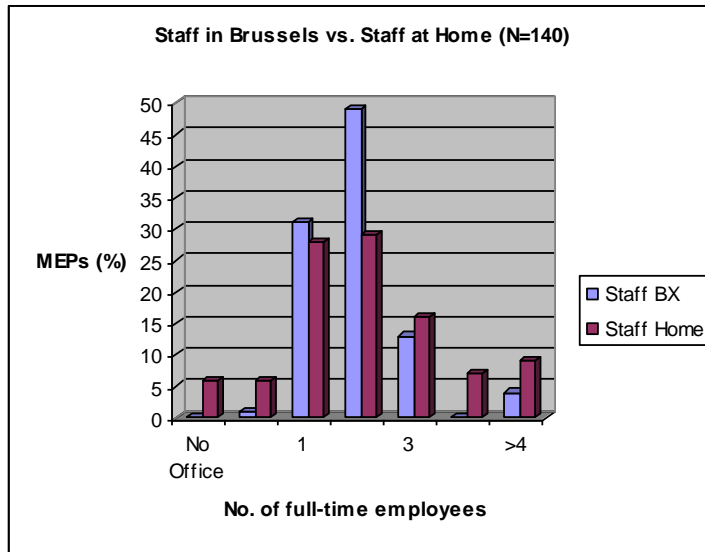
Interviews with MEPs exposed another interesting and somewhat unexpected insight with respect to what determines MEPs' staff allocation.   While the general assumption would be that constituency office staff size and MEPs' pro-constituency outreach are strongly positively correlated, where MEPs with higher number of constituency staff would be expected to conduct more constituency outreach and take on more casework, MEPs explained that there maybe other factors at play that determine MEPs' staff allocations. For MEPs from CEE, it is a question of cost advantage. It is more affordable for MEPs from CEE to hire staff in their home countries than in Brussels where staff salary expectations are higher. Given that all MEPs receive the same allowance budget, lower salary costs act as incentives for CEE MEPs to hire more staff in their constituencies. In contrast, MEPs from other EU countries even if they would want to hire more staff in their constituencies they are more disadvantaged to do so.   As it will be discussed in the next section, another explanation for CEE MEPs hiring more CO staff is that they pursue different types of constituency activities than their Western counterparts. Though they reach out to and solicit less casework from individual citizens, they take on more pork barrel cases.

In brief summary, with respect to MEPs' offline constituency orientations based on a set of four attitudinal indicators including personal perceptions, time and staff allocations, it can be concluded that MEPs attach a fair degree of importance to their constituency work and to maintaining their linkage with citizens between elections alive. As summarized in Table 5.8, three out of the four

(null) sub-hypotheses that expected low pro-constituency orientations among MEPs were rejected where MEPs showed to be more pro-constituency oriented than originally anticipated.

Table 5.8 Summary of Findings on MEPs' OFFLINE Constituency Orientations

Hypotheses OFFLINE Constituency Orientations		Findings
(H*0*a)	*Great majority MEPs do not to have a constituency office*	Rejected
(H*0*b)	*Spend less than 0.5 days being present in their constituencies would*	Rejected
(H*0*c)	*Proportionally spend less time on constituency work than on other activities*	Rejected/ Accepted∗
(H*0*d)	*Employ proportionally less staff in their constituency office than in their Brussels office*	Accepted

∗ Accepted under qualification, see above.

Regression analysis corroborated the descriptive results where pro-constituency attitudes were positively correlated with MEPs' time spend in the constituency. MEPs who spend more time in their constituencies are also more likely schedule more appointments with individual citizens and use public events rather than TV or newspapers as a means of constituency outreach. This leads to suggest that those MEPs who spend more time in their constituencies engage in more direct, face-to-face constituency activities. MEPs from regional constituencies, European Peoples' Party and those who are younger (25 to 35 year olds cohort) was also positively correlated with the more time spent in the constituency. Ballot structure or other demographic factors such as gender or education did not play a role. Incumbency, which theoretically should be negatively associated with pro-constituency orientations, more political responsibility (committee and delegation work in Brussels), distance to constituency and MEP-constituent ratio also showed to be insignificant.

5.2 Constituency Outreach OFFLINE

As outlined in Chapter 1, representatives can pursue several different types of activities in their constituency work. While leaving the question open ended for exploration during interviews, as part of its empirical analysis, this thesis focuses on how MEPs conduct two of the more commonly observed constituency activities – casework and explaining political work but also the extent to which they solicit and encourage two-way, interactive communication and opportunities for deliberation with their constituencies. With respect to these three dimensions and in line with the *null* low pro-constituency hypotheses, it was anticipated that MEPs will spend low amounts of time on casework hence receive and respond to a low amount of cases (H1*e*) while (*H1f*) conjectured that in their constituency outreach MEPs will likely use one-directional rather than two-directional, interactive offline communication channels. In other words, they would be expected to invest their time and energy onto explaining work activities via en masse newsletters, radio, press and TV than through interactive two-way channels such as face-to-face constituency consultations, being accessible via phone calls and public meetings.

5.2.1 Constituency Outreach OFFLINE: Casework OFFLINE

Given that casework is known to be one of the most time consuming constituency activities, it was surprising to find that MEPs receive and respond to substantial amount of casework. On average, casework takes up 20 per cent of MEPs' time while one out of four MEPs indicated that casework occupies more than one third of their time; one tenth reported it consumes more than a half of their time.

MEPs report that most of their casework comes from individual citizens and European interest groups where on average, MEPs receive approximately 21-40 requests weekly from each group, amounting to about 3000 cases a year for both groups. National interest groups, regional authorities and civic associations show to contact MEPs for assistance the least. Email is the most used channel through which MEPs receive casework, letters and phone calls are the second most common while national party office and websites show to be the least used by constituents when requesting MEPs for assistance with a case. These observations suggest that constituents prefer to communicate directly with their MEPs when launching their cases.

Similarly as for other activities, there are no stipulations on how much and the types of casework MEPs should respond to; such decisions are entirely up to MEPs' discretion. Nonetheless, 60 per cent of the survey respondents reported that they respond to 80-100 per cent of incoming cases. Casework from MEPs' their nationals - citizens, regional authorities and civic organizations are given highest priority while EU interest groups' requests receive the lowest.

During interviews, MEPs explained that they prioritize cases based on 'need' or on the cases' link to the specific policy areas they work on. Interestingly, pork barrel types of cases – through which MEPs try to secure benefits (e.g. funds, projects) for their constituencies – which at national level are known to be politically and electorally rewarding, were only 'moderately' important to majority of MEPs. As it will be shown in a later section, however, MEPs from some member states do take on more pork barrel cases than others.

Be it from individuals or organized groups (civic groups, trade unions and business associations), MEPs' casework can be grouped into three categories:

i) The first category includes *light casework*. Light casework usually concerns citizens' difficulties to "navigate in the sea of EU bureaucracy" and includes *basic requests for information about EU institutions, MEP's work, specific legislation, EU scholarships and internships.* Light cases make up most of MEPs' casework load and typically can be attended to by MEPs' staff.

ii) The second group refers to *harder or "real cases"* that require more research and MEPs' personal intervention. Harder cases mostly involve: *trans-border issues* such as advice on trans-border healthcare services and legal implications (or reports of misconduct) in other EU countries; companies requesting legal counsel on permits, market regulations/ directives in other EU countries; immigration, asylum, cross-border child abductions by family members and illegal residency; 'second residence' and property/ real estate issues, or as mundane as requests for MEP's intervention when nationals' cars have been impounded in other countries[31]. The second group relates to *flagship or thematic issues that individual MEPs work on* such as human rights, trade law, health care or animal rights. The third type of harder cases involve requests for MEPs' personal *interventions on behalf of citizens at higher level*

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[31] Or as difficult as being requested to assist constituents (parents) receive proper legal resolve in a cross-border homicide investigation where a girl died in a neighbouring EU country but whose death certificate (issued in Austria) showed a different cause of death (suicide) than Slovak coroner's report (who listed it as homicide). The MEP took on the case and had to intervene at the Ministry of the Interior as parents previously exhausted all other legal and official remedies without success.

institutions such as pending cases at the European Court of Justice or assistance concerning more technical issues and requiring access to the European Commission at a higher level.

iii) Harder cases also can spillover into the third category and become more serious *personalized, politicized 'trophy' or 'flagship' cases.* Trophy cases are usually handpicked by MEPs for further political action. They can be addressed in the form of *Parliamentary Questions for the European Commission*[32] and other EU institutions or as lobbying, political advocacy or public awareness building campaigns that MEP may choose to spearhead. In the notorious case of 'missing Madeleine', for example, parents (of Madeleine) requested MEP's assistance, a case that eventually lead to the mobilization of a EU-wide campaign and a directive on the registration of missing children information in the Schengen register and its distribution in all EU border-crossings. Another example includes the standardization of EU 'handicap car stickers' – a wider initiative taken by an MEP after a handicapped constituent was fined in another EU country for parking in a handicapped spot using his/her national sticker which the foreign authorities failed to recognize. MEPs' collective advocacy of a real estate class action suit and an EU petition against the Spanish government by UK and German retirees who were unknowingly sold illegal property titles and EU-wide standardization of mobile phone chargers, are some other examples of trophy cases.

In summary, though there are no benchmarks as to what constitutes low or high average number of cases that (MEPs) receive and take on, casework adds an important accountability and political legitimacy dimension to representation. It constitutes concrete or tangible forms of service and linkage between citizens and European institution(s). In view of the observations made above, MEPs show to fulfill a similar role with respect to casework as do their national counterparts; – citizens do contact them to ask for assistance and MEPs do respond by taking on cases. However, the comparative frequency with which citizens contact MEPs and MPs would need to be further empirically verified. This was beyond the scope of this thesis. Moreover, the role of casework and its implication for political representation at the EU level should not be over estimated as they may not be the first and only point of contact when their require assistance. As one MEP claimed *"we are*

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[32] Parliamentary questions are questions addressed by Members of the European Parliament to other EU Institutions and bodies. They are a direct form of parliamentary scrutiny of other EU institutions and bodies. There are three categories of parliamentary question: i) Questions for oral answer dealt with during plenary sittings, and included in the day's debates. They may be followed by a resolution (Rule 115); ii) Questions for Question Time asked during the period set aside for questions during plenary sittings (Rule 116); and iii) Written questions with a request for a written answer (Rule 117) http://www.europarl.europa.eu/plenary/en/parliamentary-questions.html.

usually the last ones to be contacted. Only when citizens exhaust all other forms of remedies, then they come to us. All too often we end up on citizens' or NGOs' catchall blanket campaigns as one of many institutional targets" (British MEP).

5.2.2   One directional (explaining work) vs. Interactive Constituency Outreach OFFLINE

While casework is a concrete form of constituency linkage through which constituents can request direct forms of assistance and to which MEPs can respond to, the explaining work dimension represents a one-directional, MEP → constituent, and one-to-many form of constituency outreach through which MEPs communicate and 'educate' the public about the EP and about what they do in Brussels.   Unlike with interactive forms of communication that stimulate two-way interactions between MEPs and constituents, the explaining work features such as newsletters, addressing the public through offline mass media channels such as TV, newspapers and radio, the MEP is seen to engage in one-directional contact without explicitly soliciting feedback and interaction from constituents.   According to (H0f) MEPs were expected to favor this form of constituency outreach over direct two-way interactivity.

When looking at the MEP survey data, the findings suggest that this hypothesis cannot be fully accepted.   On the one hand, more than 90 per cent MEPs considered 'explaining their work in the EU', as an 'important' or 'very important' aspect of their job that scored slightly higher than importance of their committee and parliamentary work (see Table 5.4 above).   Moreover, MEPs' responses in Table 5.9 also indicate that in terms of offline outreach, 66 per cent MEPs prefer to use newspapers for reaching out to their constituents the most where media relations show to take up 20 per cent of their time on media relations.

During interviews, MEPs attested to feeling 'responsible' for explaining Europe Union and its institutions to the people.   They claimed that national media and governments provide little information to citizens about EU issues hence they felt that their role is to act as an alternative source of public information about the EU.   As one Slovak MEP explained *"while we fight to get the right information to the public, the mass media commonly misrepresent our work. They prefer to write what sells rather than the substantive aspects of our work and far from a neutral perspective".*   By explaining their work and EU issues personally, MEPs feel they provide the public with more

objective information that the public would not have access to otherwise.   In this context MEPs act as communication bridges between Brussels and their constituencies.

> *"To be an MEP is to be a tie between Estonian people and the EP. In this sense, I do*
> *a lot of explaining like for example why should Estonia be involved in and help people*
> *in Africa – for people in the new member states these are new topics that my people*
> *do not understand very well and our job as MEPs is to explain these things*
> *to them" (Estonian MEP).*

Another reason why MEPs explain their work is to foster transparency but also as a form of anticipatory self-defence mechanisms and projection of accountability. As citizens' demands for political responsiveness and accountability have risen in the recent past (see Norris 1999 - 'critical citizens'), 'explaining work' has become a "*demand driven exercise – because if you don't say anything on certain issues, people will complain*" (Irish MEP).

Table 5.9: Channels & frequency of MEP ⟷ citizen interactivity

Response category	MEPs' preference	Constituent Preference
	Mean Score	
Newspapers	3.8	-
Radio	3.2	-
TV	3.2	-
Party bulletins	3.1	-
Mailed newsletters/ mail	3.0	-
OFFLINE INTERACTIVITY		
Public meetings	3.6	3.5
Telephone	3.5	3.6
Office visits (Brussels)	3.4	4.0
Office visits (Home)	3.4	3.1
Mailed letters	3.0	3.4

Note: 1-5 scale range: (1) never, (2) rarely, (3) sometimes, (4) often, (5) most
often; N = 129-133; both columns are based on MEPs' estimates

Though feeling responsible for explaining the EP and their work forms an important aspect of their jobs, at the same time, the findings also show that apart from newspapers, MEPs show a low preference for using other one-directional channels of communication such as radio, TV

newsletters, party bulletins and mailed newsletters.   Instead the second preferred channel of constituency outreach is a two-directional use of face-to-face public meetings (61%), telephones (58%) and office consultations.   Only 17 per cent MEP admitted that they never used them. Moreover, a strong positive correlation was also found between MEPs' use of different interactive media. MEPs who were above average phone users also attended more public meetings and used office consultations more frequently to interact with constituents.   But interactivity was also positively linked with one-way communication channels. Overall, Table 5.9 shows that majority of MEPs use a mix of one-directional as well as interactive, two-directional communication channels to reach out to their constituencies and to the public at large, a finding that prompts the rejection of (H0f).

When it comes to the reciprocal citizen/ constituents → MEP vector, MEPs contend that citizens prefer the highly interactive modes of communication when reaching out to them. Interestingly, the top two choices include office visits in Brussels, telephone as well as public meetings. Citizens, however, seem to show a low preference for constituency office consultations when reaching out to MEPs.   While this could have been a feasible expectation if majority MEPs did not have a constituency office, but as 94 per cent of MEP respondents report to have both an office in Brussels and a constituency office in their home country, this finding is somewhat puzzling. Could it be that constituents venture out all the way to Brussels to speak and lobby their MEPs on specific issues?

There are several possible explanations. Rather than being visited in Brussels by single individuals, during interviews, MEPs referred to receiving 'delegations of constituency visitors' such as schools or professional organizations. In fact, for this purpose, MEPs receive an annual budget where they can invite up to 300 constituents to Brussels. Hence, it is possible that in their survey responses, MEPs referred to these 'groups of constituents'.   The second possibility is, because the interactivity measure is based on MEPs' estimates, it may include a response bias where MEPs under or over estimate their levels of two-way interactivity especially where the constituent → MEP vector is concerned.

In summary, in spite the rather low standard deviation in the different modes of interaction, MEPs rely on wide range of both one-way and two-way channels when reaching out to their constituencies. While they tend to prefer channels facilitating wider audience capture such as newspapers and public meetings, which makes sense given the size of their constituencies, majority

of MEP also frequently use interactive forms of constituency outreach. MEPs' propensity to use variety of outreach channels underlines their interest to maximise their public visibility, a trend that is reinforced by MEPs having to compete with national MPs and more salient EU institutions for media exposure.

5.3 Variation and Determinants of MEPs' Constituency Orientations OFFLINE

While the following sections outlined the descriptive characteristics of MEPs' constituency orientations and outreach the following sections examine the extent to which MEPs' constituency orientations and outreach vary as well as what explains that variation. In other words, answering the question - are some MEPs more pro-constituency oriented than others with respect to case work, explaining work and interactivity dimensions? If so, what explains that variation?

5.3.1 Determinants of casework

Due to the low institutional expectations on MEPs' constituency work by the EP, MEPs have high leverage in acting as gatekeepers as to the types and amount of cases they take on. In order to determine which factors influence MEPs' casework orientations, three dependent variables depicting MEPs' casework propensities - i) time spent on casework; ii) responsiveness to casework, and iii) importance attached to pork barrel cases[33] - were tested individually first (see Tables 5.1 – 5.4 in Appendix 3). While measures of the same dimension, each is slightly different from the other.

With respect to variation in the casework dimension, there are three notable observations.   First, unlike what was expected, is that MEPs spend a fair proportion of their time on casework. On average casework consumes 20 per cent of MEP's workload and comes comparatively second after parliamentary work and 'communication with citizens'. Moreover, 32 per cent MEPs reported that they spend more than 20 per cent on casework. These could be considered as pro-constituency caseworkers. Assuming that citizens know and should in principle care little about the affairs of the EU, this is higher than was expected.

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[33]   The variable's values ranged from '0' to a maximum of '3'.

As to the determinants, several observations were made across the three 'casework' proxies. The first observation made is that with the exception of time spent of casework and higher propensity to make appointments with citizens where a positive correlation was found, the different casework proxies (see Table 5.1 in the Appendix) were not correlated. Time spent on casework, for example, though positively correlated with higher caseloads from civic associations and regional government, had no effect on MEPs' level of responsiveness to casework and on their willingness to take on pork barrel cases. A possible explanation here is that casework from civic organizations or interest groups falls in the 'harder cases' category hence is more time consuming and requires tradeoffs. The lack of a correlation with other casework variables, however could also be due to the sample size even though it was statistically significant (17% response rate for most of the response categories).

The second observation made is that there are different 'casework styles' among MEPs. The first observes a standard or *catchall casework style* where MEP responds to all types of 'cases' but prioritizes 'individual cases' from citizens while the second refers to the *pork casework style* where MEP does not necessarily take on cases from individuals but rather focuses on securing advantages by attracting funding, projects or political attention from the EU to his/her district.

Both the data and qualitative insights gained during interviews confirmed that the *pork casework style* is particularly pronounced among MEPs from new member states. While MEPs from CEE were interestingly less likely to take on cases from individual citizens, they took on more 'pork cases' (H3f) than MEPs from other member states (1.045 (.243), p<0.01, N =137, see Table 5.3 in Appendix 3). During interviews, it was confirmed that MEPs from new member states feel 'responsible' for promoting their countries and constituencies in different EU contexts as well as to help their various sub-constituencies (regional governments, interest groups, local businesses etc.) to gain more access to EU resources. As a result, in typical pork cases MEPs assist their regional authorities or SMEs gaining access to EU networks, EU grants and other types of resources. In this sense, MEPs from CEE do fulfill their role as facilitators and *live* linkages between Brussels and 'home'.

In addition to being from a new member state, Model 1 - electoral system, open ballot structure also proved to be, as was expected (H3a), positively correlated with responsiveness to casework orientation (.557 (.445), p<0.05, N=133 – Table 5.4). Moreover, in Model 2 related to MEPs' role orientations (H3b), 'taking instruction from citizens' was also positively correlated with the time

that MEPs spend on casework and pork and barrel cases (.633(.298), p<0.01, N=111 – Table 5.2 and .284(.298) p<0.1, N=122 – Table 5.3) even though the response sample for one of the dimensions was not statistically significant.

While most of the political variables in Model 3, showed to be insignificantly correlated, number of delegations (H3c)[34] to which individual MEPs belong were found to be negatively correlated with both the time spent on casework dimension (-.918 (.481), p<0.1, N=127 - Table 5.2) and pro-pork casework orientation (-.506 (.255), p <0.1, N=127). Hence MEPs who served on more delegations were likely to spend less time on casework. This is logical since belonging to an EP delegation typically requires additional traveling the already heavy travelling load that hence providing less time for constituency related activities. Based on this finding has lead us to accept the H3c hypothesis related to 'belonging to delegation'. However, being a party or committee senior or incumbency (H3d), which were expected to be negatively associated with casework showed to be insignificant.

MEPs' previous national political career (H3e) also showed to be insignificant which is surprising as during interviews MEPs (who previously served as MPs, mayors, professionals or public personalities at national level) noted that citizens often contact them for assistance with 'cases' linked to their previous political or public role. For example, an Estonian MEP, a former Olympic athlete hence a popular sports personality claimed to receive requests related to the promotion of recreation and sports in the EU while another Irish MEP received:

> " *fair bit of requests because I am a known personality in my region from my previous political activities as the only Labour MP. Because people know and recognize me as a public figure, I receive a high number of individual requests but I am mostly contacted by trade unions, business organizations and companies who are affected by EU legislation and stem cell research.*"

Similarly, a Cypriot MEP noted:

> "*I was a doctor and later became an MP and people still knock on my door with health related issues or political issues I was involved with back then.*"

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[34] The European Parliament's delegations maintain relations and exchange information with parliaments in non-EU countries. Through its delegations, the EP helps to represent the EU externally and to promote in third countries the values on which the European Union is founded.

The insignificance of 'previous political national career' could likely be due to the survey's small sample size hence worthy of future research. The only additional political variable that showed significance was political EP party group affiliation where ALDE MEPs were more responsive to casework than MEPs from any other political group (2.61 (1.08), N=133, p<0.1). However, for the other casework dimensions, political affiliation did not play a role.

