

The Spiral of Euroscepticism: Media Negativity, Framing and Opposition to the EU

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Introduction

Research on Euroscepticism has primarily focused on agency and opinion; it has either analysed the activities of political parties and the mobilisation of claims by political actors or it has analysed the passive attitudes of citizens and their readiness to support and/or oppose European integration. Euroscepticism research has, in turn, only paid little attention to the intermediary processes of communication, interpretation and framing through which knowledge and attitudes are shaped by political agency and the latteris conditioned, in turn, by opinions of citizens. To open this ‘black box’ of intermediation, we need to analyse Euroscepticism in relation to the media. In the internet and social media age, the relationship between Euroscepticism and media reporting becomes ever more important not just with regards to traditional media, but also social media as citizens turn away from print journalism and access information and news online. In June 2016, the United Kingdom voted to leave the European Union in a national referendum. Following this unprecedented vote, the EU now faces the uncertainty and challenge of maintaining unity among the remaining twenty seven member states. However, Eurosceptic parties have been gaining more ground not just in the UK, but also across the EU – most notably in Germany where the AfD has increased its share of the vote and recently boosted the number of seats it holds in regional parliaments. Central to the contestation, and ultimately the rejection, of the EU’s legitimacy are, however, not just Eurosceptic parties and their supposedly direct impact on voter choice but also the media and public sphere dynamics that surround them. Given that a

‘Brexit’ vote was supported by most British national tabloid newspapers and one broadsheet, the role of the media in delegitimising the EU becomes paramount. The electoral success of Eurosceptic parties is thus often related to their successful media strategies and campaigns. To understand whether the media are facilitators or obstacles of an emerging EU democracy (see introduction to this volume) it is therefore necessary to attribute a more independent role to the media and specifically to the role of news journalism. In the social media age, however, the role of reader feedback in escalating Eurosceptic attitudes is also key to understanding these dynamics. This chapter will draw in part, but not exclusively, on research from the UK context that can shed light not just on the mechanisms that led to a vote against EU membership in Britain, but also to identify ways in which similar circumstances can be avoided in other EU member states.

Media scholars who have discussed the changing role of the news media in generating democratic legitimacy have found that a systematic negativity bias applies to political news-making (see for example Patterson, 2000; Kepplinger, 1998; Cappella and Jamieson, 1997). Instead of being devoted to fair judgment and substantive critique, journalists often prefer polemicism, excessiveness, and general negativity, leading to a ‘spiral of cynicism’ (Cappella and Jamieson, 1997). In this chapter, we argue that this spiral of cynicism in EU news results in a ‘spiral of Euroscepticism’ (De Vreese, 2007). The forms this negativity bias takes and the causal relationship with political behaviour is, however, unclear, and warrants new research programmes that investigate linkages between media framing strategies, social media engagement and opposition to the EU. Instead of considering media as an arena that is strategically occupied by political parties, we suggest taking media autonomy seriously to understand how media internal logics and selective devices contribute to the shaping of public discourse about the EU. In the following we will review the existing literature on Euroscepticism, EU legitimacy and the media and present evidence that supports the thesis of a ‘spiral of Euroscepticism’.

This can account for the salience of Eurosceptic statements and opinions in the public sphere that then push political parties to contest the EU in predominantly negative terms and limit citizens' options for constructive engagement in EU democracy.

Journalism and Media Negativity

When considering the role of the media in shaping negative attitudes of the citizens about the EU, the focus is often laid on the media strategies of political parties, civil society organisations and individual actors. This includes, for instance, the mobilisation potential of Eurosceptic parties, the emergence of new extremist movements or the media skills of particular leaders to spread anti-Brussels propaganda (see other contributions in this volume; Adam, 2009; de Vries and Edwards, 2009), or the insufficient communication tools utilised by the EU Commission and its limited capacities to reach out to the relevant segments of the public (van Brussel, 2014; Brüggeman, 2010). The high salience of Eurosceptic actors in the news media also relates to media logics and potential media biases. The existence of a negativity bias in journalistic news coverage is an almost universal finding in journalism studies. In general, news selection is found to be value driven, one consequence of which is a tendency towards negative news over balanced or positive reports. In the tradition of Galtung and Ruge (1965), media scholars have drawn a list of different criteria, such as relevance, familiarity, negativity, that journalists apply when they select and frame political news (Bohle, 1986). The theory of news values argues that journalists classify events according to these criteria that then need to be balanced. These values have been found to apply across different cultures, but there are specific ways of balancing them that apply to particular news formats or cultures. One consistent finding is that bad news is more newsworthy than good news. Media negativity is also found to correlate with distance from the events covered, while proximity in local news, for example, creates demand for good news. The media negativity bias therefore applies, in particular, to foreign news coverage where other criteria for news

