European Commission

Evaluation of the Share Europe Online pilot project

Final Report

Written by coffey

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Table of Contents

Abstract

In 2013, the European Commission (EC) and the European Parliament (EP) jointly launched the pilot project called **"Share Europe Online"**, which was aimed to test the proposition that the two institutions could use public online social media platforms to communicate with citizens in a new way, locally and conversationally, in local languages and responding directly to local concerns and interests. The initiative followed a proposal of the EP for a pilot project in the 2012 Budget[1], calling the EU institutions to adapt their communication policies to the realities of web 2.0. More specifically, it called on the EU institutions to:

- Allow citizens to interact and contribute to EU policymaking

- Improve access to information on EU policies

- Involve EU citizens in sharing their European Union experience

- Increase the level of information on what EU citizens expect or want

- Reach out to a larger public and broaden the public sphere

The project goal, in the words of MEP Marietje Schaake (who initiated the project with MEP Morten Løkkegaard), was to achieve "interactive communication with citizens online".

In 2014, the research and monitoring practice within Coffey (Coffey International Development), was commissioned by the European Commission's Directorate General Communication to assess the outcomes of the project and make recommendations for the use of social media at local level. This document is the Final Report of the evaluation. The report recommends the continued support of social media in the Commission Representations (Reps) and European Parliament Information Offices (EPIOs), as well as a range of suggestions for how to increase the targeting of activities in-line with the broader vision for institutional communication to the public.

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[1] EP Budgetary remarks (Feb 2012)

Acronyms list

CM	Community Manager
EC	European Commission
EDCC	Europe Direct Contact Centre
EDIC	Europe Direct Information Centres
EQ	Evaluation Question
EP	European Parliament
EPIO	European Parliament Information Office
EPS	European Public Space
ESN	European Service Network
I&C	Information and Communication
KPI	Key Performance Indicator
LM	Line Manager
MS	Member States
REP	European Commission Representation
SEO	Share Europe Online
TTIP	Transatlantic Trade and Investment Partnership

1 Executive Summary

This section is intended to present the main conclusions and recommendations of the evaluation of Share Europe Online.

1.1 Draft conclusions

This evaluation found that Share Europe Online (hereafter SEO project or project) has been an effective pilot project. The project succeeded in:

- **Showing the added value of dedicated social media resources;**
- **Providing management/monitoring information to show the evolution of social media use throughout the project;**
- **Highlighting the strengths and weaknesses of the process and its outcomes;**
- **Generating unanimous feedback from the Reps and EPIOs on the need to continue.**

There is evidence to show that the project has increased the overall capacity of both the Reps and the EPIOs in using social media with limited additional resources (1.5 additional days per week). All 56 Reps and EPIOs are now engaging with the public via 125 social media accounts. According to the contractor European Service Network's (ESN) reported data there has been a 144% increase[2] in followers from the initial baseline of followers[3].

However, feedback from Heads of Rep and EPIO and their staff, suggests that the momentum created is not sustainable due to a lack of resources. At the same time, our assessment is that there is still room for improvement in the way that the institutions present themselves using social media. A more strategic approach is required, with defined target audiences, as well as decisions on priorities in the current uncertain climate.

- **The Reps and EPIOs improved their social media skills**: even those with an established presence at the time of the project launch were seen as benefitting from the expertise and additional support provided by a dedicated Community Manager (CM). The Reps and EPIOs have been coached on the importance of localising messages to make them relevant to people's lives in national contexts and there are many examples of good practices shared. The work to raise awareness of the European Parliament (EP) elections showed just how powerful using social media could be. Participants in focus groups confirm that they are appreciative of the opportunity to connect locally with the institutions and to know how the EU actions impact on their daily lives. We argue that the next step should be to establish target audiences and appropriate messages.
- **The SEO project helped to support EU institutional visibility**: the project is seen as making significant strides in helping the Reps and EPIOs increase their reach and visibility, particularly among audiences already somewhat engaged in

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[2] This figure relates to the increase between the baseline number of followers (251,000 for the first and second cohort of accounts Feb and Nov 2013) and compares this with the 612,000 at June 2014.

[3] This figure relates to the 112 social media accounts that benefited from the direct involvement of a Community Manager.

thinking about the EU. The aggregated number of followers of all Facebook and Twitter accounts with direct involvement of a CM has more than doubled with an increase of 144%.

- **The implementation method was successful**: the delivery method (i.e. providing the Reps and EPIOs with intra-muros assistance, advice and training) proved to be relevant and effective for enhancing social media communication and building social media capacity in the Reps and EPIOs. The implementation approach was seen as effective, because the central coordinator located in Brussels provided on-going mentoring and technical support to Community Managers located in the Reps and EPIOs, whilst all shared access to a common social media monitoring platform. With a few exceptions, CMs were considered as highly skilled and creative individuals who made a significant contribution and were highly valued by the Reps and EPIOs. The central coordinator provided by the contractor (ESN) was also considered to be an invaluable resource. The Reps and EPIOs are now far more able to communicate with citizens on social media. The project leaves them with a set of resources that can be further exploited (e.g. Engagor, documents/guidelines for social media activity, compilation of best practices, etc.).

- **The SEO project also demonstrated effective change management**: the project was instrumental in raising the Reps and EPIOs' collective awareness and acceptance of the growing importance of social media in their day-to-day work. First of all, the Community Managers influenced the mentality of the institutions' staff about what could be achieved with social media and the benefits it could bring to their regular communication activities. In addition to this, they offered technical training combined with learning-by-doing, which resulted in an undoubted upgrade of skills, as well as in the integration of social media to the Reps and EPIOs' communication activities.

- **The approach to monitoring and reporting was appropriate**: the approach met the need for management information on the roll-out of the project. However, the value of this monitoring information was not always felt at local level by Line Managers (LMs) and CMs, for whom the reporting requirements were often seen as too extensive, while providing a low return on investment. However, it has provided a detailed and valuable track record on the progress of the project, which has been shared with all Reps and EPIOs to create a common awareness. With serious questions about the future financial support for the project, it will be important to prioritise efforts and a less extensive approach now seems desirable, for example the need for central tracking of comparative indicators is now questionable.

- **There is a need to enhance key performance indicators (KPIs)**: the KPIs are relatively standard and based on quantitative outcomes. They emphasise the increase in social media activity, interactions with citizens, reach etc. but they do not allow to understand the relevance and impact of engaging with citizens, for example, with regards to perceptions of the EU. Also the current KPIs are limited in their ability to generate insights on how to further develop a particular account and / or potential impacts. There are no qualitative indicators to provide a more meaningful level of results interpretation. Given variations in the performance of different Reps and EPIOs, it may be that the vision and general objectives need to be set at central level, whereas SMART objectives need to be set at Rep and EPIO level with a view to supporting other communication goals.

- **There is a need for a more strategic approach:** the operational objectives have been too general to confirm what the Reps and EPIOs are trying to achieve and why. Without a specific focus beyond the volume of reach and engagement, Reps and EPIOs will find it difficult to enhance their impact. Key questions include who are the Reps and EPIOs trying to reach and why, and what target group

response are the Reps and EPIOs trying to elicit? Do the institutions want to disseminate information to 'influencers' or conquer new audiences? Recourse to paid promotion may be attractive and make sense for specific one-off initiatives, but it should not be considered as a sustainable alternative to a more strategic approach, which continues to be responsive and proactive in its outreach.

- **Inter-institutional cooperation should be discretionary:** given the different mandates of the European Parliament (EP) and the European Commission (EC), the feasibility of a strong inter-institutional cooperation and joint online media presence can be questioned. The evidence suggests that closer coordination of social media communication is difficult and, in many cases, not desired. However, the Reps and EPIOs agree that there will always be occasions and opportunities to collaborate. This will probably take the form of sharing/liking each other's content and developing joint social media campaigns to promote specific events or disseminate information of common interest (e.g. thematic weeks). Encouragement from the central level would facilitate this process. Nonetheless, the focus should be placed on moving to an interest-based approach, which focuses on specific themes and target group concerns, rather than purely a transmitter-type approach, which relays central messages.

- **There has been limited targeting of specific groups (with some exceptions):** this may have resulted in limiting effectiveness. The mapping exercise, whilst providing useful needs analysis, did not provide sufficient in-depth insights to allow the Reps and EPIOs to know their target groups and to use this information to make choices about which segments to target. A more focused approach based on a researched understanding of the key hot topics or concerns of specific target segments is likely to be more effective and also likely to decrease the operating costs.

- **There has been limited support to political intelligence:** the Reps have, to a small extent, been able to include insights from social media in the political intelligence they regularly provide to decision-makers. They have also gained experience in detecting and rebutting rumours/misinformation using their social media accounts. However, there is a reported lack of capacity for political intelligence and Engagor is not fully exploited for social media monitoring. The number of followers and the Reps and EPIOs' limited knowledge about their online community and who they are engaging with are also limiting factors. The interviewed representatives of the SPP, the political reporting sector and the Heads of Rep and Line Managers have all emphasised that the focus on this aspect could be increased in the future. However, this would require some clarifications in the application of the social media guidelines, resource availability and capacity, and closer cooperation between the political reporting and communication/press and media sections in the Reps.

- **More resources are required and priorities need to be set:** resources were key to the implementation of the SEO project. Many Reps and EPIOs struggled to cover all of their different priorities and were not able to focus on social media prior to the project. The SEO project has managed to create a social media momentum, which our evidence suggests has been noticed by the public. Most Reps and EPIOs still need the support of a dedicated CM, who could either be an external person provided by the project, hired locally or a designated experienced member of staff for this role. Without additional resources, it will be difficult to maintain this momentum and in many cases the progress made will fade away. This suggests a need to prioritise where to focus efforts going forward. Maintaining an effective social media presence requires dedicated individuals to research and plan creative ways to reach target audiences.

1.2   Draft Recommendations

The overarching recommendation from this evaluation is for the European Commission and the European Parliament to support the continued use of social media by the Reps and EPIOs to enhance their local communication activities. If the Commission and the European Parliament want the Reps and EPIOs to make the most of modern communication platforms to strengthen their communication at local level, then it makes sense to use social media. This approach is in-line with the global communication trend followed by all major international communication spenders, including other government bodies and international organisations.

Social media are platforms and channels which facilitate communication. The Reps and EPIOs need to align the content of their social media activity with the content of their other communication actions. These should be mutually reinforcing and should also support the achievement of wider institutional communication goals. The evaluation points to a need for clearer articulation of what the Commission and the European Parliament want to achieve with their local social media communication, beyond creating visibility around Rep and EPIO events and initiatives. This should help to underpin decisions on how to use social media to greatest effect. This leads to our next recommendation.

We recommend that the European Commission and the European Parliament define the overarching vision / goal for Rep and EPIO communication on social media. It has been decided that the Reps and EPIOs should not simply relay central messages and that postings need to be localised. However, to do this effectively there is a need for a clearer central steer to answer the questions:

- Why do the Commission / European Parliament want to communicate using social media at national level?

- What do they want to achieve?

For example, is the goal to *make the EU voice heard on headline issues of joint national / EU concern?* With the vision in place, it will be easier for the Reps and EPIOs to define their own strategy and specific objectives with regards to communication and social media.

We recommend a focus on researching and understanding national audience concerns. There is a lack of information about Rep and EPIO target groups. ESN's initial scoping study did not include a focus on understanding target audiences in different Member States. Currently there tends to be a focus on engaging with interested individuals, but without knowing who they are and what their interests are. This is likely to mean using Engagor / another social media management tool to greater effect to define key trending, hot political topics. These topic areas need to be articulated and monitored and, we suggest, provide a focal point for communication goals. However, the first step in this process is the central steer described above.

We recommend a more targeted and focussed approach. Content is key. We believe that the Reps and EPIOs will achieve greater impact if they focus on a small number of key themes, based on target group research, and build communication around these areas. Once key topics have been selected there will be a continuous need to monitor and research initiatives / news on these areas, in liaison with the relevant policy DGs. With a clear focus, the Reps and EPIOs will be in a better position to identify key opinion formers, understand target group concerns and target communication material. This does not mean that the Reps and EPIOs will stop relaying central, localised news or information about their events, but means that other content will be more

purposeful and focussed to make sure that the EU is present on the national scene. With budget cuts, it is understood that this recommendation maybe delayed for some Reps and EPIOs, as highlighted below.

We recommend that consideration is given to replacing the current social media management and analysis tool Engagor. We suggest that there are other tools available, which are much more intuitive (easy to use) for non-expert users. Members of staff have struggled to make best use of Engagor and, in many cases, further training is still required. It is essential that the Reps and EPIOs have access to this type of tool. However, whist Engagor is a solid central / local control tool, it does not allow the qualitative insights that are really useful to staff who need intelligence on how to target their messages. The tool should enable them to take the more focussed approach that we recommend. The Reps and EPIOs need to be able to easily identify local actors identifying, targeting and addressing the political topics of interest to increase their potential for success.

The following recommendations are prioritised to take into account the short and medium term perspectives that are currently on the table.

Recommendations for the short term (2015-2016[4])

During the next phase, the Reps and EPIOs will use social media without or with limited central support. With limited resources, it is likely that most will focus on enhancing the visibility of their communication activities and relaying localised central messages. We recommend a focus on:

- **Effective communication:** place a priority on effective communication of the implications of the budget reduction for the Reps and EPIOs' social media activity and of the objectives of the project in the next phases. It is vital to keep the Reps and EPIOs on-side and motivated in their efforts to use social media. Poor handling of this transition phase could have a highly negative impact.

- **Training and advice:** there is a continued need for training to maximise the potential benefits of using Engagor. Furthermore, with the constant evolution of social media platforms, it is recommended to provide periodic training / master classes, for example involving an external expert to help the Reps and EPIOs to keep up-to-date.

- **Collaboration:**
    - o Encourage regular / on-going communication between the Reps and EPIOs with regards to plans for social media posting, but to leave this collaboration to the discretion of the Reps and EPIOs;
    - o It is recommended that the Press officers / staff responsible for social media in the Reps and EPIOs establish a closed Facebook page for press officers / staff responsible for social media in the Reps and EPIOs, which should provide a source of on-going support and inspiration on social media use, as well as a mechanism by which top performing Reps and EPIOs should / could share their insights / initiatives.

- **Platforms:** whilst Facebook and Twitter are likely to continue as the mainstays of social media activity, the Reps and EPIOs should also plug into other popular

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[4] During this phase, there will be limited project funding to be shared between Reps and EPIOs.

platforms at national level, as many already do, to avoid a dependency type situation.

- **Tools:** target available support to allow all Reps and EPIOs to have the tools needed for effective social media activity such as access to Photoshop / video editing software, for example Premier Pro or Final Cut, 4G tablets, picture libraries, etc.

- **Monitoring:** Reps and EPIOs should continue with monitoring and analysis of their social media activity with a view to reporting this via reports that are provided by the Reps and EPIOs to the central institution. Given the reduction in manpower, it is not recommended to continue the focus on the collection and analysis of comparative monitoring data across all Reps and EPIOs. Where feasible it is recommended to regularly monitor trending hot topics / political issues and to feed this information into the political sections / feedback to the central institutions.

- **Paid promotion:** budget permitting, DG COMM should make available a small pot of funds to allow the Reps and EPIOs to use some paid promotion to target groups. Paid promotion should be used strategically, for example where there are extraordinary events / activities / content, which justify paid visibility. Consideration should be given to facilitating flexible payments, which most likely fall outside the standard payment protocols of the institutions.

Recommendations for the longer term[5]

It is recommended that the Reps and EPIOS use social media both to enhance the visibility of their usual communication activities and **to strengthen the visibility and engagement of the institutions at national level** on issues where the EU has an impact / role. With this in mind we recommend:

- **More targeted / strategic:** we recommend to use social media in much more strategic ways so that it feeds into political intelligence gathering and broadcasts EU 'stories', which feed into news trends and events. Public opinion on the EU institutions has reached a low point[6], yet many Europeans do not really know what the EU does. We recommend that each Rep and EPIO aims to create visibility around **a small number of themes, which fit within the framework of the 10 political priorities[7] presented by Commission President Juncker, whilst at the same time tapping into** persistent / trending national hot political topics. In this way, the Reps and EPIOS will be more responsive to what really interests nationals. This means a three-pronged approach:

    o Relay of relevant central news / stories (localised by the Reps and EPIOs)

    o On-going rebuttal and correction of misinformation about the EU / insertion of the EU voice on trending political topics

    o A planned and sustained focus on a small number of themes, for example, on a yearly basis, with a view to establishing the EU stance / truths among key opinion formers / followers on the topics.