With respect to demographic variables, apart from age, which was negatively correlated with MEPs' pro-casework orientation, other demographic variables – gender and education level showed to be insignificant predictors of MEPs' casework orientations.

In summary, as already noted, contrary to the initial expectation, majority of MEPs receive and take on substantial amounts of casework mostly pertaining to cross-border issues. Insights gained from interviews also showed that MEPs are requested to cater to the interests and requests of multiple-sub-constituencies but because "it is impossible to be everything to everyone" MEPs have to make pragmatic choices about the types of cases they take on. With respect to the determinants, overall, open ballot structure and MEPs' pro-citizen role orientations show to be the strongest predictors of MEPs' casework orientations. MEPs from CEE countries also show to be different types of case workers as they tend to focus more on pork barrel cases than their non-CEE peers. MEPs' previous political affiliation, political career and demographic predispositions, however, were found to be inconclusively linked. Still, these should not be discounted as possible determinants in future research that could isolate and testing more narrowly defined set of variables.

5.3.2 Determinants for Explaining Work OFFLINE

With 92 per cent of MEPs considering that explaining EU politics and their political work is 'important' or 'very important' part of their job, variation with standard deviation 0.68 on a 5-point Likert scale for this dimensions of MEPs' constituency outreach is low. Irrespective of MEPs' background the explaining EU dimension is seemingly a standard feature of MEPs' mandate. It rates slightly higher than casework and ranks at par with MEP's parliamentary work on a scale of importance. This dimension is also correlated (see Table 5.5 in the Appendix 3) with other pro-constituency orientations such as higher staff allocation and preference for using in constituency office as a means of outreach.

In spite the low variation and controlling for demographic factors, results in Table 5.6 (Appendix 3) show that partisans – those with a party as their focus of representation - and incumbents are negatively associated with MEPs' pro-active stance to explain EU and their work to the public. This coincides with the original expectation that rookie MEPs will have vested interest to reach out more in order to gain public visibility and to establish themselves in the public's eye. The negative partisan correlation was less straight forward as there is no theoretical explanation for this trend, unless partisans get so absorbed in their party related work that their party rather than their constituency becomes their 'public' for outreach. While preference for using the one-dimensional channel of newspapers as a means of reaching out to the public was considered as another proxy for this dimension, the response rate for that particular question was not statistically significant hence had to be dropped from analysis.

5.3.3 Determinants of interactivity OFFLINE

As noted in an earlier Chapter, the interactive dimension was added here as it is not explored in classical literature on political representation. However, because MEPs' interactive propensity is assumed to correlate with a pro-constituency orientation, according to the incumbency hypothesis suggests that rookie MEPs are expected to be more interactive than incumbents. Moreover, MEPs from electoral systems with open ballot structure and regional constituencies was expected to be higher. MEPs with higher committee or delegation responsibilities are expected to focus more on their work in Brussels than to interact with their home constituencies that is known to be more time consuming.

Overall, the regression results point to two types of MEPs who are prone to be interactive. The ones whose interactive outreach coincides with other pro-constituency orientations - more time spent in constituency and attachment of importance to communicating with constituents. In other words, these MEPs would most likely be the typical constituency workers. This positive correlation is consistent with similar findings in the allocation of resources and casework dimensions.

Interestingly, results for electoral systems, namely 'open' ballot structure showed to be insignificant in connection to the interactivity dimension. In theory, MEPs from open systems were expected to be more 'interactive'. Though in interviews, as one Spanish MEP candidly stated:

> *"We don't really do it. We have no direct contact with ordinary citizens. When I come back to Spain, I go to my party HQ, receive a printout of what I am expected to do and I do it. …Citizens also just do not contact us."*

> *"Doing 'guest speaker circuits' or making appearances at party functions, at local party centers across the country is most expected of me by my party and what I do at home"* (Estonian MEP).

> *"I don't necessarily have a constituency office, I go to my party's office and mainly attend its local functions."* (Belgian MEP)

The anticipated incumbency, proximity to constituency and political responsibility hypotheses, however, showed to be insignificant. EP party group affiliation, staff size when controlling for age, gender and education level were also insignificant.

In addition to the three dimensions, overall, respondents showed a low proclivity for reaching out to their party voters, irrespective of their country's electoral system or other factors. At the same time, insights gained from MEP interviews, suggest that MEPs do end up doing party related activities, some do so exclusively, in their constituencies.

Spanish, Belgian and Estonian MEPs pointed to their service as 'party parade horses' when working on their home turf. Their party secretariats request them to appear as guests speakers on cross-country party tours, while UK MEPs acknowledged that since 2002 (post introduction of pan-EU PR system for EU elections) they are obliged to do significantly more party related activities than before. Since MEPs in these cases came from mixed district types (regional and national) as well as ballot structures points to the potential heterogeneity in national political culture dynamics hence the need in future research to disaggregate results by national level and more intricate measures of political culture.

Regression results show that MEPs' pro-constituency orientations comprise a cluster of linked, mutually reinforcing behavioral tendencies. In other words, MEPs' pro-constituency orientations are correlated. For example, those who value 'being active in their countries', tend to spend more 'time in their constituency', to prioritise 'appearing at public events' and tend to allocate more staff to their constituency office.

The finding that strong 'case work' oriented MEPs come from CEE countries was also somewhat surprising. By inference, it was expected that CEE MEPs will be less constituency oriented given

the communist legacy of a highly centralised, planned and party driven political system where representatives' bottom up accountability to their constituencies was less likely to be the rule.

MEPs' casework load and responsiveness to casework which were expected to be positively correlated with higher numbers of constituency staff, showed to be insignificant. A possible explanation is that though MEPs may receive casework locally, cases are worked out in Brussels hence would not be attended to by constituency based staff.

Chapter Summary

Chapter 5 made several observations about how MEPs think, the importance they attach and the activities they pursue with respect to their constituency outreach offline. It also looked at what determines MEPs' pro-constituency orientations.

As to how MEPs' *think* about their constituencies, two observations were made. First, it was observed that MEPs see their constituencies as composite and heterogeneous rather than uniform territorial or purely electoral entities. The complex, multi-level character of the EU polity shows to affect the way MEPs think about their constituencies. While at first instance MEPs contend that they 'officially' represent their national or regional (electoral) constituencies, 'in practice' they conceive to be representing the pan-European electorate or various thematic groups that are not necessarily limited to nationals of their own countries. This is quite interesting since catering their allegiance or representation to the pan-European constituency does not necessarily bring MEPs direct electoral rewards. It further suggests that the 'European context' conditions MEPs and prompts them to adopt a sense of perceived duty to Europe and blurs their electoral allegiances.

The second observation made attests to MEPs' frequent struggle to navigate in the complex multi-level EU environment. MEPs' personal accounts explain that they often feel overwhelmed by the different layers of representational demands that are imposed on them. As a result, they prompted to resort to pragmatic means and are forced splinter or reduce their representational universe into more 'workable' and 'personalised' sub-constituencies or foci of representation. These usually correspond to more narrowly defined policy areas or flagship causes that MEPs work on, or comprise of reactive and punctuated mix of "sometime theme specific, some times regional, other times Europe or something in between" sub-constituencies. Moreover, this way of thinking about

constituencies coincides with Fenno's (1978) contentions that representatives tend to split and categorize their constituencies in terms of different concentric circles of importance.

Results related to the degree of importance that MEPs attach to constituency work were also insightful. H3a expected that MEPs will allocate proportionally less *time, staff and office* to constituency related activities than to parliamentary activities. Although on average, respondents did report to spend slightly more time on parliamentary activities than on constituency outreach, with respect to staff allocations, MEPs employed the same number of staff in their constituencies as they did in their Brussels offices. Almost all MEPs also reported to have both a constituency and a Brussels office and spend significantly more days working in their constituencies than was expected.

As to constituency outreach, in recognition that citizens are mis- and under-informed about the EU affairs, MEPs almost uniformly feel that educating the public about the EU and explaining their own work is one of the most important activities in their mandate. For this purpose one-directional outreach – via printed press but also more interactive public meetings are the most common channels of MEPs' constituency outreach. Though MEPs end up doing a fair amount of casework, it consumes slightly less time than the educational and outreach activities they pursue. In this sense, individual citizens and interest groups tend to contact MEPs the most which suggests that in spite the distance, the 'constituency' linkage at the European level is alive.

With respect to variation on the different pro-constituency propensities, the results show MEPs' constituency orientations vary on some pro-constituency dimensions more than on others. While nearly all MEPs regarded 'communication with and education of citizens on EU matters' as important aspects of their jobs, they began to vary in their pro-constituency orientations in the casework dimension. Interestingly, while MEPs from new member states were less likely to interact directly with citizens, they were significantly more prone to take on pork types of casework. As to other determinants of pro-constituency orientations, as it was expected, open ballot structure (Model 1) and MEPs who were prone to take instruction from citizens (Model 2) tended to be more pro-constituency oriented. Demographic and political determinants (Model 3) such as past political career and political affiliation, however, showed to be insignificant. 'Constituency characteristics' such as distance to constituency and MEP-constituent ratio in Model 4 also showed to be poor predictors.

In addition to their constituency orientations, when asking the question to what extent are MEPs unique in their offline representational style when compared to their national counterparts, it was observed that the particularity of the multi-level governance context conditions the representational demands and splintered EU-national loyalties. The second is that MEPs also tend to be 'reactive' and 'discretionary' in their representational style. In this sense, they befit the trustee model of representation where 87 per cent of them claim to decide on policy issues based on their own judgement rather than by taking instruction from their parties, citizens or their national governments. These findings confirm past research on MEP role orientations (Katz 1999). This is largely due to the claimed greater degree of freedom where "nobody breathes down my neck' and in being free from party politics, or the daily 'political baggage and political games that are common at the national level'.

6.   MEPs' CONSTITUENCY ORIENTATIONS AND OUTREACH ONLINE

"My website is a point of reference about what I do and evidence of what I have done." (UK MEP)

ICTs' appeal lies in the opportunities they offer for re-establishing direct relationships between citizens and political exponents, as well as giving life to new forms of participation in democratic processes (Bentivegna 2006: 334). However, given the empirical novelty of the field, empirically backed theories about what determines political actors' online behavior are few in number. None exist specifically for determining MEPs' online behavior.

While Chapter 5 looked at how MEPs' conduct their constituency relations offline, Chapter 6 looks at how they do so online.   In this sense, MEPs' constituency orientations *online* comprise three dimensions: (i) the importance that MEPs attach to Internet usage with respect to their constituency work, (ii) the extent to which they use it for constituency related duties, and (iii) the variation in MEPs' online constituency orientations and factors that determine it.

The chapter is divided into three parts and uses data based on the triangulation of three sources: i) responses from the author's MEP survey (N=159) about their Internet usage, ii) MEP's websites' content analysis, and iii) qualitative insights from interviews. The first part of this Chapter addresses the first question by looking at the key features appearing on MEPs' websites, MEPs' motives for creating their websites and the importance that MEPs attach to their online activities by the resources they allocate to them. The second part follows by providing an overview of MEPs' actual usage of online platforms for constituency outreach in terms of the three constituency dimensions – casework, explaining work and interactivity.

The chapter's third part answers the third question by examining the variation in MEPs' online constituency orientations. Similarly as in the previous Chapter 4, while online proxies for MEP's online constituency orientations act as the dependent variable(s), OLS and logistic regression analysis is used to test four models of independent variables: the *electoral system* Model 1; t h e *focus of representation and role orientations* – Model 2; *political factors* - Model 3; and constituency characteristics Model 4. In addition to the four models, several exploratory variables specific to the online dimension such as internet penetration and tries to summarize and draw some general conclusions about MEP's online constituency outreach.

6.1 Attitudinal Dimensions of MEPs' Constituency Orientations ONLINE

Before elaborating on MEPs' constituency outreach online and the activities they pursue to this effect, the analysis first set out to find out more about MEPs' attitudes toward Internet usage by asking them about: (i) their motives for creating (or not) their website; and ii) to estimate the 'proportion of time they spent on website management'. While the former aimed at more general attitudes, the second question was a proxy for determining the level of importance that MEPs attach to the use of ICTs and the Internet for constituency work.

With respect to the first attitudinal question on MEPs' motives, Table 6.1 demonstrates that MEPs create websites mostly for interactive, information provision and transparency purposes. All of these motives, in principle, relate to the interactivity and explaining work dimensions. Personalization of self-presentation also featured highly while partisan motives show to play a very small role. Thus this seems to suggest that either MEPs create their websites out of their own interest and for self promotional purposes, and, or, that national parties or EP party groups do not have explicit IT communication and outreach policies. Partly, these results coincide with past research which has found that representatives and political figures do indeed use online platforms predominantly for self-presentation and self-promotion.

Table 6.1 MEPs' motives for creating a website

What were the main reasons for creating your personal website as MEP?	%
Increase direct contact with citizens	82
Provide educational information about the EU	82
Offer public transparency over your work	79
Personalize your public message and visibility	78
Receive policy feedback from citizens	61
Advertise types of assistance you offer	25
Reduce office communication costs	12
It is your national party's policy	5
It is your EP group's policy	4

N = 131

With respect to the time spent on website management, as Table 6.2 below further indicates, MEPs on average spend an estimated 10% of their time on managing their websites while 30 per cent of MEP respondents, however, reported to spend no or 'zero' time attending to online activities. Moreover, when compared to other activities such as parliamentary work, casework, media and interest group relations, 'website management' shows to score the lowest.

Table 6.2 Proportion of time spent on website management

MEP Activity	Mean	SD	N
Parliamentary and committee work	5.1	1.87	136
Citizen relations	4.0	2.18	136
Casework	3.1	2.08	132
Media relations	3.0	1.96	136
Interest group relations	2.7	1.71	131
Website Management	2.2	1.54	132

As many political responsibilities vie for MEPs' attention, it is understandable that MEPs *personally* devote little time to managing their websites and outsource the activity to website consultants or to their staff. This being, MEPs' interest and importance attached to the use of ICTs in their constituency outreach should not be underestimated.

Most MEPs interviewed recognized the importance of online presence, but were also conscious about the resources and responsibilities that *being online* requires. As one Irish MEP explained "*I mostly use my website for receiving feedback but you also have to consider that I need to feed it too, and this takes time and resources.*" While another UK MEP pointed to the responsiveness and accountability factors attached to being online where "*due to the speed of communication and citizens' expectations of instantaneous responses to their questions, maintaining a website is a responsibility...one has to respond to them (citizens) fast, otherwise they will complain*". As a result, some MEPs and their staff have developed standard daily or weekly routines where they receive printouts of incoming messages and feedback coming through their websites while other use a more instantaneous approach where they carry laptops with them to events and request their assistants to immediately upload outcomes or photos from the events on their websites.

Moreover, MEPs interviewed also showed that they do take a strong interest in controlling and contributing to what goes into their websites' contents. In fact they were quite aware about and took pride in the traffic that their websites generate.   At the same time, they acknowledged that the day-to-day management of their online activities is predominantly delegated to their assistants. The latter act as the gatekeepers or filters of the multitudes of emails ("350 a day") and requests that comes via the online channels. In order to manage the large amounts of traffic and carpet lobbying campaigns by European and national interest groups, MEPs and their assistants have been forced to become fairly creative in developing various screening and sorting

mechanisms in order to carefully screen those requests that 'matter' and those that do not.

6.2 MEPs' Use of the Internet for Constituency Outreach

In 2008-2009, on the official EP website[35] that lists the online profiles of *all* 785 MEPs (the *entire* MEP population) serving in the 6th EP session, 76 per cent MEPs showed to be online at least via an email and 57 per cent included a link to 'their' website (bloggers excluded). It is to be noted, however, that MEP respondents in the author's survey (n=159) showed a slight bias in favor of Internet usage where 84 percent stated that they had email, 63 per cent had a website, 9 per cent showed to be exclusively blog users while 14 per cent used both blogs and websites simultaneously. Thus with the website users and bloggers combined, the total survey respondents online amounted to 72 per cent. This is higher than results found in the actual MEP population and should be taken into account when considering results presented in this chapter.

When looking at the content analysis of MEPs' websites or blogs, 70 per cent contained between 6 – 10 out of the twenty website features originally identified for website coding (see Table 6.3); 21 per cent had between 11-13 while only 3 per cent had the full amount of the twenty features that were coded for. On average, MEPs' websites contained six website standard features. Sections below will elaborate on these in some more detail.

Though a significant proportion of MEPs has expressed that they consider 'Europe' as their greater constituency (see Chapter 5), the 'pan-European' aspirations are less reflected on their websites. Multilingual platforms and communication are necessary conditions for the creation of linkages in the pan-European context and for the creation of a vibrant European public sphere (see Koopmans & Statham 2002; Koopmans & Zimmermann 2003; Trenz-Jorg 2004, 2005). However, though the official EP website has been translated into all 27 EU languages, only 20 per cent of MEPs' websites showed to be multilingual. Interestingly, more than half of the multilingual websites belonged to MEPs from new EU member states while MEPs from Southern member states (i.e. Cyprus, Greece, Italy, Spain, Portugal, Malta) were less likely to include multilingual features on their websites. These findings suggest that a fairly low number of MEPs attempts to reach out to citizens and publics beyond their own linguistic group(s).

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[35] The EP website lists a complete set of MEP's standardized profiles which include personal information such as age, (domestic and EP) party affiliation, key EP activities (committee and delegation membership), overview of speeches, voting record and forms of contact.

Table 6.3 Features on MEP websites

Website Features	%	Website Features	%
Explaining own work	64	Comment, feedback forms	37
Press releases	60	You Tube	25
EU news	58	Blog	23
Photo gallery	56	Casework	21
Podcasts	52	Multilingual	20
EP speeches	52	Personal & private life	15
Facebook	46	E-forums	9
Agenda overview	44	E-poll	8
Annotated CV	43	Twitter	7
E-newsletter	39	E-petition	6

N=144

Explaining Work ONLINE

As established in Chapter 5, MEPs consider explaining their legislative work and informing their constituencies about EU issues as an important part of their job; they consider it as important as their parliamentary and legislative work. *Offline*, they do so through traditional media by issuing press releases, offering media interviews, through telephone calls or face-to-face interactions during group visits from their constituencies in Brussels and at public events or one-on-one consultations in their constituency offices. *Online* they can do it via their website, blog or increasingly via social networking sites such as Facebook, Twitter or You Tube.

Based on previous research of national representatives' online behavior, H2 expected that MEPs will prioritize one-directional, non-interactive 'explaining work' website features such as information about the EU and EP and various forms of self-promotion over two-way, *interactive* features related to casework and various forms of feedback (e.g. e-petitions, e-polls, comment forms, e-discussion forums, online consultation hours and links to SNS).

In view of the observations made in Table 6.3, H2 was confirmed. The six most common features appearing on MEPs' websites were all one-directional and included: 'explaining work', 'press releases', 'EU news', 'photo galleries', records of MEP's 'speeches and interventions' and podcasts. In addition to informing and educating their public(s) about EU affairs, MEPs used these features for professional and personal self-promotion purposes in several ways.

1) The *first* most common way appeared under a variation of the same website feature typically called 'my work', 'my activities in Brussels', 'what I do' or 'what I stand for'. This feature appeared on 64 per cent MEP's websites or blogs. Content of these features included annotated text-form exposes highlighting different issues that the EU and MEPs take on and supplemented by links to related documents and institutions linked to the specific issues.

2) The second common online channel for explaining work is a listed record of MEPs' speeches – either in the form of text or live video feeds, questions to the EU Commission and other formal interventions. This feature appeared in 72 per cent of MEP websites. It is questionable the extent to which constituents peruse these pages, nonetheless, the frequent use of this feature by MEPs suggests its perceived importance by the latter in order to provide a sense of transparency.

3) The *third* popular mode of explaining MEPs' work is via podcasts, common to 69 per cent MEP websites. Podcasts mostly resemble personalized mini video newscasts, where an MEP in person, acting as a newscaster, offers small reports and updates explaining latest aspects of their work, their positions on specific policies, and their responses to pertinent EU issues discussed in EP. They also sometimes include live footages from MEP's parliamentary interventions or media interviews. Though podcasts are a fairly new online application, and their fairly high usage suggests that MEP are quick to adopt new ways of reaching out to their public(s) and signal the preference for a personal account of explaining their work. Podcasts thus serve as MEP's own, self directed and personalized news channel through which they can bypass the main media communication outlets.

4) The *fourth* way of providing a personalized account and overview of their work were e- newsletters; 56 per cent MEP websites incorporated e-newsletter subscriptions and online access to previous issues. E-newsletters usually list a pot pourri of latest updates on diverse topics linked to MEPs' work but also to EU related issues in their constituencies.

The author's MEP survey results closely correspond with the website content analysis (see Table 6.3). When asked to self-assess the frequency of their own use of different online media to communicate with their constituents, email and websites were by far the most often used,

respectively followed by plenary speeches, questions to the European Commission and e-newsletters. Blogs and features linking their national party websites or work were listed as used the least often.

It was encouraging that observations derived from website analytics on the explaining work dimension corroborated results in the MEP survey and *offline* observations on the same dimension made in Chapter 5. All converge to the conclusion that explaining legislative work and informing their constituencies about EU issues is a leading priority for MEPs, at par with their parliamentary and legislative work. Moreover, the consistency of website analytics corresponding with the survey responses is also important from a methodological perspective.

Casework ONLINE

In Chapter 5, it was established that MEPs receive significant amount of casework which takes up approximately 20 per cent of their time. But what role does the Internet play in MEP's management of casework?

Because casework cannot be conducted entirely online[36], a proxy - the extent to which MEPs made references to or solicited casework online - was used to measure the online constituency dimension. On websites that did incorporate them, website features appeared as specific sub-pages under the label of 'services' (German MEP), 'activities in Czech republic' (Czech MEP), 'e-consulting[37]' (Czech MEP) or as 'something useful' (Bulgarian MEP).