selection (like familiarity, personalisation, unambiguity or cultural proximity) are less readily available (see de Vreese and Kandyla, 2009; Entman, 2004; Cappella and Jamieson, 1997). Attention to distant events outside the familiar national context is more easily drawn when they convey drama and conflict, when serious repercussions can be emphasized, when the integrity of particular actors and institutions can be undermined or when the news can be related to feelings of fear and scepticism. Media negativity can therefore have serious repercussions for the extent to which EU politicians are presented as honest and trustworthy, whether EU politics is seen to be plagued by crisis or by consensus or whether the EU is reported as a legitimate political authority at all.

Furthermore, media scholars who analyse journalistic practices of EU news-making found evidence that the objectivity rule applies less to coverage of EU politics than it does to domestic politics (Örnebring, 2013). While the extent to which this objectivity rule applies at all can be questioned, especially with regards to the strongly partisan British newspapers, in domestic news coverage, journalists are generally expected to report about politics in a balanced way. ‘Distorted’ news that often results from the application of news criteria such as sensationalism, singularity, negativity or crime can then be identified and, if necessary, corrected in accordance with this template of objective and truth-oriented journalism. In the case of EU news, two important qualifications need to be made: Firstly, journalists are expected to be more balanced in party positioning during election campaigns than they are in foreign policy or national interest conflicts. Journalists are thus allowed or even expected to be nationalists when they defend national interests and sovereignty, which are often at stake in the discussion of EU policies (Hannerz, 2004). Secondly, the objectivity rule of journalism often applies to politics in terms of partisan contestation but is not equally applicable to the more fundamental form of ‘polity contestation’ that is often at the heart of Eurosceptic party campaigning (de Wilde et al., 2013). In that latter case, journalists are, on the one hand, expected to be more critical

and negative with ‘extremist’ parties at the fringes of the political spectrum, but might, on the other hand, feel attracted by the very negativity promoted by the Eurosceptics or consider their messages more newsworthy for their readers.

In light of this, we should consider the implications of media negativity for the democratic legitimacy of the EU. Just as cynicism and civic disengagement are seen as likely by-products of medianegativity, Euroscepticism is often interpreted as systematically related to the negativity bias of EU news-making (de Vreese, 2004). Negative news coverage about the EU, Eurosceptic campaigning by political parties, and cynicism about EU politics can therefore be seen as causally related. This causality assumption raises the question about the (causal) mechanisms involved in diffusing Eurosceptic attitudes through the media, in particular the question of whether negativity is initiated by the media or whether the media mainly filter and disseminate negativity as produced by Eurosceptic parties. In the first case, we would attribute negativity to inherent media logics, with Eurosceptic attitudes resulting from media consumption. In the second case, we would attribute media negativity to the presence of Eurosceptic parties who have a prime interest in undermining EU legitimacy, which is then reflected and amplified by journalists. As emphasised by Lengauer et al. (2011, p. 182), this analytically fruitful question about the causal mechanisms of media negativity is however difficult to methodologically disentangle. In the following we explore the potential effects of a negativity bias in relation to the EU’s legitimacy in several respects: information and political knowledge of the EU which affects the extent to which citizens can engage with EU politics, media framing which may limit options for constructive participation in EU democracy and the role of social media.