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[5] This is subject to adequate funding for local social media after the expiry of the project, notably by the institution of a specific budget line for Reps' social media in the 2016 Budget

[6] According to Special Eurobarometer 415 of March 2014, a quarter of respondents had a negative image of the European Union (26%).

[7] http://ec.europa.eu/priorities/docs/pg_en.pdf#page=1

- o A more personalised approach, which for example gives a face to the Commission and European Parliament at national level.

- **Adequate resourcing:** we recommend that the institutions invest in national level social media activity by ensuring that each Rep and EPIO has access to a dedicated social media manager, as well as a budget for promotion and targeting. The value of young 'stagiaries' to support social media activity should not be overlooked, this is the generation who really live and breathe social media and finding ways to involve a younger perspective would likely add value.

2 Introduction

This document is the **Final Report** of the Evaluation of the SEO project. The Final Report is the third deliverable to be submitted by Coffey International Development (Coffey) to Directorate General Communication (DG COMM) of the European Commission.

The purpose of this report is to provide the key findings of the evaluation, as well as overall conclusions and recommendations. In addition, the report includes a brief overview of the context of the project and a description of the evaluation design and methodology. The findings from each of the data collection methods are provided in the Annexes of the report.

The report is structured as follows:

- Chapter 1: Executive summary
- Chapter 2: Introduction
- Chapter 3: The subject of the evaluation: includes a brief overview of evaluation context;
- Chapter 4: Evaluation design and methodology: describes the evaluation approach and the different data collection methods employed;
- Chapter 5: Evaluation results: presents the main findings and conclusions of the evaluation.

The report is supported by eight Annexes, which are presented in a separate document.

- Annex 1: Acronyms table
- Annex 2: Summary of key findings
- Annex 3: Bibliography list
- Annex 4: Stakeholder interviews
- Annex 5: Questionnaire to Heads of Reps and EPIOs
- Annex 6: Case studies of Reps and EPIOs
- Annex 7: Online focus groups with users
- Annex 8: Workshop with internal stakeholders

3 The subject of the evaluation

3.1 Introduction

In 2013, the European Commission (EC) and the European Parliament (EP) jointly launched the pilot project called **"Share Europe Online"**, which was aimed to test the proposition that the two institutions could use public online social media platforms to communicate with citizens in a new way, locally and conversationally, in local languages and responding directly to local concerns and interests. The initiative followed a proposal of the EP for a pilot project in the 2012 Budget[8], calling the EU institutions to adapt their communication policies to the realities of web 2.0. More specifically, it called on the EU institutions to:

- Allow citizens to interact and contribute to EU policymaking
- Improve access to information on EU policies
- Involve EU citizens in sharing their European Union experience
- Increase the level of information on what EU citizens expect or want
- Reach out to a larger public and broaden the public sphere

The goal of the SEO project, in the words of MEP Marietje Schaake (who initiated the project together with MEP Morten Løkkegaard), was to achieve "interactive communication with citizens online".

According to the 2012 and 2013 Commission work program in the field of communication, the **objectives** of the project were set to:

- Expand and improve the social media presence of the EC Reps and EPIOs by providing them with the necessary information, training and expertise to do so.
- Improve the way in which the EU institutions engage with citizens on social media by stepping up the online presence of the Reps and EPIOs in the Member States, making their communication more targeted, coordinated and adapted to local concerns, as well as to the specificities of national social media landscapes.

Furthermore, the Terms of Reference of this evaluation confirmed that the objectives of the SEO project also included:

- Addressing the gap in institutional communication on social media in local languages and on locally developed platforms.
- Identifying the shortcomings in the way the institutions communicate with citizens on social media and make suggestions for sustainable improvement.

3.2 Implementation

The SEO project consisted in providing the Reps and EPIOs in the 28 Member States with centrally coordinated intra-muros assistance, advice and training on social media. More specifically, the project made available to the Reps and EPIOs experienced external social media experts (known as Community Managers) working on a part-time basis, for a period of 9 to 18 months at the time of the evaluation, depending on the country. The CMs were expected to work in cooperation with the Reps and EPIO's LM, who was usually a member of the Press & Media team.

The project was implemented in four phases:

- **Phase 1 - Mapping exercise**: The first phase of SEO project lasted from September 2012 to January 2013. An external contractor carried out a

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[8] EP Budgetary remarks (Feb 2012)

preliminary mapping of the social media landscape in 27 Member States[9]. The mapping included an assessment of the existing social media presence of the Reps and EPIOs in each country.

- **Phase 2 – Pilot Project (1st cohort of countries)**: This phase lasted from February to July 2013 and was aimed at providing the Reps and EPIOs in 17 Member States[10] with external Community Managers (CMs) that would help them to further develop their social media presence and build in-house social media capacity. The Reps and EPIOs were also equipped with a web-based tool (Engagor) to carry out local social media monitoring.

- **Phase 3 – Pilot Project (2nd cohort of countries):** This phase lasted from August 2013 to February 2014. The project continued with the planned communication and capacity building activities in the first cohort of countries. As from November 2013, a second cohort of 11 countries joined the project and additional CMs were appointed for the new Reps and EPIOs.

- **Phase 4 – Pilot Project:** This phase lasted from March to June 2014 and was a continuation of the work carried out during the prior phases in terms of communication and capacity building activities. The EP elections in May 2014 provided an opportunity to all Reps and EPIOs to exploit the platform for social media dissemination created within the project.

- **Phase 5 - Preparatory Action:** The project was extended till January 2015 in the form of a preparatory action. The CMs were asked to focus on building and consolidating in-house social media capacity in order to ensure that the Reps and EPIOs could pursue their social media presence in autonomy once the project ended.

3.3　Operations

The implementation of the SEO project was overseen by an **inter-institutional steering group**, which included representatives from the EP, as well as from the EC.

Phases 1 to 3 of the project were carried out by the external contractor ESN, as partner in the EURESIN & RETELL consortiums, who provided the central coordinator in Brussels and the CMs in the Reps and EPIOs.

The main tasks of the **central coordinator** were to coordinate the work of the CMs, provide them with support and ideas for enhancing social media activity and capacity at national level, and feedback to the EC and EP on the project's progress. The central coordinator also prepared the weekly editorial calendars after meeting with the central communication services in Brussels and identifying the main issues and messages for the week. The editorial calendars were distributed to all the Reps and EPIOs, together with suggestions of how to use them.

Every month, the central coordinator also submitted country reports which included detailed information on the performance of the accounts covered by the project, as well as of best practices identified (based on input by CMs and, later, LMs themselves). The reports were targeted at CMs and LMs, and included specific recommendations for the Reps and EPIOs.

In addition, the central coordinator provided the steering group with a monthly overview report (all countries covered) which was also shared with LMs.

The contractor submitted a final project report for each phase which was disseminated at central and local level, including the Heads of Rep and EPIO.

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[9] The mapping exercise for Croatia was conducted after the country's accession to the EU, in June 2013.
[10] These were the Member States where the EC and EP had already collaborated to operate physical European Public Spaces (EPS). The objective was now to develop an EPS online.

Phases 4 and 5 of the project were implemented by another contractor, the NOVACOMM Consortium, with ESN maintaining the operational responsibility for the activities as sub-contractor.

4 Evaluation design and methodology

This chapter provides a description of the evaluation, including its objectives, questions, design and methods.

4.1 Objectives and scope of the evaluation

The overall goal of this evaluation was to **assess the extent to which the SEO project delivered the results expected to meet its objectives and to draw lessons for further actions** in the field of local social media communication in the EC and EP. The evaluation took place during a transition phase of the project as it moved from being a pilot project to a preparatory action.

The evaluation provided a detailed analysis and assessment of the impact and usefulness of the project, which took into account two aspects:

1. **Communication impacts** (in terms of changes in the Reps and EPIOs' social media presence and activity, as well as in the level of interaction with citizens in a local setting)

2. **Capacity building** (in terms of changes in the commitment and competence of those engaged in social media activity in the different Reps and EPIOs)

Furthermore, there was a focus on understanding more about the inter-institutional aspects of this project and its future potential. In addition, some of the evaluation questions or additional tasks (see below) strictly focused on the Reps.

The evaluation covered the whole pilot project phase running from February 2013 to June 2014. As explained in Chapter 3, this included phase 2 (first cohort of countries), phase 3 (second cohort of countries) and phase 4.

Furthermore, it is important to note that the study was meant to provide an overview of the activities undertaken in all MS. However, taking into account the tight time frame and the budget allocated for the assignment, the evaluators focused on a smaller number of countries to provide an in-depth assessment of the factors that explain the performance of the project in different settings (see Section 4.4.4).

4.2 Evaluation questions

The evaluation of the SEO project was guided by 14 evaluation questions (EQs) and six additional tasks, which are presented in the Table below.

Table 1: Evaluation questions and additional tasks

Nr	Question/Task
Evaluation question	
1	To what extent have the objectives of the Pilot project been met? Where expectations have not been met, what factors have hindered their achievement?
2	How effective were the individual activities of the project (i.e. mapping exercise, community management, and capacity building)?
3	Is the target public aware of the social media communication activities of the Reps? Which are the main variables at play and what could be done to improve the visibility of the actions? Should paid post promotion (advertising) be considered as a way to reach a larger public?

Nr	Question/Task
4	Have the objectives been achieved at reasonable cost (i.e. did the project represent value for money?). Compared to other possibilities, how efficient was the implementation method under the two dimensions: communication impacts and capacity building? Could the same results have been achieved with less funding?
5	On the whole, how efficiently are the Reps using social media under the following aspects: a. Internal organisation (procedures and working practices, training) b. Volume, timeliness and quality of messages (adapted to the local context, platforms and audience) c. Meeting the information and communication needs of their target audiences (responding to questions and comments) d. Local communication of central messages (conveying in a contextualised way the political and communication priorities of the Commission) e. Monitoring system underpinning re-active and pro-active communication f. Providing political intelligence
6	How efficient was the coordination between the Reps and the central communication services of the EC in terms of: a. Editorial planning b. Support on hot issues and sensitive topics c. Political reporting d. Support to specific campaigns (e.g. Citizens' dialogues)
7	Is a joint online presence of the EPIO and REP in a Member State feasible with regard to (or despite) the differences in the perogatives, communication agendas and (occasionally) divergent positions of the two institutions? Can significant synergies be exploited by a closer coordination of their communication on social networks or would this lead to inefficiencies?
8	Are the effects likely to last after the initiative ends (i.e. when the CMs' support is phased out?) To what extent have the sought change of mind-set and upgrade of skills been achieved? Are the Reps ready to pursue their social media presence in autonomy? If not, should the initiative continue and for how long and under what terms?
9	What long-term impacts can be expected from the project if it is continued vs. discontinued?
10	To what extent have the general, specific and operational objectives of the project proved relevant to the needs identified at the outset of the initiative?
11	Was the implementation method (i.e. providing the local Reps and EPIOs with intra-muros assistance, advice and training) conducive to reaching the overarching objective of improving online dialogue with citizens?
12	To what extent has the initiative proved complementary to other online and offline communication activities of the EC, such as the EC's website on Europa and the central social media presence, the policy communication by line DGs, the EU publications, the Europe Direct network or the Debate on the future of Europe?
13	What is the European added value of the initiative (e.g. what is the additional value resulting from EU activities, compared to what could be achieved by the MS on their own at national and/or regional levels)?
14	Is there a need for local institutional social media communication?
Additional tasks (abridged version from the Terms of Reference)	
1	Appropriateness of maintaining a social media presence of individual Reps to meet the information and communication needs of the target groups vis-à-vis other sources (e.g. EC websites, the Europe Direct Contact Centre, and Member States' I&C services).
2	Viable options for the maintenance of effective local social media communication of the Reps after the expiry of the project.

Nr	Question/Task
3	Extent to which the Reps are making good use of the modern I&C technologies to engage with citizens
4	Aspects of social media activity and target groups that represent the biggest opportunities for the Reps in terms of impact (strategic/political potential) and cost-effectiveness
5	Recommendations on a possible structured recourse to paid advertising
6	Recommendations for optimising the coordination between the Reps and the central services of the EC
7	Development of the objectives into suggestions for SMART objectives for the SEO project/preparatory action and for the EC intervention on social media in general

4.3   Evaluation design

The EQs presented before indicated that the evaluation should focus on both accountability and learning. In other words, the evaluation should address the overall value of the project - in terms of relevance, effectiveness, efficiency, sustainability, complementarity and added value - while also providing detailed recommendations on future actions.

To adequately examine the project, the evaluators proposed an evaluation design that was based on the following elements:

- **A cumulative perspective:** The assessment of the SEO project was partly based on existing knowledge about it. Consequently, the evaluation relied heavily on desk research, systematically covering the project's available quantitative and qualitative data. The list of documents reviewed is presented in **Annex 3**.

  The existing information was used to assess the performance of the project in terms of communication results (e.g. size and reach of the social media accounts, together with applause, engagement and conversation rates) and capacity building (e.g. number of staff trained, dissemination of good practices, editorial planning, etc.). However, the existing information was insufficient to analyse the linkages between the different activities of the project and the changes produced at both citizen and organisational level. Thus, to better understand the linkages between the project and the results achieved, the evaluators complemented the existing information with additional data collection: online focus groups with users, staff questionnaires, case studies of Reps and EPIOs, and stakeholder interviews. The key findings from the data collection are presented in **Annexes 4 to 7**.

- **An explanatory focus**: Drawing from the existing and new data collected, the evaluators conducted an assessment of the project's performance and the key factors that contributed to it. This was done via the examination of the project's intervention logic, implementation and context, complemented by an in-depth study of a sample of 14 Reps and EPIOs that participated in the project. The results from this served as the basis for answering the evaluation questions and developing the conclusions and recommendations presented in **Chapter 5**.

- **A utilization-focused approach:** We argue that a learning evaluation should support intended use by intended users. Thus, a basic element in this evaluation concerned the identification of different end-users and their needs. The utilization-focused evaluation was based on the understanding that the end-users of this evaluation were those involved in the implementation of the project (LMs, CMs, and the central coordinator) and those that had to make strategic decisions about it (DG COMM, the EP and other high levels within the EC). In order to support the work of both type of actors, the evaluation included a cost-effectiveness analysis (CEA) and a collaborative workshop. The CEA served to compare the value-for-money provided by social media activities, in relation to

other means of communication. The workshop served to discuss findings, conclusions and potential improvements with the key end-users of the evaluation. The results from these exercises are presented in **Chapter 5 and Annex 8.**

The evaluation was launched on 23 July 2014 and consisted of three phases: inception, data collection, and a final reporting phase. The next sections present the different methods that were implemented over the course of the evaluation.

4.4 Data collection

This section describes the methods and tools utilised to gather evidence for the assessment of the SEO project.

4.4.1 Desk research

As explained before, the evaluation was based on a cumulative perspective. In order to avoid duplication with earlier work, the evaluators systematically reviewed and used existing data. This was done by an extensive desk study of documents provided by DG COMM at the outset of the evaluation. These are listed in **Annex 3**.

The initial review of the listed documentation began immediately after the contract signature. The secondary evidence and hard data served to counterbalance the views and opinions of the project's users and stakeholders, which were gathered through a questionnaire, interviews and online focus groups. The desk research also helped the evaluators to define the sample of Reps and EPIOs for the case studies, as well as to assess the project's intervention logic.

4.4.2 Stakeholder interviews

A total of **15 interviews** were held with key members of staff involved in the set up and management of the SEO project, as well as with EC and EP staff involved in central communication and information, other information and policy services within the EC, and staff working in political communication.

The interviews were held between July and September 2014 and were conducted either face-to-face or on the phone. The interviews allowed the exploration of possible factors that might have influenced the evolution and performance of the SEO project, as well as areas where specific improvements should be made to enhance the project's impact. The discussions included, but were not limited to, the following points:

- Results in terms of communication and capacity-building
- Factors facilitating/hindering objectives achievement
- Strengths and weaknesses of the delivery method
- Challenges and risks foreseen from the end of the project
- Level of complementarity with other communication activities by EU institutions

The list of stakeholders interviewed and the main findings from this exercise are presented in **Annex 4**.

4.4.3 Questionnaire to Heads of Reps and EPIOs

A questionnaire was sent to all the Heads of Rep and EPIO involved in the SEO project. This was intended to collect their opinions and perceptions with regards to the following issues:

- Project design and implementation
- Community Managers' work and added value
- Communication and capacity building impacts
- Inter-institutional cooperation at local level

- Cost effectiveness of the project versus other communication activities
- Need for a local, institutional communication on social media

A total of **34 questionnaires** were returned to the evaluators (60% response rate). The analysis of the responses to the questionnaire is presented in **Annex 5.**

4.4.4 Case studies of Reps and EPIOs

Within this evaluation, the case studies served to identify the main explanations of why the SEO project was more successful in some settings, and less successful in others. As mentioned before, the case studies had an explanatory purpose, and thus, they helped to analyse how the project's activities, when interacting with contextual factors, produced different outcomes in different settings. By identifying a number of success factors, this exercise was intended to stimulate learning and development across the Reps and EPIOs.

