Much Ado about Nothing?
The Use of Social Media in the New Digital Agenda Committee of the German Bundestag

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Introduction

In times of decreasing political participation (indicated by lower voter turnout and less political party memberships) it has been suggested that the Internet could vitalise political communication through online participation. Social media tools in particular create a greater potential for direct connections between political representatives and citizens.

The question is whether more technical opportunities and also more communicative and participatory options online can lead to more political interest in general, and to closer interrelations between citizens and politicians. Although we cannot expect digitalisation to be a panacea for rekindling interest in democracy, empirical results show some evidence that new channels and fora are used to express one's own political opinion online (e.g. Coleman and Blumler 2009; Ritzi and Wagner 2016; Emmer and Vowe 2004). But the way that communication and participation flows may take shape should be distinguished with respect to the actors: while citizens' political online activities follow a bottom-up logic (from citizens or activists to politicians), communicative interrelations driven by political elites and politicians are top-down, often inspired by the demands of transparency or by the need for self promotion and image management.

To estimate the social trust in democracy, interactivity and transparency are important indicators which perhaps become even more important for the idea of representative democracy that manifests in interrelations between citizens and representatives. Our argument is that the growing use of social media provokes a remarkable change in the interrelations between citizens and politicians, both in engendering closer relationships or in facilitating the formation of new sub-fora for interaction that exist in previously marginal spaces.

From the point of view of democratic theory, it is highly relevant whether citizens are vividly participating in politics or not. In light of recent events (such as the success of the Brexit referendum, the electoral successes of political parties on the far right wing, or the populist demagoguery of the Trump campaign in the 2016 U.S. election), it seems even more important to evaluate the positive and negative potential of online communication and its implications for democracy.

As parliaments are at the heart of democracy, MPs can generally be seen as mediators between citizens and government in representative democracies. How they fulfil their parliamentary functions (including making laws, scrutinising government, voting on new initiatives, and - most relevant in this chapter - public communication) can either foster or hamper citizens' political interest and participation, and consequently their social trust in the legislative assembly, democratic values, and representative democracy itself. Using social media to actively communicate with citizens and report about their activities is increasingly crucial, and especially important for MPs with explicit ambitions for engaging with digital media. We have identified one specific community in the German parliament that can by nature be characterised as being more concerned with digital matters than all others in the Bundestag: the 16 full and 16 deputy members of the new Digital Agenda Committee (DAC), the only committee of its kind in the European Union so far. In terms of interactivity and transparency, the Bundestag's permanent parliamentary committees do not usually operate publicly; however, given that the DAC has started its committee work with a claim for more transparency, we seek to investigate how it (as a collective body) and its members (as individual MPs) fulfil their communicative ambitions to inform the public about their

work. Do aspiration and reality drift apart due to parliamentary routine – which mostly consists policy-making behind closed doors – or does the DAC depart from the traditional approach of committee procedures in the Bundestag, and work more transparently and visibly for the public?

This chapter addresses these questions by analysing the Digital Agenda Committee's social media activities. Social media applications were developed to foster more engaging online communication – not only politically. For political purposes, Twitter is especially frequently used by professionals (including political elites, journalists, and interest groups) in election campaigns; to report, comment on, and discuss political events; or to stimulate political online protest. Twitter users can be characterised as a "highly active sphere for political discussion with dynamics and content that spilled over to the public sphere" (Jürgens and Jungherr 2015: 471), even though the number of people who use Twitter frequently is highly divergent from country to country. In Germany, almost 12 million users visit Twitter every month. This number includes registered users as well as casual visitors to the Twitter Website; it is relatively low compared to the number of 500 million worldwide active users (cf. *Spiegel Online* 2016).

Nonetheless, Twitter seems to be an appropriate space in which to assess the communicative activities of MPs who describe themselves as digital experts in parliament. It is regarded as highly interactive, as "politicians can directly communicate with citizens without having to overcome the gatekeeping functions of traditional mass media" (Rauchfleisch, Metag 2015: 2), and may use the tool to interact with citizens as well as with journalists and other societal actors.

We collected Twitter data from late June to early November 2015 to determine quantitatively for each member of the DAC their number of followers, the number of tweets they posted or retweeted, and how many retweets and @mentions they received themselves. Qualitatively, we further explored what information MPs tweeted about the DAC's work, and how they informed the public about parliamentary business and their individual activities. For the purposes of this chapter, we focus our attention on the top-down direction of communication (from politicians to citizens), rather than on bottom-up responses (from citizens to politicians).

We argue that by using social media (and in particular, Twitter) to report on its activities, the DAC can increase transparency and interactivity between representatives and citizens. This could increase and strengthen citizens', journalists', and other actors' interest in parliamentary business. In the following discussion, we examine whether the observable activities of the DAC members on Twitter realise such ambitions in practice for the period of our investigation. In doing so we contribute empirically to knowledge on MPs' purposes for using social media tools (such as communication, self-management, and other reasons). We secondly generate evidence to assess a possible shift in how political offices may function (for example, by incorporating more direct representation).

The remainder of the chapter proceeds in the following order: the next section gives an overview of the history of the Digital Agenda Committee and outlines its recent establishment as a permanent committee of the Bundestag. We then present further theoretical considerations on social media and politics: we first examine how Twitter can be used as a general communication tool, and then evaluate existing studies that deal with the communicative activities of German MPs on Twitter. Next, we outline our empirical analysis of the committee members' uses of Twitter, and of the public engagement with their accounts. Finally, we discuss our results, and present some general conclusions.

The Digital Agenda Committee: A New Permanent Committee in the Bundestag

The governmental system of Germany is a parliamentary democracy. To distinguish it from other democracies (such as the majority democracy of Great Britain), Lijphart (2012) has classified it as being rather consensus-seeking in its mode of problem-solving and decision-making. With respect to its internal parliamentary mode of operation the Bundestag is defined as a working parliament, emphasising the meaning of committees as bodies responsible for preparing the decisions of parliament, in addition to public debate in the plenary (Steffani 1979).