Media Negativity and Knowledge of the EU

Media negativity can potentially play a constructive role in democracy by informing readers and encouraging critical engagement with politics. Some scholars have argued that media negativity is an

important element of a healthy democracy, as it subjects governments, politicians and other elites in positions of power to scrutiny. In this sense, media negativity can be interpreted as a form of democratic accountability (Soroka, 2014). Research on the existence of a negativity bias in political news in fact originated in the US, where the Vietnam War and the Watergate scandal changed established routines of news making. With a journalistic culture of the sixties that involved reporting hard facts, the events of the seventies led journalists to believe they had failed to properly scrutinise the country's political leaders (Patterson, 2000, p. 9). Kepplinger also attributes a gradual increase in negative news reports about politicians in West Germany in part to the 'more critical and democratic' 1968 generation entering the profession (1998, p. 144). Negativity in political news therefore has its origins in a desire to challenge power structures and hold politicians more effectively to account.

Studies have also shown that negative stories can better inform readers. In study of US campaign news, Dunaway et al. (2015, p. 783) find that 'slanted coverage', that is, reports that are biased towards one candidate over the other, contains higher quality information than more balanced news. Moreover, Scheufele found that people became more aware of a problem when they read an article that criticised the ability of politicians to solve it than those who read other articles (2008, p. 56). Media negativity and its effect on EU legitimacy can thus be discussed in quantitative terms regarding the extent to which EU politics is communicated in national public spheres and the quality of information provided to EU citizens, which will have a knock-on effect for EU legitimacy. Negative news in the form of critical reports can further lead to better quality information and better informed voters when it comes to the EU elections. In the case of a negativity bias, we might therefore hypothesise that citizens feel more inclined to participate in EU politics, vote in EU elections and engage in political debate – either offline or online on forums, social media platforms and newspaper comment sections.

However, studies into the effects of media negativity have also demonstrated that negativity can lead to a lack of political knowledge or awareness of the news. Patterson demonstrates that people became less interested in politics and public affairs as the news in the US became more negative after the 1970s (2000, p. 10). 93 per cent of people who said they paid less attention to the news than they did previously were found to believe the news to be mostly negative. Negative news thus creates a vicious cycle, with people becoming less interested in politics as the news becomes more negative, which in turn makes them less interested in reading the news (2000, p. 11). The situation is likely to be worse when it comes to the EU, as media generally devote less attention to EU politics compared with national news which further aggravates the EU's 'information deficit' (Clark, 2014). While the direct link between Eurosceptic attitudes and EU information is not clear, a lack of knowledge of the EU limits the extent to which European citizens can engage in EU democracy.¹ If negative news discourages interest in reading the news, it raises questions about whether citizens have the required level of political knowledge to fully participate in democratic politics.

What matters, however, is not just the quantity of information about the EU, but the quality of information news readers receive. Poor knowledge of the EU can contribute to creating a public not just uninformed about EU politics but also deeply sceptical. British newspapers, for example, have been found to demonstrate severe factual deficiencies in their reporting of the EU (Leveson, 2012). They frequently report myths about EU rules and regulations (Daddow, 2012, p. 1224) along with a consistent conflating of the EU institutions with the European Court of Human Rights. The Leveson Inquiry, an investigation into the culture, practices and ethics of the press launched following a phone-hacking scandal at Rupert Murdoch's News International, found that reporting about the EU 'accounted for a further category of story where parts of the press appeared to prioritise the title's agenda over factual accuracy' (2012, p. 687). In his testimony to the inquiry, former British Prime Minister Tony

Blair explained that inaccurate information about the EU in the press determined what kinds of policies he was able to pursue in the EU (Leveson, 2012, p. 688). The UK case raises the important role of media ownership and market competition in the development of Eurosceptic attitudes and constructive engagement in the EU. Daddow(2012) attributes hard Eurosceptic media coverage in British newspapers to the development of the Murdoch media empire since the sixties (for a definition of dimensions of Euroscepticism see Guerra, this volume), which is not just responsible for the hostility in the British press towards the EU but has exercised significant pressure on British governments to oppose European integration (see also Rowinski, 2014). It is not just the Murdoch press, however. Startin also notes that Richard Desmond, the owner of The Daily Express, the tabloid that has been at the forefront of a campaign for a referendum on EU membership, is a donor to UKIP and the newspaper's deputy chair Lord Stevens is a UKIP peer (2015, p. 320). Krouwel et al. (this volume) find that there is a clear link between reading 'Eurosceptic' newspapers and negative attitudes towards the EU. The relationship between media ownership and Eurosceptic coverage could therefore be one avenue of media research on Euroscepticism. The quality of information readers receive is, however, not solely a question of factual accuracy but also the effects of framing.