The approach agreed with DG COMM to implement the case studies was to select a sample of **14 Reps and EPIOs** that had demonstrated different levels of change in their social media performance since they joined the project started. These were namely:

- Prague EPIO (Czech Republic)
- Budapest EPIO (Hungary)
- Paris EPIO (France)
- Sofia Rep (Bulgaria)
- Luxembourg Rep (Lux)
- Helsinki Rep (Finland)
- Rome Rep (Italy)

- Bratislava EPIO (Slovakia)
- Vilnius EPIO (Lithuania)
- Riga EPIO (Latvia)
- London EPIO (United Kingdom)
- Paris Rep (France)
- Lisbon Rep (Portugal)
- Zagreb Rep (Croatia)

The development of the case studies included the implementation of the following research methods:

- **Desk research**: Aimed at examining existing knowledge about the performance delivered by the different Reps and EPIOs. The key sources for the desk research were the monthly country reports, the project's final reports, and the results of the surveys with CMs and LMs.

- **Checklist of potential explanations**: A list of potential explanations of performance was sent to the CM and LM from each of the Reps and EPIOs selected. They were asked to express their level of agreement with the different explanations and send it back to the evaluators.

- **In-depth interviews**: Telephone interviews with the CM and the LM were conducted. The interviews provided an opportunity to analyse the performance of the different Reps and EPIOs and discuss the potential explanations presented in the checklist.

The findings from the case studies are presented in **Annex 6**.

4.4.5 Online focus groups with users

To collect information at the user level, the evaluators conducted **four online focus groups** in English, German, French and Polish with users of some of the Facebook and Twitter accounts supported by the SEO project.

The online discussions took place between 23 and 26 September 2014. A total of 24 users participated in the groups. The recruitment of participants was done via the Facebook and Twitter accounts of the Reps and EPIOs in the countries that spoke the mentioned languages (i.e. United Kingdom, Ireland, Austria, Germany, Luxembourg, Belgium, France, and Poland).

The findings from the online focus groups are presented in **Annex 7.**

4.4.6 Cost-effectiveness analysis

We have evaluated the cost-effectiveness of the SEO project. As agreed with DG COMM during the inception phase, this analysis considered the following questions:

- Have the objectives been achieved at a reasonable cost i.e. does the project represent value-for-money?

- Compared to other possibilities, how efficient was the implementation method i.e. providing local Reps and EPIOs with centrally coordinated intra-muros assistance?

- Could the same results have been achieved with less funding?

- Should paid post promotion be considered as a way to reach a larger public?

- Could the cost-effectiveness have been increased by a decentralised procurement of the Community Managers, as opposed to a centralised one?

When answering the above questions, we have drawn on a wide range of data collection methods, described elsewhere in this report, namely: desk research, case studies, stakeholder interviews, online focus groups and a questionnaire to the Heads of Rep and EPIO.

The cost-effectiveness analysis is based on qualitative, as well as quantitative data, but it provides overall assessments, rather than specific calculations. As described in Chapter 5, we have not benchmarked the project against comparable initiatives. It should also be mentioned that the respondents have been involved only to a small extent in the budget design and that the financial details are relatively unknown across our sample of interviewees. In turn, this has made it difficult to: a) systematically analyse the costs of the SEO project in relation to other communication efforts, currently implemented by the EU institutions (as suggested in the inception report) and b) to adequately estimate the potential gains of a decentralised procurement-approach in relation to a centralised one.

The findings from the cost-effectiveness analysis are presented in **Section 5.5.**

4.4.7 Workshop with internal stakeholders

Prior to the development of the Draft Final Report, the evaluation team and the DG COMM team participated in a workshop to discuss and think about **future options for social media in the Reps**. The workshop was held on 23 October at the Commission premises in Brussels and involved six members of EC staff.

Participants were given an indication of the areas for discussion prior to the 2 hour discussion, and were asked to come ready to discuss. This was intended to allow a more fruitful level of participation.

Table 2: Workshop participants

Participant name	Role / function
Ludolf van Hasselt	Acting Director, Directorate B, Representations
Gwenn Straszburger	Head of Sector 'Citizens', DG COMM
Ladi Pohlen	Project coordinator for Representations, DG COMM
Dana Manescu	Head of Social media, DG COMM
Agata Stasiak	Communication officer, DG RTD
Anna Mattias	Intern, DG COMM
Melanie Kitchener Steffen Ovdahl	External evaluation team (Coffey)

Nicolas de Gennes	External social media expert

The purpose of the workshop was to engage in forward-looking discussions on how the project can be sustained and developed in the Reps after January 2015, when the current funding ends. It was understood that a proposal had been made by the EP for funding of 1 MEURO to be voted in the 2015 EU budget. This represents 50% of the project's current annual operating costs, to be spread over all Reps and EPIOs over a two-year period (2015 – 2016). Given the likely cut in funding, the main thrust of the workshop was to consider if and how it would be possible to prioritise aspects of the current approach, so as to retain the most important elements. Whilst Reps would continue to take responsibility for their own approaches to social media, the premise put forward by the evaluation team, was that DG COMM should provide a steer to guide choices with regards to maximising social media impacts at local level.

At a more detailed level, the workshop was structured around the following options, related to if and how to:

- Prioritise by Rep / EPIO
- Prioritise by channel
- Prioritise by target groups
- Prioritise paid post promotion
- Social media ambitions for 2016

The outcomes of the workshop with stakeholders are presented in **Annex 8.**

5 Evaluation results

This section presents the results of the evaluation of the Share Europe Online Pilot Project based on the evaluation questions listed in the Terms of Reference. The results are provided on a thematic / topical basis with a view to reducing overlap between areas, as follows:

1. Communication impact
2. Capacity building
3. Inter-institutional cooperation
4. Explanatory factors
5. Cost effectiveness
6. Future of the SEO project

The evidence for key findings and conclusions presented is drawn from the different evaluation sources explored during this assessment. Key findings were plotted within the Evaluation Questions Matrix (EQM), the analytical framework that was developed during the inception phase of the project, which was used as a key tool to support analysis. The EQM can be found in **Annex 2**.

5.1 Communication impact

5.1.1 Meeting objectives

This section provides an assessment of the extent to which each of the project's objectives has been met, namely:

- Improve how the EC and EP engage with citizens on social media.

- Address the gap in institutional communication on social media in local languages.

- Identify shortcomings in the way the institutions communicate on social media and suggestions for sustainable improvement.

Improve how the EC and EP engage with citizens on social media by increasing online presence at local level, making communication more: interactive, coordinated, targeted and adapted to local concerns/ national social media landscapes.

When considering if and how Share Europe Online project has helped to improve the way that the EC and the EP engage with citizens, the key communication parameters considered relate to format, reach and content.

With regards to format, the EC and EP maintain a wide range of social media pages and engage on numerous networks, both at the central institution level and for example in relation to specific policy areas of direct relevance to a wide array of stakeholders, as well as to high-profile individuals such as MEPs and Commissioners. However, evidence from interviews with the central EC and EP teams confirms that for the most part it is not possible to tailor central communication to national audiences, for example those outside the group of individuals who work directly or indirectly with the EU institutions. Messages tend to be channelled mainly in English and not in all 24 official EU languages. Furthermore these pages tends to highlight central communication priorities, including a focus (on Facebook) on European and International Days, EU initiatives of wide relevance for example, the EU budget,

awards, funding and political developments (in particular on Twitter). The central pages may occasionally spot light situations at national level, but cannot provide a national focus.

With their broad thematic focus and more-or-less exclusive use of English the central pages are most likely to reach individuals with some awareness and understanding of the EU institutions. From interviews with central staff, as well as Line Managers and Community Managers in the Reps and EPIOs it seems clear that there is a consensus view that Share Europe has allowed the institutions to improve the way that they engage with citizens, because it has enhanced their capacity to tailor messages to national audiences. We know from communication theory that communication works best by: '*defining audiences and encoding messages so that they appeal to the target*.[11]' Messaging in national languages can be considered to be a basic first step in engaging with audiences at a national level. Going to where the people are is a valid if not obvious communication strategy[12]. The evidence suggests that the possible alternative approach of managing national language accounts from Brussels would not work because the central teams would find it difficult to assess the national mood.

With regards to reaching citizen target groups, the SEO project increased EC and EP online presence at national level. The aggregated audience for all Facebook and Twitter accounts with direct involvement of a CM (112) increased 144% from a pre-project baseline of circa 251,000 followers (January and November 2013, depending on the country) to 612,000 (June 2014). The increase in the aggregated audience is greater when the data is disaggregated by type of account and Rep and EPIO, as highlighted by the table below. This shows that the impact of the project (in terms of increase in the number of followers) was greater for the EPIOs, and for the Twitter accounts. About the latter, it should be noted that, in absolute numbers, larger communities were created over Facebook though.

Table 3: Increase in the aggregated audience of Reps and EPIOs Facebook and Twitter accounts during the project

Account	Reps	EPIOs[13]
Twitter followers (Jan/Nov 2013)	46,375	12,246
Twitter followers (June 2014)	122,978	57,954
% Increase from baseline	165%	373%
Facebook followers (Jan/Nov 2013)	105,289	86,874
Facebook followers (June 2014)	195,533	235,428
% Increase from baseline	86%	171%

The assessment by the external contractor (ESN) suggests that SEO project helped the Reps and EPIOs to develop more interactive and appealing social media communication activity. ESN evidences this feedback by pointing to the strong rise in engagement and applause rates on Facebook. It is noted that conversation rates remained relatively low particularly on Twitter, with the exception of a small group of

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[11] Kotler and Keller (2006)
[12] Garvin (2008)
[13] The results reflected the EPIOs' significant focus on promotion of the European Parliament elections campaign, including through on-line advertising.

accounts. This outcome to some extent reflects the different nature of Twitter and Facebook. The EP elections provided a specific opportunity to engage with European citizens at local and national level and the spikes in activity and reports from CM and LM confirmed that this was used to help to increase engagement, conversation, awareness-building and outreach. As highlighted in ESN's Final Report from Phase 4: "*For the first time, Share Europe Online gave the EU institutions a solid platform for local online communication in each Member State…attractive visual communication, leveraging the influence of celebrities and experts supported by Facebook promotion, reached many communities previously untouched by EU communication*".

There are numerous examples of activities which engage citizens including quizzes and debates. However, according to ESN reports on KPI performance, there were **significant differences between the level of engagement / interactivity**: "*…25% of the 133 social media accounts[14] – the first quartile - were responsible for 77% of total reach. In comparison, the fourth quartile was responsible for only 1% of reach.*"

The objective of improving the way that the EC and EP interact with target groups is broad and not sufficiently specific to allow a judgement as to whether this objective has been reached in all aspects. This perhaps reflects a reality, where it is difficult to define a relevant performance target for relevant and achievable levels of interaction beyond activity, conversation, etc., as well as the challenge of how to assign meaning and significance to improvements made using these indicators. However, another way of assessing whether improvements have been made relates to the experiences of those involved in the project and, importantly those targeted by the project.

The initial mapping exercise carried out by ESN highlighted that most of the social media activities carried out by the Reps and EPIOs where this occurred prior to the set-up of the project focussed almost exclusively on the top-down publication in local languages of Brussels-produced content. In this evaluation, it has been possible to establish that there is consensus among Heads of Rep and EPIO who replied to the evaluation questionnaire that the SEO project allowed the institutions to produce more targeted online content/actions. The support provided by CMs was thought as having enhanced the scope of Rep and EPIO communication activities, in making them more interactive and in connecting with new audiences. This feedback is also supported by evidence from the case study, based on 14 Reps and EPIOs, which suggested that the project had helped them to make communication messages more relevant and targeted. The case study interviews suggest that typically Rep and EPIO posting comprise less than 50% of central messages.

Feedback from target audiences, who participated in a series of evaluation Focus Groups, indicated that the EU institutions desire to interact with people at local level is appreciated as an opportunity for more transparency. There were some indications that the Focus Group participants had noticed an improvement in activity, which suggests a more engaged approach. Aspects cited were: an increase in 'fun stories', more and better info-graphics and more participation and dialogue. However, from this evidence, it can be ascertained that there are nonetheless **differences in approach and that some Reps and EPIOs may still find it difficult to veer from their more formal style of communication, which is less engaging**.

This links to questions with regards to targeting. It is noted that the initial mapping of the project focussed on the social media environment in each Member State, as well as the use of Social Media by public bodies. At a general level, it can be confirmed that by supporting the use of social media at national level, SEO helped to increase targeting of local groups, as greater efforts were made to 'localise messages', which

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[14] A total of 133 Facebook and Twitter accounts were monitored by the SEO project and 125 of these were managed/operated by the CMs

ESN reported to be the guiding philosophy of the project. At the same time, the general suggestion of a need for a more segmented approach seems to be a clear finding of the Focus Groups. The suggestion coming out of these groups was for messages to **differentiate between those for whom EU information was useful / relevant for their work and others for whom EU information served interest purposes**.

It was not possible to review each of the social media accounts in action during this evaluation. However, based on the review of the project's reports, as well as of a number of accounts examined to define the sample of Reps and EPIOs for the case studies, it is possible to say that, with a few exceptions, including the use of targeted accounts by the London EPIO, most Reps and EPIOs tended to communicate on a wide range of topics in a localised format. As such, **the focus has been on how to provide attractive content, rather than a more strategic focus on defined target groups** and a sample of topics of interest to this group. To date there has been limited structured focus on understanding target group needs. Whilst the initial mapping exercise served to prove the relevance and utility of supporting the EU institutions presence on social media as well as critical success factors to underpin this activity, there has been a lack of research into target needs. This may be understandable given the importance of serving critical needs in the first phases of the project, for example creating a shared acceptance of the importance of integrating social media within the communication activities of the Reps and EPIOs, which seems to have been achieved.

However, looking ahead the need for a more focussed approach is in-line with advice on how to improve communication activities. This means defining one or more specific target segments, carrying out research to understand the key concerns of this segment and tailoring messaging around these concerns is likely to yield higher levels of success: "***Understanding the public is the key communication challenge***[15]".

Conclusion

The SEO project has improved the way that the EC and the EP communicate with citizens on social media at national level. Feedback from focus groups suggests that over the timeframe of the project an increase in interaction has been perceived. However, with no specific indicator for improvement it is not possible to define the extent that this improvement is sufficient.

The initial mapping exercise did not map the interests / hot topics at national level per target group, and aside from targeting specific profiles, for example to increase participation to an event, the approach taken is not as strategic as it could be, for example with a view to enhancing awareness of the EU role with specific, defined target groups on key hot topic areas. This suggests that there is more scope to increase targeting and to evolve a more strategic and focussed approach.

Address the gap in institutional communication on social media in local languages and on locally developed platforms.

As highlighted above, the SEO project has helped to address the gap in institutional communication on social media in local languages. Those responsible for the central EC and EP accounts confirm that these mostly provide information in English. Heads of Reps who responded to the evaluation questionnaire highlighted that national linguistic needs were being better met, as a result of the project. A few Reps and EPIOs have also expanded their presence on locally developed platforms (e.g. Drauguem.lv in the case of the Latvian Rep and EPIO) or have diverged to other

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[15] Schrier B. (2008) Are you ready for Web 2.0?, Public CIO, 6.

platforms including You Tube, Instagram, Pinterest, and LinkedIn, depending on their popularity in the different countries and on the Reps and EPIOs' ambition and capacity (however, the general recommendation was not to overstretch resources).

The use of country-specific info-graphics during the EP elections and their contribution to increasing the visibility of messages also provide evidence of how the Reps and EPIOs were able to bridge the gap. Moreover, EC officials confirmed that the Europe Direct Information Centres (EDICs), who also communicate in national languages, benefited from the project too both directly (via training, presentations, and ad hoc support provided by the CMs) and indirectly (by the availability of content to share/adapt from the accounts of the Reps and EPIOs).

