

Research Paper

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Social media as a source for journalistic work

An investigation into the influence of Facebook and Twitter posts by politicians on reporting in daily newspapers

Abstract: This article analyzes the extent to which journalists use the contributions of politicians in social networks as a source for reporting in their newspapers. Using a content analysis, six daily papers and the Facebook and Twitter accounts of nine politicians from Austria, Germany and Switzerland were examined. Politicians have a partial influence on the agenda setting of daily newspapers through their social media contributions. Moreover, the number of fans and followers and interactions with a politician's posts significantly influenced the probability of being cited in print media coverage. Furthermore, there were great differences between the three countries and the respective parties regarding the usage of social media as well as the chance of a Facebook or Twitter post being cited in a newspaper.

Introduction

»What we do on social networks leads to extra attention on television and in the newspapers« (de Volkskrant 2010; quoted in Broersma/Graham 2012: 408) said Dutch Prime Minister Mark Rutte in explaining why politicians use social networks. Numerous German-speaking politicians – at local, state and national level – are also active on Facebook and Twitter. Through their presence on social networks, they attempt to bring their message to as many potential voters as possible.

Their social media posts are received not only by their own fans and followers, but also by journalists. If journalists pick up and report on the politicians' messages in the social networks, this generates attention for the politicians. It also serves to make what the politicians are saying more credible, as classic news media remain dominant as a source of information on current events (cf. Engel/Rühle 2017: 396). This paper examines the influence that the social media activities of selected Austrian, German, and Swiss politicians have on journalistic reporting in daily newspapers. Facebook and Twitter posts by politicians are considered to have been used in reporting if they are quoted or mentioned in newspaper articles.

The following hypotheses were investigated:

- The more controversial Facebook and Twitter posts are, the more likely they are to be used in the daily newspapers investigated.
- Tabloid newspapers use more Facebook and Twitter posts in their reporting than quality newspapers in each country.
- The more Facebook fans or Twitter followers the politicians have, the more likely their posts and tweets are to be quoted in the daily newspapers' reporting.

Taking into account the various political cultures and parties, the aim was to determine the potential influence of the politicians' Facebook posts and tweets on the daily newspapers' agenda setting.

Use of social networks by politicians and journalists

Social media is a way for organizations, companies, parties, and even individual politicians to reach their target audiences in addition to reporting in traditional journalistic media. Using Twitter, Facebook etc., politicians can present their own topics and give their opinions on current reports and events. In addition, social media allows them to refuse to take part in the debate in journalistic media by refusing to respond to requests or give interviews to certain media, and instead merely sharing their opinion on Facebook or Twitter (cf. Broersma/Graham 2013: 461f.). Based on the social and emotional relationships of the users, social networks particularly encourage the spread of emotional and conviction-based posts, known as soft news (cf. Imhof 2015: 19f.), and promote the personalization and trivialization of politics.

In the Austrian election campaign of 2017, those parties and actors who had previously made less use of social networks began to do so more (cf. Klinger/Russmann 2017: 304). There was clearly an increased focus on personalities rather than factual issues, with the objective of making these people more recognizable, likeable, and credible (cf. Puhle 2003: 41). Another of the campaign strate-

gists' aims was to use the candidates' social media presence to access journalistic media and thus influence the media and audience agenda.

For journalists, social media represent a reservoir of sources that never runs dry (cf. Hermida 2010: 298f.). Social media posts are quoted in journalistic media either because they appear worthy of reporting in themselves, or because journalists consider them suitable evidence for a statement or attitude (cf. Broersma/Graham 2012: 405). Social media content thus makes the work of journalists easier, saving them from having to set their own interview questions and gather a range of opinions. Instead of interviewing a politician, they can simply pick up on a tweet and integrate it into their report (cf. Broersma/Graham 2012: 408). Although social networks play host to a wide range of opinions, journalists tend to pick up primarily on statements from prominent and powerful actors – thus reinforcing rather than questioning existing power structures (cf. Knight 2012: 61).