Most parliamentary business is done by permanent committees. They can generally be distinguished from other committees such as the mediation committee, the joint committee, and committees of inquiry. Enabling members to concentrate on a single, specialised policy area, permanent committees are fora where all bills are deliberated before decisions are taken in the plenary. Procedural rules give some sense of the significance of committees in parliamentary business: the committees discuss draft bills relating to their policy areas and usually revise them to a significant extent (or even reject them). At the end the bill can be passed by the plenary in its committee version – usually after another debate. The members of the committees therefore do a considerable amount of the technical policy work involved in the process of adopting legislation (cf. Bundestag 2016c).

Therefore, they can obtain information from the government and also from outside the parliament (such as from academic scholars, trade unions, or other practitioners) to gain expert knowledge on a particular policy issue. Committees are formed by MPs who come from the various parliamentary factions, in line with their relative strengths in parliament (cf. Bundestag 2016c).

Traditionally, each committee of the German Bundestag has been dedicated to a federal ministry (with a total number of 22 federal ministries corresponding to 22 permanent committees in the 18th electoral term of 2009-13). This was changed after the federal election in autumn 2013, when following the recommendations of an April 2013 report by the enquete commission Internet and Digital Society (*Internet und digitale Gesellschaft*), the majority of MPs decided to establish a new permanent committee: the Digital Agenda Committee (DAC) was established in February 2014, increasing the number of permanent committees to 23.

The DAC is the only permanent committee that does not directly mirror any government department with a specific policy area, because no 'digital' ministry exists at this point. As a natural consequence, the DAC only has an advisory role, without any immediate law-making responsibilities. It has 16 full members – composed proportional to the relative strengths of the parliamentary factions, it is comprised of seven members from the Christian Democrats (CDU/CSU), five Social Democrats (SPD), two members of the Left party (Die Linke), and two members of the Greens (die Grünen). These accompany and supervise all activities on the federal government's Digital Agenda to exercise the parliamentary function of scrutiny. Further, empowered to take up issues on their own authority, the DAC's members deliberate on issues that fall into their terms of reference, without referral from the plenary, in order to obtain information about legislative projects from the ministries (cf. Bundestag 2016a). The DAC is therefore somewhat restricted in its abilities to intervene in the legislative process. This contrasts with long-established permanent committees, which have extensive law-making responsibilities.

When the DAC was formed in 2014, the committee members were in favour of interactivity, and announced that they would organise the committee's work more transparently than other committees usually do. To achieve this, an online participation tool was used to connect (registered) citizens via the Internet to the committee's business, to stimulate a public online debate about certain digital policy issues. This pilot project and its results were documented until mid-2015, and are still available from the Website of of the German Bundestag, but its actual activity concluded at that time (cf. Bundestag 2016b).

In assessing its performance after one year in office, the DAC was lambasted by journalists as well as by the online community: in February 2015, prominent German bloggers' comments recognised a wide gulf between ambition and reality as they reviewed the DAC's activity and results. They counted how often and on what topics the DAC had met over the period of one year; as well as expressing disappointment about the result of the 28 sessions held until the DAC's first birthday, they also criticised that there had been only six public sessions. They argued that, instead of making the committee's work more transparent for the public, it had continued to meet behind closed doors. Not surprisingly, the DAC was judged to have become nothing more than an additional, ordinary permanent committee among the others (cf. Voß 2015; Schnoor 2015).

One question not answered by the harsh reviews so far has been whether the DAC itself, or its members, use social media effectively to connect more directly with citizens. We therefore investigates the committee's and its individual members' Twitter activities in order to estimate the extent of their social media use.

Theoretical Background: Twitter as a Social Media Engagement Tool

Twitter has become a common resource for political communication among politicians, journalists, interest groups, and citizens. Compared to the traditional means of political communication – such as broadcast communication from sender to receivers via newspapers and television, or reciprocal communication between senders and receivers via email – Twitter instead follows a multidirectional, multi-participant logic: at a number of different levels of visibility and publicness, it enables forms of communication ranging from direct interpersonal exchanges through group discussions to the public broadcast of messages to an audience of unknown size (Bruns and Moe 2014). This facilitates both real-time and asynchronous communication among users of diverse backgrounds, including ordinary citizens as well as representatives of the media, politics, business, academia, etc. Users follow each other to observe the communicative activities of their counterparts. Messages of up to 140 characters can be posted, retweeted, liked, and responded to by others. Moreover, Twitter users can mention others and be mentioned by others in their tweets. Issue-specific topics can also be marked by hashtags: topical keywords prefixed with the hash symbol (e.g. #hashtag). These can be used to aggregate users' comments on certains topic into a combined feed of live updates.

Although globally, Twitter attracts some 500 million active users each month (cf. *Spiegel Online* 2016), the distribution of the Twitter userbase around the world is highly uneven. Take-up in Germany remains comparatively low, with only about 12 million visitors to Twitter per month; this number represents a combination of registered users and unregistered visitors to Twitter site. However, German users' activities on Twitter are nonetheless important, especially because of its affordances as a means for more direct and active communicative exchanges between citizens and their parliamentary representatives, and because the German Twitter population represents a particularly Internet-affine subset of overall society. But Twitter should not be overestimated in its contribution to the German political environment: the platform itself does not stimulate communication, but rather could be seen as a means to such end if parliamentarians and ordinary users choose to use it in this way. It facilitates everyday political discussion as a complementary practice to offline communication, but whether it can function as a substitute for the latter remains highly doubtful.

Early political science literature shows two contradictory expectations on how the concept of political representation might change over time due to digitalisation: on the one hand, cyber-optimists awaited a transformation of responsible party government into more direct, individualised types of political representation. For example, discussing developments in the United Kingdom, Coleman (2005) shows some anecdotal evidence for the decline of traditional political representation and of the importance of political parties, and sees instead a shift towards more direct representation and closer connections between MPs and citizens via the social media then available. On the other hand, cyber-sceptics predicted the reinforcement of established systems of political representation.

Suggesting a technological model of political representation in the networked society, Zittel (2003) empirically analyses three cases to shed light on the two different assumptions. He shows for MPs of the US House of Representatives, the Swedish Riksdag, and the German Bundestag that the Internet puts pressure on the concept of political representation. Despite country-specific differences, in all three cases the age of an MP played an important role for their digital media use. It was always the younger generation of politicians who established websites and communicated online with their constituencies. Zittel (2003: 49) carefully reflects on his own results in the context of an early stage of digitalisation.