Bridging the gap has gone beyond language. Participants in the evaluation focus groups, highlighted that the Reps and EPIOs were also helping to bridge an information gap, by providing information that may otherwise be difficult to find, for example in the mainstream media. This was indicated as being particularly interesting because of reports of the perception that other available information on the European Union tends to be disorganised and difficult to navigate. Furthermore, the SEO project provided an opportunity for the EU institutions to be 'locally relevant', which was identified as one of the successful social media qualities required of public sector organisations that was found to be lacking from the central account perspective. Staff working in communication at the central level also shared the view that the Reps and EPIOs are simply better able to tailor central information to local audiences in a way that cannot be done from the central accounts. This reflects communication research that confirms that communication '…*efforts are most effective where audiences and communicators have similar areas of experience.*'[16]

Conclusion

The SEO project clearly addressed the gap in institutional communication on social media in local languages, given the focus of the EC and EP central accounts on providing information in English. The project supported the extension of EU institutional presence on Facebook and Twitter in all Member States, but did not necessary lead to a consistent focus on other locally developed platforms beyond Facebook and Twitter. There were, however, exceptions and some Reps and EPIOs used the project to also develop a presence on other platforms such as YouTube, Instagram, Pinterest, and LinkedIn.

Identify the shortcomings in the way the institutions communicate with citizens on social media and make suggestions for sustainable improvement.

The concept and implementation of SEO included an on-going learning element, which helped to ensure that shortcomings in ways of communicating were clearly articulated and shared amongst staff involved at central and national level. Share Europe provided two levels of support. Community Managers provided on-going support, as well as dedicated training sessions and ESN's Central Coordinator, plus support team, allowed a continuous monitoring and overview of the project throughout, which provided detailed feedback to specific Reps and EPIOs and the central institutions on the evolution of the SEO. The initial mapping exercise and the reports at the end of each of the four project phases of SEO all provided useful guidance with regards to how to continuously improve.

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[16] Kotler P. and Keller K. l. (2006) Marketing Management 12e, p539-565

For example in ESN's Final Report relating to Phase 4 of the project they identified a number of areas for improvement, as follows:

Table 5: Advice on how to address shortcomings

Area	Recommendation
Social media monitoring	Improve use of social media monitoring tools (e.g. Engagor) to help focus efforts where can achieve impact
Resources	Allocate more resources to social media (people/time/ tools)
Visual content	Enhance selection, production & dissemination of visual content
Innovation technologies	Continue innovating, testing & experimenting on social media platforms, technologies, strategies as user expectations / behaviours evolve
Outreach	Strengthen activities to reach influencers/multipliers. Be proactive find conversations / turn them into opportunities to reach/talk to new communities

Feedback via the case study interviews suggests that some recommendations and / or observations made centrally were not always perceived to be useful, because for example they did not seem to take into account the specificities of a particular national social media landscape or because best practice examples from one country could not necessarily be replicated elsewhere. Through the CM infrastructure, support was provided at source when it was required, this helped staff to understand and be shown what makes a good Tweet, how to develop engaging and attractive posts, how to respond to negative posts and questions, etc.

The picture of support and advice was not necessarily homogenous. From interviews, CMs had a learning curve with regards to best approaches to maintaining and expanding the reach of social media presence, as well as the fit with EU institutional profiles. Furthermore, the CM was not in all cases required to provide advice with regards to shortcomings, where Press Officers and other staff had already developed significant expertise themselves prior to the launch of the project.

From the evidence, making **suggestions for sustainable development seems to have been less well embedded** within the project. In August and September 2014, several CMs indicated that they were only just starting to consider ways to allow the Reps and EPIOs to continue without or with less support. The significant involvement of CMs in developing and maintaining the on-going social media presence for many Reps and EPIOs leads us to conclude that a certain dependency had been developed, which would be felt as a gap if and when the CM scheme came to an end. Yet the picture is mixed. From the interviews and evidence from a small number of Heads of Rep and EPIO, there are indications that plans were already in place to ensure continued maintenance and updating of a small number of accounts, whilst acknowledging that tight human resources would pose a significant threat.

However, it can be underlined here that the **SEO project's objective of making suggestions for sustainable improvement is to some extent difficult to achieve**. Firstly, sustainable improvements need to be underpinned by available human resources, which are outside the control of the project, but remain critical to maximise the strides made thus far. Secondly, the project highlights the complexity of communication on social media and of achieving desirable communication outputs and outcomes. How to develop and manage communication to achieve a particular effect is

not easy to teach, nor is it possible to guarantee outcomes. This relates in part to the fact that the sending and receipt of messages does not happen in a black box. Target groups that receive messages are influenced by a wide range of factors, which may result in messages simply passing them by unregistered, or being mis- or partially understood.

Furthermore, all interviewed as part of this evaluation highlighted the ever changing nature of social media and the challenges in keeping up with the new possibilities. Also suggested was the importance of a 'creative mind-set' able to conceive new and interesting ways to engage existing and new audiences. Throughout the project there were many examples of creative approaches to raise visibility, which can be exemplified by this visual which was tweeted by the Dutch Rep in May 2014 to encourage citizens to vote in the EP elections. Also, the Cypriot CM gave social media training to 16 young people, who drafted messages and developed videos to show the EU Youth Event 2014. Heads of Rep and EPIO placed a particular emphasis on the effectiveness of the CMs at enhancing and sometimes establishing from scratch the institution's presence on social media.
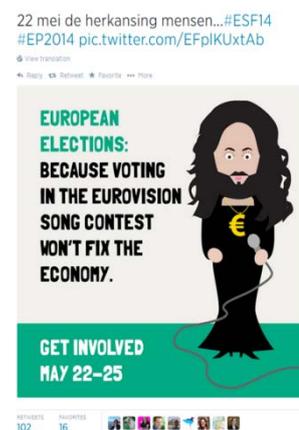
In short, there is no magic formula that can be neatly defined and described with a view to passing on 'the knowledge' to other staff to ensure sustainability. At best, it is possible to articulate guidelines and best practices, which can be applied in different contexts, which varying degrees of impact. Considered against this broad benchmark, it seems reasonable to ascertain that the SEO project has achieved the objective of identifying shortcomings and that some attempts have been made to make suggestions for sustainable development.

Taking into the account the content of reports provided, as part of the project's process, it can be identified that suggestions tend to be directed towards the Reps and EPIOs and, therefore, relate to day-to-day operations, rather than the overarching strategy in place. As a result, suggestions appear to be somewhat piecemeal and limited to the sphere of the CM or LM, rather than reassessing the fundamentals of the scheme. However, it seems likely that this would go beyond the scope of the project.

At a basic level, the picture that emerges clearly from this evaluation is that **unless additional resources are made available to support the on-going use of social media by the Reps and EPIOs, it will not be possible to maintain the advances made to date** and that these, given their intangible nature, will simply disappear. There is already evidence that unmanned pages will quickly become dormant[17]. There is a body of research on social media[18] which clearly confirms that the 'social element' is the most significant aspect, which users seek to explore. Findings from the focus group research point to the importance placed by users on receptive institutions that respond quickly to citizens' comments and / or inaccurate information in the media.

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[17] There was a steep fall in Facebook reach particularly among the EPIOs in June 2014, which was reported to be direct result of reduced posting frequency following the EP elections in May (Phase 4, Final Evaluation Report, p.12)
[18] Serrat O. (2010) Social Media and Public Sector, Knowledge Solutions, 83

Conclusion

The on-going monitoring and reporting process, combined with the coaching of existing staff made available through the SEO project have helped both the EP and the EC to address their social media short-comings at local level. In some instances, the impact of this support has been felt to a lesser extent, depending on the starting point of the Rep or EPIO. The performance indicator data clearly show the added value and impact of CMs within this project. However, the heavy involvement of Community Managers in keeping Reps and EPIOs social media profiles up-to-date has created a dependency on external support. It appears that plans with regards to how to address the future sustainability of social media interaction are to be added towards the end of the project rather than being part of the on-going method.

However, it is difficult to capture the lasting benefits of the project, partly due to the intangible nature of any expertise developed and because visibility generation requires continuously evolving efforts. There is no one-size fits all roll-out type approach that can be applied.

It is concluded that the project seems to have done well at generating a shared awareness of its evolution and how to address day-to-day short comings, but it has been less able to generate insights to guarantee its sustainability. This goal is perhaps impossible to achieve without certainty of available human resources.

5.1.2 Communication performance

This section considers the following aspects:

- Meeting target group needs

- Messaging: volume, timeliness and quality of messages

- Local communication of central messages

- Levels of awareness and visibility

Meeting target group needs

Communication is usually considered to have the best chances of being effective by selecting specific target groups, defining their key interests and characteristics and then tailoring messages to better resonate with these groups. Typically the Rep communication is focussed on three categories of target groups: government, multipliers and citizens. However, evidence from Heads of Rep questionnaire suggests that social media are not used to target government officials and are considered to be appropriate for communication with multipliers and citizens. Facebook was suggested by some to be particularly suitable for reaching young people.

Evidence from the focus groups suggests that in fact **the SEO project has not really been targeting specific groups.** The general approach has been to post information to reach those who will be interested and, although not possible to prove, it seems likely that this audience can be considered to already be somewhat switched on to the EU. Focus group feedback suggests that **the project has contributed to meeting the needs of this group, which is interested in EU matters, has a view or position about the EU and is comprised of active users of social media**. These individuals appreciate the more human and informal approach now provided in their language and in relation to their country. They also appreciate receiving information that they might not otherwise be able to source from the main stream media. These users are interested in the EU, but they find **other online sources of EU information confusing** and difficult to navigate.

There are exceptions to this approach. For example, the London and Dublin EPIOs have accounts on specific topics, for example, education. However, feedback from the English, French, German and Polish language focus groups suggests that there is a need to segment messages between professional and laypersons information. This confirms a lack of targeting. There has, of course been some targeting, for example posting messages with a specific audience in mind and **work around the EP elections showed what can be achieved when a specific goal and audience has been identified**. However, we suggest that targeting would in this context mean focussing on a defined group and tailoring all activities to engage with and penetrate this group.

To some extent not taking a decision to focus on a specific target group can be considered to relate to the pilot nature of the project and a need to get established and learn how to interact in the initial stages. The **performance indicators set stimulate a focus on increasing reach rather than targeted reach**. Also, whilst some Reps and EPIOs have attempted to gather opinions, including by conducting surveys or quizzes, there is little in-depth evidence with regards to what interests target groups in each country. Evidence is required to facilitate choices on where to focus. The mapping exercise provided a rationale for the use of social media and highlighted successful accounts in each country. It stopped short at defining key themes in each country and confirming the key influencers and opinion formers and types of citizens are interested in these themes.

Defining specific target audiences and tailoring messages / materials to suit these audiences is good practice in effective communication. Target audiences will be most receptive to messages on issues which concern them. Therefore, one of the best ways to select target audiences is to first select the theme / issue of concern and then to research the individuals who are most concerned by this theme, for example key influencers, advocates and representatives, specific segments of the population that have the most critical experience of the issue, etc.

> As highlighted by our social media experts, there are several trends in social media communication that the Reps and EPIOs would do well to take on board, as follows:
>
> - Visuals are more powerful than words: there is a need to develop and share more specifically designed audio-visual content
>
> - If the Reps and EPIOs want immediate reaction, then short formats make sense e.g. text (Twitter) or video (Vine)
>
> - If more in-depth content is required, then Facebook and YouTube work best
>
> - There is an increase in social media channels that allow discussion and perspective for a voluntary limited amount of time, e.g. Snapchat or combined blogging and social networking such as Tumblr.[19]

Messaging: volume, timeliness and quality

ESN's Phase 4 Final Evaluation Report (August 2014) reported that there were many examples of content that had generated a positive response from followers. Over the course of the project, there was **a marked increase in the creation and use of visual conten**t by all Reps and EPIOs, including the use of info-graphics and info-

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[19] Social media is here to stay and the landscape of new platforms is constantly evolving.

charts. Evidence from the focus groups suggests that users noticed an increase in social media activity over the last year and they felt that the Reps and EPIOs had a proactive attitude to disseminating and rebutting information. The provision of photos of what EU representatives were doing and background information was also welcomed.

From the case study interviews, it was understood that Reps and EPIOs **used their own initiative to decide upon the extent that it was appropriate to respond to questions and comments**. This approach seems to be realistic based on the difficulties of imposing a top-down approach. However, in each case **escalation procedures were in place** with regards to how to handle particularly tricky or politically sensitive issues and both CMs and LMs seemed to be aware of how this should work.

Overall feedback from the focus groups suggests that the direct relationship offered by the Reps and EPIOs was appreciated and felt appropriate, even if they had suggestions for possible improvements, including providing links to further information[20], retaining an informal tone and not resorting to relaying central information. Some users complained that the accounts that they followed tended to use somewhat **'boring profiles' that sometimes provided too many facts**.

With regards to timeliness, it was suggested that the Reps and EPIOs were not always on-time when uploading information in comparison to the traditional media. This can be the case particularly for sensitive topics that need to be consulted / validated internally and/or with the central EC/EP teams before being disseminated on social media. However, the perceived delay can also be questioned from the fact that social media activity is actually more regular than other information sources and that many Reps and EPIOs schedule the timing of their posts to coincide with the peaks in their audience's activity.

Local communication of central messages

Localisation was reported to be the guiding ethos for the SEO project, according to ESN's Final Evaluation Report: *"Many look for the local angle first before considering posting generic messages."* This assertion was confirmed in the interviews with Community and Line Managers, who stated that efforts were made not just to find the local relevance of central messages, but also to put a preference on the generation of their own messages. ESN reported on the positive reception of info-graphics on EC country-specific recommendations, which were disseminated by more than half of the Reps and provided a good example of how central information could be tailored and presented in an appealing way. Whilst certain central elements needed to be prioritised, the Reps and EPIOs were able to make to decisions with regards to what to post.

There needs to be a clearer central steer with regards to whether the social media capacity should be considered as an opportunity to extend the reach of institutional messages or whether the goal is to engage with specific target groups (or both), which means that there has been a high level of discretion for the CMs and LMs. However, ESN confirms[21] that **limited resources / lack of time still make it more difficult for some to localise** and as a result some Reps and EPIOs may resort to copy-pasting central content.

Levels of awareness and visibility

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[20] However, it is possible that posting links, unless in a comment, can have a negative impact on reach due to the EdgeRank Algorithm.
[21] Phase 4 Final Evaluation Report, page 17.

The SEO project has contributed to a significant increase in awareness and visibility of the Reps and EPIOs at national level. The global theoretical monthly reach of their social media activity peaked at **67.5 million in May 2014** during the EP elections[22]. The aggregate number of followers of all Facebook and Twitter accounts with direct involvement of a CM (112) rose to 612,000, resulting in an increase of circa 144% since the start of the project (January and November 2013, depending on the country).

As highlighted above, the Reps and EPIOs seem to have been particularly successful at reaching people who are already interested in the EU, have an opinion about it and are active on social media. Evidence from the case studies and mapping reports suggests that social media take-up varies in different EU Member States. Some CMs highlighted that in some cases extensive social media use is still in its infancy for certain groups. There is no real evidence available to this evaluation to confirm whether the Reps and EPIOS are managing to extend their reach to new audiences.

Despite the considerably high percentage increase in the aggregated number of followers and reach[23] since the start of the project, feedback via the case study interviews highlighted that how to continue to extend the Reps and EPIOs' visibility is not straight forward. Social media communication tends to be most effective when it resonates with target groups, including when target groups have a high level of involvement with the messages communicated. Public sector audiences tend to have extreme high or low levels of involvement in public sector communication[24]. The clear example of this working relates to the growth in followers in relation to the EP elections, where Reps and EPIOs were able to appeal directly to citizens who were all concerned by the voting process and outcome. This highlights the **importance of topics / messages, which make people feel involved / affected**.

Once a certain threshold of followers has been reached on a corporate account, for example 10,000, it seems that Reps/EPIOs published content on Facebook is at risk of being invisible to its audiences. This can be explained by the fact that since 2012, Facebook has been restricting organic reach[25] of content published from brand pages more and more.[26] Another important factor is that there is a considerable number of content providers (i.e. family and friends, as well as businesses) competing for their audiences' attention, and thus it is becoming harder for any story to gain exposure in social media platforms. Both the central and local levels consider that **paid post promotion** is critical to underpin the future visibility of the Reps and EPIOs social media content. However, the social media experts engaged in this evaluation highlighted that there are a number of aspects to take into account when considering an increased use of paid post promotion.

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[22] Phase 4 Final Evaluation Report, page 3.

[23] Phase 4 Final Evaluation Report, page 11.

[24] Rothschild M. L, (1979) „Marketing in Communications in Non-Business Situations or why it is so hard to sell Brotherhood like Soap", Journal of Marketing, 43 (Spring): 11 – 20.

[25] Organic reach refers to the total number of unique users who saw a person/organisation's published content for free; whereas paid reach is the total number of unique users who saw the published content as a result of advertising.