The Role of Media Framing in EUDemocracy

As we have argued in the previous section, negative news about the EU can have either a positive or negative effect on information and knowledge of EU politics. What matters is for engaging people in EU politics is, however, also the framing of news stories. Originating in social movement research, frames are key to mobilising collective action by diagnosing problems and defining possible solutions (Caiani and Della Porta, 2011, p. 182, see also Entman, 2004; Snow and Benford, 1988). Frames are a way of making sense of the world and providing simple and easily grasped analysis of complex issues (Caiani and Della Porta, 2011). With regards to the media, frames are used 'to simplify and give

meaning to events, and to maintain audience interest' (Valkenburg et al., 1999, pp. 550-551). Framing studies thus analyse the processes of shaping political knowledge through the news and how different framing devices in political news stories shape degrees and forms of mobilisation and citizen engagement (see e.g. de Vreese and Semetko, 2007). Framing has proved important in the contestation of the EU since the crisis; Della Porta et al in this volume demonstrate, for example, how left-wing parties frame positive yet alternative visions of European integration to mobilise opposition to austerity. Studies into the effect of negative campaigning have demonstrated that different kinds of negative campaigning produce different responses – Crigler et al. for example differentiate between attacks on candidates, cynical news, and fear-arousing messages (2006), but as Lau et al. find, the empirical evidence is ambiguous (2007). De Vreese and Tobiasen argue that political news framed as conflict can provide 'mobilizing' information for voters and improve the functioning of democracy by presenting voters with a choice (2007, pp. 90, 104). Conflict-centred negativity can also contribute to making the EU more 'marketable'. Eurosceptic reports and actors are more eye-catching and add drama to EU news stories that otherwise would be considered as irrelevant by the audience.

While media negativity heightens problem awareness and the need for a political solution, fear might also inhibit critical attitudes and makes readers more likely to approve proposed solutions offered by Eurosceptic parties (Soroka et al., 2015; Scheufele, 2008; Gale, 2004). Given the recent turn to the use of social media by news outlets, the effect of the use of fear in news for the purposes of 'clickbait' becomes an important question when simple but fear-provoking messages can be transmitted easily through linking on social media. As noted above, frames serve to simplify complex issues into easily understandable calls for action. Frames can be used by pro-European actors and media to promote critical engagement with the issues, but, as Caiani and Della Porta (2011) note, can also be engaged by populists and the extreme right. In the context of EU politics, messages that elicit or convey

fear may prevent Europeans from engaging critically with the solutions put forward by those who challenge the legitimacy of the EU. Eurosceptic parties construct ‘fear stories’ about the EU and count on the high media salience of such stories. Even if opposition parties and quality journalists find it easy to deconstruct such stories, these appeals to fear ‘make people talk’ – they are likely to be shared through social media where they rouse momentary emotions and indignation, while the trustworthiness of the plot is rarely put at test (Tandoc, 2014).

Fear-based stories are also often related to identity frames, which relate to ideas about community values - ‘who we are’(see for example Díez Medrano, 2010; Koopmans and Statham, 2010). Such frames delimit the boundaries of a community between ‘us’ and ‘them’ (Caiani and Della Porta, 2011, p. 182). The UK’s EU referendum campaign was described as ‘Project Fear meets Project Fear’ (see also Daddow, 2016; Ruparel, 2016). Both sides have put forward scare stories, either about the impact of an ‘influx’ of EU migrants and asylum-seekers or about the potential economic disaster Brexit will precipitate. Precisely how this fear-based campaigning impacts on Eurosceptic voting behaviour is unclear. What this framing does do, however, is construct boundaries that promote distrust amongst Europeans. In the UK, the EU is generally seen as a threat to the nation (Rowinski, 2014; Díez Medrano, 2003 and Startin in this volume; see also Anderson and Weymouth, 1999;), and the tabloid press in particular has been key in linking the issue of European integration with migration (Startin, 2015, p. 317). As Startin notes, the framing of the EU in the UK tabloid press ‘has become submerged by the weight of the emotional argument drawing on notions of sovereignty and identity’ (2015, p. 317). In other countries, recent crises in the EU have also been reported using identity frames that construct ‘out’ groups, especially through stereotyping of the Greeks and ‘southern Europeans’ in Germany and anti-German sentiment in Greece and a number of member states during the Euro crisis (see also Risse, 2014; Galpin, 2015, forthcoming). This kind of framing promotes fear of the ‘Other’