Today, we see the broader acceptance of digital communication in politics, brought on not least by the adoption of social media. Studies now address not simply the question of whether MPs use digital media tools at all, but investigate which tools they use, and for what purposes. Assessing the literature on MPs' uses of Twitter, the results of empirical case studies tend to show that politicians utilise Twitter mostly for self-promotion and impression management. While only few of the British and German MPs covered by these studies adopt Twitter as a regular communication channel, most of their posting activity follows their pre-existing ideological positioning and promotes them as opinion leaders (cf. Hegelich and Shahrezye 2015; Jackson and Lilleker 2011). But what holds true for the UK and Germany is rather different in Switzerland: Rauchfleisch and Metag (2015:15) show that geographic factors are more important for politicians' interactions via Twitter than

their party affiliations. Because of a low penetration rate in Switzerland, Twitter serves there a more elite network for politicians, political journalists, and interest group actors (ibid.). More generally, compared to previous studies there appears to be a decline in the importance of the age factor as a predictor of MPs' level of online activity; digital and social media tools are now used more widely by politicians of all ages.

Many studies dealing with MPs' social media uses do not concentrate on intra-parliamentary groups, using broad samples of MPs' Twitter activity instead of focussing on a selection of actors or distinct actor groups. By contrast, we have chosen to study the Bundestag's Digital Agenda Committee because it provides a ready example of a particular group of MPs whom we could expect to be highly interested and versed in using digital media. Additionally, the DAC is unique among parliaments within the European Union, and thus provides no opportunity for comparative investigation. It is underinvestigated; we know little about its members' activities; their idea of political representation; and their approaches to informing the general public via social media about the DAC's work. However, in light of the first evaluations of the DAC's performance by German bloggers after one year in office, our expectations of the DAC members' social media activities are not high. The next section provides a first overview of these activities.

Empirical Data and Findings

Methodology

We used an open-source platform for tracking and capturing Twitter data, DMI-TCAT (Borra & Rieder, 2014), to collect tweets from the Twitter Streaming API by following the Twitter accounts identified as belonging to members of DAC and by tracking their screen names and the hashtags #btada and #DigitaleAgenda. These members and their Twitter screen names are shown in table 1, grouped by party membership and committee role. The table also includes the four deputy members of the DAC for whom no Twitter account was identified, and whose activity is therefore not included in this study. There is no official account for the Digital Agenda Committee itself, and we are therefore focussing only on its members' individual accounts.

Data were collected for four months, from 23 June to 1 November 2015. The data collected using the Twitter Streaming API contain the tweets and retweets sent by each user being followed, as well as replies to and retweets of these tweets, and any other mentions of the user (tweets including @username). It will not include tweets from protected (private) users.

TABLE 1. DAC COMMITTEE MEMBERS DURING THE PERIOD OF DATA COLLECTION

Name	Screen name	Party
Full members		
Dr. Andreas Nick	DrAndreasNick	CDU/CSU
Hansjörg Durz	Hansjoerg_Durz	CDU/CSU
Jens Koeppen *(Chair)*	JensKoeppen	CDU/CSU
Maik Beermann	MaikBeermann	CDU/CSU
Christina Schwarzer	TinaSchwarzer	CDU/CSU
Thomas Jarzombek	tj_tweets	CDU/CSU
Tankred Schipanski	TSchipanski	CDU/CSU
Halina Wawzyniak	Halina_Waw	Die Linke
Herbert Behrens	HerbertBehrens	Die Linke
Dieter Janecek	DJanecek	Grüne
Konstantin v. Notz	KonstantinNotz	Grüne
Christina Kampmann	c_kampmann	SPD
Christian Flisek	ChristianFlisek	SPD
Saskia Esken	EskenSaskia	SPD
Gerold Reichenbach	g_reichenbach	SPD
Lars Klingbeil	larsklingbeil	SPD
Deputy Members		
Bettina Hornhues	BettinaHornhues	CDU/CSU
Kai Whittaker	Kai_Whittaker	CDU/CSU
Marian Wendt	MdbWendt	CDU/CSU
Nadine Schön	NadineSchoen	CDU/CSU
Peter Tauber	petertauber	CDU/CSU
Ulrich Lange	UlrichLange	CDU/CSU
Marco Wanderwitz	wanderwitz	CDU/CSU
Petra Pau	PetraPauMaHe	Die Linke

Jan Korte	No account	Die Linke
Tabea Rößner	TabeaRoessner	Grüne
Volker Beck	Volker_Beck	Grüne
Sören Bartol	soerenbartol	SPD
Jens Zimmermann	JensZimmermann1	SPD
Martin Dörmann	No account	SPD
Svenja Stadler	No account	SPD
Carsten Träger	No account	SPD

The Twitter hashtags in table 2 were identified as topics related to the work of the digital agenda committee, and used as a measure of how many of the tweets in the dataset were related to the activities of the DAC. These were identified by coding the top 100 hashtags by frequency in our dataset as either a DAC topic or not. The frequency of hashtags follows a long-tail distribution, so that the top 100 hashtags describe most of the hashtagged activity. However, there maybe other DAC-related hashtags that we have excluded by applying this cutoff; additionally, of course, there may also have been other tweets related to the activity of the DAC that did not contain any hashtags at all.

TABLE 2. HASHTAGS IDENTIFIED AS RELATED TO DIGITAL AGENDA COMMITTEE'S WORK

#adafinest	#digitaleagenda	#landesverrat	#oer
#bnd	#digitalebildung	#netzneutralität	#periscope
#btada	#digitalisierung	#netzpolitik	#piraten
#cdudigital	#dk15	#nohatespeech	#pressefreiheit
#cnetz	#edchatde	#nps15	#snowden
#cnight	#ff	#nsa	#vds
#ctour	#gba	#nsaua	#vorratsdatenspeicherung
#datenschutz			

Results

The four months of data collection resulted in a dataset containing 60,318 tweets sent from 11,347 Twitter accounts, including the 26 full and deputy members of the DAC. Two of the 28 members of the DAC for whom we identified Twitter accounts did not send any tweets during the period, one full committee member, Hansjörg Durz (@Hansjoerg_Durz) and the deputy member Ulrich Lange (@UlrichLange) both from CDU/CSU. The other 26 members sent between 3,076 Volker Beck (@Volker_Beck) and 16 Bettina Hornhues (@BettinaHornhues) tweets during the period (figure 1). This represents an exponential distribution, showing a substantial variation in active participation on Twitter between the different members. The most active committee member, Volker Beck, sent 50% more tweets than the next most active member, Tankred Schipanski (@TSchipanski), who in turn sent 36% more tweets than Halina Wawzyniak (@Halina_Waw), with a further 50% decrease from Halina Wawzyniak to the next most active member, Dieter Janecek (@DJanecek). There is no clear pattern of participation by party, although Greens (Grüne) party members are all located towards the more active end.