[26] http://social.ogilvy.com/facebook-zero-considering-life-after-the-demise-of-organic-reach/

Table 6: Earned versus paid media

Media	Description	Considerations
Paid	When you pay to have something distributed for you. This includes advertisements, paying for media coverage, rewarding fans or followers who share your content with monetary thank-yous, or distributing press releases on paid sites, for example.	• Messages can be controlled, but note decline in consumer attitudes to ads • Maybe a good way of driving awareness to new audiences, but can create artificial peaks: if there is no good / engaging content behind this[27].
Earned	When someone distributes your content on your behalf, it's considered to be "earned" media. This includes social sharing, using social bookmarking sites like Reddit, re-blogging, as well as being featured in publications (without having to pay for the coverage).	• Earned media is considered more valuable because there is some level of audience involvement in sharing • Most big viral campaigns have resulted from social sharing, but to facilitate this, there is still a need of big efforts

Source: adapted from rewardstream.com

Paid promotion can help with targeting and visibility creation, for example, in relation to specific events, and to target a specific group such as young people. It is **less suited to targeting influencers** because the goal here should be to develop long-term relationships. There is evidence from other EC communication activities that paid promotion can lead to **an artificial peak in applause/engagement which is not sustainable**. By purchasing likes or followers, the promotion creates a community that is non-existent in terms of supporting and spreading messages and providing feedback, which is the essence of social media.

Several Reps and EPIOs showed how **paid promotion can significantly increase applause/engagement**[28]. However, other Reps and EPIOs demonstrated that it was also possible to make significant impacts during the elections without recourse to paid promotion. The potential of a strategic approach with **clear objectives, a good understanding of the audience and their consumption habits and a focus on topics of high interest** to them should not be underestimated. This is what characterises all effective communication and we suggest is lacking from the current approach.

This raises the question as to whether there are structural reasons relating to roles and responsibilities, for example, within the European Commission, which make it **difficult for the Reps to focus on specific themes** Many policy DGs communicate with their stakeholders using social media. DG Communication on the other hand focuses on communicating the Commission's key priorities, not sectorial stakeholder content. The Reps represent the whole institution and must communicate the Commission's political priorities. As a political organisation, the typical approach to new initiatives is that they are pushed from the top down. This means taking a more thematic approach. In this context, the new Commission's ten priorities[29] announced

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[27] A common error is the setting up of accounts on social media platforms that are not linked back to a website.

[28] The Berlin and Prague Reps achieved 'extraordinary applause rates in May 2014 of 115 and 99, where the average rate across all accounts had been 9.04' (Phase 4 Final Evaluation Report, ESN)

[29] http://ec.europa.eu/priorities/docs/pg_en.pdf#page=1

by European Commission President Jean-Claude Juncker , may provide an opportunity to the Reps (and to all EC communication services in general) to focus on specific themes and have a more targeted communication.

Ultimately the decision on whether or not to use paid promotion needs to be aligned with the goals set for the exercise. If the goal is to occasionally make the Reps and EPIOs briefly visible to specific target groups to meet a specific goal, then this could make sense on a case-by-case basis. ESN recommend using paid promotion to break out of the 'vicious cycle' of low visibility. In this later case, the effects of the promotion will quickly fade and it will be important to have a planned approach to maintain and pull in any new followers.

It is **not recommended to try to use paid promotion to build a community**, which needs to be structured and closely followed. The simple task of being available and responsive is most valuable and cost effective. **However for a campaign type approach a mixture of earned and paid media can be considered to be the norm** depending on the goals of the exercise. This is in-line with the global communication trend typically followed by national and international public and private sector-type organisations.. It is not meaningful to make suggestions for how much of a given budget should be allocated to paid promotion because there is no one size fits all approach: decisions on if and when to spend must be made on the basis of the goals of the exercise.

"*For marketers today, there's no firm line in the sand where paid media ends and earned media takes over… We stand behind that idea that both paid and earned media are a crucial part of any team's marketing strategy. Find what mix of earned and paid media works for you by focusing on your campaign's goals*".[30]

Conclusion

The project made significant strides in helping the Reps and EPIOs to increase their reach and visibility, particularly among audiences already somewhat engaged in thinking about the EU. However, with some exceptions, there has been limited targeting of specific groups to date. Going forward without deciding on a specific focus and setting objectives to be achieved beyond the volume of reach and engagement, means that the Reps and EPIOs will find it difficult to enhance their impact. Objectives need to be aligned with a more clearly defined goal for Rep and EPIO social media communication at local level and subsequent decisions on a (or a small number of) focal topic/s (citizens' concerns). With clear goals and objectives, it will be easier to make decisions on content.

Occasional paid promotion makes sense for specific planned initiatives that are likely to be of interest / value to wider audiences. Paid promotion should complement a well-defined strategic focus and on-going social media account management, which is responsive and proactive in its outreach.

5.1.3 Measuring social media activity and performance

The analysis of the measurement of social media activity carried out within the project needs to be framed with regards to the goals of the project. The SEO project was a pilot project; a trial. First, it was intended to ensure that all Reps and EPIOs had established a social media presence on the most popular platforms (e.g. Facebook and Twitter)[31]. It was then necessary to gather data to demonstrate the evolution of the

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[30] http://rewardstream.com/paid-vs-earned-media/
[31] The Reps and EPIOs took the decision on which platforms to be present, taking into account the social media landscape in the country.

project and its outputs / outcomes, to allow an assessment of whether the Reps and EPIOs were able to add value to their communication activities with social media.

This assessment considers:

- The SEO project's performance indicators
- Monitoring and reporting on the SEO project
- Possible alternatives / areas for consideration

Performance indicators

The evolution of social media use was extensively monitored through the measurement of five specific performance indicators, highlighted below.

Table 7: Performance measurement indicators

Performance indicator	Explanation
Activity	The sum of an account's original posts and its replies to users.
Conversation rate	The ratio between the number of replies to users posted by an account and the number of its original posts.
Applause rate	The average number of 'appreciation actions' per original post by the monitored accounts (Likes on Facebook, Re-tweets on Twitter)
Engagement rate	The average number of replies, comments and mentions by other users in reaction to each original post by the monitored accounts.
Followers	The aggregate number of followers across all accounts

The focus to date has been firmly placed on measuring the volume of activities across the social media accounts. This approach to monitoring and measurement can be considered to be fully in-line with standard measurement practices: measuring the measurable. Furthermore, we suggest that this approach also reflects the pilot-stage of development of the project, allowing managers to clearly see the evolution of the different accounts. It is also important to take account that, as with all communication activities, it is in any case difficult to show the direct cost / benefit of social media.[32]

The evidence suggests that the project has managed to increase visibility of the Reps and EPIOs. The project has helped the Reps and EPIOs to raise awareness both of their own activities, including specific events and the activities of the central institutions such as the EP elections. This was confirmed by the SEO Overview Report for May 2014, which highlighted the spike in performance across all indicators, demonstrating the impact of communicating on high relevance topics and a '*number of well-planned, strategic outreach actions*.'

However, the current metrics do not allow an overall appreciation of the significance of the Reps and EPIOs' social media activity. Whilst this is not necessarily easy to ascertain, we suggest that there are two options, which could be considered:

- Analysis of content / sentiment and
- Analysis of feedback on perceptions.

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[32] Skeels M.M. and Grundin J. (2009) When Social Networks Cross Boundaries: A Case Study of Workplace Use of Facebook and LinkedIn, Proceedings of the ACM 2009 international conference [on-line]

Although CM and LM see the impact of specific posts with regards to the positive, neutral and negative responses of users, there is no structured analysis of the content of social media interactions. It is understood that Engagor can facilitate some limited sentiment analysis and it should be explored to what extent this could fulfil the need for more structured qualitative insights. It is suggested that this could be particularly effective if used in a targeted way, for example in combination with paid post promotion to specific target groups.

Another alternative for gathering qualitative feedback could be regular structured data gathering on the opinions of users of social media accounts. This could for example be done as an annual exercise in the form of on-line focus groups or surveys. The need to better understand the significance of social media activity was raised both by EC staff during the familiarisation interviews and by the social media experts engaged in the evaluation.

Reporting

Activity across the different Reps and EPIOs has been measured and specific monthly country reports prepared, as well as a project monthly report prepared by the central coordinator. The monitoring of statistics allowed Reps and EPIOs to view peaks in their visibility, for example in relation to specific efforts to post on 'hot topics', and monitor progress through time. In addition, attempts were made to highlight good practices and make recommendations for improvement.

Feedback from the questionnaire with Heads of Rep and EPIO and the case study interviews suggests **a variable level of appreciation of the monthly reports** by the Reps and EPIOs. Whilst some appreciated the opportunity to compare their performance to the performance of other Reps and EPIOs, many questioned the validity of comparisons due to differences in the social media landscape. It was also reported that the production of reports was too time-consuming for the Reps and EPIOs and provided little return on investment. There was also some suggestion that good practices were not sufficiently practical on how to make improvements. Others questioned the usefulness of centrally provided country reports, when they were able to produce data themselves, for example from Engagor.

All Reps and EPIOs have access to Engagor, which is the social media management platform already in use in the EC and EP. Feedback from case study interviews confirms that Engagor has a high level of functionality, which can be used to monitor social media and develop queries to generate additional insights, for example on trending topics. However, Engagor is not very intuitive. For some staff (in particular, occasional users), Engagor has proven to be too sophisticated and complicated. This seems to be reflected by the low level of use of Engagor throughout the project, as reported by ESN. Also ESN's survey suggests that at the end of phase 4 of the project only 2% of individuals considered themselves to be fully competent users and just over half (51%) reported that they were able to work independently. However, the Final Report of Phase 4 (August 2014) suggests that greater emphasis is now being placed on training staff in the use of Engagor.

It is essential that the Reps and EPIOs have access to a social media management platform to allow them to monitor their own activity and the social media landscape, with a view to facilitating more informed and rapid communication.

Possible alternatives / areas for consideration

Looking to the next stages of the project, when resources, if they are allocated, will become even scarcer, question marks should be raised about the need for such

extensive monitoring and reporting. Reps and EPIOs are able to monitor their own performance and it seems reasonable to integrate social media reporting within reports on Rep or EPIO overall communication performance. The rationale for maintaining the current system could include a need to ensure a standardised approach to monitoring to facilitate central level management decisions. However, with the need to use social media now clearly established, the emphasis on reporting and gathering comparable statistics could be reduced. This could free up scarce resources to allow them to focus on the job of maintaining social media activity.

Over the longer term, it is suggested that the Reps and EPIOs should aim to set a small number of qualitative indicators, for example in relation to perceptions of the EU. However, the setting of qualitative indicators to provide meaning on the significance of social media activity requires decisions to be made with regards to the overarching goals of the EC and the EP in trying to reach out and engage with people. Like all communication activities, social media activities need to be guided by a longer term vision and specific and tangible objectives, which are aligned within a wider communication programme. Increasing the number of followers or likes, whilst providing an indication of raised awareness, does not necessarily translate into an improved understanding or appreciation of the institutions.

Conclusion

The approach to monitoring and reporting seems to have fitted the need for management information on the roll out of a pilot project Systematic monitoring and reporting has provided DG COMM management with a detailed and valuable track record on the evolution of the SEO project. DG COMM has been able to share this data with all of the Reps and EPIOs, which has allowed a common overview amongst all those involved in the project. There is now a shared understanding that social media can help to increase the visibility of Rep and EPIO activities.

However, given the likely low levels of additional financial support for the SEO project, certainly in the next two years, it will be necessary to prioritise activities. The level of value placed on comparative data by the Reps and EPIOs is variable. In some cases, the time taken to generate reports was considered to be too high in relation to the added value of comparative data. This issue was identified in the Reps and EPIOs that can be considered to be front runners. Whilst Reps and EPIOs will need to continue to monitor their own performance, there is an argument for focussing remaining resources on using social media rather than on reporting for comparative purposes and / or providing comparative data at less frequent intervals.

The key performance indicators set can be considered to be relatively standard for the measurement of volume of activity. Consideration should be given to defining the approach to measuring the qualitative value of the activity for the Reps and EPIOs. Qualitative indicators need to be linked to overarching objectives and strategy. Given variations in the performance of different Reps and EPIOs, it maybe that the vision and general objectives need to be set at central level, whereas SMART objectives need to be set at Rep and EPIO level with a view to supporting other Rep and EPIO communication goals.

The Reps and EPIOs need to have an effective management and SM analytics tool. Engagor has been the tool of choice, which has been used by all Reps and EPIOs. However, Engagor is not intuitive, which has resulted in its low level of use throughout the project and the need for additional training. In addition to these issues, our experts confirm that Engagor does not provide actionable qualitative data on local conversations / topics of political interest, which we consider to be critical to the success of SM action. This suggests a need to explore other alternative / complementary tools that are more user-friendly and allow the Reps and EPIOs to focus their scarce time on engaging on SM rather than on how to work with the analytical tool.

5.2 Capacity building

5.2.1 Strengths and weaknesses of the delivery method and process

The majority of the Reps/EPIOs staff engaged in the evaluation via interviews or questionnaires were of the view that **the direct insertion of an external social media expert with specialist skills could be credited with the success of the project at local level**. For them, the CMs provided 'unique expertise' and did a valuable effort to create mind-sets and working practices needed to exploit social media effectively. In addition to this, they emphasised that, in the absence of a dedicated CM, they would not have been able to implement the project themselves or neither achieve the same level of social media presence mainly due to a lack of human and financial resources.

The evidence collected shows that the SEO project made other valuable resources and support available to Reps and EPIOs in 28 MS. This includes:

- **Enhanced Facebook and Twitter accounts with a more humane profile, localised content, and appealing visual content**. This shows a significant change on the conclusions of the mapping exercise conducted in phase 1 of the project, which revealed that the Reps/EPIOs existing social media accounts were highly institutional and almost exclusively limited to a 'top-down' publication, in local languages, of content created in Brussels.

- **Structured and ad hoc one-to-one training/coaching sessions resulting in an increase of the number of staff capable of engaging in social media activity**. According to what CMs and LMs reported in the questionnaire on capacity building[33], circa 230 staff across all Reps and EPIOs received some training (an average of 7 staff per Rep / EPIO). Circa 42% of these received at least 8 hours of training and/or hands on experience on social media. This resulted in circa 82 people actively involved in social media across all Reps and EPIOs (an average of circa 3 staff in Reps and 2 in EPIOs).

- **A web-based tool (i.e. Engagor) that allows the Reps and EPIOs to carry out their own local social media monitoring**. The project's reports establish that despite the relatively low use of Engagor during the first phases of the project, the tool is now more extensively used and the Reps and EPIOs are more able to organise and structure a team approach towards managing their social media accounts. In addition, in the case study interviews staff provided some concrete examples of the use of Engagor for monitoring local reactions of people to hot topics such as the Ukraine crisis, the EP elections, and the Transatlantic Trade and Investment Partnership (TTIP).

- **A central coordinator in Brussels that monitored progress, who provided guidance and support, and resolved problems**. Most interviewees from Reps and EPIOs, as well as the Heads of Rep and EPIO, agreed that the central coordinator did a very good job to manage and coordinate the project. Moreover, he provided valuable advice and guidance, as well as good ideas on things that could be improved at the local level. The central coordinator was also perceived as a 'bridge' between the Reps and EPIOs and the central EC/EP communication services.

- **A substantial body of good practice in social media communication was accumulated and disseminated to all Reps and EPIOs**. The central coordinator compiled the first two good practice guidelines[34], one about outreach and another on visual content. In addition, it provided examples of good practices in each of the monthly reports that were targeted to the Reps and EPIOs. Community Managers, in particular, mentioned that these were valuable sources of ideas for improving social media communication.

- **A Facebook working group where CMs shared and commented on ideas and good practices**. Interviewees from the case study exercise highlighted that this group was a very useful source of ideas and that all CMs participated actively in the group.

In terms of weaknesses of the delivery method and the implementation process, the desk research and stakeholders consulted have pointed out the following:

- **The integration of the Community Managers into the Reps and EPIOs was not immediately straight forward.** Community Managers (CM) were recruited centrally because they formed part of the service provided by the

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[33] The questionnaire was developed by the external contractor (ESN) and sent by DG COMM to all LMs and CMs in August 2014. All CMs returned the completed questionnaire. In the case of LMs, this was 34 out of a total of 56 LMs.
[34] The guidelines are the first of a series of 10 that will be completed by January 2015.

contractor (ESN) and the involvement[35] of the Reps and EPIOs in this process was limited. This reduced the potential recruitment burden on Reps and EPIOs and meant that they were not required to appraise technical skills, which were not always available prior to the pilot project. In all but a small number of cases, the hires turned out to be excellent, well-valued and respected team members, which can be taken as proof of the validity of the approach.