In this sense, in using social media, politics and journalism enter into a symbiotic relationship. If politicians bypass journalistic media and use their own channels, or journalists uncritically quote what politicians circulate on social media, there is insufficient critique and scrutiny. The majority of tweets and posts do not achieve the same reach as reporting in traditional journalistic media (cf. Theis-Berglmaier 2014: 154-159f.). This means that social networks do not replace traditional media, but merely supplement them as additional channels. Despite this, the increased use of social media by politicians to bypass journalistic media is a development worthy of close observation.

Method

Six German-language daily newspapers from Austria, Germany, and Switzerland were selected for the investigation – one tabloid and one quality newspaper from each country. They were *Der Standard*, *Heute*, *Süddeutsche Zeitung*, *Bild-Zeitung*, *Blick*, and *Neue Zürcher Zeitung*. In the case of the Austrian and German newspapers, the investigation included not only the print version but also the website, as the interactivity of Facebook and Twitter posts can be integrated into online articles more easily and thus may be used more often. The search terms »Facebook«, »Twitter«, and »tweet« were used to conduct the broadest possible search for articles from the six daily newspapers in the online archives and the APA-De-Facto database. As there was no way of predicting which politicians would be quoted in the newspaper articles, Facebook and Twitter posts of numerous German-speaking politicians were constantly saved during the recording period of March 9 to May 31, 2019. Once the recording period was finished, the frequency with which the politicians were quoted in the articles was counted. This was then used to determine the politicians most frequently named for Austria, Germany,

and Switzerland, in order to examine their Facebook and Twitter posts in more detail. The politicians selected were Heinz-Christian Strache (FPÖ), Sebastian Kurz (ÖVP), Pamela Rendi-Wagner (SPÖ), Annegret Kramp-Karrenbauer (CDU), Heiko Maas (SPD), Christian Lindner (FDP), Natalie Rickli (SVP), Jacqueline Fehr (SP), and Thomas Aeschi (SVP).

SA total of 3054 posts were coded and analyzed in the investigation using a code book. These posts comprised 1156 Facebook posts, 1036 tweets, and 862 articles in daily newspapers. 245 articles – around 28 percent of the total, or a little over a quarter – looked at the social network posts of the selected politicians and were coded further.

Descriptive results of the investigation

Number of Facebook fans and Twitter followers

The politicians named vary widely in terms of their number of Facebook fans and Twitter followers – partly due to the population sizes of the three countries. Despite this, it is clear that the social networks hold differing significance for the politicians and citizens in Austria, Germany, and Switzerland. In Austria, Facebook is a particularly important instrument of communication for the politicians. In Switzerland, by contrast, the social networks play a much smaller role. Although Germany has ten times as many inhabitants as Austria, the top Austrian politicians are far ahead in terms of the number of Facebook fans. Even before the Ibiza affair, Strache's Facebook page was an important and much-observed channel of communication and »was long the prototype for direct political communication in Austria and the backbone of its own media world« (Fidler 2019: 8). This is also clear to see from the number of fans and followers in the table below (figures from September 2019):

Politician	Number of Facebook fans	Number of Twitter followers
Heinz-Christian Strache (FPÖ)	792.000	62.000
Sebastian Kurz (ÖVP)	800.000	348.000
Pamela Rendi-Wagner (SPÖ)	102.000	16.300
Annegret Kramp-Karrenbauer (CDU)	40.000	83.500
Christian Lindner (FDP)	250.000	354.000
Heiko Maas (SPD)	50.000	333.000
Thomas Aeschi (SVP)	3.700	1.200
Jacqueline Fehr (SP)	7.200	10.800
Natalie Rickli (SVP)	29.000	45.800

Number of newspaper articles using Facebook and Twitter posts

Figure 1 shows the distribution of the articles that look at the Facebook and Twitter posts from one of the nine selected politicians. While the Austrian newspapers *Der Standard* and *Heute* published a very large number of articles on the nine politicians, the German newspapers did so much less. The online editions of *Der Standard* and *Heute* in particular published numerous articles. A total of 813 articles were published in the Austrian and German newspapers. This means that only a few articles were published in the two Swiss media: eleven articles in *Blick* and 38 in the *Neue Zürcher Zeitung*.