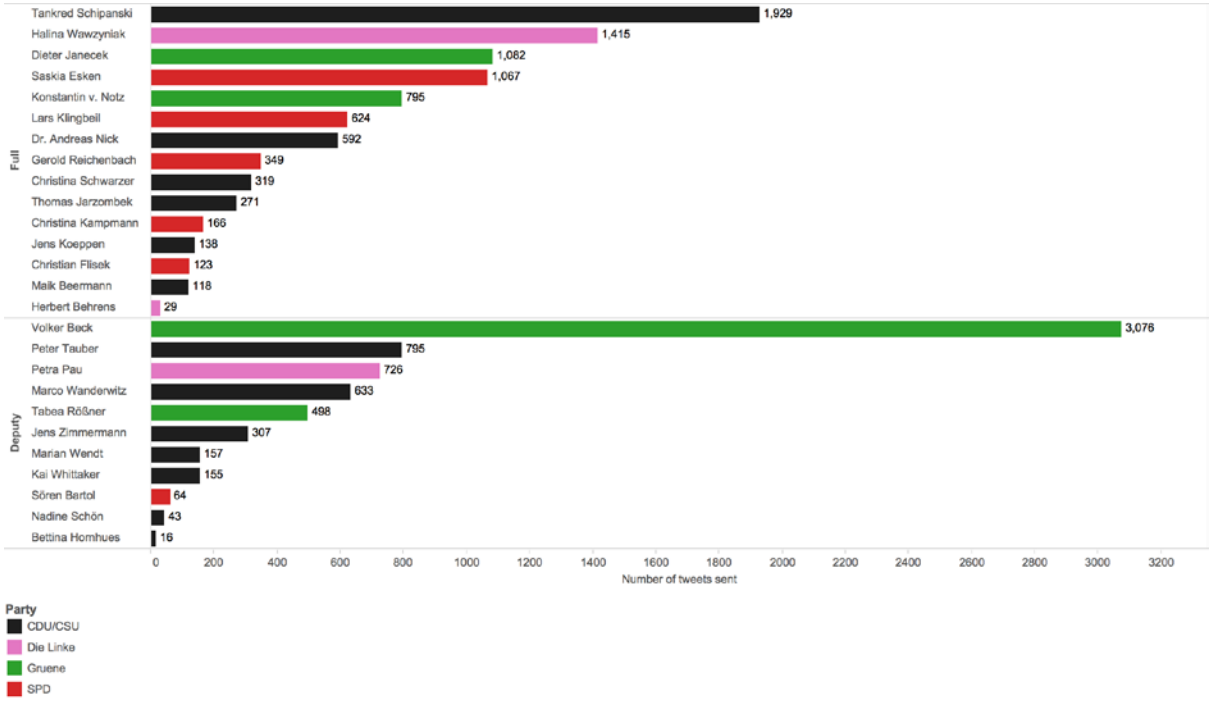


FIGURE 1. NUMBER OF TWEETS PER DAC MEMBER

The total number of tweets sent by each member, shown in figure 1, can be separated into tweets containing hashtags (blue) and tweets without hashtags (orange), as shown in figure 2. There is some variation in the proportion of tweets containing hashtags, with all users using hashtags at least. The most active user Volker Beck (@Volker_Beck) is amongst the least active users of hashtags, with hashtags in only 20% of his tweets, while Tankred Schipanski (@TSchipanski) has one of the highest uses of hashtags, at 51%.

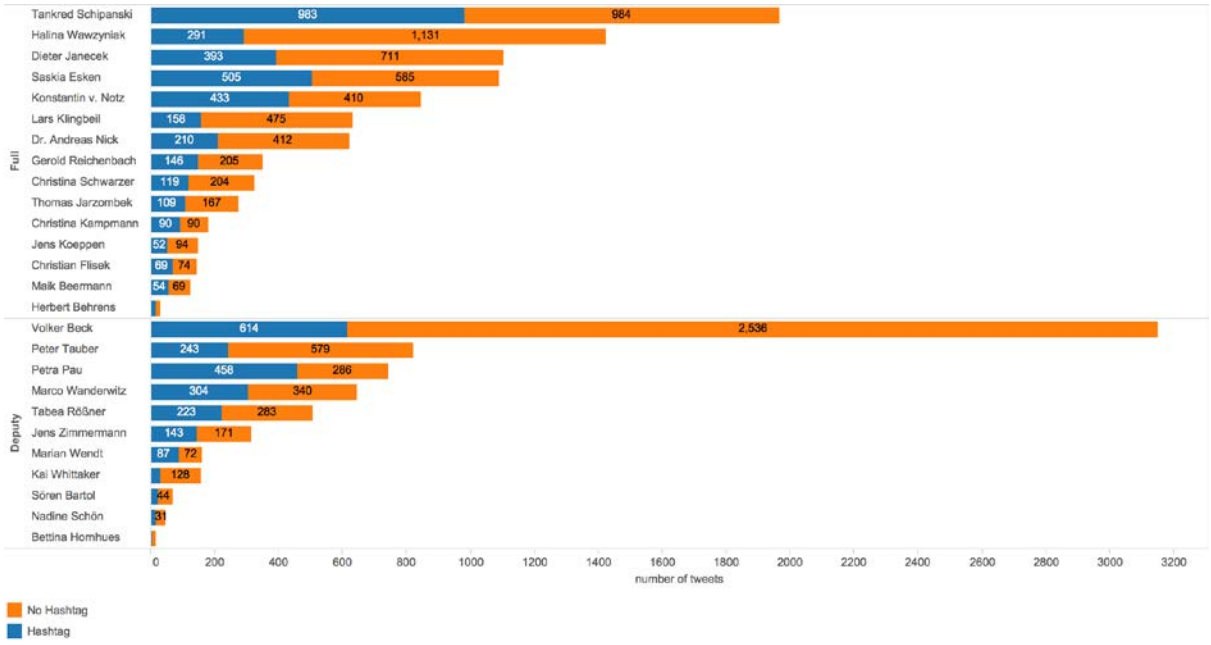


FIGURE 2. NUMBER OF TWEETS PER COMMITTEE MEMBER USING HASHTAGS

Figure 3 shows the number of tweets by each committee member that contain one of the top 100 hashtags, and also indicates which of these (shown in green) we have identified as being related to topics associated with