The disadvantage of this approach was that it slowed the integration of the CMs into the Reps and EPIOs and in some cases gave a sense that Community Managers had been imposed by headquarters. This caused some delays in the work of the CMs, who had to focus their initial efforts on ensuring 'buy-in' of staff to the project.

- **The majority of staff members are still beginners in the use of Engagor for social media monitoring (particularly among EPIOs**). This was the opinion of CMs in particular. The LMs were more positive about the staff's ability to work independently with Engagor; however this may be explained by the fact that CMs are more aware and knowledgeable of the under-exploited potential of Engagor as a tool for social media monitoring. The central coordinator's view was that, during the last phase of the project[36], the CMs needed to focus on building the understanding and confidence to set up, optimise and interrogate the data produced by Engagor queries, which are essential for effective social media monitoring. It is also important to note that, during the case study interviews, some staff criticized Engagor for being too complex and having too many functions.

- **The questions about which members of staff are mandated to speak for and on behalf of the EC using social media was perceived as a limiting factor**. Some of the stakeholders consulted pointed out that there is a need to provide further guidelines or clarifications on the rules on social media use, which was now no longer limited to the Head of Rep and the Press Officer The current approach (i.e. Reps staff and/or CMs engaging with citizens through the social media accounts) is not thought to be aligned to current rules, which is a barrier to encouraging staff to use social media. A review of the guidelines, to take into account the increasingly shared ownership of social media communication at the Reps, would be beneficial.

- **There is a lack of appropriate tools for social media activity.** The initial mapping exercise showed large variances in social media capacity between the different Reps and EPIOs. It was noted that not all Reps and EPIOs had the same tools or resources available to them (e.g. not all had Photoshop and were able to edit/create visual content). The EPIOs were considered to be better equipped than the Reps, particularly for the development of visual content. Within the context of the project, there were a few Reps and EPIOs that sub-contracted the development of info-graphics/visuals to external providers. However, except for Engagor, there was no homogenous approach or decision to provide the Reps and EPIOs with additional tools/resources for social media. In terms of concrete requirements made, apart from Photoshop, some have asked to have tablets with 4G to allow live Tweeting when there is no Wi-Fi. Others mentioned that the EC should have or pay a subscription to a bank of visuals (photos, info-graphics, etc.).

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[35] The CMs were recruited by ESN, based on specifications agreed with the EC/EP project team. The Reps and EPIOs were asked to agree on the CVs selected and, in some cases, could also meet the candidate. Some Reps and EPIOs felt they could have been involved on a greater extent, for example, by suggesting or searching for candidates locally, interviewing them, etc.
[36] August 2014 to January 2015

Finally, a number of stakeholders (in particular, Heads of Rep and CMs) reported that, on many occasions, the communication and information exchange was difficult given that the CMs had no access to the IT systems of the EC/EP. Due to their external nature, they were outside the EP/EC mailing and server systems and thus had to ask colleagues to share documents/photos/links with them each time they needed them. Using their private email addresses (e.g. Gmail) was also reported as unprofessional, particularly for email liaison with journalists or other stakeholders.

Conclusion

The project's delivery method (i.e. providing the Reps and EPIOs with intra-muros assistance, advice and training and central support to share good practice) proved to be relevant and effective for enhancing social media communication and building social media capacity in the Reps and EPIOs. After the SEO project, the Reps and EPIOs are in a much better position to communicate with citizens on social media. Moreover, the project leaves them with a set of resources that can be further exploited (e.g. Engagor, documents/guidelines for social media activity, compilation of best practices, etc.).

In view of this, it is likely that an external implementation method, not involving the members of staff, would have affected the sustainability of the project. In other words, if the project had been completely outsourced, and carried out with a small degree of input or cooperation from local staff, it would have been difficult to achieve long-term change.

However, it should also be pointed out that the delivery method and process had some weaknesses and these were mainly related to the limited involvement of the Reps and EPIOs during the design and first phases of implementation of the project. This resulted in some delays in the work of CMs, who had to first focus on convincing staff about the benefits of the project.

5.2.2 Change of mind-sets and upgrade of skills

The evidence coming from desk research, case studies, interviews and questionnaires demonstrates that the SEO project was successful in changing mind-sets and upgrading the Reps and EPIOs staff's skills for social media. Although a need for additional coaching or training is perceived in a number of cases.

As mentioned before, at the outset of the project, **there was some resistance in the Reps and EPIOs to allocate time to both social media activity and training/coaching sessions**. In addition to the staff's doubts about the purpose of the project and the role of CMs, social media was generally seen as an extra responsibility, risky, and a bad fit with existing communication procedures and Staff Regulations. Some staff saw that social media was a responsibility of Press Officers and communication staff only.

However, the case studies and ESN's Final Report from Phase 4 show that, by the end of the pilot project, staff from some political reporting teams and European Semester Officers started to get involved too, as well as people in senior management positions such as Heads of Reps/EPIOs. In effect, social media is now increasingly being considered a team effort in many Reps and EPIOs.

As reported by the Heads of Reps/EPIOs, the **CMs played a key role in influencing the mentality of the staff** about the Reps and EPIOs' social media presence and what could be achieved with it. In effect, a high level of satisfaction with the CMs work was found across all Reps and EPIOs. The CMs were generally seen as competent, committed and creative. They supported the Reps and EPIOs in their day-to-day

communication on social media, but, above all, they contributed to building in-house capacity for social media activity.

The case studies pointed out two other factors influencing the change of mind-sets and the increased commitment of a broader portion of the staff to the project. One was the **video conferences organised by DG COMM** where all Heads of Reps/EPIOs and CMs participated and could share their concerns and experiences with the project. The other was the **EP elections** in May 2014 which gave a boost to the project and an increased awareness and understanding of social media as a crucial element of communication with citizens.

In terms of the upgrade of skills, **the project gave the Reps and EPIOs additional, competent manpower to build and/or enhance social media presence**. This is not only due to the direct insertion of an external social media expert, but also because in-house staff was provided with relevant training and hands-on experience on social media which resulted in an active involvement of staff, as well an increase in their level of skills and confidence.

By the end of phase 4 of the project, CMs and LMs reported that an average of three people regularly played an active role in social media activity in the Reps, and two in the EPIOs. Moreover, the level of skills and confidence of the most experienced member of staff with respect to various aspects of social media work increased from a "beginner" to an "independent" or "fully competent" level from phase 3 to 4 of the project.

As illustrated in the table below, overall, the most significant changes were seen in the capacity of staff to use Engagor for social media monitoring and to develop attractive and localised content. Considerably higher percentages of LMs and CMs thought that the staff could either "work independently" or were "fully competent" on these aspects by the end of phase 4 of the project than of phase 3. These results are in line with the increased effort put by CMs during the last phase of the project to train and support staff in the use of the tool.

Table 8: Percentage of LMs/CMs who think that the most experienced member of staff is either a "beginner", "can work independently" or is "fully competent" with respect to various aspects of social media work[37]

	Phase 3	Phase 4
Engagor for monitoring and analytics		
Beginner	61%	47%
Can work independently	34%	51%
Fully competent	5%	2%
Attractive, localised content for different platforms		
Beginner	14%	5%
Can work independently	58%	62%
Fully competent	28%	34%

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[37] It is important to note that some of the changes in percentages presented in this table (e.g. the drop of "fully competent" staff in relation to the use of Engagor from phase 3 to 4) may be explained by the fact that, in some Reps and EPIOs, the questionnaire was responded by different people in phase 3 and 4. This means there may be different appreciations of the staff's expertise in relation to social media. Thus, the data from the questionnaire was compared to data coming from other sources (e.g. interviews and project reports) in order to arrive to the findings presented in the body of the report in relation to the upgrade of social media skills in the Reps and EPIOs.

Conversation, engagement and outreach		
Beginner	18%	10%
Can work independently	56%	50%
Fully competent	26%	40%
Rebuttal, troll handling, crisis management		
Beginner	24%	18%
Can work independently	50%	46%
Fully competent	26%	36%

Source: Questionnaire with LMs and CMs developed by ESN and distributed by DG COMM in February (Phase 3) and August 2014 (Phase 4)

Nevertheless, and as it is further explained in the next section, **the successful capacity-building of the project has not resulted in a wide-spread feeling of sustainability**. Most of the Heads of the Reps and EPIOs consulted believe that the **training activities and support from Brussels should be prolonged** in order to get all staff on the same page and be prepared to continue and improve social media activity after the end of the project. This view is in line with what LMs and CMs reported during the case study interviews. In some Reps and EPIOs, staff members are still at different levels in social media and are still not able to exploit the use of Engagor to its full extent.

Conclusion

The SEO project was instrumental to raising the Reps and EPIOs' collective awareness of the growing importance of social media in their day-to-day work. First of all, the CMs influenced the perception of the Reps and EPIOs' staff about what could be achieved with social media and the benefits it could bring to their regular communication activities. In addition to this, the project offered technical training combined with learning-by doing, which resulted in an undoubted upgrade of skills, as well as in the integration of social media to the Reps and EPIOs' communication activities. However, additional training and coaching is needed in a number of Reps and EPIOs in order to maintain and enhance social media activity.

5.2.3 Readiness to pursue social media activity in autonomy

One of the purposes of this evaluation was to assess the extent to which the Reps and EPIOs are now ready to pursue social media activity in autonomy. There are at least four factors that should be examined in order to judge their readiness:

- Internal organisation
- Skills and experience
- Resources
- Tools

Internal organisation

The SEO project provided general guidelines for the CMs' work and it was left to each Rep and EPIO to organise the team and develop its own specific processes and procedures. Thus, **the way in which CMs worked and reported to LMs varied**. The ability of the Reps and EPIOs to coordinate CMs in the way they saw fit gave the

flexibility required in this project, given the scarce human and financial resources available in the different Reps and EPIOs.

The evidence from the questionnaire with Heads of Reps/EPIOs and case study interviews reveals that, in general, the Reps and EPIOs had to re-organise their Press teams to be able to implement the SEO project and that this was felt as a burden and **"squeeze" of existing human resources**. However, most Reps and EPIOs were able to come up with some basic working procedures and guidelines for social media activity, which were relatively aligned to other communication activities. Social media is now integrated in most Rep and EPIO communication activities and there is an understanding that social media is here to stay.

Nevertheless, the Heads of Rep and EPIO and their staff emphasise that there are still some internal arrangements needed in order to be more able to work in autonomy. These are presented in Table 9 below.

Table 9: Internal arrangements needed for Reps and EPIOs to be able to work in autonomy using social media

Area for improvement	Description of the need
Job descriptions and work schedules	Include social media activity in job descriptions of relevant staff, as well as prioritise and organise work schedules to take social media into account.
Staff guidelines	Update internal guidelines with regards to which individuals are mandated to communicate on behalf of the EC/EP on social media (see section 5.2.1).
Editorial planning	Continue central steer with regards to key messages and topics, but for the most part the Reps/EPIOs should be free to decide which content is more appropriate for their local audiences and tailor it accordingly.
Editable visuals	Visuals produced by the central communication services should be sent to the Reps and EPIOs in an editable format in order to avoid unnecessary delays when tailoring and translating them.
Payment arrangements	If paid post promotion is to be considered, the Reps and EPIOs will need appropriate payment processes and procedures to be established.
Reporting requirements	Less time-consuming requirements, focusing on communication quality and sharing of best practices.

Skills and capacity

The SEO project provided the staff with basic skills needed for social media activity (see Section 5.2.1). The staff members who are now working on social media are capable of managing Facebook and Twitter accounts, as a minimum, and producing localised and targeted content. The evaluation reveals that there are a number of Reps and EPIOs that can be considered to be ready to pursue social media activity in autonomy and can be asked to continue innovating, testing and experimenting in social media platforms. At the same time, there is a larger group of Reps and EPIOs who have achieved much more modest results, particularly in terms of reach[38]. These **need additional training and guidance in order to continue with and enhance their social media presence**. The continued presence of a dedicated CM would

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[38] Phase 4 Final Evaluation Report, page 11.

probably help them to achieve this, as well as the set-up of additional training/coaching sessions on Engagor (see Table 8) and the creation of a knowledge hub including best practices.

Resources

Most LMs consulted for the case studies emphasised that **it will be difficult for their Reps and EPIOs to maintain a high level of social media presence without the support from the CM**, mainly due to the fact that they are currently under-staffed. This means that the loss of the CM combined with the structural human resources deficit will probably pose a significant risk on the level of social media activity and quality of content of most Reps and EPIOs. This is in line with one of the findings of the case studies: that there is a correlation between outcomes and resources; Reps and EPIOs that have been able to allocate more resources (e.g. dedicating internal staff to the project) have generally been more successful. Even the Reps and EPIOs that are more ready to pursue social media in autonomy may experience a decrease in the level and quality of social media activity if they were to lose the support of an experienced and dedicated CM.

Finally, a more systematic use of paid post promotion by the Reps and EPIOs would also need additional resources. However, the need to use paid promotion should be analysed taking into consideration the advantages and limits of paid post promotion, as explained in Section 5.1.2.

Tools

A number of Reps and EPIOs may need additional guidance and assistance in using Engagor for finding relevant conversations to participate, as well as for identifying and reaching specific target groups. Another area in which Reps and EPIOs feel that they are not ready to work in autonomy is in the **selection, production and dissemination of visual content**. The evaluation also reveals that there is a need to provide the Reps and EPIOs with appropriate tools and programmes for this (in particular, the Reps) e.g. Photoshop, a subscription to a photo library, resources for subcontracting the development of info-graphics, etc.

Conclusion

Although the project has been successful in many ways, the evidence collected in this evaluation shows that a number of Reps and EPIOs will have difficulties to continue with and improve their communication with citizens on social media without the support from a Community Manager. Most Reps and EPIOs still need the support of a dedicated Community Manager, who could either be an external person provided by the SEO project, hired locally, or a designated experienced member of staff for this role. In the cases, where this role can be played by an existing member of staff, there may be a need to adapt job descriptions and remunerations accordingly.

Moreover, given the dynamic nature of social media, there may always be a need for some kind of external advice or training to keep members of the Reps/EPIOs up to date. In many Reps and EPIOs, efforts are being made already to support those working locally, to confirm the importance of what they are doing and to try to stimulate working cross-institution. But in addition to these efforts, it is important that the central services in Brussels keep people motivated and establish some additional internal arrangements and resources to facilitate autonomous work by Reps/EPIOs on social media.

5.3 Inter-institutional cooperation

5.3.1 Cooperation between Reps and EPIOs

We explored two aspects of the cooperation between the Reps and EPIOs. Firstly, we examined whether cooperation is feasible with regard to (or despite) the differences between the two institutions. Secondly, we explored whether there are any existing synergies between the two institutions that could be further exploited.

In terms of the first aspect, the evaluation findings suggest that **there is now a common understanding of the relevance and added value of the SEO project**, which increases the likeliness of a cooperative relationship between the two institutions in the future. The staff in both the Reps and EPIOs emphasise that the project is highly relevant to their work and mandate. Moreover, both Reps and EPIOs see that they add value to central communication by localising content and reaching audiences outside of the EU/Brussels bubble.

However, the data also shows that, across the different countries, there are varied experiences and feelings in relation to the inter-institutional cooperation between the t Reps and EPIOs.

In general, **cooperation was maintained at a relatively low level throughout the project**. The Reps and EPIOs wanted to keep their own identities and the EPS social media accounts were mainly used for big joint events (e.g. film screenings, debates or Europe Day).

In some cases, sharing the CM worked as a bridge between the two institutions and facilitated content coordination and sharing. However, the evidence suggests that in the cases where this worked better, the relationship between the two institutions was typically good prior to the SEO project.

In other cases, **sharing the Community Manager was sometimes cumbersome** and did not necessarily fulfil the objective of facilitating inter-institutional cooperation, particularly as both organisations emphasised their distinct identity and goals. In effect, in a number of Reps and EPIOs, it was relatively difficult to adequately share information and create meaningful synergies because the Reps and EPIOs had different communication objectives and interests.

Drawing from this, it seems that a joint (and strong) online Rep and EPIO presence would be inappropriate in many countries. According to the Reps and EPIOs staff this might even lead to serious confusion for citizens due to the different mandates of the institutions. However, this does not mean that there is no potential for further synergies, which takes us to the second aspect of the question.

Existing synergies could be further exploited especially for particular events and/or topics of common interest (e.g. EP elections, thematic weeks, EU debates, Europe Days or any other offline event taking place in the EPS premises). In effect, during the EP elections in May 2014, many Reps and EPIOs worked closely together to monitor buzz on social media or to create joint social media projects and campaigns.