and limits solidarity amongst EU citizens through the politics of blaming (Galpin, 2015; Ntampoudi, 2013; see also Triandafyllidou, 1998).

While the negative framing of EU news stories through conflict might motivate Europeans to engage critically in EU politics, framing in terms of fear and identity can therefore promote attitudes that undermine EU legitimacy. Negativity in the form of strategy framing can, furthermore, lead to general cynicism with the political system, which leaves democratic institutions further susceptible to legitimacy challenges from populist movements. Cynicism involves the belief that politicians primarily work for their own self-interest rather than for the common good. Cappella and Jamieson (1997, p. 19) argue that there has been a 'spiral of cynicism' in US politics, finding that people feel more cynicism towards politics when exposed to political news that is primarily framed in terms of the strategies of candidates and conflicts over who is 'winning' or 'losing' instead of substantive policy issues. When portrayed as motivated by self-interest, politicians are attributed negative rather than positive qualities (1997, pp. 166-167). Experimental designs in audience research also indicate that such repeated exposure to strategic news coverage produces political cynicism and decreased readiness to support the EU (De Vreese 2004). Kepplinger finds evidence of an increase in political apathy (*Politikverdrossenheit*) towards the elite, political institutions and political participation (for example electoral turnout) in Germany (1998, p. 31) which can be attributed to a rise in the number of articles highlighting problems with a more and more negative tone and pessimistic outlook (1998, p. 137). Furthermore, politicians were often presented as incapable of solving an increasing number of problems in the political system. A preoccupation with the negative qualities of politicians can therefore lead to lack of interest in politics, distrust of politics and political cynicism and consequently undermine the legitimacy of democratic institutions.

In the EU in particular, we can expect that the dominant media negativism leads to systematic misrepresentations of the EU governance system's performance. In the 'spiral of cynicism', journalist preferences for negative news is seen to correspond to public preferences and a demand for sensational stories (Cappella and Jamieson, 1997). The 'spiral of cynicism' is turned, under these conditions, into a 'spiral of Euroscepticism' (De Vreese, 2007), which is driven by the supply and demand of negative news about the EU. If EU politicians are regularly portrayed as Machiavellian figures, unconcerned with the public good, such strategic news framings would unilaterally stress the power game aspects of EU politics – winning and losing, self-interest, manoeuvres and tactics, performance and artifice – and misrepresent the common good orientation that is often at the focus of EU policies (Trenz, 2008). Anderson and Weymouth, for example, find that stereotyping and xenophobia underlies British press reporting of the EU institutions, which are portrayed as corrupt and dysfunctional (1999; Gavin, 2001). In the end, the media audiences would expect to get only negative news from Brussels and automatically associate the EU with dysfunction and corruption.

These effects of media negativity and the implicit distrust in democratic politics underlying negative news stories can in this sense become self-defeating, undermining not only trust in representative democracy but also in journalism and the media which produce such stories. Research so far on media negativity shows that certain kinds of negativity – framing in terms of strategy and political problems – promotes a high level of distrust in the media, politicians and political cynicism more broadly. This general distrust promoted by negative news has been clearly linked to Eurosceptic and populist parties and therefore feeds challenges to the EU's legitimacy. As such, media negativity can be linked to the rise of these populist movements and the electoral success of parties which fundamentally challenge the legitimacy of the established system of representative democracy. Populist actors highlight the failings of democratic systems to fully engage their citizens, but also pose

challenges to democracy, particularly through xenophobic discourse and scapegoating of immigrants and minority groups. For example, Pegida ('Patriotic Europeans Against the Islamisation of the West'), an anti-Islam and anti-immigrant populist movement in Germany that emerged in October 2014, expresses a strong distrust towards political institutions and the media, what they call the *Lügenpresse* (liar press) (Dostal 2015, p. 529). Furthermore, Ford et al. find that significant indicators of support for *UKIP* include the belief that politicians are corrupt and dishonest, that there are no differences between the main political parties and reading Eurosceptic newspapers (2012, p. 204-234). Distrust towards politicians and the media in general therefore challenges democracies and decreases the legitimacy of political institutions.