the DAC committee in table 2 above. The graph is sorted by the total number of tweets containing hashtags sent, which has altered the order of the committee members compared to figures 1 and 2. Both the proportion and the absolute number of each member's tweets which contain one of the DAC topic hashtags provide us with an indication of that member's activity in communicating about the DAC on Twitter. Figure 3 reveals that the most tweets with such hashtags were sent by Konstantin von Notz (244 tweets), and that these were also constituted a high proportion of all the tweets containing one of the top 100 hashtags that were sent from his account. The next most active members were Halina Wawzyniak (133 DAC-related hashtag tweets) and Saskia Esken (125 DAC-related hashtag tweets). By contrast, although Tankred Schipanski sent the most tweets containing one of the top 100 hashtags, only 65 of these contained DAC-related hashtags, compared to 518 with other hashtags. The most active user by the total number of tweets sent during our period of observation, Volker Beck, only sent 33 tweets with DAC-related hashtags, out of a total of 304 tweets containing one of the top 100 hashtags. Meanwhile, although Christian Filsek and Jens Koeppen were not very active overall, sending only 143 and 146 tweets respectively during the collection period, over 80% of their tweets containing top 100 hashtags included DAC-related hashtags, which indicates that a high proportion of their overall activity was related to the DAC.

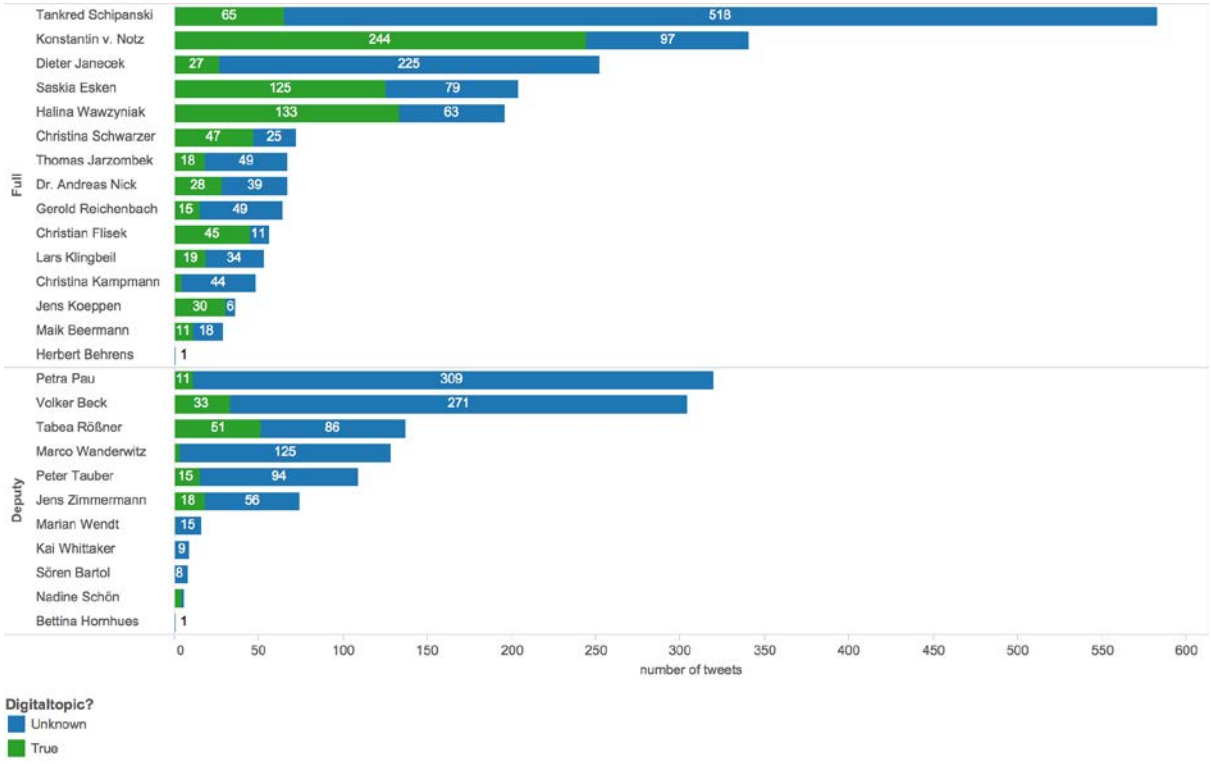


FIGURE 3. NUMBER OF TWEETS PER COMMITTEE MEMBER USING ONE OF THE HASHTAGS IDENTIFIED AS RELATED TO THE DIGITAL AGENDA COMMITTEE'S WORK

The hashtags most directly related to the DAC are #digitaleagenda and #btada (Bundestagsausschuss Digitale Agenda) but there were very few tweets sent by committee members which contained these, with only 19 tweets containing #digitaleagenda and 67 containing #btada (table 3). Interestingly, most of the committee members that used one of these hashtags also used the other. The total tweets containing #btada or #digitalagenda sent by each member are shown in Figure 4 and highlights that the deputy committee members had much lower activity using these hashtags than full members.