In addition to the presence of an online casework feature, two additional aspects were also looked at: i) whether promotion of 'casework assistance' factored into MEP's motives for creating their website, and ii) whether citizens lodge 'cases' to MEP via online channels.

The findings show that MEPs' websites are used the least for casework when compared to the online 'explaining work' or 'interactivity' dimensions. Only 22 per cent MEPs incorporated casework features on their website. At the same time, casework features show to be more

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[36] Casework, namely the 'harder cases' often require diverse means – potentially both online and offline means of intervention (i.e. preparatory research and investigation, follow up by MEP's personal contact, phone calls, meetings etc.). As a result, this makes it difficult to accurately distinguish the exact role of websites and how they impact MEP's constituency work.

[37] (trans.) **"**E-consulting **-** Its aim is to speak to the private sector as well as small towns to assist with them with the early stages of applying for financial mechanisms such as EU Structural funds and the 7th Framework Program. Three basic activities will be supported: Structural funds, Research and innovation, and Public requests. Based on filled out online application forms, our analytical team will provide relevant assistance and possible solutions. The second line of assistance will be provided to Managers of EU research projects also through online forms." (MEP Bobosikova, Czech Republic).

common than the interactive e- petitions or e-forums but less common than MEP's use of SNS, comment forms, podcasts, photo galleries, biographical data, parliamentary speech records or e-newsletters.

Interestingly, in a separate survey question, though 62 per cent of MEPs believed that having a website increased their casework load, based on MEPs' estimates, citizens   show a preference for using more direct and personal channels such as email or letters when lodging casework requests rather than websites (see Table 6.4 below).

Table 6.4   Channels for receiving casework requests

Channel for receiving casework requests (citizens)	%
Email	93
Letters	37
Telephone	35
Brussels office	27
Website	24
National party office	10

N = 138

The low use of websites for casework purposes among MEPs is not surprising. Attending to cases is known to take up sizeable amount of representatives' time with precarious returns. Actively soliciting cases means commitment.   One reason why MEPs are hesitant to shift their casework duties online is their concern for overstretching their capacities. MEPs' active promotion of their willingness to assistant may invite new casework. Given that MEPs already receive a fair amount of it (via various communication channels), inviting more casework than they and their staff could handle would overextend their capacity to respond to casework and subsequently erode their accountability to their constituencies. Interview testimonies suggested that MEPs are quite conscious about these dynamics and realities.

The second reason is that websites are not the most suitable platforms for handling all 'cases'. While websites may remove the burden of lighter cases, such as specific information seeking or the provision of specific forms and announcements, more complex cases will require MEP's personal attention. Thus it is understandable why constituents would resort to more direct and personal channels e-mail, phone calls or letters.

Interactivity ONLINE

What distinguishes interactivity from other communicative acts is that it seeks two-way communication - the sending of a message with the expectation of a response. In other words, interactive communicative acts implicitly presume a dialogue and a sense of continuity between the sender and the receiver. In political communication studies the vector of communication between legislators and citizens has been presumed for the most par to be one-directional and top down. According to proponents of participatory democracy, the inherent lack of reciprocity, feedback, transparency and accountability has been detrimental to a balanced two-way representational relationship.

However, as much as it has been criticized, interactivity has not been commonly empirically studied as a distinct component of constituent-representative relationship. For the most part, it is merely assumed. To test this assumption here, interactivity has been isolated as distinct dimension of (MEP's) constituency work. Moreover, by its proponents, the Internet has been claimed to facilitate interactivity but little is known thus far the extent to which this applies to MEPs.

To determine MEPs' interactivity online, an interactivity index was created (Table 6.5)[38] based on different features' interactive properties. Interactive features were considered those that solicit two-way interactions between MEPs and their constituents. For example, a blog offers content-comment and feedback properties which make it more interactive than a simple website with information pages or podcasts which merely reinforce conventional one-way communication. Not having a website at all features at the most minimum end of the scale which online discussion forums and social networking sites rank the highest[39]. The reverse, constituent MEP vector, is measured through two survey questions based on MEPs' own estimates about their constituents' media preferences and means of contact as well as by features that MEPs consider to attract the most website traffic.

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[38] Cumulative scores on individual level MEP - constituent interactivity, measuring individual communicative acts (i.e. MEP sending, constituent replying) – their content, thread and thread length of reciprocity would be the most precise way of measuring interactivity, however, access to this level of data (i.e. emails, comments) is difficult for a representative sample of MEPs and their constituents.

[39] There are more tricky ones such e-petitions which seem interactive, but in reality fail to promote direct MEP→constituent interactivity. They merely enable horizontal social interactivity and activism.

Table 6.5 Online Interactivity Index

Participatory Potential	NUL	LOW One-way		MEDIUM Two-way (feedback)		HIGH Two-way (dialogue)	
On-line format	No web site No e-mail	Web site + …(1)		Web site + …(2)		Web site + …(3)	
(MEP) Web features	None	• Explain work • Podcasts • Speeches • E-newsletter	64% 53% 51% 40%	• E-mail • Feedback • Blog • E-poll • E-petition	84% 37% 24% 7% 6%	• Social networking sites (SNS) • E-forums	46% 9%

Moreover, unlike many Internet studies which tend to isolate online behavior/ phenomena from their offline contexts, results in the following section show that the online and offline worlds are inextricably linked, they condition each other. They challenge the skeptics' rather simplistic accounts that Internet brings nothing new to politics and the idea that political actors solely pursue top-down one-way communication style. MEPs' communication style and online constituent-interactivity is more complex. It needs to be contextualized against the intersecting demands placed on representatives by new trends in political communication and citizens' expectations of what political representation means to them.

When examining MEPs' actual online interactive behavior a paradox emerges. While 94 per cent MEP survey respondents considered communication with citizen as 'important' or 'very important' and 81 per cent listed 'increasing direct contact with citizens' as the principal reason for creating their website, MEPs' actual website content showed that only a minority of MEPs incorporated medium and highly interactive features listed in Table 6.5. In 2009, 46% MEPs were members of social networking sites such as Facebook where their number of 'friends' range anywhere from 38 to 4977, or 236 on average. Moreover, 84 per cent publicly listed their email despite the fact that email generates the most volume than any other contact medium. Only 37 per cent had comment or feedback forms, 24% had blogs, 7% e-polls but only 10% of MEPs' websites incorporated the highly interactive synchronous debate forums.

At first glance this observation supports the early skeptics' (Coleman & Gotze 2001; Bentivegna, 2002; Margolis & Resnick's 2001) views of Internet failing to generate two-directional representative-citizen interactivity - except for one glitch. While greater majority of MEPs' websites do indeed score low on medium to highly interactive content, 84 per cent of MEPs list their e-mails as a means of contact on their EP personal profiles while 46 per cent appear

on social networking sites (SNS) such as Facebook and Twitter[40]. Both of these features belong to the 'medium' and 'maximum interactive' category. While e-mail fosters direct, interactive and asynchronous communication, SNS are known to be personalized networking and interactive spaces that include various synchronous or asynchronous feedback loops and two-way dialogue sub-features. The website content results are in line with previous research (Dai 2006, 2007) and my survey data which confirm MEPs' preference for using e-mail in maintaining contact with constituents, closely followed by their websites.

Three plausible factors explain why MEPs use interactive online features less. The first puts to question MEPs' intentions to maintain active constituency relations versus being constrained by their busy workload. While MEP's personal interest to maintain active communication with constituents is often genuine, it is more difficult to execute in practice. MEPs engage in a range of daily activities such as party group meetings, legislative and committee work, press conferences and traveling as part of their delegation duties. Similar to casework, interactivity takes time and individual attention.

MEPs claim that the expediency and increasing volume of communication enabled by new ICTs add to MEP's workload. Citizens expect 'instantaneous responses' which are not always easy to provide. The large size of Euro-constituencies with high MEP-constituent ratios do not help. Even if a small margin of constituents contacts their MEP, replying to citizen queries is time consuming. MEP receive hundreds of emails - "500 per day and never below 300" (UK MEP) from various groups and individuals daily. Moreover, not all incoming emails are constructively linked to MEPs' work and priorities. With limited staff resources and personal time at MEPs' disposal, the expectation that MEP will personally respond to every citizen's query is thus unrealistic. It is therefore understandable that MEPs are cautious about how wide they open their gates of online interactivity. As one Belgian MEP put it, 'I cannot multiply myself and be everywhere, all the time' while another explained 'because citizens expect immediate responses, I must be careful what response time I promise to them'. Hence the low inclusion of interactive features maybe a matter of pragmatic choice to prevent solicitation of request but not due to disinterest to interact but rather not to make false promises that are outside of MEPs' capacity to keep.

Thus though 'increasing direct contact with citizens' and facilitation of accessibility and accountability may ideally be a sound motive for establishing a website, it comes at a price.

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[40] At the time when this thesis was written SNS were still a novel phenomenon that has likely risen over time.

One coping mechanism is to engage in activities that give MEPs the greatest return on their time investment. Moreover, MEPs are conscious of the utility offered by different online tools. *As a result, they tend to use those that facilitate rather than complicate their work and t h e y dismiss others that invite lower quality of interactive exchanges.* For example, several MEPs tried to launch online discussion forums but explained that they tended to attract "non-serious" participants and low deliberative quality of interactions. So they abandoned them. Ploughing through daily spam messages, blanket email campaigns, citizens' flaming or non- substantive whimsical messages are additional examples of 'waste-of-my-time' interactivity that MEP and their staff deal with daily. In response, MEPs staff develop hefty screening mechanisms and become very good at sorting out 'unserious' emails. Still, to remain 'in touch' and 'on top of things', at the end of the day, MEPs often end up sifting through their own inboxes or "(I try) to have a policy of responding to them all" (UK, MEP).

The third factor influencing MEP-constituent interactivity is constituents' communication preferences. Given that constituents are MEP's clients, it is conceivable that MEP adapt their own communication style to those of their clients. This aspect has not been researched in explaining representative-citizen interactivity. While political communication analysts focus on political elites or the mass media as the principal drivers of communication patterns, Section 6.3 below demonstrates that MEP- constituent modes of online communication mirror each other.

Given the limitations of my data[41], though it is difficult to disentangle which causes which, the general picture points to a level of mutual interdependence in the use of online media as both sides prioritize the same media in contacting each other.

MEPs' dependence on their constituents' communication preferences is further reinforced by the fact that unlike citizens, who can contact MEPs through various channels - phone, letter, e-mail, website, blog etc. – MEP's means are more limited. Because MEP serve large, country-wide constituencies, gaining access to their constituents' phone numbers and addresses is difficult. Even if attempted their databases would be enormous requiring resources to manage them. Still, MEPs show to derive a sense of 'satisfaction' in constituent e-mail and mailing lists that they accumulate during their term in office either from constituent initiated contact, groups coming to visit them in Brussels, or subscribers to their website newsletters.

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[41] To gain a more accurate measure of the citizen-MEP communication vector, a constituent survey would fill in this gap.

Table 6.6 Frequency of media used by citizens to contact MEP

Media channels	Scale 1-5*	N
Email	4.6	133
Brussels Office	4.0	131
Telephone	3.6	132
Public Meetings	3.6	118
MEP website	3.4	130
Letter	3.3	130
Constituency Office	3.1	133
National Party Office	2.6	126
National party website	2.3	129
MEP blog	2.1	125

N=118 -133, *Scale: (1) never, (2) rarely, (3) sometimes, (4) often, (5) most often

Table 6.6 above shows MEPs' survey responses based on their own estimates of constituents' preferences in media usage. According to MEPs' estimates of constituent MEP interactivity, e-mail is the most frequently used channel for contacting them. MEPs' websites, however, are apparently accessed less, only 'sometimes' and show to be used as often as mail or letters – the more traditional (non-ICT mediated) channels. National party websites and MEPs' blogs, compared to other online or offline media are used the least by citizens. Features attracting the most traffic on MEPs' websites appear to be information pages and those linked to MEP's legislative work while 'medium' to 'highly' interactive features such as debate forums, comment/ feedback forms and e-polls, on the other hand, are 'rarely' or 'never' used.

These findings are consistent with observations in Table 6.6 where websites are less preferred by citizens when contacting their MEP. For the latter, citizens seem to prefer more direct channels such as e-mail, face-to-face encounters during public meetings and group visits to Brussels or the telephone. This goes to show that when contacting their MEP, citizens prefer direct individual attention – to be personally heard and seen – hence cultivating a more personalized relationship with their representatives.

According to Chapter 5, the largest proportion of MEPs' casework comes from interest groups and individual citizens. These results are difficult to corroborate online since it citizens or interest groups were not surveyed.

Table 6.7 Comparative MEP ↔ Citizen Online interactivity

	MEP → Citizen	Citizen → MEP
Response category	**Mean Frequency**	**Mean Frequency**
E-mail	4.1	4.7
MEP's website	4.1	3.4
National party website	3.1	2.3
MEP's blog	2.3	2.1

*Scale: (1)never, (2) rarely, (3) sometimes, (4) often, (5) most often

So, what do observations in Tables 6.6 and 6.7 tell us about MEP-constituent interactivity then? The first notable observation is that uses of online communication channels on both sides mirror each other. Going down the columns, both MEPs and citizens use the same media with decreasing intensity.   However, when comparing them per '(single) media' basis, some differences emerge. While MEPs tend to use both e-mail and websites with the same intensity ('often'), citizens show to contact MEPs more often through email than via websites.   Citizens are also less likely to use national party websites than MEPs but blogs are 'rarely' used by both.

On the one hand, this mirroring effect can be explained on the basis of a rationale that MEPs' low provision of interactive web content negatively preconditions citizens' use of interactive features. In other words, due to a lack of top-down *supply of* interactive opportunities by MEPs, citizens by default do not use them. This reasoning supports the classic – politics as usual skepticism where the Internet is seen to perpetuate conventional top-down modes of communication (Margolis and Resnick 2000; Bentivegna 2002, 2006).

On the other, the reverse is also conceivable where MEPs interpret citizens' disinterest – manifested in low traffic (on interactive features) and poor quality – 'unserious' or 'non-attitudes' –online interaction (Kinder 2006: 199) as low *demand for,* poor conducive-ness of their websites for their interactivity with constituents. In response to citizens' non-responsive cues MEPs consequently pragmatically reduce the relevant features to a minimum.

MEPs taking cues from citizens through the communication channels they use is supported by their high use of email. On the one hand, MEPs find email management to be time-taxing as hundreds of e-mails pour into their inboxes on a daily basis. However, given that responding to constituents forms part of their 'job' and given that citizens contact them the most via email, MEPs end up responding by default via the same medium. In doing so, they adapt to

the communication preferences of their clients.

The third explanation points to the selective rationality and utility maximization of online features; both MEPs and citizens use different features for self-serving purposes. Judging from citizens' communication patterns and website traffic, email fares better in facilitating direct interaction while websites are used for information seeking. Conceivably, email offers and satisfies a sense of direct contact[42] whereby individual constituents are listened and responded to on a personal basis. MEPs, on the other hand, prefer to use email and websites equally often when reaching out to their constituencies. This makes sense as MEPs have much more to gain from using their websites in 'presenting themselves to a wider audience', 'providing information materials and projecting transparency over their work for credibility gains. The level of outreach offered by a website would be more difficult and costly to attain otherwise.

At the same time, there are several caveats that circumscribe these explanations. The first two relate to the limited survey data or website analytics from the citizens' side. The survey was only limited to MEPs' personal estimates which raises the question of estimation accuracy and response bias skewing answers in favor of pro-citizen and pro-technology orientations. The potential measurement error in MEPs' answers is reinforced by 23 per cent respondents admitting that they were 'not sure' about which features attracted the most traffic. The third caveat, as already mentioned, it is difficult to clearly decipher the arrows of causality as to whose communication preferences and patterns affect whom – do MEP precondition constituents communication preferences or vice versa?

On the same token, answers to most of the survey questions corresponded with results in our website content analysis which was conducted separately from the survey. Since MEPs were unable to influence outcomes in the latter, and given that results were similar – suggests a level of consistency and frankness in MEPs' survey responses thus offsetting the concern about MEP inflating their answers. MEP's ability to specify the number of hits their websites generate or the number of 'friends' they have on Facebook during interviews also suggests that many MEP are interested and well aware about their online activities (unlike the 23% who were unsure about their website traffic).

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[42] This is also supported in the way constituents use offline media – showing strong preference for phone and letters.

6.3   Determinants of MEPs' ONLINE Constituency Orientations

As noted in the introduction of this chapter, few established theories exist on the determinants of political actors' *online* behavior. In earlier theories, when the use of Internet was beginning to be mainstreamed, *demographic factors* - age, education and gender were considered as important determinants for Internet usage. Higher educated, younger, males showed to be the most prototypical Internet users. Though with the narrowing of the digital divide and widespread Internet penetration, the validity of determining factors needs to be validated. Another classic hypothesis positively linked *Internet penetration* with internet usage - higher internet penetration and online literacy in a given population was expected to yield higher Internet usage[43]. Under the assumption that the way MEPs think determines the way they act, an exploratory hypothesis linked to MEPs' positive attitudes or motives for ICT usage was introduced.

For the purposes of this thesis, the logit and OLS regression analyses included dependent (dummy) variables based on three online proxies (derived from website analytics) for the three constituency outreach dimensions – explaining work, casework and interactivity.   Based on classic theories on political representation and similarly as in Chapter 5, the four sets of independent variables linked to *electoral systems, institutional/ political, role orientations and constituency characteristics* - were then used as four models to be tested. For example, the PR system was hypothesized to be similarly inimical to MEPs' online constituency outreach while the greater number of responsibilities in Brussels and incumbency were also.

More significant to online constituency outreach was the role of geographic remoteness or distance to constituency and Internet penetration. Though working remotely is a reality that all MEPs have to deal with, MEPs from far Eastern European and Southern member states (e.g. Estonia, Latvia, Romania, Cyprus, Bulgaria) are more disadvantaged, hence were hypothesized to be more proactive users of online platforms in order to offset the distance constraints when cultivating relations with their constituencies.

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[43] While by now (2012) variation in the Internet penetration has been significantly reduced (due to lower costs of PCs) in 2006-2009, MEPs from countries with lower income per capita (from Central and Eastern European and some Southern countries – e.g. Portugal, Cyprus, Greece etc.) were expected to have lower Internet penetration than their Western and North European counterparts.

Determinants for Explaining work ONLINE

With respect to the three constituency outreach dimensions, as established earlier 'explaining work' is the most common o n l i n e feature used in 64 per cent of MEPs' websites (N=143, Std. Deviation .483) which suggests a relatively low variation for the explaining work dimension.

Logit regression outputs (refer to Table 6.1 in the Appendix) to a great extent confirmed this where Models 2-4 - role orientations, political responsibility variables and constituency factors failed to be significant. Moreover, MEPs' motives for creating a website also proved insignificant. More interestingly, however, electoral systems did prove to be significant where being from an electoral system with open (Coeff. .851, Std. Err .450 P>z 0.06, N= 139) or ordered (Coeff. 1.58, Std. Err .623 P>z   0.01, N= 139) ballot structure was positively correlated with this dimension.

These findings thus confirm that with respect to explaining work online whether an MEP is pro-constituency oriented or not, partisan or a delegate, from an open or closed electoral system, prone to be representing the EU or his/her country, being from a distant constituency with high or low Internet penetration does not really matter. Hence pointing to the fact that the online explaining work feature is a standard or minimum feature incorporated by majority MEPs on their websites irrespective of their specific personal background. This observation further coincides with findings in Chapter 5 which observed that a great majority of MEPs consider 'explaining their work' as an important aspect of their jobs.

This being said, however, the analysis did show that demographic factors, namely age and education in Model 1 did matter where higher educated (Coeff. 0.140, Std. Err .078, P>z   0.07, N= 139), younger MEPs (Coeff. -.039, Std. Err .020 P>z   0.05, N= 139) showed to be more pro-active in incorporating the explaining work feature on their websites than older and those with lower educational attainment. While gender proved to be insignificant, these findings coincide with the early Internet usage theories where demographic factors – indeed education and age were observed to be positively correlated with Internet usage.

Determinants for ONLINE Casework

Results in Chapter 5 established that there is a fair bit of variation with respect to how much time MEPs' spend on casework – over a quarter of MEPs reported that casework consumes over 30% of their time, while 10% say it takes more than half of their time. However, less than

one-third of MEP survey respondents (21 per cent) had an online casework feature. Though as already noted in earlier sections, it is rather difficult to conduct casework online. Most of the casework features found on MEPs' websites therefore included advertisements of the types of services that MEPs can provide or past successful projects or services rendered. 'Nonetheless, *what* sets the 21 per cent of MEPs apart who did go the extra mile from others that did not have an online casework feature?

One observation derived from website content analytics is that the online 'caseworkers' though small in number, were more likely to incorporate other interactive online features. They were more likely to explain their work online, to have an online 'petition', 'feedback' and 'e-poll' - in other words, the more interactive online features. Moreover, they were also more likely to have positive attitudes toward Internet usage and interactivity-prone motives for creating their websites such as 'receiving feedback', 'promoting 'casework' and 'personalizing their message'.

As illustrated in Table 6.2 in the Appendix, however, the four sets of independent variables provided weak directional value for determining MEPs' online casework orientations. Among the few variables that did prove to be significant included the positively but weakly correlated role of education (Coeff. .137, Std. Err .087, P>z 0.10, N=136) which parallels findings from the previous section on the online explaining work dimension, but age has proven to be insignificant. Political responsibility in Brussels such as membership in numerous parliamentary committees (Coeff. -1.99, Std. Err 1.05, P>z 0.06, N=132) were less likely to include a casework feature on their websites while.