Media frames can therefore often be made responsible for negative cues about the EU. This type of coverage in turn incites particular cognitive and emotional reactions from audiences, which lean towards hostility regarding the European project. Euroscepticism can thus be partly explained as an effect of negative learning through media inputs. The negativity bias of media news coverage of EU politics is not, however, entirely independent from audience demands and responsiveness. News audiences often receive information from different sources and process media content selectively on the basis of collective interpretations and emotional reactions (Kepplinger et al., 2012). These public judgments and emotions can equally be made responsible for the negative bias in news coverage, in turn informing the media frames and content. Negative learning through media discourses is thus a complex process in which providers of media content (journalists and political actors) and audiences interact and contribute equally to structuring public debates and expectations. In this regard, it is important for media scholars to keep an eye on the dynamic transformation of political journalism in interaction with changing audiences demands and responsiveness, This relates, above all, to the new interactive environment of news-making, distribution and interpretation as facilitated by digital media

technologies. The role of new and social media in amplifying the negativity bias of democratic politics in general and of EU news in particular therefore warrants exploration.

The Role of Social Media: Better or Worse?

The Internet and social media now has an important role to play in journalism. How we consume news has fundamentally changed, with print newspaper circulations falling significantly in recent years and the internet becoming an important source of news. A recent report by the Reuters Institute for the Study of Journalism states that over half of those surveyed obtain news from social media and more young people than ever now consider social media their primary source of news (Newman et al., 2016). The role of social media in driving or challenging the forces of Euroscepticism are therefore of great importance in the internet age, but the question whether such new digital media practices play also a more constructive tool for democracy remains unanswered (Couldry 2012; Loader and Mercea 2012). Media scholars disagree in this regard on the potential of the internet and social media for overcoming inherent deficits and biases of political journalism. On the one hand, the internet is turned into an important source of political information where journalistic inputs can be more easily balanced by the information of independent news providers, often including the citizens. Citizen journalism is in this sense not only supplementary, but also often provides a corrective to the news stories of professional journalism (Bruns, 2010). Cyberoptimists have further heralded the digital media as a democratising force, which allows ordinary people to have a greater voice. With regards to EU news, social media and online discussion forums also offer the opportunity to engage Europeans in EU politics as part of a Europeanisation process of European public spheres (Michailidou et al., 2014). Politicians are now communicating directly with the public during election campaigns via social media and party websites (Haßler, 2015, p. 2). Online news in particular has the potential to reach wider audiences and to engage

citizens in political debate, providing the ‘opportunity for active communication that is easy and accessible for ordinary users’ (Weber, 2013, p. 942). Numerous incentives for online user feedback on EU policy initiatives are also provided by EU actors and institutions, most prominently by the European Parliament, which runs a highly visible Facebook page with more than 2,000,000 followers, organizes regularly online meetings and chats with MEPs, candidates and EU top politicians (Tarta, 2014). During the EU referendum in the UK, a number of organisations have been publishing myth-busting and fact-checking articles online, such as KCL’s The UK in a Changing Europe (ukandeu.ac.uk) and Full Fact (fullfact.org) amongst others, which are then shared on social media platforms such as Facebook and Twitter.