TABLE 3. COMMITTEE MEMBER TWEETS CONTAINING #DIGITALEAGENDA OR #BTADA

Committee Member	#digitaleagenda	#btada
Tankred Shipanski	3	11
Halina Wawzyniak		10
Dieter Janecek	4	8
Saskia Esken	3	5
Konstantin Notz	1	2
Lars Klingbell	2	1
Dr Andreas Nick	1	1
Tabea Rößner		2
Jens Zimmermann	1	3
Thomas Jarzombek	1	
Marian Wendt	1	
Jens Koeppen		21
Malk Beermann		3
Nadine Schön	2	
TOTAL	19	67

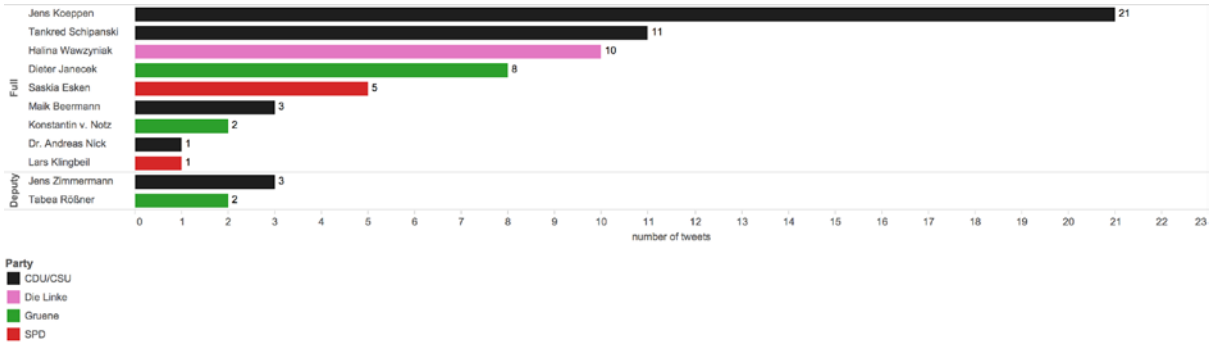


FIGURE 4. NUMBER OF TWEETS CONTAINING #BTADA OR #DIGITALAGENDA SENT BY EACH FULL OR DEPUTY MEMBER OF THE COMMITTEE. COLOUR SHOWS PARTY MEMBERSHIP.

By examining the number of unique users mentioned in tweets from each committee member, we can assess how much they are engaging with a broader audience. Again Volker Beck is the most active, this time in engaging with 1,059 other Twitter accounts (figure 5).

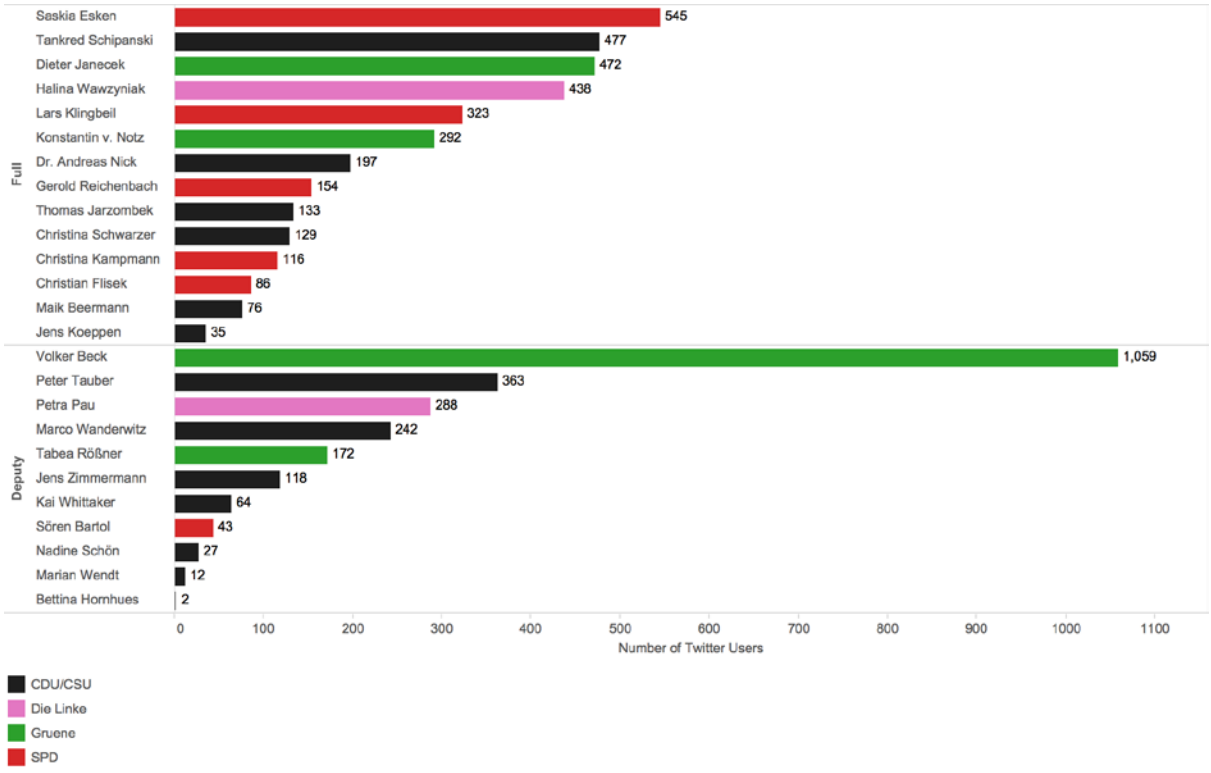
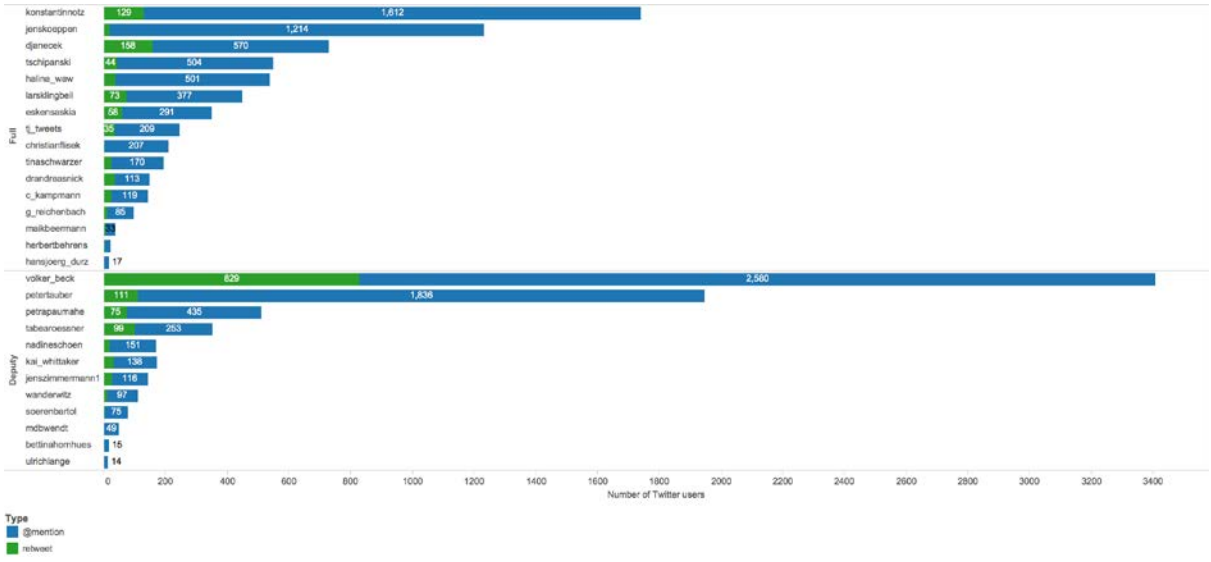