More than 70 percent of the articles were published on the newspapers' online platforms. The distribution of the articles clearly demonstrates that journalists are increasingly using Facebook and Twitter posts by politicians in articles published online. One explanation for the clear difference could be the interactivity and graphical presentation of posts on social media.

Number of Facebook and Twitter posts

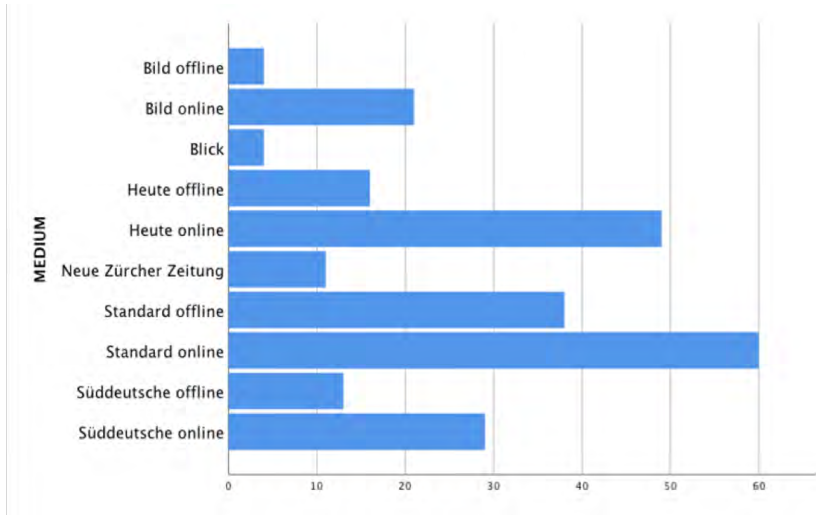
The nine politicians published a total of 1156 Facebook posts and 1036 tweets during the period of the investigation. In this, the Austrian politicians used Facebook most intensively, with Heinz-Christian Strache standing out particularly for his 330 posts. Although Sebastian Kurz published significantly fewer posts than Strache, with 217, he still used the platform more frequently than the other politicians in the investigation. Pamela Rendi-Wagner was hot on Kurz' heels with 183 posts. In the two other countries, only Christian Lindner (145 posts) in Germany and Jacqueline Fehr (111 posts) in Switzerland used the platform more frequently.

In comparison, it is striking that other politicians used Twitter more intensively than Facebook. According to Udris, Vogler, and Lucht (2018), right-wing populist parties are more likely to use Facebook. As it was only possible to collect very few Facebook posts and tweets from the German party AfD that were picked up on in daily newspapers, no AfD politician was selected for closer investigation. No assertions can thus be made regarding the use of Facebook by right-wing populist politicians in Germany. The situation in Austria corroborates the finding of Udris, Vogler, and Lucht. Strache published just 32 tweets during the period under investigation – one every two to three days on average. In Switzerland, the assertion on the use of social media by right-wing populist politicians cannot be confirmed. Thomas Aeschi used Twitter more frequently than Facebook and wrote 140 tweets, publishing one to two every day.

Sebastian Kurz used Twitter most frequently, publishing 296 tweets – between three and four every day. Heiko Maas was also a frequent Twitter user, writing 172 tweets in the period under investigation. Pamela

Figure 1:

Number of articles by medium that quote a Facebook or Twitter post by one of the selected politicians



Rendi-Wagner (106 tweets), Christian Lindner (109 tweets), and Jacqueline Fehr (100 tweets) also posted frequently on the short messaging service. This shows that politicians use the two social networks with different levels of frequency, rather than simply posting the same thing on both Facebook and Twitter.

Use in reporting

Only a small proportion of the social media posts published by the nine politicians made it into the daily newspapers. Of the 2192 Facebook posts and tweets, just 112 – around five percent of all the posts published on social networks – were used by journalists in reporting.

Content-related features

Topics of the social media posts quoted

In general, it can be said that the newspaper articles used posts from Facebook and Twitter on numerous different topic areas. Most frequently quoted were posts

in which politicians expressed their opinion on other politicians, public figures, or public institutions (165 times), or addressed the current situation in society, current processes, and the values and standards in the country (123 times).