On the other hand, findings on the potential of the internet to engage citizens more actively in debates and improving political participation remain ambivalent (Fuchs, 2014). Cyberpessimists have pointed out how online discussions on popular news sites often lack many of the qualities of deliberative discourse. On most popular online political news websites, the spectrum of political opinion remains restricted, negative news stories become selectively amplified and often turn into magnets for the expression of popular discontent (Tandoc, 2014). Studies suggest that online discussions are representative of a small number of people from particular demographics, and women especially are likely to feel excluded from actively participating in debates. For example, Quinlan et al. (2015) find that, while debates about the Scottish referendum on a BBC discussion forum were largely civil, there was little debate between commenters and users primarily used the forums to express opinion instead of exchanging information (2015, p. 193). A study by the Engaging News Project at the University of Texas at Austin, moreover, finds that half of Americans do not read or leave comments on news articles. Furthermore, 53 per cent of those people who say they left comments did so monthly or less frequently (Stroud et al., 2016, p. 3). They also find that commenters ‘tend to be

more male, have lower levels of education, and have lower incomes compared to those who read news comments, but do not comment' (Stroud et al., 2016, p. 5). Studies from Europe have produced similar findings; Quinlan et al. find further that the Scottish referendum debate on the BBC was dominated by a small number of users with a predominance of male commenters (2015, p. 193). We can also expect that there is generally likely to be less participation debates about EU news than national issues. For example, Weber finds more engagement on articles relating to institutions at the regional level than international or national institutions (2013, p. 950). With regards to EU news, we can expect lower participation in online debates because EU news is likely to be viewed as 'foreign' and distant and because readers generally have less knowledge about EU politics and policy. As issues cycles of EU news tend to be short, readers are rarely given the necessary time to develop the knowledge that is necessary for engagement.

Audience surveys have also found that the detailed information that is available online is consumed mainly by the few who are already information-rich, whereas the majority of online users receives only a very narrow and personalised selection of news (Brundidge and Rice, 2009). This means that online news consumption all too often only reproduces the opinions of like-minded people. Facing the mass commodification of online news by global players such as Google News, such online participatory forums in which foreign or EU news are debated interactively can therefore be described as 'niche publics' at best. On relevant online discussion forums, Eurosceptics are only likely to meet other Eurosceptics and mutually reinforce their views. Heft et al. (this volume) find that despite the fact that Eurosceptic parties are highly active on Twitter, they tend to communicate with those who hold similar views and do not exchange views across ideological camps. Usherwood and Wright (2016) similarly find that, in a study of the UK referendum campaign groups' Twitter use, communication between the various campaign groups takes place mostly between those on the same side of the

campaign. Studies suggest that social media debates about the EU are also more dominated by Eurosceptic groups. Usherwood and Wright find that the Leave campaign groups have significantly more Twitter followers than the Remain groups, while Cram finds that the referendum debate is overwhelmingly dominated by pro-leave hashtags (2015). What's more, Pavan and Caiani show in this volume that extreme right groups mobilise particularly well online by developing linked networks and in doing so can influence public Eurosceptic discourse. The mobilisation of Eurosceptic and extreme right groups online means that a small number of people with extreme views often dominate online spaces which excludes people with alternative views from participating in debates and shaping online media discourse. Stroud et al., for example, find that avoiding arguments, conflict and uncivil commenters are major reasons for avoiding the comment sections (2016, p. 12) meaning that we might expect that pro-European users are discouraged from commenting. Research so far therefore suggests that the social media debate about the EU is likely to be disproportionately dominated by Eurosceptic voices.

As a result, we can expect that EU news articles online amplify xenophobic or racist discourse on social media. Studies of comments sections have generally been found to demonstrate high levels of racism and xenophobia. In a study of the 'Birther' discourse surrounding Barack Obama after his election as US President on major US quality newspaper websites, Hughey and Daniels show that racist discourse is often mobilised not just through explicit hate speech (which are often filtered out by moderators) but also through 'subtle and coded language' as well as through appeals to political correctness and principles of free speech (2013, pp. 337, 339). In discussing the Greek bailouts in Germany, Michailidou et al. (2014, pp.140-42) find that journalistic inputs online were often outright negative on the question of solidarity with Greece and made frequent use of nationalist and xenophobic slogans. Such tabloid-style xenophobic stereotypes found resonance and were even amplified in the