FIGURE 5. NUMBER OF UNIQUE USERS MENTIONED IN TWEETS PER COMMITTEE MEMBER

Conversely, it is also possible to examine how many other users @mention each committee member (figure 6). Again Volker Beck leads the field, being contacted by 3,409 accounts, over three times the number he contacted. Peter Tauber and Konstantin Notz only @mentioned 363 and 292 unique users in their tweets, respectively, but are the second and third most @mentioned committee members with 1,836 and 1,741 accounts mentioning them. This means that they received 5 to 6 times as many mentions as they made. In figure 6 the type of mention is shown as retweet (green) and @mention (blue). Some users may have sent both types of tweets, so the totals may count some users twice. The only committee member being retweeted by a considerable number of users is @volker_beck, with 829 unique users.



Tweets can also contain links to external content, by including URLs. These usually indicate the sharing of information from outside of Twitter. Figure 7 shows the number of tweets containing URLs sent by each committee member. Again Volker Beck is the most prolific, with the 775 tweets containing URLs representing 25% of his total tweets. Tankred Schipanski is next with 561 (29%) tweets containing URLs. Marian Wendt has the highest proportion of tweets containing URLs at 62%, but this still amounts to only 91 tweets in total.

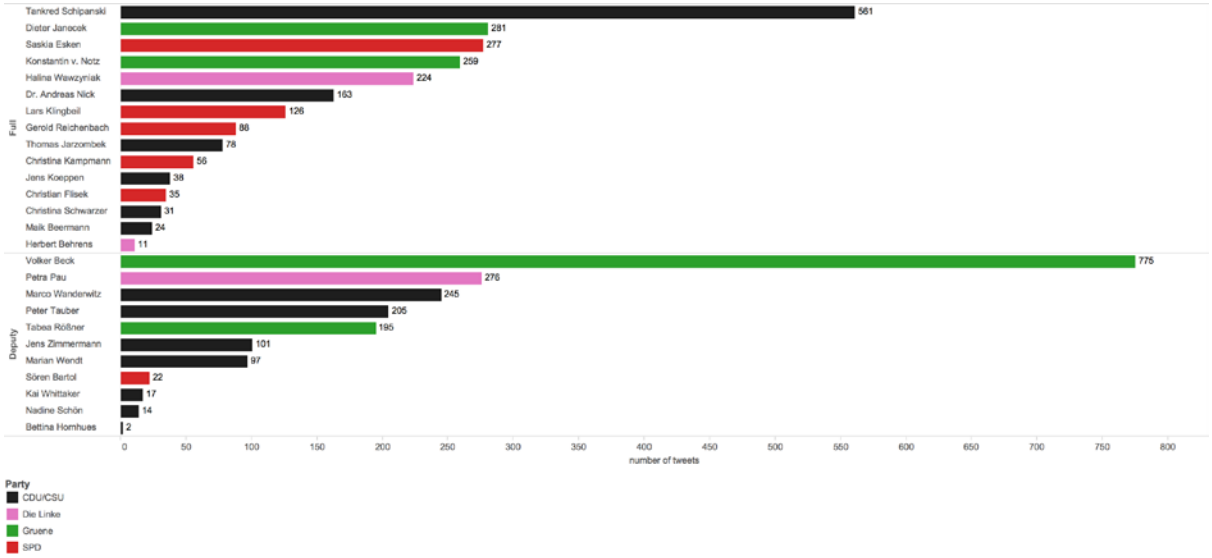


FIGURE 7. TWEETS CONTAINING URLS SENT BY MEMBERS OF THE DAC

By plotting the number mentions against the number of retweets (figure 8), it becomes evident that the proportion of each remains similar for each of the members even as the number of tweets they send increases.