Furthermore, journalists frequently used statements by the politicians on current events worldwide or reported on posts in which politicians wrote about their own party. Comments on the politicians' own political future were used in the daily newspapers in 68 cases, especially statements made after the Ibiza affair became known to the public, resulting in the collapse of the ruling coalition between the ÖVP and FPÖ. Statements from the social networks on political projects or international politics were rarely quoted. This shows that Facebook and Twitter posts on political demands by the politicians are taken into account little in the reporting.

Topics of the newspaper articles

Looking at the 245 articles that quote a Facebook or Twitter post by one of the nine politicians shows major differences in topics. While the newspapers most frequently look at the domestic policy situation in the respective country, this was less important as a topic of the social network posts. This means that, in this case, the topics of the posts from social media did not determine the topic of the entire newspaper article. The second most frequent topic of the articles was the Ibiza scandal, even though this only became public in the last few days of the period under investigation. The articles looked less often at tragic events worldwide, sporting successes, and the Facebook and Twitter appearances of the politicians in general.

Topics of the Facebook posts and tweets

In total, the most frequent form of posts and tweets found was those coded as an announcement/live stream/press conference (354 posts). Almost as often, the politicians concerned themselves with communication with or about other politicians (338 posts). Another 287 posts were found that looked at the topic of the election.

It was notable that, compared to the posts from the nine politicians quoted in the daily newspapers, the politicians wrote in the social networks a lot about current and future political projects. This means that, although numerous posts on political matters were published on Facebook and Twitter, the daily newspapers used very few of them in their reporting. Posts on the situation in society (211 times) or sporting events/deaths/tragic events (198 times) are thus less important in the politicians' communication on social networks than political demands and projects

Stylistic features

Tonality

When it comes to their tone, the majority of the articles were either neutral (40 percent) or somewhat negative (48 percent). Almost ten percent of the articles were very negative; just two percent were classified as somewhat positive. The politicians' posts on Facebook and Twitter were most commonly neutral, with 31 percent. In contrast to the newspaper articles, more than 25 percent of the posts on social networks were assessed as very positive and more than 14 percent as somewhat positive. Fewer posts were written in a negative tone.

Style

The style of the daily newspapers was also recorded. Around two thirds of the articles were relatively objective, while around one third had a more tabloid style. There was a significant difference between the reporting of tabloid and quality newspapers – tabloids used an objective style for only around a quarter of their articles, while quality newspapers did so in more than 97 percent of their reporting, even when using Facebook posts and tweets.

Linking of newspaper articles

In social media posts in which politicians included links to newspaper articles, it is striking that a large number of different news sources was used. This suggests that the politicians do not concentrate on the reporting of a specific medium, but instead draw on various sources that best support their own statements or political attitudes.

Politicians quoted

Frequency of quotation of the selected politicians

The frequency with which the selected politicians were quoted varied very widely. The activities of Heinz-Christian Strache were reported on most frequently, being covered in 156 articles. It was much rarer for the daily newspapers to cover the social media activities of Sebastian Kurz. Pamela Rendi-Wagner was mentioned in just nine articles in connection with her posts on social networks.

Posts by the three politicians selected in Germany were covered in the daily newspapers with a similar frequency: The Facebook or Twitter posts of Annegret

Kramp-Karrenbauer were mentioned in 13 articles, those of Christian Lindner in 15, and those of Heiko Maas in 18. Just two articles each looked at the social media accounts of the two Swiss politicians Thomas Aeschi and Natalie Rickli. Jacqueline Fehr's online activities were covered by journalists in six reports. This shows that posts in social networks by Austrian politicians are incorporated into reporting a great deal more often than those of their counterparts in Switzerland and Germany.