It is worth noting that, apart from specific social media content, **Reps and EPIOs could also learn from each other and share ideas for content and visuals**. For example, the Reps think that the EPIOs are particularly good at developing visual content and that they have more resources for this. Creating a shared library of visual content or a knowledge hub with ideas/best practices could facilitate mutual learning.

Another example of cooperation that was highlighted in the evaluation concerns the Facebook closed group where CMs share ideas and discuss with each other. It would be a good idea that this group continues and that the dedicated social media staff members from both institutions are encouraged to participate in it.

With this in view, it would be important that the central EC and EP communication units encourage cooperation between the Reps and EPIOs, but also maintain an active involvement and cooperation with each other in order to identify common topics and develop content that could be shared by both institutions.

Conclusion

Given the different mandates of the EP and the EC, the feasibility of a strong inter-institutional cooperation and joint online media presence can be questioned. The evidence from the evaluation suggests that a closer coordination of social media communication is difficult and, in many cases, not desired. However, the Reps and EPIOs agree that there will always be occasions and opportunities to collaborate. This will probably take the form of sharing/liking each other's content and developing joint social media campaigns to promote specific events or disseminate information of common interest. Encouragement from the central level for the Reps and EPIOs to share content, best practices or ideas between them would facilitate this process.

5.3.2 Cooperation with central communication activities and services

As per EQ 12 in the Terms of Reference for the evaluation, the complementarity between the SEO project and other offline and online communication activities by the EC was analysed with a focus on Reps. The EC communicates through a variety of channels, including the Reps (e.g. Europa website, central social media accounts, policy communications by line DGs, EU publications, Europe Direct Network, among others). Even though the different channels serve different purposes, the evaluation reveals that there are a number of reasons why social media activity by the local Reps is complementary to other communication activities by the EC, namely:

- **Citizens consider the EU institutions social media accounts as a valuable 'entry point' for EU-related information searches**, especially considering that the EU information available online is generally perceived to be disorganised and difficult to navigate. This is especially the case for the Europa website.

- **The Reps social media accounts provide information in the national languages**, whereas messages provided on the EC's central social media pages are usually in English or in a few EU languages.

- **The Reps social media accounts disseminate targeted and localised messages** which relate better to the national/local audiences' information needs and interests than those disseminated by the EC's central services or DGs.

- **The Reps social media accounts are many times used to quickly rebut misinformation on the EU** that circulates in the national/local media. This is more difficult to do, and would probably take more time, from other EC's central information services e.g. the Europa website or the central social media accounts.

- **The Reps social media accounts can be used to support communication campaigns by line DGs or other EC communication services.** An example of this was the launch of the communication campaign organised by DG RTD on the topic of Horizon 2020, which was supported by Reps in the different Member States.

- **With Engagor, the Reps can help to monitor feelings and views on hot or sensitive topics at the local level** more accurately than if it was done centrally because of their knowledge of the national landscape. An example of

this was the Rep in Finland, which was able to warn Headquarters about social media outbreaks on the TTIP.

Despite these examples, complementarity and synergies between the Reps and other central communication services can be further improved. In general, **there is openness to liaising with the Reps and a sense that the potential for liaison has not been fully exploited yet**. With this in view, consideration could be given to identifying specific objectives and priorities for each communication service and to facilitating cooperation, based on the strengths and mandate of each service.

What follows are some **suggestions on how DG COMM can enhance coordination and cooperation between the Reps and the EC's information services**:

- Focus on establishing a dialogue with citizens (and other local stakeholders) and disseminating localised and targeted messages, rather than providing document based information on the EU. The latter is already addressed by the network of EDICs which answers citizens' specific information requests. In line with this, the existing support on social media provided by the project to the EDICs (e.g. training activities, editorial briefs etc.) should continue. Keep the EC's communication services informed about the current and future developments of the SEO project, as well as of the Reps objectives for social media activity.

- Compile and distribute to all central communication services and DGs a monthly (or quarterly) calendar of communication activities/campaigns that could be sponsored on social media, as well as editorial guidelines and material for doing it.

- Ask the Reps to provide feedback on the outcomes of the campaigns run on social media at national level and circulate this information among the relevant services/DGs[39]. In addition, consider linking the Reps and DGs' Engagor accounts to facilitate retrieval of monitoring data.

- Implement annual meetings of central communication services operating at national level (e.g. Reps, EDICs, Your Europe, etc.) to agree on communication objectives and messages, identify topics of common interest, and facilitate exchange of best practice on the use of social media at local level.

- Share contact information of key communication/social media contacts in the different services and Reps.

As a final remark, it is important to note that the extent to which the Reps are currently able to support communication campaigns of the central services or DGs through the Reps' social media accounts is somewhat unclear. Whilst there is clear potential for this, **there are obvious question marks over their capacity, especially in terms of human resources**. This is an area where more thought is required if a number of services/DGs needed communication support from the Reps.

Conclusion

The evaluation of the value of the Reps' social media use needs to consider activity within the broader context of the EU information landscape, which is characterised by a range of information services, at local and central level, targeted at citizens and stakeholders. The evaluation highlights that there are examples of successful cooperation between the Reps and other central information services and DGs, as

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[39] The information on the outcomes of campaigns could consist of basic quantitative indicators e.g. applause, conversation and engagement rates, complemented with qualitative information such as a brief review of the positive/negative comments made by followers and any relevant information that could be pulled out with Engagor in terms of e.g. conversations where the campaign was mentioned.

well as that there is clear potential for a more effective flow of information and cooperation. However, there are also some question marks over the Reps' capacity and how this should be handled.

5.3.3 Political communication and intelligence

One of the purposes in this evaluation was to assess how efficiently the Reps are using social media for political communication and intelligence. Even though this was not one of the main objectives of the SEO project, there was an interest in examining if the Reps are supporting the EC's political communication in any way and if they are feeding back the central level with information on what is going on at MS level.

In terms of supporting central political communication, **social media has been used by the Reps to** spread locally the political messages by the President and Commissioners, **react to comments, as well as to rebut misinformation or rumours**. For example, the Rome Rep created the hashtag "Vero o Falso", which is used to respond to incorrect information on the EU being disseminated on mainstream media. However, the staff members dedicated to social media activity at the Reps are generally not mandated to disseminate political messages and communicate on hot topics or sensitive issues in autonomy. This is the task of the Head of Rep, Press Officer or the political reporting sector who, with the support of the central Spokespersons service, provide guidance to the social media coordinator on lines to take.

The evidence collected shows that **there has been limited feedback from the Reps into the political reporting mechanisms of the EC to date. However,** there are some specific examples where information has been provided to this effect (e.g. Ukraine crisis, EP elections, TTIP, etc.). Nevertheless, the SEO project has created (or enhanced) an additional channel for a more in-depth interaction with citizens at the national level that could potentially allow the provision of a stronger political intelligence and communications service by the Reps. For this to happen, there are some aspects that should be considered:

- **There is a need to clarify if what is being disseminated on social media can be considered to be an 'official' communication by the EC**. As confirmed in the interviews with staff from the political reporting and spokesperson sectors, there have been some questions from journalists with regards to the credibility of, for example, Twitter (i.e. do Tweets by the EC or Reps represent an official communication?). This is in-line with what the Heads of Reps pointed out in the questionnaire: that there is a need for clarification on the rules for speaking on behalf of the Rep using social media.

- **There is a clear opportunity to increase the use of social media to counteract misinformation and/or the negative portrayal of the EU on national/local media**. There is consensus among the spokespersons consulted that it makes sense that the Reps use social media to provide a direct counter offensive / rebuttal that would otherwise be very difficult to do from the central services. The citizens consulted in the online focus groups also agreed on the need to confront negative coverage of the EU in mainstream media and saw social media as the best channel to do this.

- **The translation of content to the national languages is a critical element of Reps work** that could further support political communication by the EC at Member State level. The Heads of Reps agreed with this, as a majority believed that a local social media presence is indispensable in order to translate central messages to the native language and context, and to be present, relevant and responsive to the national debate.

- **At headquarters, there is an expectation of receiving feedback from the Reps**, for example with regards to the mood of populations or hot topics in the Member States. However, for the moment, this does not appear to be particularly forthcoming and the feedback provided so far was considered to be very general. As mentioned before, this is probably related to Reps' current lack of human resources to play a more active role in feeding information back to the central services, but also to an under-exploited use of Engagor for social media monitoring.

- **A stronger cooperation and linkage between the political reporting and press sections in the Reps is likely to facilitate political intelligence**. The evidence shows that the level of cooperation varies a lot in the different countries. Moreover, not all staff responsible for political reporting currently see the value of social media, although there has been some training provided via the CMs. In the future it will be important that both teams work closer together in identifying key topics and issues that are worth monitoring or promoting via social media.

Conclusion

The Reps have supported the dissemination of political messages,, reacting to citizen's comments, and rebutting misinformation or rumours. Moreover, the Reps have, to a small extent, been able to provide decision-makers with political intelligence. The provision of political intelligence has been limited by a current lack of capacity and an under-exploited use of Engagor for social media monitoring, but may also be related to the difficulties in gathering this type of feedback and levels of citizen engagement with the accounts. The interviews emphasised that the focus on political communication and intelligence could be increased in the future. However, this would require some further clarifications on the rules for using social media. In addition, there would be implications for, resources and capacity, as well as a need for closer cooperation between the political reporting and press sections in the Reps.

5.4 Explanatory factors

Throughout the progress of the Share Europe Online project, there has been a focus on monitoring the performance of the Reps and EPIOs using a set of quantitative indicators. Using this information, we made a selection of a total of 14 Rep and EPIOs from a pool of 56 Reps and EPIOS in 28 countries. The Reps and EPIOs were selected as case studies, to allow us to analyse why the communication impact differs among the participating Reps and EPIOs. The case study exercise, which is described at more length in Annex 6, was based on the Direct Method of Agreement (DMA), while including two kinds of Reps and EPIOs:

- Reps and EPIOs with an appreciable change in their communication KPIs

- Reps and EPIOs with a limited change in their communication KPIs

In accordance with the DMA-methodology, the case studies sought to identify factors that are present when the effect is present (an appreciable KPI-change) and absent when the effect is absent (a limited KPI-change). During the Inception Phase, we developed a checklist of hypotheses, potentially explaining why the project has been successful in some countries, but not in others. These hypotheses relate to different factors, at different levels, and they are described at more length in the table below.

Table 10: Hypotheses

Category	Factor	Assumption
Contextual factors - related to the MS	Euro scepticism	It is easier to engage with citizens in EU-positive countries
	Social media take up	It is easier to engage with citizens in countries where a large proportion of the population is active on social media
Background factors - related to the participating Reps and EPIOs	Inter-institutional cooperation	A high degree of inter-institutional cooperation fosters good results
	Management support	A high degree of management support fosters good results
	Social media experience	A high degree of social media experience, among the staff, fosters good results
Factors related to the project implementation	Staff endorsement	The project success depends on the endorsement by the staff
	Central support	The project success depends on the level of support given by the central coordinator
	Internal cooperation	The project success depends on the cooperation between the CM and the rest of the team
	Alignment	The project success depends on the ability to align social media activities to other communication efforts
	Community Manager	The project success depends on the competence and experience of the Community Manager
	Capacity-building	The project success depends on the quality of the capacity-building
	Resources	The project success depends on the resources available and the possibility to dedicate internal staff to Share Europe Online
Factors related to the communication messages and the advertising	Paid post promotion	Paid post promotion contributes to a significant (short-term) KPI-change
	Target group identification	The identification of relevant target groups contributes to a significant KPI-change
	Localised messages	The ability to localise the communication contributes to a significant KPI-change

When examining the causality within Share Europe, we analysed the factors in Table 10 across all selected Reps and EPIOs, through desk research, in-depth interviews and a checklist that was sent to the Community and Line Managers within the selected

organisations. The conclusions from this data collection is summarised in the table below.

Table 11: Case study results

Conclusion	Examples	Comment
Some factors seem to be randomly related to communication outcomes in the case study Reps and EPIOs	Euro scepticism Social media take up Inter-institutional cooperation Social media experience Staff endorsement Internal cooperation Target group identification	The case studies show that several factors are randomly correlated to the communication impacts; for example, a high degree of Euro scepticism is present in 10 cases (five positive and five negative), while being absent in 4 instances (two positive and two negative).
A number of factors are present among Reps and EPIOS with an appreciable KPI-change, as well as Reps and EPIOs with a limited KPI-change	Management support Central support Alignment with other communication activities A competent Community Manager Capacity-building Localised messages	Some factors are systematically present among all Reps and EPIOs. These factors can be used to explain the overall success of Share Europe Online, as described elsewhere in this report, but they do not determine variations.
There is a relatively strong relationship between two factors and the overall results	Paid post promotion Resources	Paid post promotion and available resources tend to correlate with KPI-change across our sample. This relationship is probabilistic, rather than deterministic. In other words, none of the negative cases have paid for post promotion[40], whereas some, but not all, of the positive ones have done so.

To summarise, the case studies show that some factors are weakly related to the communication impacts, that other factors are present among all the selected Reps and EPIOs. Two factors (post promotion and adequate resources) correlate with the project KPIs. These factors are mutually exclusive, but somewhat related, which means that it is easier for large Reps and EPIOs, with comprehensive budgets, to pay for post promotion.

The importance of considering post promotion has been strongly emphasised in our evaluation. Many respondents argue that it is very difficult to create a wide-spread interest on Facebook, without paying for post promotion, especially since the algorithms changed.

Before deciding upon the scope of a future post promotion-scheme, it is important to discuss the overall strategy of the social media presence as such. If the objective is to reach a large number of followers, then post promotion is a relevant alternative. However, a comprehensive post promotion scheme does not, necessarily, have to play an essential role in a more qualitative communication approach, focusing on a close

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[40] We are aware that the Zagreb Rep recently has started to pay for post promotion. However, these campaigns occurred after our KPI-measurement (in June 2014).

and regular interaction with strategic target groups, in order to change their perceptions about the EU-institutions.

Finally, the correlation between resources and positive results can be understood as follows: if the CM is supported by dedicated Reps and EPIOs, which are adequately staffed, then it is easier to develop a local strategy (segmented to different target groups), analyse the policy context, develop strong communication messages and systematically monitor the results. Due to the lack of resources, many respondents emphasise that they would have preferred an even more extensive CM-scheme, exceeding the 1.5 days per week that are currently allocated to each Rep and EPIO. However, this was limited by the existing budgetary constraints.

Conclusion

Human and financial resources were critical to the implementation of the SEO project. Many Reps and EPIOs would have otherwise struggled to cover all of their different priorities and social media communication. The case study exercise also highlights that none of the Reps and EPIOs with limited KPI change used paid promotion. However, it is important to note that to date success has been measured by volume increase in relation to quantitative indicators. This approach to measurement does not allow an understanding of the relevance and impact of engaging with target groups, for example with regards to perceptions of the EU.

5.5 Cost-effectiveness

In this section, we describe our assessment of the project's cost-effectiveness. We define cost-effectiveness as the extent to which the observed results are achieved at a reasonable cost. In brief, we argue that the SEO project has been efficiently implemented, while providing value-for-money. This conclusion is described at more length below, where we discuss a number of topics, ranging from the communication outcomes, to the intra-muros approach and the central procurement of CMs.

As described in Chapter 5, the SEO project has achieved a significant communication impact. In relation to the project baseline, the aggregated number of followers of all Facebook and Twitter accounts with direct involvement of a CM (112) has increased by 144%. It should also be mentioned that the project has been able to effectively build a social media capacity across the Member States, thereby addressing an important gap in the EU's institutional communication, while successfully engaging with a wide range of citizens, for example through info graphics and localised messages.

Although it is difficult to firmly evaluate the project's budget, the evidence at hand indicates that the communication outcomes have been achieved in a cost-effective way. This conclusion is substantiated by the following findings:

- **In our Heads of Rep and EPIO questionnaire, many respondents estimate that the project provides value-for-money** in relation to other communication activities, which are currently implemented by the EU institutions, such as seminars, conferences, report publications and information campaigns.[41]

- **A number of respondents, interviewed through various data collection methods, emphasise the momentum created by the SEO project**, whereas none have argued that the project is too expensive or time-

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[41] With this said, it should be mentioned that the Heads of Rep and EPIO, only to a small extent, have been involved in the budget design and that the financial details are relatively unknown among the interviewees. As mentioned in Annex 4, this caveat also relates to our assessment of the local procurement model, presented in Table 11 overleaf.

consuming. On the contrary, the interviewees often stress: a) that they lack internal resources, which has made it difficult to dedicate staff to social media and b) that they would have preferred an even more extensive CM-scheme, exceeding the 1.5 days per week that are currently allocated to each Rep and EPIO (see above).