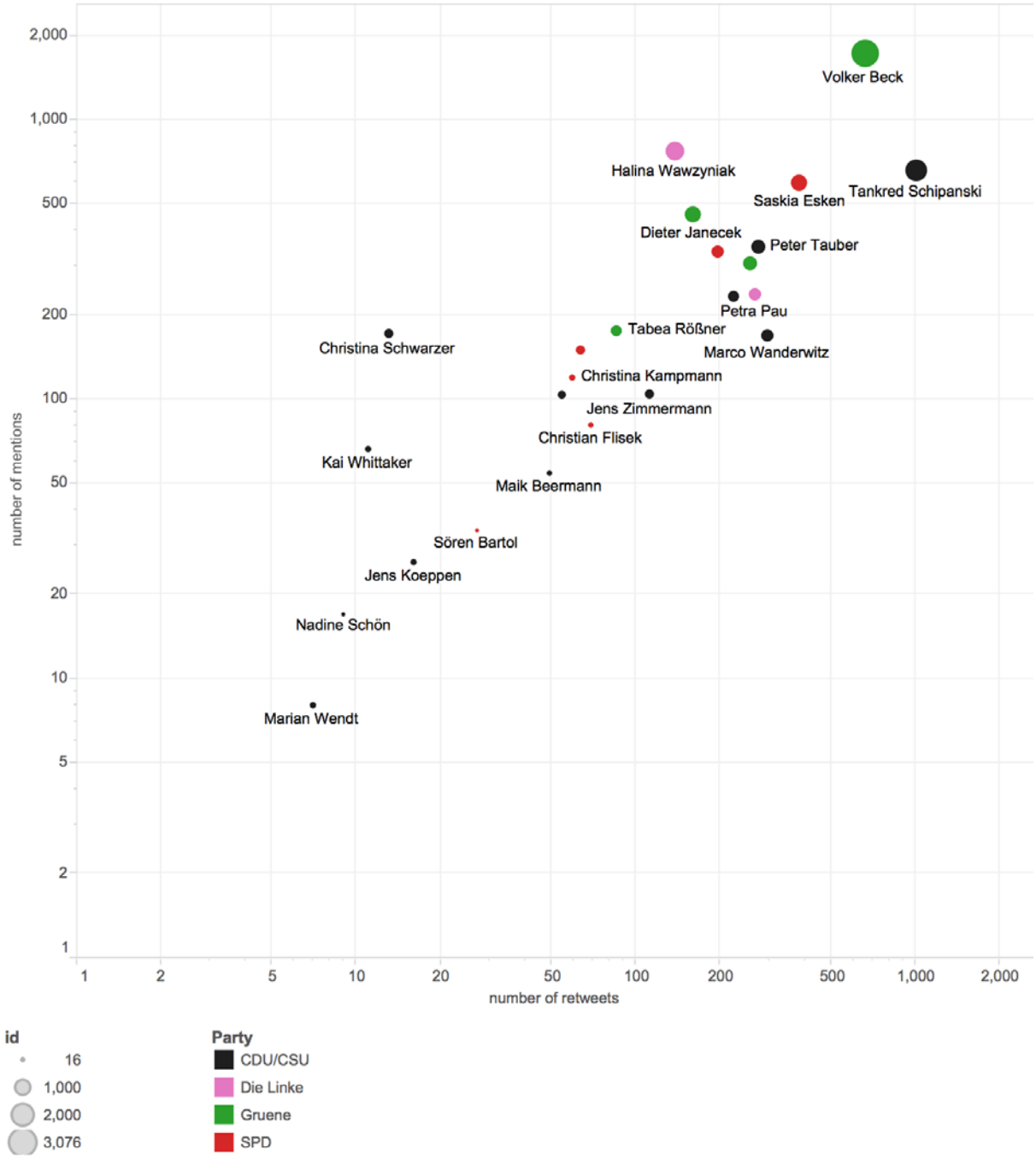


FIGURE 8. COMPARISON OF THE NUMBER OF MENTIONS AND RETWEETS SENT BY EACH DAC MEMBER (LOG/LOG GRAPH SCALE)

Discussion and Conclusion

The empirical results have generated some interesting but also disappointing results. We do not find any common marketing strategy amongst its members to promote the topics, procedures, and aims of the Digital Agenda Committee. There seems to be no substantial relationship between what the committee members tweet out and what the DAC is concerned with. Party membership also does not predict the DAC members' activities. Further, there are no clear patterns in who is engaging with their Twitter audience, when, and how often.

Overall, this points to a use of Twitter by the members of the Digital Agenda Committee that is no more and no less active and engaged than is the case for the average member of the Bundestag; it appears that they have failed to take any steps beyond the ordinary in order to promote this extraordinary, particularly Internet-affine committee through one of the leading social media platforms, and this affirms the criticism of the committee

and its work that was published on its first anniversary by some of Germany's leading bloggers. We note in this context that our data gathering continued for a sufficiently long period of time, and occurred outside any major federal election campaigns or other extraordinary circumstances that would have artificially boosted the volume of social media activity that the DAC members engaged in - what we have captured and documented here is highly likely to represent the levels of social media engagement by committee members during their day-to-day parliamentary work.

We did not track a comparative sample of non-DAC members of the Bundestag, which would have enabled us to explore whether even this limited level of activity is nonetheless ahead of their peers in other roles and committees. Outside of such comparisons, however, in absolute numbers the level of activity and engagement by DAC members that we have observed here must already be considered to be remarkably low in the context of their specific roles on the Committee, and of the stated aims at the institution of the Digital Agenda Committee. We would have expected this group to be more active, given their self-declared ambitions for engaging with digital media; we would have expected them to be more proactive in reaching out to and engaging with ordinary citizens and societal stakeholders, in order to transport the matters addressed by the committee into wider public debate and enhance the transparency of the committee's work; and we would have expected them to make a concerted effort, in particular, to use the affordances of leading social media platforms to create a focal point for discussions of the DAC's work - in the case of Twitter, for instance, by consistently establishing and promoting a dedicated hashtag for the Committee. None of these expectations have been met to date.

This is not entirely surprising. Research on the use of Twitter in the House of Commons provides clear evidence that MPs tweet first and foremost to manage and promote their personal brands, rather than to inform the public about their current parliamentary work. Second, MPs' use of Twitter in the UK is also intended largely to promote their local activity and constituency work (cf. Jackson and Lilleker 2011). Our results paint a similar picture: the number of tweets dealing with the DAC or related topics (identified by the hashtag #btada or #digitaleagenda) is relatively low. Among 60,318 tweets sent by 11,347 Twitter accounts including the 26 members of the DAC, we find only 19 tweets using #digitaleagenda, and 67 tweets using the hashtag #btada. Most of the latter were sent out by Jens Koeppen, the head of the committee.

It is unrealistic to expect that parliamentary committee work will ever attract a massive social media audience, of course - too much of it is too topically specific and procedurally complex to be relevant and accessible to a generalist social media audience. But this should not stop it from attracting a smaller but no less important group of dedicated followers with a specific interest in the topics under discussion, and - used appropriately - social media do have a valuable role to play in enhancing the transparency and popular understanding of the sometimes arcane activities of such committees; on social media, the work of such committees is not required to attract a *large* audience, it merely needs to attract the *right* audience. It can only ever do so, however, if parliamentarians themselves make sufficient efforts to actively and consistently document and promote the work of their committees - if they proactively and collectively identify the most effective ways of using their social media platforms to engage with the citizens and stakeholders who may be interested in their work. In a consensus-seeking parliament like the Bundestag, this must also be a concerted effort across party boundaries. On present evidence, the members of the Digital Agenda Committee of the German Bundestag have been found sadly wanting in their social media activities, unfortunately.

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