Incumbency, electoral systems, role orientations and constituency characteristics proved to be insignificant. In other words the offline theories from which most of the variables were derived were weakly relevant for explaining the variation for this online dimension.

Interestingly, however, bivariate OLS regression analysis showed that there was positive correlation yet no difference between MEPs from old (Coeff. 1.77, Std. Err. .785, P>z 0.02, N=140), or new member states (Coeff. 2.12, Std. Err. .800, P>z 0.01, N=140), when it came to incorporating the casework feature on their websites. At first glance, this somewhat counters the observations made with respect to the offline casework where MEPs from the new member states were shown to be more pro-active offline caseworkers than MEPs from older member states.

On second glance, it makes sense since the coding of the online casework feature did not distinguish between 'lighter' versus 'harder' types of casework. And it is along this distinction that the two groups tend to differ where MEPs from new member states solicited 'harder' cases such as promoting their assistance *on-* and *offline* to 'small and medium size entrepreneurs or smaller towns', regional administrations, and civic organizations with access to various structural funds and EU grants though the provision of targeted guidelines, useful tips, on-line application forms, and offline information workshops in MEPs' constituency offices. MEPs from older member states, on the other hand, promoted more lighter forms of casework such as the provision of links to various EU institutions, information about EU internships, upcoming seminars or EU-related constituency activities offered by the MEP or application forms for office visits to Brussels.

Determinants for Interactivity ONLINE

As mentioned earlier in this section, up to 88 per cent of MEP websites incorporate at least one features in the medium-high interactive category while over 49 per cent of them have at least four of such features (Table 6.5). The dependent variable and proxy for *online interactivity –* was derived from content analysis of survey respondents' websites that coded for the 'presence =1' ('non-presence =0') of select interactive features on MEPs' personal web sites or blogs (as indicated in Interactivity Index - Table 6.5). A composite, cumulative score for each MEP on the total number of features their websites contained was then awarded. Each feature was ascribed a value between 1-3 based on its minimum or maximum interactive potential (e.g. in the 'high' category, e-forums and SNS sites =3 points while uni-directional listing of speeches, in the 'low' category were ascribed the value of 1). The maximum possible score was 21.

Though this constituency dimension is quite novel with few established and tested theories, based on extant literature, the general hypotheses with respect to online interactivity expected demographic variables – age, gender and education to play a role where younger, well educated males were expected to be the prototypical users of interactive online applications that tend to be more sophisticated, requiring a certain level of IT skills and savvy than the simple one-directional communication features such as webpages with MEPs' speeches or the uploading of information about the EU. MEPs with larger staff size would also be more likely candidates for this type of features.

As to the results, with the exception of gender and education results for which were insignificant, the *demographic background hypothesis –* of being younger (Coeff -.013, Std. Err. .008, P>z 0.1,

N=138) was confirmed with respect to online interactivity (Table 6.3 in the Appendix). Older MEPs being less willing to use interactive online features was well summarized by an Estonian MEP who explained:

> "... No I do not have a website. Look, I am 66 years old and am not into those things. My assistant was very eager to do it but I decided against it. I believe in tangible things, paper in front of you to read and face to face contact."

Electoral systems – Model 1 also showed to be significant but with a rather surprising finding where ordered ballot structure was positively correlated with online interactivity. Though without robust theoretical grounding, it was rather expected that MEPs from electoral systems with open ballot structure would be more prone to be interactive online as open ballot structures are known to prompt delegate-like or more pro-citizen orientation. An explanation for this finding is thus inconclusive.

Going down the list, while *role orientations – Model 2* and *constituency characteristics* – Model 4 showed to be inconclusively linked, among the *political variables – Model 3* and contrary to expectations, incumbency showed to be positively correlated with online interactivity (Coeff .334, Std. Err .169, P>z 0.05, N=137) as were *previous public office* holders (Coeff .121, Std. Err .064, P>z 0.06, N=137) show to be positively correlated with online interactivity.

With respect to incumbency, the finding was somewhat surprising. Political wisdom holds that incumbents, seasoned politicians who are more electorally established tend to focus more on legislative and parliamentary activities than on chasing personal votes and interacting with their constituents. Hence it is puzzling why they would be more prone to incorporate interactive features on their websites. The positive correlation with previous public office holders, on the other hand, was less surprising. In an effort to maintain their popularity and linkages and not to loose touch with their established constituencies, it was expected that they would be inclined to pursue interactive behavior online. The online platform perfectly enables and facilitates such possibilities over distance.

Providing these findings, it can be concluded that with respect to online interactivity more research needs to be conducted as more dynamics are at play and where other variables may be more suitable in determining MEPs' propensities for online interactive behavior than the usual suspects identified here.

Chapter Summary

So how do MEPs use the Internet in the context of constituency outreach? Most notably, findings in this chapter support that MEPs do indeed use the online platform for constituency purposes. Though email showed to be the most common channel of communication for both MEPs and constituents, 72 per cent MEP have an active website or a blog. Out of those that are online 64 per cent use their websites for explaining their work, 22 per cent for casework related functions, while over 49 per cent MEP websites incorporated up to three of the 'medium to highly' interactive features (Table 6.5).

With respect to their allocation of resources, MEPs on average spend approximately 10 per cent of their time on website management while their top motives for creating a website are to increase direct contact with citizens, to educate citizens about the EU, to personalize their message as well as to increase their accountability by providing transparency over their work (Table 6.1).   Reduction of office costs and promoting party activities were interestingly the least likely motives for creating a website. From the side of the constituents, MEPs are most contacted by individual citizens and lobby groups.

While their websites may not be fully replacing offline, conventional constituency offices, they fulfill several functions and complement the latter.   During their face-to-face or e-mail encounters MEPs frequently divert citizens' queries to their websites. MEPs' websites are thus places 'to go to' serving as clearing houses and virtual resource platforms - to which MEP commonly delegate a share of citizens' requests. They act as a reference point for information which offloads some of the lighter casework related to information seeking or interest in MEP's work. Their virtual constituency office, in this sense, is open and accessible 24/7 to their constituents.

In terms of their interactive usage, on average, MEPs' website contain four out of the seven features in the medium to high interactive category thus showing that MEPs invite online interactivity. According to MEPs' estimates, constituents, however, prefer to use email to websites when communicating with their MEP. This finding dispels the common criticism that elites use website as a continuum for top-down communication. Instead, the observation indicates that while MEPs may offer interactive features, constituents do not necessarily reciprocate by using them but rather prefer to use MEPs' websites for information seeking; this is consistent with previous research (Tolbert & Mossberg 2006). At the same time, constituents do enjoy and seek out MEPs' personal attention when they need it, particularly with

respect to casework, however, this preference manifests more in interactivity via email.

The reciprocal utility maximization and interdependence in MEP-constituent communication has been less depicted in previous research. In other words, while constituents depend on the types of channels through which MEPs reach out and/ or provide, MEPs too reciprocally depend on how citizens communicate with them. For example, though MEPs may want to pragmatically devolve more interactivity to their websites to offset the volume of emails coming into their office, constituents may not necessarily use them for the same purpose. They may prefer email instead, thus subjecting MEPs to respond via the same medium. This utility maximization has implications for how we evaluate online interactivity and dynamics of political communication where the latter has presumed Internet usage by elites to be a uniform top-down with constituents passively consuming the latter. But as demonstrated, this is not necessarily the case.

It was also established that MEPs use their websites more for presenting themselves than for promoting their parties. Only 6 per cent MEPs listed party links in their EU official profile, among which majority were Spanish and German MEPs. On MEPs' own websites, this number was slightly higher (47 per cent) but represented merely symbolically in the form of a party logo or a link to their national party's website. Interestingly, 53 per cent websites also featured European party group's link, a percentage which is slightly higher than for those featuring their national parties' logos. In terms of European party group affiliation, ALDE MEPs were most likely to have a website, to explain their work and to use interactive online features. This may have to do something with the fact that ALDE has declared a party policy of being the 'first paperless party in the EP' (interview with MEP Graham Watson, ALDE Party group leader in 2008-2009). With respect to EP Social Democrats, though the party had an IT savvy and highly interactive website, this did not translate into its MEPs' online behavior[44].

Another sign for the highly personalized use of websites was the fairly common use of podcasts, SNS and You Tube broadcasts which seem to fulfill the role of quasi self-directed mini TV channels where MEP is the lead actor - 'seen and heard' in a personal rather than party capacity. In this sense, the online platform provides MEPs' a carte blanche for self-presentation which would be difficult to obtain via other media.

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[44] It is to be noted, however, that though the overall survey is statistically significant, when survey responses were broken up by EP party groupings, the individual sub-samples became very small, likely non-representative hence affecting the rather inconclusive OLS and logit analytic results. By increasing the survey sample or targeting certain EP Groups over others may correct for this shortcoming in future research.

With regards to the *determinants of MEP online behavior,* demographic factors - age and education - still showed to be strong predictors while gender showed to play a lesser role. In other words, younger and higher educated MEPs were more likely to be online and have more interactive features on their websites. The significance of the demographic factors for the different online constituency outreach dimensions is noteworthy in that they failed to play a comparatively important role in the case of offline constituency outreach.

Electoral system variables also showed to be pertinent for most of the online dimensions. MEPs from systems with open and ordered party lists were most likely to reach out to their constituents online than those from systems with closed party lists. This in line with the electoral systems theory for offline constituency orientations.

In the group of *political* and *institutional determinants* – the effects were mixed. Both party affiliation and political responsibility showed to be a relatively weak predictor of different aspects on online constituency activities. MEPs having more political activities appeared to have no effect on their online constituency outreach. *Previous public office* and *incumbency*, however, showed to be stronger predictors for two out of the three online dimensions. *Constituency characteristics* on the other hand indicated to be less salient. In other words, MEP-Constituent ratio, distance to constituency and in the case of online constituency outreach i*nternet penetration* did not show to matter. Focus of representation and MEPs' role orientations in the comparative table also showed to be insignificant apart from the explaining work dimension.

In summary, results in Chapter 6 demonstrated that MEPs use their websites quite actively for various purposes. With respect to the three dimensions, MEPs' websites tend to be used for the explaining work dimension and interactivity the most while for casework the least. Evidence shows that MEPs are also being contacted by individual citizens, interest groups and civic organizations on a daily basis. This reality dispels the misnomer that MEPs are insular and disconnected from the public.

Overall, observations made in this chapter have shown that MEPs deliberately think about and are quite conscious about the value added of online platform but also about the detriments of what it takes to be online'. And even though at the end of the day MEPs may delegate the technical and administrative website management tasks to their assistants, they do care about what goes on their websites content-wise. Hence having a website is very much an MEP's personalized affair.

From a research perspective, the chapter also showed that it is possible to use concepts derived from offline theories and adapt them to measure online phenomena. Interestingly, it also demonstrated that MEPs' survey responses and website analytics which were conducted independently and without MEPs' knowledge coincided. In other words, MEPs were truthful hence strengthening the credibility and validity of the survey as such.

On a methodological note, it was further encouraging to see that the survey results obtained from the author's original survey tended to consistently coincide with the results found in the website content analysis. This evidence hence provides the MEP survey conducted by the author more credibility.

7. Toward a Virtual Constituency Office?: Comparing MEPs' Constituency Outreach OFFLINE and ONLINE

While Chapters 5 and 6 outlined the way MEPs' constituency orientations play out both offline and online, this chapter compares the two levels and thereby traces the extent to which the Internet prompts MEPs to adopt more pro-active or simply different forms of constituency outreach online than they would conventionally – offline. Or pushing the envelope even further, the central question of this chapter asks – is it conceivable that MEPs are shifting all (or predominant amount) of their constituency outreach online hence using the online platform as a quasi virtual constituency office?

Using a comparative online-offline approach and under the assumption that ICTs may have an enhancing effect on MEPs' constituency outreach, three plausible hypotheses were proposed. The null or *politics as usual hypothesis* (H4) with the expectation that there is no difference or no effect observed when comparing MEPs' constituency outreach *off-* or *online*. In other words, the null hypothesis posits that MEPs will emulate similar types of behavior online as they already pursue offline - where the latter determines the former - in terms of the three constituency outreach dimensions: explaining work, casework and interactivity.

To the contrary, the two alternative hypotheses propose that ICTs *could* either affect all three constituency dimensions - the *virtual office hypothesis* (H4a) or only *partially* where differences are observed in some rather than across all three dimensions (casework, explaining work, interactivity).

In the analysis, *online* proxies for the constituency outreach dimensions served as the dependent variable(s) while *offline* casework proxies served as independent variable(s). Using logistic regression analysis and a covariance matrix, the strength of the correlation between the four dimensions MEPs' was tested. Strong correlation between the online-offline comparisons along the three constituency dimensions was considered as evidence for accepting the null hypothesis. MEPs' own assessment of Internet's impact on their constituency outreach was also used as a qualitative measure.

Chapter 7 is structured in two parts. The first part introduces qualitative results from MEPs' own estimates of Internet's impact on their constituency outreach while the second outlines the

key findings and puts the comparative online-offline approach into perspective.

7.1 MEPs' (own) Assessment of Internet's Impact on Their Work

A stand-alone question in the survey requested MEPs to assess Internet's impact on different aspects of their work (Table 7.1).

Table 7.1 Perceived impact of websites on MEP 's work

How has your MEP website affected the following aspects of your work?

Response Category	Decreased (1)	(2)	Same (3)	(4)	Increased (5)	Unsure	Mean*	Std. Dev.	N
Contact with citizens	1	2	26	32	52	11	4.3	1.0	124
Contact with interest groups	1	3	55	31	23	11	3.9	1.1	123
Office efficiency	1	1	36	33	41	11	4.2	1.0	123
Policy feedback	1	1	25	40	47	8	4.3	0.9	122
Chances of being re-elected	3	1	42	23	23	28	4.2	1.3	121
Requests for assistance	1	2	31	44	34	10	4.1	1.0	122
Contact with young people	1	1	21	37	51	13	4.4	0.9	124

 * (2) Slightly decrease, (4) Slightly increase. The mean has been calculated on the basis of responses per 1-5 scale.

Based on Table 7.1 several observations can be made. Firstly, the standard deviation for all seven response categories is low with the mean for most categories being very close to the '4' value which corresponds to Internet usage (use of websites) causing a "slight increase" in the corresponding activity. When taking MEPs' own estimates for their face value, the existing general trend suggests that the Internet has a slight rather than significant impact on the mentioned aspects of an MEP's work.

However, percentage-wise the most positive impact was felt in the area of 'policy feedback' and 'contact with youth' and confirmed by 71 per cent of MEP respondents. 68 percent of MEPs also felt that their 'contact with citizens' has increased, while casework and office efficiency were next in line. Interestingly, 'chances of being re-elected' was an area least prone to impact and judging by the number of 'unsure' answers, it was also a response segment most difficult to estimate for respondents. This is interesting given that pro-active constituency outreach is normally seen as

strongly motivated by electoral incentives to build credits of 'good will' among constituents that are to be remembered at the next election. Two plausible explanations for this include: i) that MEPs are not being driven by electoral incentives when reaching out to their constituencies online, and (ii) a likely corollary of the former MEPs have not associated nor extensively use the Internet in the election context, unlike their national counterparts tend to do.

While another commonly assumed added value of the Internet is expediency and cost efficiency through which MEPs could cut back on long-distance communication costs, only 2 per cent MEPs estimated that the Internet has significantly reduced their costs while 61 per cent suggested that it had 'slightly increased' or 'increased' their office efficiency while 29 percent stated it remained the same and 9 per cent admitted that they were not sure.

7.2 Comparing MEPs' Constituency Outreach OFFLINE and ONLINE

7.2.1 The Virtual Office – Full impact Hypothesis

The *virtual office hypothesis (H4a)* postulates that MEPs are shifting their offline constituency outreach entirely or fully – in all three constituency outreach dimensions - online. To the contrary, the *no impact* or *the politics as usual hypothesis* expected that MEPs' constituency outreach online would emulate their conventional constituency outreach offline – hence the use of the Internet platform bringing nothing new to the way MEPs conduct constituency outreach. In regression analysis, this would manifest as a positive correlation between *'not having a constituency office'* and ' *not having a website'* but also between *'having a constituency office' and 'having a website/ blog'.*

In the results, the *virtual constituency office hypothesis* was not confirmed. Descriptive statistics show that 72 per cent MEPs had either a website or a blog, while 28 per cent did not. Offline, 94 per cent MEPs had a physical office in their constituencies and only 6 per cent reported not having one at all. In a 2x2 cross-tabulation matrix (see Table 6.2 below), the comparison is more visible. For the *virtual constituency office hypothesis* to hold true, it was expected that the proportion of MEPs appearing in the upper right quadrant, representing those without a constituency office but also those with a website/blog instead would be the largest in proportion to others. This is not the case. Instead, greatest proportion of respondents (69%) clusters in the lower right

quadrant that corresponds to MEPs having both constituency office as well as a website while only 3 MEPs (2%) appear in the expected quadrant – those with a website but no constituency office.

Table 7.2 Constituency Office v. Website/ blog status

Staff Home	Website/ Blog		
	No	Yes	Total
No constituency office	5 (4%)	3 (2%)	8
Yes constituency office	35 (25%)	97 (69%)	132
Total	40	100	140

In other words, the results suggest a fairly high correlation (Coeff. 1.33, Std. Err.788 P > |z |= 0.04, Pseudo r2 = .017, N=145) between being online and having a conventional constituency office offline which also holds true for MEPs without a constituency office to be less likely online. Hence results for this first comparative dimension support the acceptance of the *null* rather than the *virtual office hypothesis* where MEPs who are pro-constituency oriented offline tend to be also pro-constituency oriented online by having a website. In other words, with respect to this first dimension, MEPs are seen to emulate similar behavior patterns online as they already have offline.

7.2.2 OFFLINE-ONLINE Explaining Work (feature) Comparison

"We have incomparable public and media visibility to national MPs (much lower) – whatever they do, how they legislate appears next day in the news since their work immediately affects peoples' lives. Though we in principle do similar work… we legislate, we work on much more macro issues at the European level which take a long time before they touch peoples' lives." (Spanish MEP)

As established for both the offline and online dimensions, MEPs feel quite strongly about their role and duty to bridge the information divide or disconnect between citizens and EU institutions. They feel that the mass media does not provide adequate or objective information about the work of the EP and other EU institutions. As a result, MEPs fill this informational gap by investing a sizeable

amount of their energy into various communicative acts to educate their constituencies and the public at large about their own work, and the work of the EU.

Table 7.3 below provides a comparison of typical offline and online media channels via which MEPs reach out to their constituencies. The table provides both one-directional forms of communication features indicative of the 'explaining work dimension (shaded areas) as well as two-directional modes that enable feedback and dialogue. It also provides constituents' preferences on the same channels of communication (based on MEPs' preferences).

Table 7.3: Channels and frequency of MEP ↔ citizen communication

OFFLINE	MEP's Preference	Citizens Preference	ONLINE	MEP's Preference	Citizen Preference
Response category	Mean	Mean	Response category	Mean	Mean
Newspapers	3.7	-	E-mail	4.1	4.7
Public meetings	3.6	3.5	Website	4.1	3.4
Radio	3.2	-	E-newsletters	3.2	-
TV	3.2	-	Your party website	3.1	2.3
Mailed newsletters/ mail	3.2	3.3	Your blog	2.3	2.1
Telephone	3.1	3.6			
Party bulletins/party office	3.0	2.6			
Office visits (Brussels)		4.0			
Office visits (Home)	2.0	3.1			

1-5 scale range: (1) never, (2) rarely, (3) sometimes, (4) often, (5) most often; N = 129-136

From the table, couple of comparative trends can be observed. The first observation is that MEPs, be it offline or online prefer to use communication channels that optimize *wide audience capture and predominantly those that cater to one-directional information provision*. Offline, it is newspapers and public events, even though the latter have some level of interactivity, the while online it is multi-purpose websites with 24/7 accessibility. Even when looking at website's sub-features – explaining work, press releases are the most common features appearing on MEPs' websites.

The second trend when comparing the frequency of usage between the two levels of communication suggests that MEPs and constituents use online channels – email and websites – more frequently than their offline homologues – newspapers and public meetings. MEPs explain

that the utility value of websites is its multi-purpose functionality where MEPs can upload diverse information and explain their work to their constituents and public at large in ways that they could not do otherwise. Serving as a non-stop, 24/7 point of reference symbolic of MEP's accessibility to constituents is another appeal of the website. Interestingly, however, no difference is apparent between online or offline communication via party channels.

At the same time, it is important not to overstate the importance of the MEPs use of their websites and email for constituency outreach. The fact that MEPs spend an estimated 20 per cent on media relations versus 10 per cent on website management accounts for this reality. 60 per cent of MEPs' websites also dedicate specific sections to 'press releases' for 'media uses' that include their latest press releases, personal logos, bio sketches and photos for media to download. At the same time, when it comes to scheduled appointments in their constituencies, attendance of public events seems to outnumber those of meetings with the media.

Hence, in summary, MEPs indicate to be using the online and offline communication channels in a complementary way. While the online platform is conducive to providing didactic and personalized information that MEPs may want to share with the public domain (e.g. explaining their policy stances without the filter and spin of the mass media), they still need the mass media such as newspapers, TV and radio to further widen their audience and constituency capture. Competing for public attention is particularly important due to MEPs and EP's rather low institutional visibility as national MP and other EU institutional heavyweights such as the Council or the Commission tend to steal the frontline spotlight in the media. A British MEP's explanation well depicts the precarious relationship between MEPs and mainstream media: "*while many of my colleagues do, I personally do not invest lot of time into press releases. There is not much return on them. I mean, when did you hear that the press release launched by MEPs, has become a big new story*?" On a similar note, a Belgian MEP explained:

> "*T]here is not much demand for MEP's views or general visibility in the public domain. For the most part they, as well as the (European) issues they represent remain in the shadows of national politics. Their presence in national media such as radio, television is minor. And even when they do appear, the debates on Europe are most likely to be about the Council, national ministers and European commissioners etc. Therefore, in order for MEPs to become protagonists in debates at the European level, they need to strategically create very targeted – tres, tres pointu - dossiers on current events and issues where the Parliament has a co-decision competences and power.*" www.pierrejonckheer.be)

Being conscious of these realities, it is no surprise that MEPs diversify and resort to alternative means of public outreach. In this sense, ICTs and the Internet platform offer them a disintermediating utility whereby MEP can bypass mainstream media to create and control their own stories (Bentivegna 2002, 2006) or in the words of a Spanish MEP, "through my website I create my own media".