Nationality of all politicians quoted

During the period under investigation, 265 different German-speaking politicians were recorded as having their Facebook or Twitter posts mentioned at least once in one of the six daily newspapers. All in all, the Facebook and Twitter activities of Swiss politicians received barely any attention in daily newspapers (36 articles) compared to those of their counterparts in Austria and Germany. In contrast, posts by Austrian politicians were mentioned in 445 articles. German politicians were quoted most frequently by daily newspapers, in 516 cases. While in Germany the social media activities of more different actors were covered, with each individual being quoted less frequently, in Austria reporting was focused on a few central politicians such as Heinz-Christian Strache and Sebastian Kurz.

Party families in the German-speaking world

In the German-speaking world as a whole, newspapers most frequently quoted the social network activities of politicians associated with right-wing populist parties (296 articles). Social democrat politicians were mentioned in 265 articles, while the social media activities of conservative/liberal politicians were described in 218 newspaper reports.

In Austria, the social media activities of the FPÖ were covered most frequently in the daily newspapers – in a total of 257 cases. A long way behind was the ÖVP (69 articles), 56 of whose mentions can be attributed to Sebastian Kurz. Facebook and Twitter posts from SPÖ politicians were mentioned in 56 articles. This shows that journalists concentrate a great deal on Sebastian Kurz when it comes to the ÖVP, while the social media activities of other politicians are also covered in the case of the SPÖ and FPÖ.

When it comes to the German politicians, it was the social media activities of SPD actors that were quoted most frequently in the daily newspapers (197 articles). CDU politicians were named less frequently than SPD politicians, in 146 articles. In the German parties, a range of politicians have their say in the daily newspapers through their social media activities, with no concentration on individual persons like in Austria. FDP politicians were covered in just 29 articles,

with Christian Lindner, quoted in 15 articles, a central figure.

In Switzerland, the very low number of articles that looked at the Facebook and Twitter activities of Swiss politicians is noticeable. The SVP and SP were each covered in twelve articles that mention the social media posts of their party members.

Political position

The majority of politicians quoted in the articles are active at a national level (548 times). Journalists covered the Facebook and Twitter posts of regional and local politicians almost equally frequently (161 and 158 times respectively). Surprisingly, regional and local politicians were quoted in the newspaper articles more frequently than EU politicians (63 times), even though they have less influence in the national area of the respective newspaper than those active at an EU level.

Facebook posts and tweets as a source

Topicality of social media posts

The topicality of the Facebook posts and tweets covered in the daily newspaper reporting was also analyzed. The results showed that around two thirds of the posts were topical, i.e. published on Facebook or Twitter less than a week before the article in the daily newspaper. This proves that journalists usually react to topical posts and tweets, regularly monitoring the politicians' accounts. 15 percent of the posts were more than one week old, showing that journalists use the social networks in a similar way to an archive, also making use of older posts in certain news situations.

Agenda setting analysis

Facebook or Twitter posts as the main topic of an article

Another indicator that provides information on the extent to which Facebook posts and tweets determine the reporting in daily newspapers is the number of articles in which a Facebook or tweet is the main topic. The variable Facebook and Twitter post as main topic means that the entire newspaper article was about the posts on the two social media networks. However, this was found to be the case for just nine of the 245 articles, meaning that just 3.7 percent of the articles focus on the politicians' posts in social networks as their main topic.

Centrality of the Facebook and Twitter posts

In contrast to the variable Facebook and Twitter post as main topic, for the variable centrality to apply, the entire article does not need to revolve exclusively around the post or tweet – it must merely be used as the central starting point of the content or the subject of the reporting. Politicians' posts on social networks had a significant influence on the reporting in 52 newspaper articles, or only around a fifth. In most reports, the posts and tweets played a less important role in the reporting, or even no central role at all.

Facebook and Twitter posts were often used to underpin a fact with an example, such as in the case of the *Blick* article that quotes a tweet by Thomas Aeschi. The article covers a controversial political statement by the Swiss junior minister Roberto Balzaretti and picks up on a tweet by Aeschi as an example of a critical voice (cf. *Blick* 2019: 2). As far back as 2012, Broersma and Graham found that illustrating a story is one of the most important reasons for Facebook posts and tweets being used in reporting (cf. Broersma/Graham 2012: 405).