- **Most respondents highlight that the project has been efficiently implemented**; for example in terms of content localisation, capacity-building and internal organisation - as mentioned elsewhere in this report. Our evaluation also illustrates that the intra-muros approach, providing Reps and EPIOs with central support, has been appropriate. First of all, a number of interviewees emphasise that it would have been difficult to implement the project without a CM, due to a lack of resources. Secondly, it is likely that an external implementation method, not involving the members of staff, would have affected the sustainability of the project. In other words, if a project is completely outsourced, and carried out with a small degree of input or cooperation from the employees, then it is difficult to achieve long-term change.

- **In this evaluation, it has not been possible to adequately benchmark the SEO project against comparable initiatives,** since the initiative itself is unique, covering two different institutions and a new way of communicating with European citizens. With this said, anecdotal evidence suggests that the project budget (3.73 million EUR in total between 2012 and 2014) is relatively small in relation to other communication and information activities that are carried out by the EC.

Conclusion:

The objectives of the SEO project have been achieved at a reasonable cost, the intra-muros approach has been appropriate and the project represents value-for-money. Although the project has been successful in terms of cost-effectiveness, there is room for improvement. In other words, it is possible that the same results could have been achieved with less funding, through some modifications in the project set-up. These modifications are described in the table below.

Table 12: Reflections regarding the cost-effectiveness of the project

Aspect	Reflection
Paid post promotion	Although it is very difficult for an organisation to buy a sustainable community of followers, post promotion can be effectively used to temporarily break out of a 'vicious cycle' of low visibility. Hence, it is possible that the project results could have been even more significant, if a larger number of Reps and EPIOs would have complemented their 'earned media activities' with carefully selected post promotions, targeting relevant objectives and specific target groups. In isolation, post promotion represents an additional cost and we do not argue that the project should have increased its overall budget. However, it is possible that a re-distributed spending, with a stronger focus on post promotion, would have improved the results, especially among the so-called negative cases that were analysed in our case study exercise (see Section 5.4).
A local procurement of CMs, including country–adapted fee rates for CMs	The CMs were procured centrally, by the external contractor (ESN). There are some advantages with a coherent procurement process; for example in terms of project coordination and knowledge management. With this said, a number of interviewees estimate that a localised approach, based on national fee rates for the CMs, would have reduced the operating costs, particularly as the same rates were paid for all countries[42]. Moreover, our evaluation shows that many LMs would have preferred to participate in the recruitment process, thereby being able to select the most appropriate person for each Rep and EPIO.
A systematic involvement of interns	In Section 5.4, we described that there is a correlation between outcomes and resources; Reps and EPIOs that have been able to spend more resources, for example by dedicating internal staff to the project, are generally more successful. In this context, it is possible that a systematic involvement of interns, for social media purposes, could have improved the results, without increasing the costs; most Reps and EPIOs tend to attract relatively young and social media-savvy interns anyway. However, the involvement of interns needs to be adequately complemented by in-house staff and transparent guidelines, in order to be sustainable, since most interns only will stay for a limited period of time.
A more explicit and segmented communication strategy	Share Europe Online is a pilot project. This means that the project has been explorative, encouraging Reps and EPIOs to communicate with citizens in new and creative ways. As a consequence, the strategic direction, from the central level, has been quite limited. It is possible that a stronger steer would have increased the efficiency. For example, by resource prioritisation on specific channels, target groups and/or communication activities. Having said this, it should be mentioned that an exaggerated top-down approach, not allowing local modifications, often leads to a low degree of ownership and involvement at the local level, which increases the risk of implementation failure; see for example Pressman & Wildavsky (1973).

5.6 The future of the SEO project

This section considers options for the future, by considering the following elements:

- The need for EC and EP local social media presence
- The status quo at the end of the project
- Options for the future for effective social media in the Reps

5.6.1 The need for EC and EP local social media presence

"*It is important for government to use social media because they provide a route to direct interaction with citizens, which is otherwise hard to achieve.*[43]" Serrat (2010).

"*Social media can help the public sector to improve dialogue and responsiveness towards citizens and, thereby, improve trust and commitment, which reduces the gap between bureaucracies and the people that they serve*"[44] (Greenberg, 2008).

The above assertions are backed up by the conclusions from the mapping exercise. Governments and other public sector organisations are now using social media to connect to their target groups and the EU institutions have an important opportunity to engage with target groups at local and national level. The increased focus on social media use by the Reps and EPIOs, confirms the importance of connecting with people locally, by addressing them in their national or local settings through their favourite media.

The need to be present at local level can also be confirmed because of a certain increase in disillusionment in the EU project. The Eurozone crisis and current questions on movement of people within and to the EU, in certain Member States has exacerbated this situation. In addition there is evidence to show that the **institutions can be misrepresented at national level** both in the media[45] and by national politicians. National governments although participating in the EU project cannot be relied upon to provide adequate explanations to their publics about how the EU institutions complement the activities carried out at national level.

In consequence, as well as being linked to the fact that publics tend to be apathetic, there is a **persistent lack of understanding about what the EU institutions do**. Thanks to the SEO project, when the Reps and EPIOs use social media, they complement the information provided by the central pages of the institutions. Language is an obvious communication barrier. The central institutions are not able to communicate in all official languages, nor are they able to tailor information to national publics. The focus groups confirm that there is a strong **interest in knowing more about what the EU is doing and how this relates to the national level.** This interest has also been observed in many other research assignments conducted by Coffey, because it reflects a concrete gap in knowledge. Citizens appreciate when EU information is useful and relates to them and or the place where they live / work.

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[43] Serrat O. (2010) Social Media and Public Sector, Knowledge Solutions, 83 [on-line]
[44] Greenberg P. (2008), Power to the People AND the Government: The Value of New Media in Public Service [on-line]
[45] Lord Justice Leveson said: "*there is clear evidence of misreporting on European issues*", see: http://www.bnegroup.org/blog/archives/945

According to the evaluation survey, Heads of Rep and EPIO are also convinced that there is "absolutely" a need for local institutional communication on social media to translate messages, which are distant and opaque to the regional level. Having a local presence is considered to be indispensible to translate and bridge the gap with local populations but also to be present at key moments with the EU dimension in national debate. Other EC and EP staff members, at central level, are convinced that the need and added-value for social media has now been clearly established.

Part of the assessment of added-value relates to the availability of other information services at national level. There are, in fact, many services available at national level / in national languages, providing info on EU legislation, rights & policies, for example the Europe Direct network, the Consumer Centres and so on. However, these organisations all have different goals. Our understanding is that the Reps and EPIOs are principally concerned with:

- Rebutting misinformation in the media
- Political communication (only the Reps)
- Supporting communication campaigns
- Engagement with citizens
- Increasing visibility of the institutions at local level

There have been some positive examples of the Reps adding value to the communication campaigns of the policy DGs, for example in relation to DG RTD's Horizon 2020 campaign and communication around DG Trade's TTIP negotiations. The provision of more systematic support to the campaigns organised by other DGs seems to be an obvious area for development. However, with current limited human resources, it may be unwise to promote this opportunity too heavily.

Conclusion

It is relevant and necessary for the EU institutions to engage at national level, given the lack of understanding and misinformation about what they do and to ensure better transparency to the people that they are intended to serve. There are no other EU or national services, which are or are able to provide the same interface between the institutions and national and local publics. The EU-added value is clearly established.

5.6.2 The status quo at the end of the project

This section considers the status quo / outcomes of the pilot and preparatory action, in the light of the initial objectives that were set for the project. This information sets the scene for the discussion on possible options, which follows.

The SEO project has come to the end of its pilot project phase and now continues as a preparatory action. As a result, all Reps and EPIOs are now actively and consistently engaged on social media. The need to engage on social media has been clearly established. On one level, the Reps and EPIOs are now in a better position to fully integrate social media within their mainstream communication functions. However, **the message is clear that for the most part this cannot be achieved without additional resources**. The EP adopted a proposal for a new budget allocation of 1M EURO spread over 2015-2016. This represents a 50% reduction in the budget allocation to the project and about 25% of the project's current operating costs for each of the two years, and for both Reps and EPIOs. In the long term, the project

activities should be integrated into regular communication of the Reps and EPIOs. As regards the Reps, it is foreseen that there will be a possible reinforcement of their operational budgets (from 2016 onwards).

Taking into account that we are now at the end of the pilot and preparatory phases, many of the SEO project's objectives can be considered to no longer be relevant to its future development, both at the Reps and EPIOs. Trying to communicate with everyone is not cost-effective. The EC has extensive experience of a wide range of communication activities and this basic principle seems to be understood. However, because social media present some differences to traditional approaches and can offer significant reach and engagement potential, it seems that this important principle is not always respected. We suggest that specific objectives are required for the next phase of the project. These will provide a solid basis for Rep social media activity.

The table below presents our analysis of the project's current general and operational objectives and what type of changes are needed.

Table 13: Analysis of the general and operational objectives of the SEO project

General objectives		Analysis
Improve dialogue with citizens on social networks ('interactive communication with citizens online')		This fits with the pilot phase of the project, but now needs to be updated to provide a clearer steer and more ambitious goal
Operational objectives		**Analysis**
1.	Improve listening & reporting capacity	This is happening to a limited extent. If considered to be important, the goal should be for Reps and EPIOs to use Engagor more and better to go beyond reporting on traffic on Rep and EPIO accounts to capturing the big issues / trending topics and prevailing citizens' views / concerns.
2.	Make communication more regular, engaging and adapted to local specificities	This has been achieved and is understood as important. We suggest that this can now be removed from the list of objectives.
3.	Reach out of the 'EU bubble' to potentially interested citizens in a targeted way and with useful information	This suggests that the target group is '*interested citizens*', which is not sufficiently specific to allow effective communication. We suggest that the Reps define a specific theme /s which represent current concerns in each country themes, from this it should be possible to define the key influencers, multipliers, advocates and citizens most affected; these are the target groups for the Reps and EPIOs.
4	Build relationships with influencers and EU-related players	This is happening to a limited extent, but it is understood as relevant and important. Engagor can help here. This should mean not only multipliers (media / bloggers), but also influencers within specific target groups (this is also highlighted by ESN) There is still scope to improve here.
5	Coach and train members of staff	This is a pilot project and preparatory action objective, but it is not an output objective as is now required for the project.

6	Coordinate and develop inter-institutional communication	Evidence suggests that this is relevant, but it is not a key objective which will significantly enhance what the Reps and EPIOs are able to achieve.

Conclusion:

There is a strong rationale for making use of social media in Reps and EPIOs. However, there are currently several fundamental elements which limit their use. On the one hand, it seems clear that additional resources are required; it is not possible to add social media on to existing tasks, given the need for planning, research and creativity. On the other, a lack of clear direction with regards to what the institutions want to achieve with social media also limits potential. The objectives set for the pilot project are no longer sufficient to guide the use of social media. There is a need to reframe these goals to guide operational choices on social media use.

5.6.3 Options for the future for the Reps

As a final step in the evaluation, we were asked to consider possible options for the future. Three different options are explored below.

In all of the proposed options, it is recommended that DG COMM continues to pay the licence fee for Engagor, which is an essential platform to support social media monitoring, which could also be used to monitor trending topics of political interest which should be fed back to the central Commission.

Taking account of the available budget, for the period 2015-2016 it will no longer be possible to centrally fund CM support for each Rep. However, some Reps may decide to reprioritise their available / existing budgets in order to fund a dedicated Community Manager or consider hiring a 'stagiaire' to support their social media activity.

All of the three options can be 'tweaked' to better suit the needs of the European Commission.

A. **Option A: an equal approach and semi-autonomy: to share the budget equally among the Reps with a limited level of central support / coordination / training.**

This option comprises two strands. **Strand 1 would entail retaining the central coordinator**, who would provide:

- General support for liaison between the central Commission communication team and all Reps;
- Specific support and advice to the group of Reps, which are still not able to work in full autonomy. The Reps would be able to seek guidance from the central coordinator at their discretion / in-line with their advice needs;
- Occasional / on-going centrally organised training on Engagor taking into account the current levels of competence / difficulties in the Reps;
- The setting up, stimulation and support of a closed Facebook group for press officers on social media.

Strand 2 would focus on enhancing the tools available to the Reps. This would entail distributing the remaining additional budget equally between the offices, to enable them to enhance their social media activity including:

- The provision of specific resources for Reps without a basic level of equipment, including tablets with 4G, Photoshop, photo libraries and / or outsourcing the development of visuals that can be edited locally;
- Budget permitting, a small fund to support paid promotion to increase visibility of extraordinary events, initiatives and / or campaigns.

The advantages of this option are suggested to be as follows:

- This option responds to key needs identified by the evaluation:
  - Training needs on Engagor continue to be met;
  - The central coordinator's role in the preparation of the weekly calendar / the provision of on-going support would place additional demands on the central DG COMM team which could most likely not be met.
- All Reps are resourced with the equipment they need to produce images / videos and live tweeting at events;
- This option is a slow transition to autonomy. It encourages the Reps to take responsibility, but provides the tools and some minimal support to do this.

The disadvantages / risks of this option include:

- Many Reps will find it difficult to engage on social media without a CM;
- Resources may be spread too thinly to provide much added value;
- Some Reps may eventually become disengaged from using social media, particularly if there staff changes resulting in the loss of know-how.

B. **Option B an equal approach and full autonomy: to share the budget equally among the Reps, without central support / coordination.** Here funds would be allocated directly to the Reps. The Reps would make their own decisions with regards to how to spend the allocated funds to support social media. There would be no central coordinator and no centrally organised training or support, beyond that which could be offered by the central DG COMM team.

The advantages of this option include:

- The Reps become responsible for social media (the logical next step of the project), but are provided additional tools to support this;
- This option may encourage creativity as Reps consider how best to maximise the available funds, etc.;
- Reps are able to tailor funds to suit their needs and look for local low cost solutions / partnerships, where these exist.

The disadvantages / risks of this option include:

- Training on Engagor is still required – this need will not be met;
- Many Reps will find it difficult to engage on social media without a CM;
- Resources may be spread too thinly to provide much added value;
- Some Reps may eventually become disengaged from using social media, particularly if there staff changes resulting in the loss of know-how;

C. **Option C: a differentiated autonomous approach: to provide financial support to a smaller sample of countries, using a rationale to be defined.** This could be decided on the basis of an application made to the central team for

the funds, and could take account of Reps that have declared that they can be independent. The rationale for selection could also be driven by a political rationale – to focus on specific countries.

The central team should provide guidelines/ideas on how to use the resources, but then give flexibility to the Reps to propose a set of activities/resources where to allocate the money e.g. sub-contracting an external CM for certain amount of days a week, outsourcing the development of visuals, etc. The idea would be that with the money available they can hire additional manpower and other resources they may need (e.g. subscriptions, cameras, tablets, etc.). There would be no central coordinator.

The funds could be used either to further strengthen the capacity of those Reps who are still not ready to work in autonomy and leave the rest (i.e. those who say they are ready performers). Or to focus resources on Reps which have shown most potential in the short term with a view to generating the best outcomes for the budget spent.

The advantages would include:

- The selected Reps would have enough funds for CM support and tools;
- The approach could help to confirm the added value of social media support and the rationale for an increased budget from 2017 onwards;
- There would be no waste on focussing on countries / Reps that may not yet be ready to engage via social media.

The disadvantages of the option could include:

- The differentiated approach may prove to be divisive and unpopular;
- The project has to a certain extent 'created a need'. To remove support would be a step backwards for the Reps not selected;
- The process of selection would add additional burden to DG COMM.

Conclusion:

There will be limited budget available to support social media over 2015 and 2016. Decisions need to be made about how best to allocate the funds that will be available. There are different possibilities for consideration and a focus on using funding, where it can add most value seems appropriate. A combination of elements from different options may be most desirable.

The outcomes of this evaluation suggest that in most cases more training is required and that a lack of appropriate tools is hampering the effectiveness of the Reps' social media presence. In addition, our experts confirm that the major trend is toward providing visuals / videos, etc., which most Reps do not have the equipment to produce. Taking these needs into account, it can be concluded that as a minimum the Reps need to be better equipped to allow them to further develop their social media presence.

In this context, the main questions are: is it preferable to continue with a level of central support and coordination to ensure a common approach or would be better for the Reps to make their own decisions about how to use a small pot of funds? As highlighted, an alternative approach could be to focus funds on certain countries at certain times for political reasons. We believe that this strategy is not really appropriate at this point in time in the evolution of social media use by the Reps, because certain basic needs still need to be met (training, equipment, etc.). However, the allocation or top-up of additional funds to support specific / timely political

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communication goals could make sense in the longer term.