This all being said, however, is it possible to disentangle the Internet's effect on the 'explaining work' dimension? With respect to the explaining work dimension, the *null hypothesis* conjectured that MEPs emulate similar types of 'explaining work' activities online as they already conventionally pursue offline while the *virtual office hypothesis* posited that MEPs who did not invest as much time into explaining their work offline would do so more online.

For determining the online-offline correlation, the presence of the online 'explaining work feature' served as the dependent variable while the offline indicators for the 'explaining of work' dimension included MEPs' propensity to use uni-directional communication channels including holding press conferences with TV media, newspapers, public events and party bulletins. These channels of communication are uni-directional (MEP initiating to speak to an audience) in character and act as proxies for modes of constituency outreach that enable MEP to explain what he/she does in Brussels and the types of policy issues he stands for as MEP. However, they are not necessarily interactive (e.g. TV or newspaper print). A covariance matrix below (Table 7.4) and logistic regression analysis were used to determine the direction and strength of the bi-variate relationship.

Table 7.4 Covariance Matrix: Online-Offline Explaining work

N=106	Explaining work	Use of TV	Use of newspapers	Party Bulletin
Explaining work	.250135	x	x	x
Use of TV	-.028212	.666038	x	x
Use of newspapers	-.007367	.40575	.720216	x
Party Bulletin	.030189	.132884	.244924	1.09084

Table 7.5 Explaining work ONLINE

Using TV for constituency outreach	.030(.313)
Using newspaper for constituency outreach	-.318 (.346)
Using party bulletin for constituency outreach	.070(.208)
Public evens as channels of constituency outreach	.517*(.290)
Pseudo R-squared	.26

N=106, ***≤0.01 **≤0.05 *≤0.1

Results from the covariance matrix show that apart from the use of TV and mailed party bulletins, the relationship between offline-online 'explaining work' (dependent) variable is positive. Though the covariate logistic regression results confirm and mimic the direction of the online-offline relationships, apart from appearance at public events being positively correlated with the online explaining work dimension (Coeff .517, Std. Err .290 P > |z |= 0.075, Pseudo r2 = .03, N=106) majority of the results proved to be insignificant. Though the positive correlation between MEPs' propensity to use public events as a means of reaching out to their constituencies and their proclivity to also explain their work online steers in the direction of accepting the null hypothesis, it also needs to be noted that the sample size for both analyses was not statistically relevant (N = 106) at 13.5 per cent. Providing this caveat, it is thus not possible to accept or reject the null hypothesis with great degree of confidence.

7.2.3 OFFLINE-ONLINE Casework Comparison

The key question posed for the offline-online comparison related to casework, is whether Internet enhances or in any way changes how MEPs conduct casework? In other words, do MEPs pursue more, or different types of casework online than they to conventionally offline?

To determine the extent to which there is indeed a difference between MEPs offline and online way of conducting casework, an online 'case work' proxy (presence of a casework feature or not) was selected as the dependent variable while several characteristic indicators for offline caseworker acted as the independent variables (see Table 7.6). The null hypothesis argued that MEPs who were pro-casework oriented offline would also be so online thus Internet not contributing to changes in MEPs conduct of casework while the virtual hypothesis expected that

MEPs who are not necessarily caseworkers offline would be more so online due to the online platform's assumed convenience.

When looking at descriptive statistics, in Chapter 4, we learned that in general MEPs receive sizeable amount of casework. On average, casework takes up 20 per cent of MEPs' time but nearly a quarter of MEPs report that casework consumes over 30 per cent of their time, while 10 per cent say it takes more than half of their time. A great majority of MEPs, 60 per cent, reported that on average they try to respond to 80-100% of the requests for assistance. These genera figures on casework, however, do not disaggregate through what channels MEPs receive and respond to casework.

When it comes to online casework, as noted in Chapter 5, MEPs' use of their websites or blogs for casework purposes shows to be fairly low. Both website analytics and survey responses show similar results where only 21% MEP websites/ blogs incorporated a casework feature while similarly a low percentage, 24 per cent MEPs reported 'casework promotion' as a motive for creating their website. Both scores were comparatively among the lowest in the pool of responses (in the corresponding survey question asked) thus confirming the earlier conjecture that websites/ blogs cater poorly to casework functions in the context of the constituency outreach. These results thus steer in the direction of acceptance of the null rather than the virtual office hypothesis.

When looking at the covariance matrix and logit regression results (Tables 7.6), it is observed that i) there is a positive relationship between online and offline casework proxies though with a numeric value very close to zero while the logit regression results showed and insignificant correlation between the online and offline casework dimensions – time spent on casework (Coeff. 0.026, Std. Err. 0.104 P > |z|= 0.79, Pseudo r2 = .02, N=123) and responsiveness to casework (Coeff. 0.211, Std. Err. 0.195 P > |z|= 0.28, Pseudo r2 = .017, N=145). Hence providing these two results, there seems to be a positive (in favor of the null hypothesis) but most likely a spurious relationship between the on and offline casework dimensions.

Table 7.6 Covariance Matrix: Online-Offline Casework

N=123	Online casework	Time spent on casework	Responsiveness to casework
Online casework	.18166	x	x
Time spent on casework	.05251	4.508	x
Responsiveness to casework	.05731	.102292	1.64468

There are two plausible explanations for this finding and for the generally low usage of the online platform for casework purposes. The first is that not all casework can be conducted entirely online. While lighter cases such as requests for information could be effectively dealt with through the online platform, harder cases typically require MEPs' offline intervention. Moreover, constituents' preferences (based on MEPs' estimates) in Table 7.7 below confirm that websites are not a favored channel for communicating casework requests. Though email appears to be the most preferred choice, conventional offline channels such as letter and telephone prevail as second choices for lodging casework requests. Website ranks fairly low and represents only a quarter of requests.

A notable characteristic of the three mentioned communications channels (email, letters and telephone) is that they facilitate direct contact. Because heavier 'cases' typically involve more personal issues, problems and requests, constituents' use of direct and personalized forms of communication is understandable. At the same time, office visits also facilitate means of direct face-to-face contact, but show to be less commonly used by constituents in the casework context. Then again not all citizens know that MEP may have a constituency office – thus resort. Moreover, the high preference for e-mail may also be reinforced by MEPs' tendency to demand requests coming in via other channels to be "put in writing", reference made during interviews. Thus, e-mail contact in many cases may have been preceded by other forms of initial contact.

Table 7.7 Channels of receiving casework

Through which of the following channels do you receive most of your assistance requests?	
E-mail	93%
Letters	37%
Telephone	35%
Office visits in Brussels or Strasbourg	27%
Your website	25%
Consultation hours in your country office	25%
Your national party's office	11%
N=136	

The second plausible reason is that interdependence between both offline and online communication channels demonstrated here, though likely reflective of what happens in reality, poses challenges for disentangling the cause and effect of Internet's utility and the offline-online comparison with respect to the casework dimension. Moreover, the descriptive statistics seem to suggest that the offline-online channels seem to be reinforcing each other or where individuals, be it MEPs or constituents, may use both online and offline channels (for example if one fails, they may resort to another) for lodging or responding to casework. Hence the spurious result between the two levels.

7.2.4   OFFLINE-ONLINE Interactivity Comparison

Different media channels produce different types of communicative acts. MEP-constituent interactivity represents a two-way communicative act between MEP and his/her constituents. In the context of the online-offline comparison for this dimension, the question to be answered is whether the online platform provides new means for MEP-constituent interactivity and affects the way MEPs interact with their constituents.

In an earlier Table 7.3, the measure of MEP – constituency interactivity zeroed in on MEPs' own estimates about their own frequency of using a list of offline and online media that provided a measure for the MEP-constituent vector. In a separate question, MEPs were also asked to assess the frequency and the media with which constituents contact them thus representing the reverse constituent-MEP communication vector. Jointly these two bi-directional vectors (though limited to MEP's assessment) provide a measure of MEP-constituent interactivity. For either vector, MEPs or

constituents can in principle choose to communicate via online or offline media.

When comparing the online-offline descriptive results in Tables 7.3 in terms of interactivity, several trends can be observed. First it is notable that e-mail, which ranks among the highest on the interactivity index of online features and websites are used the most, comparatively more than any other offline channel medium, by both MEPs and citizens alike. Email is preferred as it provides easy to use, highly accessible and personal mode of contact while websites cater well to MEPs being able to offer different types of interactions (comment, e-polls, podcasts, SNS etc.). This confirms findings from previous research (Dai 2006, 2007) and suggests that the online communication channels are more preferred than offline channels in the context of constituency relations. Thus this observation can be taken as evidence supporting the *virtual office or partial effects hypotheses* that conjectures that MEPs will move some or all of their conventional offline constituency outreach duties online.

At the same time, when looking at MEPs' use of 2-directional interactive sub-features on their websites such as comment forms (37%), e-forums (9%), e-polls (7%) – it is still low when compared to one-directional non-interactive features still tend to dominate. This being said, MEPs claim, as other studies have confirmed, that the volumes of their correspondence have significantly increased with the advent of email. Over 67 per cent respondents in the MEP survey conducted for this thesis, reported that it the availability of the Internet has increased their direct contact with citizens; 71 per cent reported that it has also increased their 'policy feedback from the public' while 71 per cent stated that it has increased their 'contact with young people'.

The second observation suggests a level of observed asymmetry in the comparative MEP-constituent online-offline media usage. While MEPs report to use emails as frequently as they do websites, when it comes to offline media, they resort to use the press (newspapers) and public meetings the most, while telephone, party offices as well as consultations via their own constituency offices (in Brussels or home) score the low. Citizens on the other hand, appear to use the offline media telephone, office visits in Brussels more frequently than websites. Though clearly one cannot ignore the potential bias in MEPs' estimations about citizens' communication preferences.

Table 7.8   Website features vs. Website traffic

Website (features)	%	Website traffic**	%
E-mail*	84	Email	-
Website	63	Website	-
Podcast	59	Podcast	11
E-newsletter	39	E-newsletter	12
Comment/ feedback forms	37	Comment/ feedback	11
SNS	46	Info issues	37
Blog	24	Overview of legislative work	37
E-forums	9	E-forums	0.5

Lastly, when looking at the comparative dimensions of Table 7.3 and MEPs' use of websites in particular, the findings indicate that even where MEPs do provide interactive content on their websites, citizens' interest to use them for interactive purposes is claimed to be low. Instead, according to MEPs, the non-interactive 'information driven' pages on their websites are more popular among citizens while their own experience with the use of interactive features shows that even when online interactive features are used, they do not necessarily stimulate high quality of interactions from the side of citizens which has lead MEPs to perceive such initiatives a 'waste of time' and abandon them altogether.

These dynamics show that MEPs do make themselves available and offer several means of being interactively contacted, at minimum via their email addresses, but they are also subject to reciprocal interaction preferences of their subjects. Moreover, the cost-benefit considerations - the time required for engaging in interactive and the quality of interactive communication generated are also a concern. These dynamics need to be considered when analyzing MEP-constituency interactions online.

But what do the above insights tell us about the impact of the Internet on the fourth constituency dimension?

When examining the covariance and regression estimates where the dependent variable comprised the online interactivity (a cumulative variable of four different interactive proxies) and series of independent offline interactivity variables (see Table 7.9), it was observed that i) MEPs

with proclivity to use the phone for constituency outreach was negatively correlated with online interactivity – both the covariance and regression analysis (Coeff. -0.0955, Std. Err. 0.088 P > |z |= 0.79, Adjusted R2 = .001, N=118) confirmed this finding though statistically the relationship proving to be insignificant; ii) while a significant positive relationship was found between MEPs who are pro-active in using public events as an offline outreach activity and propensity for online interactivity.

Based on these findings the null hypothesis was accepted as most of the relationships between offline and online interactivity were positive thus suggesting that MEPs' constituency outreach coincides with MEPs' constituency outreach online even though descriptive statistics suggest that MEPs do show a alight preference for using websites for interactive purposes. However, likely due to the fairly small size of the sample the conclusion is not robustly supported hence accepted. It can be also inferred that there are several different types of subgroups of MEPs with different offline-online uses. For example, the phone users being negatively linked to online interactivity are likely those that are not online all together due to their dominant preference for using offline instead of online media. There are after all over quarter of MEP that fell in this category in 2009.

Table 7.8 Covariance Matrix: Online-Offline Interactivity

N=118	Online Interactivity	Use of phone for outreach	Use of public events for outreach	Use of office for outreach	# of appointments with citizens
Online Interactivity	.915327	x	x	x	x
Use of phone as outreach	-.05027	1.1404	x	x	x
Use of public events as outreach	.12625	.29277	.68934	x	x
Use of MEP office for outreach	.09800	.04780	.16116	.23519	x
# of appointments with citizens	.11118	.08634	.172316	.395263	.308054

Chapter Summary

The principal aim of this chapter was to address whether MEPs shift some or majority of their constituency outreach duties online, and if so, could the virtual constituency office concept be replacing the conventional (offline) constituency office as we know it? Moreover, it tested the extent to which the offline-online comparative approach could be used for studying online behavior and contributing to better assessments on the impact of the Internet on political behavior.

With regards to the first question, findings in this chapter demonstrate that it is premature to conclude that MEPs are replacing their physical constituency offices with virtual constituency office platforms. Instead evidence for all three dimensions validated the null or politics as usual hypothesis where MEPs were observed to have a propensity for pursuing similar types of constituency outreach online as they already do offline. For the most part, the Internet, though certainly adding some new outreach capacities provides another platform and tool for reinforcing MEPs' offline outreach rather than completely replacing it.

The analysis in this Chapter has also shown that a more nuanced approach to understanding of Internet's influence on MEPs' constituency outreach is necessary. The nuance approach recognizes Internet's *softer impacts* on MEPs' constituency outreach. Such nuances include *slight asymmetry in interactive usage of online-offline media* by MEPs and their constituents where the former show a preference for using online channels and communication channels that cater to wide audience capture while constituents, with the exception of e-mail, prefer more conventional and direct offline media when contacting an interacting with their MEPs. The asymmetry can be attributed to the utility maximization of different media by both parties base on their needs and particular vantage points – MEPs needing to reach our to large constituencies and audiences, and constituents seeking personal one-on-one attention from MEPs. In other words, out of sheer pragmatics, MEPs find one-to-many rather than one-on-one communication channels more useful and efficient while citizens in seeking personal attention from MEPs find direct channels such as email, telephone and office consultations more useful.

Where the Internet platform does add another new value to conventional constituency outreach is that it indeed does act as a new virtual resource person. Though websites do not yet fully replace MEPs' constituency or Brussels offices, they do serve as new *'clearing houses' for lighter casework*

and as 24/7 information or reference platforms for MEPs' work. Given that most of MEPs' casework includes requests for information, the preventive posting of relevant information online addresses such requests on an ongoing 24/7 basis. Moreover, during their offline interactions with constituents, MEPs commonly refer people to their websites and request them to put their questions or need for assistance "into writing".

Thirdly, websites provide a *platform for transparency that would be difficult to execute offline or through any other conventional media.* In addition to serving as platforms for storing information, citizens having 24/7 accessibility to MEPs' speeches, updates on their latest achievements or personalized accounts of undergoing events in the EU, website embedded features such as MEP podcasts fulfill a level accountability in MEPs' mandate as representatives.

The *disintermediating power of ICTs* is and additional value added that the Internet brings to MEPs' constituency work. On the one hand acknowledging their remoteness and lower institutional visibility in EU's multi-level pecking order, MEPs recognize their dependency on mass media that provide them access to wider audiences and their distant constituencies. MEP also compete with MP and other EU institutions for media exposure. These realities thus force them to seek alternative means of outreach or ways to create their 'own media' channels via their websites, through which they can to talk in first person, to express themselves freely and to communicate directly without an intermediary filter while personalizing their message.

In summary, this Chapter concludes that MEPs are neither communication insulars nor technophobes as some earlier ICT studies claimed. To maximize their constituency outreach potential, they experiment with, engage in and pursue several tracks of offline and online communication channels. While it was observed that one-directional forms of outreach prevail over casework and two-way interactivity online, this may not be out of MEPs' disinterest in reaching out to their constituencies but rather due to their limited resources – time and number of staff – that force them to discriminate between different the use of different communication based on cost-benefit considerations. For example, using interactive features is particularly time consuming but according to MEPs does not provide proportional benefits of increasing constituents' interest and engagement. Using the online platform for casework purposes is also not entirely suitable for all forms of casework as harder casework, for example, typically requires a combination of offline and online interventions.

Consequently, these findings dispel earlier skeptical claims that MEPs' websites are content-less showcases. Methodologically, the online-offline approach introduced has also proven to have its merits for Internet studies. It demonstrated that offline political or social science theories can be adapted to measure online behavior. Though not always easy to operationalize, yet the online-offline approach caters for conceptual adaptations that in turn enable the researcher to establish or at least approximate offline-online proxies. Nonetheless, more needs to be done conceptually and empirically in this direction in the future. The approach also expands on the extant uni-dimensional analyses that tend to overly focus on the online dimension without regard how the latter relates to or can be contextualized vis-à-vis the offline context.

Moreover, the approach has shown that the online and offline worlds are inextricably linked. They mutually condition and reinforce each other. At the same time, this dynamic can make it difficult to accurately disentangle causal relationships under study. Which world affects which? And are we by colonizing, predisposing or shaping our online worlds to resemble the offline world by measuring it on superimposed conceptual measures derived from the offline world? More research on these questions is welcome. Moreover, future research endeavors in this direction can be significantly strengthened by adding the time-series dimension which is significantly lacking in this thesis. While the comparative online-offline approach helped to put online behavior into perspective vis-à-vis its offline homologues, it failed to validate how these observations feature over time.

8.   CONCLUSION(*S*)

This thesis empirically examined political representation in the EU by examining *how* MEPs form linkages with their constituencies. However, instead of looking at how MEPs' maintain their constituency outreach during elections – the emphasis was placed on the day-to-day dynamics of representation and MEPs' cultivation of constituency linkages in the off election period. In this context, the thesis explored how MEPs think about their constituencies, how they communicate with, interact and explain their work to their constituencies and the types of casework they take on. The importance they attach to their constituency work and factors that determine the variation in their MEPs' constituency outreach were also discussed. In general, given MEPs' geographic remoteness from their constituencies, their generally low political salience and public visibility and having to represent large constituencies, it was expected that *MEPs' constituency orientations will be low*.

In addition to examining MEPs' modes of (conventional) constituency outreach offline, this thesis introduced a unique analytical dimension, by also looking how MEPs do so *online*. Using original dataset based on a self-administered MEP survey (2009) and website content analytics, it empirically examined how MEPs use the Internet platform for constituency outreach. The main research question for the online context therefore asked whether the online platform in any way alters the way that MEPs conduct their constituency outreach. To this effect three hypotheses were explored: the *virtual office hypothesis* which expected MEPs to shift most if not all of their constituency work (from offline to) online; the *partial effects hypothesis* that saw only some rather than all of the three constituency outreach dimensions affected while the *null hypothesis* conjectured that the availability and MEPs' use of the online platform will not change the way they conduct constituency outreach. Instead it conjectured that MEPs' constituency outreach online will simply emulate their already existing constituency outreach offline.

In addition to addressing these empirical questions, the thesis aim to advance the exploration of how the constituency linkage can be conceptualized, operationalized and measured at the EU level of representation but also online.

8.1   MEPs' Constituency Orientations OFFLINE

While the first three chapters explained extant theories and research related to constituency outreach in the EU context, Chapter 4 exposed empirical as well as qualitative observations related to how MEPs perceive their constituencies and the types of offline constituency work and outreach they pursue. It was hypothesized that due to EP's geographic remoteness and MEPs' low political salience at the national level, MEPs would have low pro-constituency orientations and outreach manifested in low constituency presence (*less than 0.5 days* - H*0*b), proportionally less time spent on constituency work than on Brussels-based political activities (H0c) and employing less staff in their constituency office than in their Brussels office (H0d).

With respect to MEPs' perceptions about their constituencies the thesis' findings observed several trends. The first observable trend showed that MEPs perceive their constituencies as heterogeneous mosaics rather than uniform territorial or strictly electoral entities. Moreover, though MEPs do select more specific sub-constituencies on whom they focus, the boundaries between them tend to be fluid and not electorally defined or as one German MEP explained "sometime theme specific, some times regional, other times Europe or something in between". In comparison to the more pro-active approach among national MEPs who tend to target and respond to specific (sub)constituencies based on electoral importance, the fluid or reactive approach to constituency focus among MEPs is likely unique and coinciding with their prevalent trustee role orientations since they claim to be more free to make political decisions and assume policy positions based on their own judgment rather than on partisan or public opinion cues.

A second notable trend in how MEPs think about their constituencies is that they distinguish between the constituencies they represent '*officially*' and those they represent '*in practice'*. While the former refer to their   'official', electoral   (national or regional) constituencies, the latter represent more '*workable*' and '*personalized*' sub-constituencies that MEPs end up focusing on and working with more closely. Most often these groups include supporters or interest groups in specific policy areas or flagship causes that MEPs take an interest in.