Relevance of the Facebook and Twitter posts

A further step determined how relevant the individual posts and tweets were in aiding comprehension of the respective newspaper articles. The Facebook or Twitter posts quoted were relevant in around a third of the daily newspaper articles, meaning that it would have been impossible to understand the information in the article without them. In 166 articles – around two thirds of the total – on the other hand, the Facebook posts and tweets were not relevant. This was especially the case when posts or tweets were quoted in order to improve presentation of an example, or only in part of the article.

Quotation: direct vs. indirect

Another indicator of the influence of the social media posts on the daily newspapers' agenda setting is the way in which the Facebook posts and tweets are used and quoted. The most common way, in more than 45 percent of cases, was for the journalists to quote the Facebook and Twitter posts directly. Most rarely, with eleven percent, posts were quoted indirectly. Summarizing was the term used to code all the articles that described the politicians' Facebook or Twitter accounts in general (22 percent). In around a fifth of the articles, the tweets and Facebook posts were used in the articles as images.

Another investigation had already found that journalists usually quote posts from social networks in full and directly (cf. Broersma/Graham 2012: 413). This was also the case in the majority of articles in this investigation. Both when using

the post as an image and when quoting it directly, the journalists use the politician's exact words. Broersma and Graham presumed that the reason for quoting social media posts directly was that journalists wanted to distance themselves from the politicians' statements. By quoting directly, they discharge responsibility for the opinions (cf. Broersma/Graham 2012: 413).

Critical examination

A further category of investigation was the extent to which the daily newspapers examined the posts from social networks critically. In doing so, it was assumed that uncritical use can have a greater influence on the agenda setting, as the journalists do not put the statements in context, scrutinize them, or compare and contrast them with opposing opinions. Politicians attempt to get their interpretation of a situation into the media and thus to establish their view of things (cf. Bulkow/Schweiger 2013: 175). The analysis showed that one third of the articles in daily newspapers examined the posts and tweets quoted critically, one third looked at them somewhat critically, and one third undertook no critical classification at all.

Testing the three hypotheses

1) Influence of interaction in social networks

Hypothesis 1 (H₁) was: The more controversial Facebook and Twitter posts are, the more likely they are to be used in the daily newspapers investigated.

The networks' algorithms mean that Facebook posts and tweets that are intensively discussed and receive more comments, likes, shares, and emoticons from their recipients achieve a wider reach. It is therefore assumed that journalists are more likely to use these social media posts in their reporting than posts and tweets with less interaction.

Using SPSS, the connection between interaction and use was determined with a bivariate Pearson correlation, which was used to analyze whether the probability of Facebook posts and tweets being used in newspapers rises as the level of interaction rises. A highly significant connection between interaction and use was found ($r=.28$, $p<0.01$). The analysis included 2190 posts, each of which was interacted with an average of 1433 times ($M=1433.46$, $SD=3415.80$). This means that politicians' social media posts with more interactions are more likely to be picked up on and quoted by journalists.

2) *Tabloid vs. quality*

Hypothesis 2 (H₂) was: Tabloid newspapers use more Facebook and Twitter posts in their reporting than quality newspapers in each country.

The first step was to investigate the number of articles in which the six tabloid and quality newspapers quoted Facebook and Twitter posts in the period under investigation. This revealed that almost two thirds of all the newspaper articles collected came from quality newspapers, contradicting the assumption that tabloid newspapers use Facebook and Twitter posts more often. However, it does not permit any conclusions to be drawn on the number of Facebook posts and tweets quoted, as a single article may quote multiple posts from the social networks. A further step in the analysis was therefore taken in order to investigate whether there was a significant difference between tabloid and quality newspapers in terms of the number of Facebook and Twitter posts quoted in the reporting. To test the hypothesis empirically, a T-test was used to analyze differences in the frequency of use between tabloid and quality media.

No significant difference between the two groups was found ($t(514) = 0.88, p = .38$). Tabloid newspapers ($M = 1.32, SD = .87$) do not use content from tweets and Facebook posts more frequently than quality media ($M = 1.27, SD = .63$). The hypothesis was therefore not confirmed. As tabloid newspapers address hard facts such as political processes less often than quality newspapers, focusing instead on emotionalized and personalized stories (cf. Raabe 2013: 33f.), this could explain why quality newspapers use politicians' social media activities more often.