The third trend showed that representing 'Europe' or 'European people' factors strongly into whom MEPs' perceive 'their constituency' to be. More than half MEPs surveyed considered Europe and its people as the 'constituency they represent' or listed it in combination with other

types of sub-constituencies. MEPs' loyalty to representing 'Europe' or a trans-border 'European constituency' demonstrates that MEPs' representational loyalties run wider than their national boundaries. For example, a Finnish MEP may take on casework from a Bulgarian citizen or a group of European citizens that are not Finnish nationals. According to electoral theories this is counterintuitive as representatives should in principle invest into casework that is electorally advantageous for MEPs. Representational loyalty to constituencies that hardly bring MEPs electoral rewards (in EU elections) deviates from national MPs' behavior who tend to be strongly influenced by electoral incentives.

When asked about their own representational focus, majority of MEPs report to adhere to a trustee rather than to a delegate role orientation where 87 per cent MEP respondents claimed that they decide and vote in the EP based on their own judgment rather than on instruction from their parties (EU or national), national governments or citizens. This finding coincides with earlier work by Katz (1999). In this sense, MEPs perceive themselves as representational 'free agents' with a greater sense of political freedom, where "nobody breathes down their neck' and where they 'are free from the daily pressures of party politics common in the national arena'.

Lastly, MEPs' constituency orientations tell us that MEPs perceive an 'official' obligation to represent their *home* constituencies but once in office they tend to carve out or reshape their sense of a constituency into more realistic, practical sub-constituencies where their 'European hat' plays a strong role. On the one hand these observations confirm previous research on national level representatives (Fenno 1977) who are known to narrow down their 'constituencies' into three or four concentric circles determined by electoral significance. On the other, MEPs are different in that electoral significance seemingly plays a lesser role in the selection of their sub-constituencies. Still, more research is required to determine how and when MEPs select their sub-constituencies.

In determining MEPs' constituency orientations based on attitudinal importance that MEPs attach to their constituency work, the thesis shows that MEPs attach more importance to constituency work than was hypothesized. A great majority of MEP respondents considered being active in their countries, educating public about EU issues and communicating with citizens as an important or very important part of their job. In fact, attitudinally, MEPs seem to find constituency outreach as important as their parliamentary work.

With respect to self reported allocation of resources – *time and staff* – MEPs spend 2.5 working days per week in their constituencies; this is significantly higher than the official expectation of 0.5 days indicated in the EP Calendar. In terms of staff, majority of MEPs show to employ similar number of staff in their constituency offices as in their Brussels office. This further suggests that a great majority of MEPs deem constituency work at par with their parliamentary work. At the same time, when asked to assess the time that MEPs spend on constituency work in comparison to other duties, MEP respondents admitted that they spend slightly more time (10%) on parliamentary and political work than on constituency work. MEPs prioritizing political, committee work over constituency work places MEPs into the trustee model of representational role orientations.

Among offline constituency activities that MEPs pursue, attending face-to-face public meetings and talking to the national and local media is the most common. MEPs thus show to prefer constituency outreach that caters to wider audience capture than one-on-one office consultations or conventional mail outs. With some MEPs representing tens of millions of citizens, this is understandable. However, a more surprising finding was that MEPs also conduct fair bit of casework, an activity that consumes approximately 20 per cent of their time and where trans-border cases from individual constituents or interest groups being the most common. This is significant in that trans-border 'European-ness' of political representation shows to be reportedly two-directional. Not only do MEPs consider 'representing Europe and its people' as important but individual citizens or interest groups also show to be bypassing nationality as a means of connecting and seeking representation from MEPs. Still, more research is required in this direction.

As to impediments to MEPs' constituency work, overcharged schedules with political responsibilities and the time spent on travel between Brussels and their constituencies pose the greatest challenges.

In spite these general tendencies linked to offline constituency work, variation in some dimensions (of MEPs' constituency work) was also noted. While nearly all MEPs regarded constituency outreach - 'communication and education of citizens on EU matters' - as important aspects of their jobs, the most notable variation resulted in the casework dimension. Though MEPs from new member states were less likely to interact directly with citizens, they were significantly more prone to take on 'harder' or also known as pork barrel casework. CEE MEPs' proclivity to

take on heavier casework, such as helping various sub-constituencies getting access to new resources from EU institutions, is likely attributable to their constituencies being new to the EU system and in need of intermediaries who can help them gain access to resources or opportunities offered by the EU while their Western (older member) counterparts need them less.

Based on the above observations, when revisiting the hypotheses for offline constituency work, it can be generally concluded that MEPs show to be more pro-constituency oriented than was originally assumed. Though their political activities in Brussels take up more of their time, they spend significantly more time and staff on constituency work than initially expected.

8.2   MEPs' constituency orientations ONLINE

While Chapter 5 elaborated on MEPs' constituency orientations and outreach offline, Chapter 6 examined them *online*.   With respect to constituency outreach online, the central hypothesis was that MEPs will be pro-active users of the convenient, distance-reducing online platform for all or some of their constituency outreach. It was also hypothesized, however, that incorporating one-directional rather than interactive, two-directional features will be higher.

The conclusions in Chapter 6 showed that a great majority (72%) MEPs were indeed online via a website or a blog. Moreover, email, a two-directional feature showed to be the most commonly used channel by both MEPs and constituents for contacting each other while one-directional features for explaining work to the public in different ways were the most commonly incorporated on MEPs' websites. In second place came the 'medium to highly' interactive two-way features such as comment or feedback forms while casework was the least popular. The latter is likely due to the fact that though light casework can be addressed online, harder cases still require MEP's offline intervention hence website showing to be less conducive for casework.

As to why MEPs use the online platform, 'increasing direct contact with citizens' and 'educating citizens about the EU' were the top motives for MEPs creating a website, personalization of outreach and contact was the third reason while interestingly, 'reducing office communication costs' was at the bottom of the list.

This first layer of results to some extent confirmed as well as challenged skeptical theories about

Internet usage for constituency purposes. On the one hand the results confirmed that MEPs' use of one-directional communication features prevails, on the other, they also revealed more nuanced observations. The first is that MEPs actually *do* offer two-directional opportunities for citizens to interact with them. In fact, they claim to prefer to receive interactions and feedback (e.g. via online forums, petitions, feedback forms) online rather than offline. Yet they also explained that when they do offer such interactive features, the volume of traffic generated tends to be low (website) with low quality interactions. Instead MEPs claim that citizens prefer to use their websites for information seeking and more direct offline communication channels such as email or phone calls for establishing direct contact with MEPs.

These findings confirm previous research (Xai 2006; Tolbert and Mossberg 2006) but also challenge skeptics' claims as they point to an i) apparent asymmetry between MEPs' and constituents' online-offline communication preferences, but more importantly ii) to the supply-and-demand dynamics where MEPs are equally subject to citizens' demand and communication preferences as the latter are to MEPs' supply of opportunities for interaction.

The bidirectional dynamics, utility maximization in communication preferences and mutuality or interdependence in MEP-constituent communication have not been factored in political communication accounts that tend to criticize politicians' lack of provision of interactive opportunities and constituents' passive consumption. Findings in this thesis are thus important for how we evaluate online interactivity. They add insights to the study of political communication by showing that the process of MEP-constituent interaction is more dynamic and dependent on the mutuality of communication preferences among MEPs and constituents rather than based on MEPs' unilateral decision-making as it is often portrayed. It can be further concluded that websites are potentially less amenable for reciprocal *direct* 'interaction' and deliberation in formal settings than other forms of offline communication.

When it comes to assessing the importance that MEPs attach to conducting constituency outreach online, MEPs allocate a relatively low amount (10 per cent) of their personal time to website management which is less than to any other duty. However, when it comes to staff allocation, while for having a basic website the number of staff employed in Brussels or in the constituency office did not make a difference, when the data was disaggregated by specific features, MEPs with explaining work and casework website features tended to employ more staff both in their Brussels and in their constituency office. Inferentially, this suggests that more elaborate websites

do require more staff.

Furthermore, though MEPs may not manage their websites personally, they do allocate staff resources to this activity and claim to be closely involved in screening and regulating what goes 'online' content-wise. Moreover, MEPs with committee, party and media responsibilities could not possibly manage incoming emails and website uploads alone. Receiving and sorting through 300-500 emails daily is time and labor intensive especially as constituents increasingly seek "instantaneous responses". Consequently, MEPs are "careful as to what [they] promise to deliver". In this sense, availability of new media interlinked with demands for transparency pose new resource challenges for representatives, namely in terms of MEPs' staff time.

To summarize, results in Chapter 5 demonstrated that MEPs use their websites for various constituency duties. Be it during their face-to-face encounters or in e-mail MEPs frequently refer constituents to their websites/ blogs for further information. In this sense, websites do play a role of clearing houses for incoming lighter casework or a 'virtual administrative resource 'person' to which MEPs can delegate a share of citizens' requests. They also serve as a virtual reference point or a virtual 'open door' that provides constituents with 24/7 access to and transparency over MEPs' work. At the same time, for some forms of constituency outreach such as casework or interactivity, websites show to be less suitable while email or offline – phone contact continue to be more preferred by constituents. These observations lead us to conclude that bidirectional constituency outreach requires a mix of different communication media and it is thus premature to conclude that MEPs' websites are fully replacing their physical constituency offices.

8.3   Determinants of MEPs' Constituency Outreach OFF and ONLINE

While it was established that attitudinal importance attached to constituency work was high among majority of MEPs, there was more variation when 'constituency work' was disaggregated along the three dimensions. MEPs' attitudes towards the casework dimension varied the most where MEPs from new member states were significantly more prone to take on pork types of casework. As to other determinants of pro-constituency orientations, as it was expected, open ballot structure (Model 1) and MEPs prone to take instruction from citizens (Model 2) tended to be more pro-constituency oriented while demographic and political determinants (Model 3) such as past

political career and political affiliation, showed to be insignificant. 'Constituency characteristics' such as distance to constituency and MEP-constituent ratio in Model 4 also showed to be poor predictors of MEPs' constituency orientations.

For offline constituency outreach it was expected that electoral system characteristics (Model 1) and MEPs' role orientations – those prone to take instruction from citizens (Model 2) would be more pro-constituency oriented. Results have shown, however, that MEPs' constituency orientations vary on some pro-constituency dimensions more than on others. Interestingly, being from new member states was positively correlated with harder types of casework while as it was expected, open ballot structure (Model 1) and MEPs role orientations – those who were prone to take instruction from citizens (Model 2) tended to be more pro-constituency oriented. Demographic and political determinants (Model 3) such as past political career and political affiliation, however, showed to be insignificant in the case of offline constituency orientations. 'Constituency characteristics' such as distance to constituency and MEP-constituent ratio in Model 4 also showed to be poor predictors.

For explaining variation in MEPs' *online* constituency outreach age, distance to constituency (from Brussels) and Internet penetration in MEPs' countries were expected to play a determining role. While the results for MEPs' online constituency outreach confirmed that demographic factors – age and education – do play a role in determining MEPs' constituency orientations, gender plays a lesser role. In other words, while age showed to be a weak predictor for basic online status where older MEPs were as likely to be online as were younger MEPs, when the data was disaggregated by specific website features, for the interactivity dimension for example, age was negatively correlated.

Interestingly, in addition to the demographic factors, electoral system variables also showed to be pertinent for most of the online dimensions. MEPs from systems with open and ordered party lists were more likely to reach out to their constituents online than those from systems with closed party lists. This is an interesting finding as it also held to be true for the *offline* constituency outreach.

For *political* and *institutional determinants* – the effects were mixed. Both party affiliation and political responsibility showed to be relatively weak predictors of MEPs' online constituency outreach while being more politically active in Brussels or constituency characteristics appeared

to have no effect on MEPs' online constituency outreach. In other words, MEP-Constituent ratio, distance to constituency and internet penetration did not show to matter. Focus of representation and MEPs' role orientations in the comparative table also showed to be insignificant apart from the explaining work dimension. *Previous public office* and *incumbency*, however, did play a role in two out of the three online dimensions.

Because many of the indicators were derived from national level theories, their (in)significance for determining online behavior is important for future research. For example, incumbency, a known strong predictor for offline pro-constituency orientations failed to be significant for both offline as well as online dimensions of MEPs' constituency outreach while MEPs' role orientations, a recognized determining offline factor was also insignificant. Partisanship also weakly manifested in MEPs' online behavior. These observations thus hint that other factors likely impinge on how representatives' behave online.

Methodologically, an interesting aspect in the online findings is that the survey respondents' answers about their own online behavior and analytics of MEPs' actual behavior online corresponded even though the coding of MEPs' websites was conducted separately and without MEPs' awareness. This observation thus adds reliability to the survey and the offline-online triangulation method.

8.4 *Internet, so what?* Assessing Internet's Influence on MEPs' Constituency Outreach

After determining MEPs' constituency orientations both off and online, Chapter 6 then compared the two in order to test the null or *politics as usual hypothesis*, the *virtual office* and the *partial effects hypotheses.* While the former expected that Internet will have little influence on MEPs' constituency outreach, the latter two expected that MEPs will shift *all* or *some* of their constituency outreach activities from offline to online.

Overall, findings in Chapter 6 confirmed that it is premature to conclude that MEPs are replacing their physical constituency offices with virtual constituency office platforms. Instead evidence for all three constituency work dimensions – explaining work, casework and interactivity

validated the null or politics as usual hypothesis where MEPs constituency outreach online tends to closely emulate their constituency outreach offline. In other words, though the Internet certainly adds some new communication and outreach capacities it merely reinforces or amplifies MEPs' existing constituency offline.

The analysis in Chapter 6 has also shown that a more nuanced approach to t h e understanding of Internet's influence on MEPs' constituency outreach is needed. The nuance approach recognizes Internet's *softer impacts* on MEPs' constituency outreach such as the *slight asymmetry in interactive usage of online-offline media* and utility maximization of different media by MEPs and their constituents or websites' utility in acting as *'clearing houses' for lighter casework and as 24/7 information or reference points for MEPs' work* but at the same time, showing to be less conducive for direct interaction or casework. For these aspects of constituency work, email and offline media such as the telephone show to be more commonly used.

Acting as *conduits of transparency that would be difficult to execute offline through other conventional media* and the *disintermediating power of ICTs* is additional value added that the online platform brings to MEPs' constituency work. In their remoteness and lower institutional visibility in EU's multi-level pecking order, MEPs recognize their dependency on mass media that provide them access to wider audiences and their distant constituencies. In their competition with MPs and other EU institutions for media exposure, MEPs thus seek alternative means of outreach through which they can talk in 1st person, to express themselves freely and to communicate directly without an intermediary filter of the mass media. In this sense, websites provide MEPs a carte blanche for creating their 'own media outlets' for uncensored self-expression, self-promotion and direct communication with their constituencies which would be difficult to obtain otherwise.

8.5   Implications for Political Representation at the European Level

So what implications does this thesis and all its findings bear for political representation and the MEP-citizen linkage and in the EU context? Moreover, what benefits could future research draw from the online-offline approach when studying behavioral impacts of Internet usage in the political arena?

One of the key findings in this thesis is that, be it offline or online, MEPs do allocate resources and attach importance to constituency work *more* than was initially expected. Despite the low electoral incentives and the lack of concrete expectations in the EP's Code of Conduct, nearly all MEPs have constituency offices, on average they employ similar number of staff in their constituency offices as they do in Brussels and they conduct fair amount of casework. Their willingness to respond to trans-border casework that may come outside of their national (territorial) constituency was particularly surprising. In this sense MEPs are fulfilling the role of trans-border 'European' representatives. As it is at the constituency level where representatives are in the closest proximity to the voters and where representative - constituent ties are "created, nurtured and changed" these findings are encouraging for political representation in the EU and for the commonly perceived disconnect between the European Parliament and the people it represents.

At the same time, the results have also shown that proportionally MEPs still personally spend more time on political work and base their political decisions on their own judgment rather than on citizens' or any other sources (national government, party, EP party group etc.). In other words, when it comes to representational style, MEPs ascribe to the trustee rather than delegate or partisans role orientation. MEPs' trustee orientation should comes as less of a surprise as it is a response to the institutional incentives provided by the European Parliament in its Code of Conduct for MEPs.

As trustees MEPs have the freedom and discretion to cultivate relations with citizens or to focus on their political work. In other words, few obligations are placed on MEPs with respect to their constituency work. In view of the widespread concerns about EU's democratic deficit, providing incentives for MEPs to assume the role of trustees is somewhat contradictory. On the other, the current discretionary approach pertaining to MEPs' responsibilities with respect to constituency outreach seems to work as MEPs end up doing fair bit of constituency outreach even when they are institutionally not expected to. In addition to MEPs, citizens are also given the opportunity to 'connect with' and address their grievances to the EP via the Parliament's petitions committee or via the European Ombudsman.

The extent to which this formula for representation and linkage between citizens and the EP is sufficient and effective remains a good question. The absence of an explicit constituency

mandate or a more detailed list of representational responsibilities for MEPs, however, does implicitly project EP to be a technocratic and co-legislative institution rather than the citizen-oriented institution that the Lisbon Treaty aspires it to be. It is questionable the extent to which the provisions of the Lisbon treaty will enhance the quality of linkage between the EP and European citizens. Moreover, ultimately the EP needs to ask itself the type of institution it envisions itself to be, more legislatively oriented or more citizens oriented, or potentially both, and what would it take to establish?

In EP's defense, it is difficult to estimate what would be the right or balanced formula for MEPs' representational mandate – a 50-50 or a 40-60 split between parliamentary and constituency outreach activities, or the seemingly present 70-30 split, according to MEPs? Moreover, how should the quality of constituency service be assessed?

Because the EP is in effect the sum of its constitutive parts - MEPs, how MEPs represent and the types of constituency linkages they cultivate with their constituencies between elections matters. Thus if the EP aims to bolster its electoral connection with citizens and the European public at large, setting some minimum standards for MEPs' constituency outreach could be useful. Though seeing that constituency outreach does take up significant time and staff resources, expanding MEPs' constituency outreach may have implications for MEPs' workload and resources. Therefore such factors should be considered when making corresponding decisions.

Alternatively, the constituency function could also be left 'as is' – discretionary, fluid, reactive and left for MEPs and their constituencies to define. Such an approach can potentially breed more creativity for MEPs to adapt their representational and constituency outreach style best fit to their and their constituencies' needs.

As to the significance of online platforms for political representation and constituency linkage, as noted, it is yet premature to conclude that they are fully replacing MEPs' use of physical constituency offices. Nonetheless, the effect of the Internet and IT mediated communication for MEP-citizen linkage hence political representation is not to be underestimated. Citizens' rising demands for transparency and instantaneous responsiveness facilitated by online communication puts new pressures on MEPs' accountability. Accommodating and responding to a volume of 300-500 emails per day is proving to be challenging for an average MEPs' team of 5-6

staff. Therefore, though offering various communication benefits, for MEPs to 'be online' also involves careful (re)allocation of resources, content management and budgetary considerations. 'Scaling back' in the supply of online features in fear of 'over promising' about what they cannot deliver or installing various spam, e-mail content filters to eliminate 'unserious' requests are some coping strategies that MEPs grapple with in the new era of increased communication.

The volume, immediacy and speed of online communication is also affecting the quality of communication. While online platforms increase 24/7 accessibility and opportunities for interactivity, MEPs have noticed that these opportunities do not necessarily improve the substantive aspects of mutuality, feedback and transfer of political cues from citizens. Many citizens using online channels, MEPs claim, are not 'serious' about interacting on substantive issues; interest groups also tend to use blanket campaigns of flooding rather than personalized modes of more substantive lobbying. This in turn leads MEPs to scale back their continued use of time-consuming online features such as e-debate forums or online consultation hours.

Moreover, the results in this thesis demonstrate that both constituents and MEPs are rational 'shoppers' rather than passive users of different communication tools. MEPs also tend to anticipate and adapt or mirror their constituents' communication preferences in their own use of communication channels. In other words, our results show that MEPs cater to citizens' communication preferences than the other way around. Though more research would need to be conducted to determine the exact direction and magnitude of how these dynamics work, the fact that MEPs cater to their constituents' communication preferences challenges the one-directional elitist theory in political communication (where the relationship is thought to work in reverse).

Lastly, though websites are not replacing offline constituency offices, majority MEPs are online and majority consider their online presence as an important aspect of their job. This further suggests that being online is thus inextricably becoming an important part of a contemporary politician's mandate. In order to function in an information and technology era, using a wide range of communication media – TV, mobile phones, radio, newspapers blogs in order to maximize one's personal outreach and to acquire social capital (Castells 1999) is inescapable. Results in this thesis have shown that MEPs are not immune to these trends. Navigating in an increasingly mediatized space in pursuit of a wider domestic and European audience capture, MEPs exploit both off and online media to optimize their constituency outreach.

8.6 Implications for Future Research

A side objective of this thesis was also to test the online – offline approach for *measuring* Internet's impact on political behavior. On many levels, the approach proved to be useful. It enabled the operationalization of a research question into an empirical study that went beyond the typical uni-dimensional descriptive analysis of politicians' websites. The offline-online comparison provided grounds for a more comprehensive analysis by incorporating the comparison between offline and online worlds. In other words, MEPs' online behavior was placed in the context of their existing offline behavior in order to assess any effects.

In general, the comparative online-offline approach introduced in this thesis showed that the online and offline worlds are inextricably linked. The results demonstrate that the online platform tends to amplify existing behavior rather than introduce brand new forms of interactions or behavior. At the same time, the thesis also alludes to the fact that it is difficult to accurately disentangle the direction of inherent causal dynamics between on- and offline worlds (e.g. MEPs' multi-media approach to constituency outreach). To disentangle these, further research is needed and relevant theories need to be developed. To advance new areas of online research, relevant indicators need to be conceptualized and tested in order to ensure that we do not by default superimpose conceptual derivatives of our experiences from the offline world on the online world – hence our research being subjected to systematic measurement errors.

To prevent such sources of error, several suggestions could be considered. First is the systematic future collection of time-series data on MEPs' both offline and online constituency outreach (or other relevant forms of political behavior). If relevant data is not collected, the future of Internet studies will stand the risk of being a patchwork of disparate studies without proper theoretical grounding. As ICTs applications evolve and change rapidly, Internet research is particularly prone to effervescent studies tracing the latest ICT-enhanced flavors of the month. While unavoidable, this tempting reality prevents researchers from adopting a systematic approach to data collection and theory building. In the future, empirical data collection on the subject should be advanced through the triangulation of primary data from MEP surveys, web analytics and qualitative analytics. These three sources will provide a more in-depth understanding about both the attitudinal as well as behavioral dimensions of MEPs constituency orientations and outreach both off and online.

Expanding the surveys by including citizens' perspective on the constituency linkage is also necessary in order to push the research agenda on political representation in the EU forward. This aspect is grossly missing in current literature and theory building. The leading EPRG MEP surveys and the MEP survey conducted for this thesis solely relied on MEPs' perspectives hence provided a somewhat lop-sided 'supply' account of the MEP-citizen constituency relationship. Empirical exploration of the reverse – constituents' → demand arrow in the MEP constituent relationship is therefore necessary to explore in more detail in the future.

To summarize, the interplay between the online and offline worlds when determining the effects of Internet usage on political behavior is dynamic and far from uni-dimensional. Though the virtual constituency office hypothesis that assumed websites to take over the classical offline constituency office functions was not confirmed, this thesis has demonstrated that MEP are neither technophobes nor insulars when it comes to conducting their constituency outreach. Unlike what was expected, cultivating strong citizen relations and educating the public on EP issues also rank high among MEPs' priorities. MEPs show a preference for delegating and conducting the interactive aspects of their constituency outreach to the virtual platform than traditional offline channels, while citizens prefer more direct and mixed online-offline forms of communication with MEPs . Using ICTs, however, has shown to come at a price. The increasing speed and volume of o n l i n e communication, and citizens' rising expectations of immediacy and instant responses adds new accountability and resource allocation pressures for MEPs'. Resorting to a combination of both offline and online media, rather than one or the other, shows to best optimizes MEPs' capacity for maximum audience capture and constituency outreach.

Lastly, this thesis attests to the complex nature of conducting research on political representation at the EU level. The multi-layered complexity and political uniqueness of the EU polity renders the teasing out of causal intricacies and dynamics challenging. In addition to the medley of cognitive predispositions that influence political representatives' behavior, the range of possible institutional and contextual influences doubles in the EU context. This affects the way MEPs conduct their day-to-day constituency linkage between two election points.

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APPENDIX 1 – DATA COLLECTION: Survey Administration and Representativeness

Because no comprehensive dataset specifically on MEPs' constituency orientations exists, an original dataset was compiled. The data set included data on both the offline as well as online dimensions of MEP constituency orientations and outreach. To construct the dataset, four different data sources were used:

    i)   *a self-administered MEP online survey (2009) by the author*
    ii)   *EP's official website (MEPs' profiles) and respondent*
    iii) *website analysis of MEP respondents' personal websites/ blogs*
    iv) *qualitative data from 32 structured MEP interviews (please see bibliography for details) supplemented the quantitative analysis with additional insights.*

Self-administration and distribution of 2009 MEP Survey

The online survey targeted responses from members of the European Parliament (MEPs) serving in the Parliament's sixth session (2006-2009). At the time the total number of MEPs in the European Parliament amounted to 785. The exact distribution of MEPs by country is listed in Table 1 – Appendix below.

Survey Questions. A full original copy of the survey is provided in Appendix 2.   The survey contained four modules, each containing four questions, thus the entire survey had sixteen questions in total. The typology of questions was mixed – majority were multiple choice, two included fields for open-ended answers while others (namely the attitudinal ones) were based on a 5-point Likert scale. The first module of questions related to MEPs' perceptions about *what they think about their constituencies* and *their role orientations* while the second and third focused on the importance that MEPs attach to constituency work an on their comparative *constituency outreach.* The last module specifically examined MEPs' perceptions about their constituency outreach *online* and how it impacts their work. While several of the questions build on and were taken from EPRG's survey questions, majority were newly constructed.

Distribution of Survey.   The online survey was created (on) and distributed via an online survey provider *Survey Monkey* (www.surveymonkey.com) between 10 February – 20 May 2009. This means that the survey was made available to MEPs 24/7 for the time period listed. Because the

intention was to map out both MEP's offline as well as online constituency outreach, before the survey's distribution, individualized IP addresses and links were created for each MEP. This enabled the easy tracking of each MEP respondents' identity which would be later required for the coding of respondents' personal websites and for determining their online constituency outreach. The individualized IP addresses also allowed for an easy identification of non-respondents to whom three waves of reminders (February – May 2009) were sent with approximately monthly intervals in between. Individualized *live* links to the survey were then created and inserted into body of an e-mailed survey invitation that was sent out to *all* MEPs with traceable and active e-mails listed on the official EP website[45]. The individual email invitations to participate in the survey, with the exception of the Lithuania and Latvia, were translated into *all* official EU languages. The survey itself was translated into seven languages which in effect covered official languages in eleven EU member states. Links to the English version were provided to the rest unless otherwise requested (there were such cases).

Response rate. Over 167 MEPs accessed the online survey. 159 responded to 1-3 opening questions but only 147 surveys were retained for empirical analysis, while 138 fully answered the survey. Hence these figures suggest a 13 per cent drop off rate from the survey[46] and over all yielding a 19 per cent response rate and a 19 percent sample of the entire MEP population. Because the online survey provider allowed oversight of when MEPs started and ended each individual survey, on average, the online the survey took MEPs between 7-9 minutes to complete. From the batch of 39 'hand delivered' surveys only two surveys were completed by MEPs and sent back to the author. Ten MEPs expressed an interest in receiving the survey results.

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[45] Though in principle, all MEPs should have an official EP e-mail which is normally composed of their first and last name and the affix « @europarl.europa.eu », not all MEPs were found to list their e-mail address on the EP website; the common inclusion of middle names, or hyphenated surnames (in the body of the e-mail) thus made the construction of e-mails (where not available otherwise) impossible, There were approximately 5% of such cases.

[46] Observing the patterns in completed and non-completed surveys, it is likely that a significant portion of the drop-off rates were attempts to complete the survey by MEPs' staff who wanted to take the initiative to answer the survey for their 'boss' but realized that the questions increasingly required personal perceptions that they were perhaps not equipped to answer. Alternatively, the drop-off rate could have been also caused by MEPs being interrupted by a phone call or their assistant while completing the survey and never returning back to filling it out. The survey set up saved MEPs' last answer and allowed them to return back to the last question they answered at any later point. Interestingly, some MEPs did indeed start and return to the survey at a later point hence potentially suggesting that they took answering the survey seriously.

Representativeness of results. The full breakdown of the survey's representativeness in terms of – gender, country, and online status is listed the Appendix Table 1 below. Overall, the respondents were representative in terms of gender and age, where 30% of the respondents were females. Country representativeness was also solid with the exception of Greek, Irish, Spanish, Swedish MEPs who were under-represented.

Sources of response bias Before conducting the survey three potential areas of response bias were identified and a series of steps were taken to mitigate them: (i) *self-selection bias* favoring 'survey-friendly' MEPs with predisposition to respond to surveys (Scholl 1986: 319) or who were comfortable with or interested in the survey's topic; (ii) *computer and ICT literacy bias* in targeting those with e-mail addresses who are potentially more ICT literate; and lastly iii) given MEPs' diverse linguistic backgrounds *language bias* may have skewed the response rate toward those more at ease speaking the *seven* languages that the survey was translated into.

To offset the ICT literacy bias, MEPs without a listed e-mail address on the official EP website or whose email bounced back, a hard copy of the survey was hand delivered directly into MEPs' mailboxes at the European Parliament[47].

Data for MEPs' online constituency orientations were derived from the coding of individual MEPs' websites. MEPs' online status (having a e-mail. website, or blog) was derived from the official EP website. During coding, however, it was discovered that though generally reliable, the official EP website was not accurate in approximately 5% cases. When MEPs without website or blog listed on the EP official website, were randomly googled, in at least 5% cases, they actually had a blog or a website. This could be attributed to an administrative error or MEPs may also target and send out links to a limited constituency.

Interviews. As part of this thesis' triangulation approach, to supplement the survey and coding, 32 qualitative semi-structured interviews with a sub-sample of MEPs were conducted. Using a snowball sampling method, selection of MEPs for the interviews was dependent on their availability and willingness – hence self-selection bias at play; pinning down

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[47] I spent three months (February to April 2010) on a « Research Stay » at the European Parliament in Brussels working at the Petitions Committee and simultaneously interviewing MEPs in Brussels and Strasbourg. This provided me easy access to MEPs. In addition, I spend 2 weeks in 2009 at the EP conducting lined up interviews (via email) prior to my arrival.

'busy' elites is not easy.

Three interviews were conducted in the MEPs' actual constituency office, and the rest in MEPs' Brussels or Strasbourg based offices. A disproportional number of those interviewed were males with a slight pro-incumbency bias but well spread out across country and party groups. In spite the threat of a self-selection bias, the interviews were informative and enabled the capturing of MEPs' more in-depth attitudinal perspectives as to how they perceive their constituency work and Internet usage. This level of insights were not possible to capture in the survey.

APPENDIX 1 (Table 1) - Representativeness of Survey Response rate: Country, gender, online/ offline

Country	Actual No. MEPs	No. Respondents	Male	Female	% of country	Online	Not online
Austria	18	5 (3.6%)	4	1	(28%)	3	2
Belgium	24	7 (5.1%)	3	4	(25%)	6	1
Bulgaria	18	6 (4.4%)	3	3	(6%)	4	2
Czech Republic	24	8 (5.8%)	7	1	(33%)	7	1
Cyprus	6	1 (0.7%)	1	0	(17%)	1	0
Denmark	14	3 (2.1%)	2	1	(21%)	2	1
Estonia	6	1 (0.7%)	0	1	(17%)	0	1
Finland	14	5 (3.6%)	2	3	(35%)	5	0
France	78	12 (8.8%)	7	5	(15%)	10	4
Germany	99	14 (10.2%)	9	5	(14%)	14	0
Greece	24	2 (1.5%)	1	1	(8%)	2	0
Hungary	24	6 (4.4%)	4	2	(25%)	4	2
Ireland	13	1 (0.7%)	1	0	(8%)	1	0
Italy	78	13 (9.5%)	10	3	(17%)	11	2
Latvia	9	0	0	0	0	0	0
Lithuania	13	2 (1.5%)	2	0	(15%)	1	1
Luxembourg	6	4 (2.9%)	3	1	(67%)	2	2
Malta	5	1 (0.7%)	1	0	(20%)	1	0
Netherlands	27	3 (2.2%)	2	1	(11%)	2	1
Poland	54	6 (4.4%)	4	2	(11%)	4	2
Portugal	24	6 (4.4%)	5	1	(25%)	3	3
Romania	35	7 (5.1%)	4	3	(20%)	4	3
Slovakia	14	3 (2.1%)	3	0	(21%)	2	1
Slovenia	7	2 (1.5%)	2	0	(14%)	1	1
Spain	54	5 (3.6%)	4	1	(9%)	1	4
Sweden	19	1 (0.7%)	1	0	(5%)	1	1
UK	78	14 (10.2%)	12	2	(18%)	12	2
TOTAL	**785**	**138 fully** complete **145** drop off in last 3 Qs	**70%** of sample	**30%** of sample	**(17%)**	**76%**	**24%**

APPENDIX 2 - CODEBOOK and LIST OF VARIABLES

Variable Name	Full Description	Coded Value(s)
Age	MEP's birth year	2009 – year of birth
Appointig	Number of appointments scheduled in constituency per week with interest groups	1 – 0 2 – 1 to 5 3 – 6 to 10 4 – 11 to 15 5 – ≤ 16
Appointcitizen	Number of appointments with individual citizens	Same as above
Appointgovt	Number of appointments with government	Same as above
Appointreggovt	Number of appointments with regional authorities	Same as above
Appointmedia	Number of appointments with media	Same as above
Appointcivicassoc	Number of appointments with civic associations	Same as above
Appointpubevent	Number of appointments for public events	Same as above
Attractresources	Importance of attracting EU resources to constituency	1 - Not important 2 - Somewhat important 3 - Moderately important 4 - Important 5 - Very important
Ballot	Type of ballot structure	1 – Closed 2 – Open 3 – Ordered
Blog	MEP has a blog	0 – No 1 – Yes
Casework	MEP's website has casework feature(s), references	0 – No 1 – Yes
Caseworkeroffline	Additive score of 3 dummy variables: MEP spends above average time on casework + responding to casework	0 – 3
Caseworkeronline	Presence of casework feature on MEP's website/ blog + created website for promoting casework	0 – 2
Citizenltr	Frequency and medium of communication chosen by citizens to contact MEP - letter	Same scale as above
Variable Name	**Full Description**	**Coded Value(s)**

Citizenphone	Frequency and medium of communication chosen by citizens to contact MEP - phone	Same scale as above
Citizenemail	Frequency and medium of communication chosen by citizens to contact MEP - mail	Same scale as above
Citizenwebsite	Frequency and medium of communication chosen by citizens to contact MEP - website	Same scale as above
Citizenoffc	Frequency and medium of communication chosen by citizens to contact MEP - office	Same scale as above
Citizenreach	Importance of communicating with citizens	1 - Not important 2 - Somewhat important 3 - Moderately important 4 - Important 5 - Very important
Comcwrkemail	Casework received by email	0 – No 1 – Yes
Comcwrkcoffice	Casework received through constituency office (consultation hours)	0 – No 1 – Yes
ComcwrkBRoffc	Casework received through Brussels office	0 – No 1 – Yes
Comcwrkpartyoffc	Casework received through national party office	0 – No 1 – Yes
Comcwrkwebsite	Casework received through website	0 – No 1 – Yes
Comcwrkltr	Casework received in letters	0 – No 1 – Yes
#committees	Number of EP committees that MEP is a member of as indicated on EP website	1,2,3, <3
Comtteework	Importance of committee work	1 - Not important 2 - Somewhat important 3 - Moderately important 4 - Important 5 - Very important
ComSr	MEP is a Head or Deputy of a EP Committee	0 – No 1 – Yes
ConstEU	Considers all EU as constituency	0 – No 1 – Yes
Constoffice	MEP has constituency office in home country	0 – no 1 – yes
Constsize	Constituency size per MEP – number of people in constituency	0….continuous

Variable Name	Full Description	Coded Value(s)
ConstNation	Considers own country as constituency	0 – No 1 – Yes
ConstSubregion	Considers sub-region as constituency	0 – No 1 – Yes
Constpartyvoter	Considers party voters as constituency	0 – No 1 – Yes
Constpersonalvote	Considers personal voters as constituency	0 – No 1 – Yes
Constituencywork	Importance of maintaining active presence in constituency	1 - Not important 2 - Somewhat important 3 - Moderately important 4 - Important 5 - Very important
CV	CV feature on MEP's website	0 – No 1 – Yes
daysinconstituency	Time spent in (home) constituency	1 - ≥ 1 day per month 2 - ≤ 1 day per month but ≥ 1 day per week 3 - 1 day per week 4 - 2 days per week 5 - 3 days per week 6 - ≤ 3 days per week
Distoconstituency	Distance to constituency from Brussels (km)	0….continuous
#delegations	Number of EP delegations that MEP is a member of	1,2,3, <3
Dompolitics	Held prior political office in own country	0 – No 1 – Yes
Education	MEP's level of education	0 - High school 1 – High school 2 – BA 3 – MA 4 - Doctorate
Eforum	MEP's website has an e-debate forum feature	0 – No 1 – Yes
EPentry	Year of MEP's first elected to EP	1952…2006
Epetition	MEP's website has an e-petition feature	0 – No 1 – Yes
EUSouth	Portugal, Greece, Spain, Cyprus	0 – No 1 – Yes

Variable Name	Full Description	Coded Value(s)
EUold	Old member states (original 15)	0 – No 1 – Yes
EUEast	MEPs from new (post-2006) CEE member states	0 – No 1 – Yes
EUNordic	MEPs from Finland, Sweden	0 – No 1 – Yes
EUpg	MEP's European Party Group Affiliation	1 – EPP 2 – SD 3 – ALDE 4 – Greens 5 – UEN 6 – United Left 7 – N/A Independent
EPgrpweb	MEP listing EU party group's website on his/her EP profile	0 – No 1 – Yes
epoll	MEP's website has an e-poll feature	0 – No 1 – Yes
Explainingwork	MEP's website has oversight of legislative work feature	0 – No 1 – Yes
Facebook	MEP's Presence on Facebook	0 – No 1 – Yes
Feedback	MEP's website has feedback, write me feature	0 – No 1 – Yes
Foreignrelations	Importance of promoting EU internationally	1 - Not important 2 - Somewhat important 3 - Moderately important 4 - Important 5 - Very important
ID	ID number ascribed to MEP	1…137
Incumbent	Whether MEP is an EP incumbent (≤ 2 terms)	0 – No 1 – Yes
Impactcitizen	Perceived impact of website on contact with citizens	1- decreased 2 - slightly decreased 3 - remained the same 4 - slightly increased 5 - increased 6 - not sure
Impactinfoeu	Perceived impact of website on information provision on the EU and my work	Same as above

Variable Name	Full Description	Coded Value(s)
Impactcasework	Perceived impact of website on casework load	Same as above
Impactyouth	Perceived impact of website on	Same as above
Impactcosts	Perceived impact of website on reduction of transaction costs	Same as above
Instructnatparty	Takes instruction from national party	1 - Never 2 - Rarely 3 - Sometimes 4 - Often 5 - Very often
Instructnatdeleg	Takes instruction from national delegation	1 - Never 2 - Rarely 3 - Sometimes 4 - Often 5 - Very often
Instructreggov	Takes instruction from regions	1 - Never 2 - Rarely 3 - Sometimes 4 - Often 5 - Very often
Instructexpert	Takes instruction from policy expert	1 - Never 2 - Rarely 3 - Sometimes 4 - Often 5 - Very often
Instructnatgov	Takes instruction from national government	1 - Never 2 - Rarely 3 - Sometimes 4 - Often 5 - Very often
Interactiveonline	Additive score of 6 dummy variables with '2' point weights attached to presence of email, eforum, FB or Twitter: MEP having email+ website+feedback+epoll +epetition+eforum	0-11
ITpenetration	Internet penetration rate of country that MEP comes from	Percentage 1-100%
Mediarelations	Importance of maintaining media relations	1 - Not important 2 - Somewhat important 3 - Moderately important 4 - Important 5 - Very important

Mepradio	MEP's use of radio as channel for constituency/citizen outreach	1 - Never
		2 - Rarely
		3 - Sometimes
		4 - Often
		5 - Very often
Mepnewsp	Frequency of MEP's use of radio as channel for constituency/citizen outreach	Same scale as above
Meptv	MEP's use of TV as channel for constituency/citizen outreach	Same scale as above
Mepnewsltr	MEP's use of newsletter as channel for constituency/citizen outreach	Same scale as above
Mepoffice	MEP's use of office hours as channel for constituency/citizen outreach	Same scale as above
Mepphone	MEP's use of office hours as channel for constituency/citizen outreach	Same scale as above
Mepemail	MEP's use of email as channel for constituency/citizen outreach	Same scale as above
Mepptyweb	MEP's use of national party website as channel for constituency/citizen outreach	Same scale as above
Mepwebsite	MEP's use of personal website as channel for constituency/citizen outreach	Same scale as above
Mepblog	MEP's use of personal blog as channel for constituency/citizen outreach	Same scale as above
Meppubevnt	MEP's use of public events as channel for constituency/citizen outreach	Same scale as above
Multilingual	MEP's website is multilingual	0 – No
		1 – Yes
Newsletter	MEP's website has newsletter feature	0 – No
		1 – Yes
Online	MEP has a website or a blog	0 – No
		1 – Yes
Ownopinion	Takes instruction from self	1 - Never
		2 - Rarely
		3 - Sometimes
		4 - Often
		5 - Very often
Partyweb	MEP listing national party's on his/her EP profile	0 – No
		1 – Yes
Podcasts	MEP's website has podcast feature(s)	0 – No
		1 – Yes

Variable Name	Full Description	Coded Value(s)
Proconst	MEP's cumulative pro-constituency orientation	1 – 0-1 positive score (Low) 2 – 2 positive scores (Med.) 3 – 3-4 positive scores (High)
Proconstituency	Additive variable of 2 constituency orientations	0 – 2
Reccwrknatcitizen	Number of cases received from nationals (per week)	1 – 0 2 – 1 to 20 3 – 21 to 40 4 – 41 to 60 5 – 61 to 80 6 - < 80
Reccwrknatpg	Number of cases received from national interest groups (per week)	Same as previous
ReccwrkEUintrst	# of cases received from EU interest groups	Same as previous
Reccwrkcivassoc	# of cases received from civic associations	Same as previous
RepEU	Importance of representing 'all people in the EU'	1 - Not important 2 - Somewhat important 3 - Moderately important 4 - Important 5 - Very important
Representnation	Importance of representing 'all people in own country	1 - Not important 2 - Somewhat important 3 - Moderately important 4 - Important 5 - Very important
Representregion	Importance of representing 'people in subregion'	1 - Not important 2 - Somewhat important 3 - Moderately important 4 - Important 5 - Very important
RepresentEUpg	Importance of representing 'EU party group'	1 - Not important 2 - Somewhat important 3 - Moderately important 4 - Important 5 - Very important
Representnatparty	Importance of representing 'own national party'	1 - Not important 2 - Somewhat important 3 - Moderately important 4 - Important 5 - Very important