3) *Influence of Facebook fans or Twitter followers*

Hypothesis 3 (H₃) was: The more Facebook fans or Twitter followers the politicians have, the more likely their posts and tweets are to be quoted in the daily newspapers' reporting.

This hypothesis assumes that politicians with more fans on Facebook or followers on Twitter are better known, and that journalists would therefore monitor the social network activities of these politicians more intensively. Specifically, this means that Facebook posts that were and were not used would differ significantly in terms of the number of followers/fans.

Hypothesis 3 was tested quantitatively using a T-test for independent random samples. The aim was to investigate the extent to which there was a difference regarding whether posts and tweets were used in newspaper reports based on the different number of Facebook fans and Twitter followers of the nine politicians. There was a significant difference ($t(2190) = 4.03, p < 0.01$) between Facebook posts that were and were not used in terms of the number of followers/fans. This means that there is a significant difference between the two groups. Posts that

are used have more followers on average ($M = 433580.36$, $SD = 27649.20$) than posts that are not used ($M = 316143.80$, $SD = 6590.09$).

This illustrates that the number of Facebook fans and Twitter followers is not only significant in the social networks, but also influences the further distribution of posts by journalists at daily newspapers.

Summary and conclusion

The analysis shows that Facebook and Twitter are used with different frequencies by the politicians investigated in Austria, Germany, and Switzerland. The widely differing numbers of fans and followers clearly show that potential voters receive the social media channels with different frequencies. Despite its smaller population, Austria stands out for the high relevance of Facebook in particular. This is amplified by the revelation of the Ibiza affair during the period under investigation, with the social media activities of FPÖ Deputy Chancellor Heinz-Christian Strache of particular interest. However, the above-average number of Facebook fans that politicians in Austria have compared to their counterparts in the other two countries shows that Facebook in particular is of greater significance to Austrian politicians than to those in Germany and Switzerland, regardless of the Ibiza affair that became public in mid-May

A difference was found between the three countries investigated in terms of the party-related and ideological orientation of the politicians quoted. While a large proportion of the Facebook posts and tweets in Austria come from the right-wing populist FPÖ, and especially Heinz-Christian Strache, many of the posts in Germany are attributed to the SPD. In Switzerland, only very few posts on social networks were quoted in the newspapers at all.

All in all, the influence of posts on social networks on the daily newspapers' agenda setting is a very mixed picture. Facebook posts and tweets sometimes have an influence on the daily newspapers by forming the starting point for or playing a central role in reporting. Direct quotation or publication of an image of the posts on social networks, or their use without critique in some cases, also allows politicians to get their words into the traditional mass media. This shows that, through their Facebook and Twitter posts quoted in the daily newspapers, the politicians have an influence on the articles and, consequently, potentially on the recipients.

The investigation shows that Austria is an outlier in terms of the large significance of social networks for the politicians on the one hand and the journalists' reporting on the other. Heinz-Christian Strache (until his Facebook account was deleted) and Sebastian Kurz in particular are extremely successful on Facebook, with around 800,000 fans each in Summer 2019. That is more than there

are readers of the *Kronen Zeitung*, the newspaper with the highest circulation in Austria (cf. ÖAK Österreichische Auflagenkontrolle 2018; Kurz 2019; Strache 2019). Falter Chief Editor Florian Klenk calls the social media activities of these two politicians their »own media network« (Klenk/Rabinovici 2019: 9), describing them as follows:

»Compliant communicators are bought in, their own videos are filmed and distributed online. It is the return of the party newspaper, so to speak. There is no interest in the media as a corrective, as a critical inquirer.« (Klenk/Rabinovici 2019: 9).

As a result, journalists bear enormous responsibility in researching and selecting their sources and topics. Against a background of increasing time and financial pressure in the sector, the fast and simple information provided by the social networks offers an alternative to laborious personal research. It will therefore remain essential for journalists to treat Facebook and Twitter posts thoughtfully and critically as sources for their work in the future.

About the author

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