Variable Name	Full Description	Coded Value(s)
Respondnatpartyvoter	Importance of representing 'national partyvoter'	1 - Not important 2 - Somewhat important 3 - Moderately important 4 - Important 5 - Very important
Respondcitizen	% of casework that MEP responds to from individual citizens	1 – 0 % 2 – 1 to 20 % 3 – 21 to 40 % 4 – 41 to 60 % 5 – 61 to 80 % 6 – 81 to 100 %
Respondnatig	% of casework that MEP responds to from national interest groups	Same as above
Respondig	% of casework that MEP responds to from EU interest groups	Same as above
Respondcivassoc	% of casework that MEP responds to from civic associations	Same as above
Respondreggov	% of casework that MEP responds to from regional authorities	Same as above
Repspecific	Importance of representing 'specific group in society'	1 - Not important 2 - Somewhat important 3 - Moderately important 4 - Important 5 - Very important
Sex	Sex of MEP	0 – male 1 – female
Staffbx	Number of staff that MEP has in Brussels office	1 - no staff 2 - 1 staff 3 - 2 staff 4 - 3 staff or more
Staffhome	Number of staff √in Brussels office	1 - no staff 2 - 1 staff 3 - 2 staff 4 - 3 staff or more
Staffhomeabvavg	Above (MEP respondents') average number of staff in the constituency office	0 – no 1 – yes
Staffhomeblwavg	Below (MEP respondents') average number of staff in the constituency office	0 – no 1 – yes

Variable Name	Full Description	Coded Value(s)
Timeparlwork	On a 10 percentile scale from 0-100%, proportion of time spent on legislative, committee work	0 - 100%
Timemedia	Percentile proportion of time spent on media relations	Same scaling as above
Timewebsite	Percentile proportion of time spent on website management	Same scaling as above
Timecasework	Percentile proportion of time spent on casework	Same scaling as above
Timeig	Percentile proportion of time spent on interest group activities	Same scaling as above
Twitter	MEP's Presence on Twitter	0 – No 1 – Yes
Webcitizen	Reasons for creating MEP website – having direct contact with constituents	0 – No 1 – Yes
WebinfoEU	Reasons for creating MEP website - providing information to constituents	0 – No 1 – Yes
Website	MEP has website listed on EP Profile	0 – No 1 – Yes
Webtransparency	Reasons for creating MEP website –offering transparency over my work	0 – No 1 – Yes
Webpartypol	Reasons for creating MEP website – it is my national party's policy	0 – No 1 – Yes
WebEPpartygrppol	Reasons for creating MEP website - it is my European party group's policy	0 – No 1 – Yes
Webvisibility	Reasons for creating MEP website – to personalize my message and increase visibility	0 – No 1 – Yes
Webcosts	Reasons for creating MEP website – to reduce office costs	0 – No 1 – Yes
Webfeedback	Reasons for creating MEP website – to receive feedback on my work	0 – No 1 – Yes
Webtraffiinfoissues	MEP's reflection about features that attract	0 – No

	the most traffic – info provision feature	1 – Yes
Webtrafficdebate	MEP's reflection about features that attract the most traffic – stimulate online debate feature	0 – No 1 – Yes
Webtrafficfeedback	MEP's reflection about features that attract the most traffic – feedback feature	0 – No 1 – Yes

APPENDIX 3 - REGRESSION OUTPUT TABLES FROM CHAPTERS 5 AND 6

Chapter 5 - Table 5.1

Time spent on casework (N = 119)

Importance of pork politics	.004 (.144)
Importance of communication with citizens	.304(.312)
Appointment with citizens	.497*** (.222)
Receives Casework	.192 (.158)
Preference for Constituency Office Consultations	.199 (.222)
Adjusted R2 .079	

Chapter 5 - Table 5.2   Determinants for the Casework1 Dimension OFFLINE

Time spent on casework	Model 1 Electoral	Model 2 Role Orientations	Model 3 Political	Model 4 Const.Character
Age	.013 (.018)			
Gender	.056 (.407)			
Education	-.060 (.072)			
Open	.533 (.445)			
Ordered	.218 (.554)			
Regional	.327 (.399)			
Representing EU		.005 (.186)		
Representing nation		.049 (.233)		
Representing national party		.413 (.353)		
Representing national party voter		-.658*(.374)		
Takes instruction from citizens		.633***(.298)		
Takes instruction from national party		-.379 (.263)		
Own opinion		-.364 (.290)		
EP incumbent			-.250 (393)	
# committees			.178(.461)	
# delegations			-.918*(.481)	
Committee Sr.			.001(.408)	
Domestic politics			-.224(.148)	
EPP			1.54 (2.16)	
SD			1.74(2.14)	
ALDE			2.38(2.19)	
Greens			.624(2.24)	
UEN			2.41(2.45)	
United Left			.832(2.38)	
N/A Independent			1.80(2.44)	
MEP-Constituency ratio				-1.34(.748)
Distance				0 (0)
New member state				.481(.433)
Adjusted R-Squared	0.011	0.003	0.02	0.01
N	127	111	127	138

***≤0.01 **≤0.05 * ≤0.

Chapter 5 - Table 5.3 Determinants for the Casework2 Dimension OFFLINE

Pork Casework style	Model 1 Electoral	Model 2 Role Orientations	Model 3 Political	Model 4 Const.Character
Age	-.018 (.011)			
Gender	.485*(.254)			
Education	.058 (.072)			
Open	-.267 (.273)			
Ordered	-.045 (.342)			
Regional	-.264 (.242)			
Representing EU		-.040(.100)		
Representing nation		.270**(.123)		
Representing national party		-.069 (.184)		
Representing national party voter		.225 (.201)		
Takes instruction from citizens		.284*(.298)		
Own opinion		-.186 (.151)		
EP incumbent			-.833 (.223)	
# committees			-.213 (.261)	
# delegations			-.506*(.255)	
Committee Sr.			-.404 (.233)	
Domestic politics			.077 (.148)	
EPP			-.311 (1.27)	
SD			-.679 (1.26)	
ALDE			-.619 (1.29)	
Greens			-1.17 (1.31)	
UEN			-1.94 (1.52)	
United Left			.832 (2.38)	
N/A Independent			-.769 (2.44)	
MEP-Constituency ratio				.260 (.416)
Distance				.001***(0)
New member state				1.045***(.243)
Adjusted R-Squared	0.039	0.10	0.14	0.19
N	134	122	127	138

***≤0.01 **≤0.05 * ≤0.1

CHAPTER 5 - Table 5.4 Determinants for the Casework3 Dimension OFFLINE

Responsiveness to casework (individuals)	Model 1 Electoral	Model 2 Role Orientations	Model 3 Political	Model 4 Const.Character
Age	-.019*(.011)			
Gender	-.320 (.320)			
Education	.040 (.046)			
Open	.557**(.445)			
Ordered	-.309 (.346)			
Regional	.040 (.243)			
Representing EU		-.045 (.110)		
Representing nation		.129 (.135)		
Representing national party		.235 (.213)		
Representing national party voter		-.218 (.219)		
Takes instruction from citizens		-.172 (.173)		
Takes instruction from nat.party		-.197 (.157)		
Own opinion		.049 (.173)		
EP incumbent			.158 (.240)	
# committees			-.017 (.284)	
# delegations			.315 (.255)	
Committee Sr.			.042 (.186)	
Domestic politics			-.067 (.068)	
EPP			2.14 (1.37)	
SD			1.92 (1.36)	
ALDE			2.61*(1.08)	
Greens			1.89 (1.42)	
UEN			2.17 (1.55)	
United Left			2.16 (2.38)	
N/A Independent			2.83*(2.44)	
MEP-Constituency ratio				.760*(.456)
Distance				.246(.197)
New member state				-.518**(.114)
Adjusted R-Squared	0.024	0.003	0.30	0.023
N	133	118	133	137

***≤0.01 **≤0.05 * ≤0.1

CHAPTER 5 - Table 5.5 Determinants for the Explaining Work Dimension OFFLINE

Explaining Work Important	Model 1 Electoral	Model 2 Role Orientations	Model 3 Political	Model 4 Const.Character
Age	-.004 (.006)			
Gender	-.212 (.135)			
Education	.013 (.023)			
Open	-.254*(.145)			
Ordered	.034 (.181)			
Regional	.089 (.128)			
Representing EU		.075 (.056)		
Representing nation		.011 (.068)		
Representing national party		-.139***(.108)		
Representing national party voter		.274 (.111)		
Takes instruction from citizens		.076 (.088)		
Takes instruction from nat.party		-.174**(.115)		
Own opinion		.035 (.085)		
EP incumbent			-.262**(.125)	
# committees			-.001 (.145)	
# delegations			.168 (.132)	
Committee Sr.			-.168 (.130)	
Domestic politics			.018 (.048)	
EPP			.477 (.705)	
SD			.579 (.700)	
ALDE			.880 (.714)	
Greens			.710 (.731)	
UEN			.055 (.777)	
United Left			.829 (.799)	
N/A Independent			1.13 (.759)	
MEP-Constituency ratio				.208(.242)
Distance				0 (0)
New member state				.007(.141)
Adjusted R-Squared	0.024	0.007	0.030	0.01
N	134	120	133	134

***≤0.01 **≤0.05 * ≤0.1

Table 5.6 OFFLINE INTERACTIVITY

Time spent on communicating with citizens	
Number of appointments with citizens per week	.613***(.144)
Preference for using constituency office for interacting with citizens	.325(.312)
Preference for using phone for interacting with citizens	.453***(.169)

Adjusted R2   .17

N = 121

CHAPTER 5 - Table 5.7   Determinants for the Interactivity Dimension OFFLINE

OFFLINE INTERACTIVITY	Model 1 Electoral	Model 2 Role Orientations	Model 3 Political	Model 4 Const.Character
Age	.002 (.018)			
Gender	-.302 (.409)			
Education	-.055 (.073)			
Open	.660 (.443)			
Ordered	.798 (.557)			
Regional	.773*(.398)			
Representing EU		.007 (.181)		
Representing nation		-.045 (.217)		
Representing national party		.738**(.108)		
Representing national party voter		-.973*** (.368)		
Takes instruction from citizens		.678** (.291)		
Takes instruction from nat.party		-.431 (.268)		
Own opinion		-.439 (.288)		
EP incumbent			-.639 (.415)	
# committees			.517 (.475)	
# delegations			-.577 (.132)	
Committee Sr.			.083 (.423)	
Domestic politics			-.100 (.155)	
EPP			.712 (2.30)	
SD			.844 (2.28)	
ALDE			1.25 (2.32)	
Greens			.145 (2.4)	
UEN			1.67 (2.60)	
United Left			.829 (.799)	
N/A Independent			1.99(2.5)	
MEP-Constituency ratio				.227(.375)
Distance				0 (0)
New member state				-.040(.215)
Adjusted R-Squared	0.019	0.007	0.030	0.01
N	131	117	131	129

***≤0.01 **≤0.05 * ≤0.1

CHAPTER 6 - Table 6.1 Determinants for Explaining Work Dimension ONLINE

ONLINE EXPLAINING WORK	Model 1 Electoral	Model 2 Role Orientations	Model 3 Political	Model 4 Const.Character
Age	-.039**(.020)			
Gender	-.580 (.409)			
Education	.140*(.078)			
Open	.851*(.450)			
Ordered	1.58***(.623)			
Representing EU		-.154 (.181)		
Representing nation		-.168 (.217)		
Representing national party		.434 (.108)		
Representing national party voter		-.382 (.351)		
Takes instruction from citizens		.372 (.259)		
Takes instruction from national party		-.431 (.268)		
Own opinion		-.120 (.288)		
EP incumbent			-.118 (.397)	
# committees			.058 (.442)	
# delegations			-.173 (.397)	
Committee Sr.			.480 (.425)	
Domestic politics			.313 (.167)	
EPP			N/A	
SD			N/A	
ALDE			N/A	
Greens			N/A	
UEN			N/A	
United Left			N/A	
N/A Independent			N/A	
Internet penetration				-0.01(.375)
Distance				-0.001 (0)
New member state				.076(.449)
Pseudo R2	0.09	0.03	0.08.	0.007
N	139	119	138	140

***≤0.01 **≤0.05 * ≤0.1

CHAPTER 6 - Table 6.2 Determinants for the Casework Dimension ONLINE

ONLINE CASEWORK	Model 1 Electoral	Model 2 Role Orientations	Model 3 Political	Model 4 Const.Character
Age	-.019 (.021)			
Gender	-.678 (.456)			
Education	.137*(.087)			
Open	.943 (.610)			
Ordered	.797 (.729)			
Representing EU		.027 (.209)		
Representing nation		-.321 (.259)		
Representing region		.706 (.396)		
Representing national party		-.087 (.465)		
Takes instruction from citizens		.578 (.488)		
Takes instruction from citizens		.173 (.318)		
Takes instruction from national		.173 (.318)		
Own opinion		-.217 (.288)		
EP incumbent			.108 (.455)	
# committees			-1.99**(1.05)	
# delegations			-.533 (.598)	
Committee Sr.			-.182 (.481)	
Domestic politics			-.059 (.170)	
EPP			N/A	
SD			N/A	
ALDE			N/A	
Greens			N/A	
UEN			N/A	
United Left			N/A	
N/A Independent			N/A	
Internet penetration				-0.03(.027)
Distance				-0.001 (0)
New member state				.761(.531)
Pseudo R2	0.06	0.07	0.08	0.05
N	136	113	132	137

***≤0.01 **≤0.05 * ≤0.1

CHAPTER 6 - Table 6.3   Determinants for the Interactivity Dimension ONLINE

ONLINE INTERACTIVITY	Model 1 Electoral	Model 2 Role Orientations	Model 3 Political	Model 4 Const.Character
Age	-.014*(.001)			
Gender	.051 (.456)			
Education	-.02(.033)			
Open	.133 (.201)			
Ordered	.519**(.253)			
Representing EU		-.127*(.077)		
Representing nation		-.101 (.099)		
Representing region		-.074 (.109)		
Representing national party		.152 (.465)		
Representing national party voter		-.150 (.165)		
Takes instruction from citizens		.059 (.123)		
Takes instruction from national party		-.007 (.111)		
Own opinion		-.094(.123)		
EP incumbent			.334**(.169)	
# committees			.093 (.209)	
# delegations			. 062 (.598)	
Committee Sr.			.068 (.481)	
Domestic politics			.121*(.170)	
EPP			.396 (.967)	
SD			.634 (.960)	
ALDE			1.14 (.980)	
Greens			.327 (1.00)	
UEN			.382 (1.10)	
United Left			.167(1.06)	
N/A Independent			1.3 (1.04)	
Internet penetration				-.001(.008)
Distance				(0)
New member state				.057(.208)
Adjusted R2	0.02	0.07	0.06	0.05
N=	138	114	137	139

 ***≤0.01 **≤0.05 * ≤0.1

MEP Survey on Constituency Work and the Use of New Technologies

Dear MEP,
You have successfully accessed the MEP Survey on Constituency Work and the Use of New Technologies (2004-2009). The survey contains a total of 16 questions. Please note that once you complete and exit the survey, you will be unable to return to it again. Please proceed to the first question.

1. As a member of the European Parliament, when you think of 'your constituency or district' it is composed of: (please tick all that apply)

☐ European Union and all its people

☐ The national territory and all people of your member state

☐ A sub region in your member state

☐ People who voted for your party

☐ People who voted for you

Other (please specify)

[   ]

2. How important is it to you to represent the following groups in the European Parliament (EP)? (tick one box per line)

	Not important	Somewhat important	Moderately important	Important	Very important
All people in Europe	○	○	○	○	○
All people in your country	○	○	○	○	○
All people in your sub-region	○	○	○	○	○
Your national party	○	○	○	○	○
Your national party's voters	○	○	○	○	○
Your EP party group	○	○	○	○	○
A specific group(s) in society	○	○	○	○	○

3. How often do you rely on recommendations from the following sources on which way to vote in the European Parliament (EP)? (one tick per line)

	Never	Rarely	Sometimes	Often	Almost every vote
Your national party leaders	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯
Your EP party group leaders	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯
Your national party delegation of MEPs	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯
Your EP committee leaders	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯
Your national government	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯
Your country's regional authorities	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯
Interest groups	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯
Policy experts	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯
Citizens	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯
Your own independent opinion	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯

4. In your work as MEP, how important are the following activities? (tick one box per line)

	Not important	Somewhat important	Moderately important	Important	Very important
Attracting EU resources for your country	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯
Parliamentary and committee work	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯
Communicating with citizens	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯
Advancing EU policies in the world	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯
Promoting your national party's position on EU issues	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯
Maintaining active media relations	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯
Educating the public about the EU	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯
Maintaining an active presence in your country	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯

5. How many full-time, paid staff do you employ in your:

	No office	You only	1 staff	2	3	4	>4 staff
Brussels office	○	○	○	○	○	○	○
Strasbourg office	○	○	○	○	○	○	○
Home country office	○	○	○	○	○	○	○

6. In your overall workload, about what proportion of time do you personally dedicate to the following activities? (tick one box per line, the total value in boxes ticked should not exceed 100%)

	0%	10%	20%	30%	40%	50%	60%	70%	80%	90%	100%
Preparation for your committee and parliamentary work	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○
Website management	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○
Citizen relations	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○
Media relations	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○
Interest group relations	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○
Responding to assistance requests	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○

7. On average, as MEP how much time do you spend on political work in your home country? (tick one box)

○ One day per month or less

○ More than one day per month but less than one day a week

○ One day per week

○ Two days per week

○ Three days per week

○ More than three days per week

8. When working in your own country, in an average week, about how many appointments do you schedule for the following groups and activities?

	0	1-5	6-10	11-15	16-20	>20
Interest groups	○	○	○	○	○	○
Your party leaders	○	○	○	○	○	○
National government administration	○	○	○	○	○	○
Individual citizens	○	○	○	○	○	○
Regional and local authorities	○	○	○	○	○	○
Civic associations	○	○	○	○	○	○
Public events	○	○	○	○	○	○
Media briefings	○	○	○	○	○	○

9. MEPs receive requests for assistance from various groups. On average, how many requests for assistance do you receive per week from the following groups? (tick one box per line)

	0	1-20	21-40	41-60	61–80	>80
Individual citizens from your country	○	○	○	○	○	○
National interest groups	○	○	○	○	○	○
Regional authorities in your country	○	○	○	○	○	○
European interest groups	○	○	○	○	○	○
Civic associations	○	○	○	○	○	○

10. Through which of the following channels do you receive most of your assistance requests? (tick one box)

☐ Consultation hours in your country office

☐ Office visits in Brussels or Strasbourg

☐ Your national party's office

☐ Your website

☐ E-mail

☐ Letters

☐ Telephone

11. On average, what proportion of all the assistance requests that you receive do you respond to?

	0%	1-20%	21-40%	41-60%	61–80%	81-100%
From individual citizens from your country	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯
From national interest groups	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯
From regional authorities in your country	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯
From European interest groups	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯
From civic associations	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯

12. How often do you normally (not during election campaigns) use these channels to communicate with citizens?

	Never	Rarely	Sometimes	Often	Most often
Radio (in your country)	○	○	○	○	○
TV (in your country)	○	○	○	○	○
Newspapers	○	○	○	○	○
Party bulletins	○	○	○	○	○
Office consultations	○	○	○	○	○
Mailed newsletters	○	○	○	○	○
Telephone	○	○	○	○	○
E-mail	○	○	○	○	○
Party website	○	○	○	○	○
Your personal website	○	○	○	○	○
E-newsletters	○	○	○	○	○
Public events	○	○	○	○	○
Your Blog	○	○	○	○	○

13. In general, through what channels do individual citizens contact you? (tick one box per line)

	Never	Rarely	Sometimes	Often	Very often
Letters	○	○	○	○	○
Telephone	○	○	○	○	○
E-mail	○	○	○	○	○
Your MEP website	○	○	○	○	○
Your national party's website	○	○	○	○	○
Your blog	○	○	○	○	○
During public meetings	○	○	○	○	○
Your national party's office	○	○	○	○	○
Visits to your country office	○	○	○	○	○
Visits to your Brussels or Strasbourg office	○	○	○	○	○

14. What were the main reasons for creating your personal website as MEP? (pls. tick all that apply)

☐ Not applicable, you do not have a website

☐ Increase direct contact with citizens

☐ It is your national party's policy

☐ It is your EP party group's policy

☐ Personalise your public message and visibility

☐ Receive policy feedback from citizens

☐ Offer public transparency over your work

☐ Provide educational information about EU

☐ Reduce office communication costs

☐ Advertise the types of assistance you offer

Other (please specify)

[   ]

15. Which feature(s) of your website attract the most traffic, or, are used the most? (please, choose 2 boxes maximum)

○ Overview of your legislative work (speeches, voting record)

○ Information pages on specific issues

○ Debate forums

○ Write me or "your views" comment forms

○ e-newsletter

○ E-polls

○ Podcasts (videos)

○ Policy feedback commentaries

○ I'm not sure

16. How has your MEP website affected the following aspects of your work? (tick one box per line)

	Decreased	Slightly decreased	Remained the same	Slightly increased	Increased	You are not sure
Direct contact with citizens	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯
Contact with interest groups	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯
Your office efficiency	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯
Policy feedback from public	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯
Your public visibility	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯
Chances of being re-elected	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯
Requests for assistance	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯
Contact with young people	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯
Provision of information about your work and EU matters	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯

17. YOUR PERSONAL COMMENTS

Your answers will be valuable for our research and we thank you for participating!
For any additional questions, you may contact Jordanka Tomkova at jordanka.tomkova@eui.eu, or tel: +39 320 575 4889.