newspapers' commenting section, even though the spectrum of opinion expressed by the users was often wider than the narrow views expressed by the journalists. Other readers expressed more balanced views, brought up counter-arguments or sometimes even silenced the xenophobes. Michailidou (2016) shows how increasingly mainstream Euroscepticism paired with anti-German stereotypes spreads in social media in Greece. Beneath the surface of Eurosceptic and xenophobic stereotypes, her analysis of news and social media content from the period 2008-2013 also reveals, however, a more deep-rooted concern with the state of democracy. Online commenting sections should therefore not be ignored by political elites or discarded as xenophobic (see also the contribution of Heft et al. in this volume). The resurfacing of nationalist stereotypes is often rather a consequence of the dismay of the people who find no better way to give expression to their deep discomfort with representative politics (Michailidou, 2016). These findings on social media as a sensor of popular discontent require us to reconceptualise how we study online social spaces and what the benchmarks are for online democratic debate. This regards, in particular, the role of emotions, which often seem to dominate online debates (for example Habler, 2015), but are not automatically contrary to deliberative debate.

Conclusion

In this chapter we reviewed the evidence on the amplification of media negativity in EU news and its relationship with EU legitimacy. We argue that Euroscepticism is at least partly explained as the result of the negativity bias of political news and not simply triggered by the campaigns of Eurosceptic political parties. A media perspective on Euroscepticism helps to understand this crucial role played by journalists in amplifying and framing negative news stories about the EU in traditional media as well as the important effect of the internet and social media in driving Eurosceptic attitudes. We have shown how media negativity can have negative consequences for knowledge about the EU and awareness of EU politics, as well as the way in which the framing of news stories can hinder critical engagement with

the EU's political process by strengthening support for Eurosceptic parties. Framing of news stories through fear and exclusive identities can drive opposition to the EU whilst framing in terms of strategy – presenting EU politicians as self-interested or corrupt - can promote apathy and political cynicism towards not just the EU but democracy more broadly which, in turn, also drives support for populist parties. We have also discussed the potential of the new media in amplifying media negativity and driving Euroscepticism online. Negativity towards the EU is no longer mediated, or even mitigated by journalists, but given expression in the direct voice of the people against the political elites and representatives. This unmediated voice of the people on the web risks being increasingly detached from the intermediate representative procedures and institutions of civil society and government. Understanding the influence of new and social media sheds light on the active role played by media audiences who create a demand for news stories that challenge EU legitimacy and, through news commenting and social media platforms, increasingly contribute to the negative framing of the EU. We argued that in online news formats, such Eurosceptic audiences are offered a forum where they can directly react to political news by commenting and sharing. Social media and news commenting forums therefore amplify the negativity bias of EU news with citizens/users primarily expressing their critique, discontent or frustration with the EU (see also the chapter by Caiani and Pavan in this volume) .

The negativity bias of political news coverage has important repercussions for the design of democratic government and the routine ways political representatives seek publicity and interact with journalists. For the case of the EU, media negativity correlates with a double misrepresentation of democratic politics in terms of both output and input legitimacy. Within the output dimension, legitimacy is constrained to the extent that journalists predominantly focus on overregulation, failure and crisis. Within the input dimension, journalists apply a predominantly nationalist perspective on democratic will-formation that often privileges the Eurosceptic voice over others. Media negativity is

thus a useful interpretative framework to understand the systemic constraints on EU legitimacy, especially with regard to the numerous attempts of EU actors and institutions to launch a more proactive media and communication strategy to 'sell' a more positive image to the public (Brüggemann 2010). From the vantage point of media negativity, it may well be that such strategic communication efforts achieve opposite effects: the more publicity, the less legitimacy. Being constantly exposed to media negativity, we have observed a new post-Lisbon protective attitude of many EU actors and institutions designed to shield themselves from the negative effects of mediatisation (Michailidou and Trezz, 2014). Withdrawal from the media stage and the turn towards depoliticised technocratic governance (Schimmelfennig, 2014) is, however, equally risky and might create even more negative news in the long run. EU institutions can therefore remain highly vulnerable to negative events, especially in moments of heightened public attention such as the current crises (economic-financial, institutional-constitutional and humanitarian). Entrapped in the 'spiral of Euroscepticism', EU actors and institutions need to learn to account for the imponderables of mass media communication and the biases of political journalism, for which online and social media do not provide a corrective.

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¹On the relationship between the type of political information that voters receive, their attitudes towards the EU, and their choice for Eurosceptic parties see also the Mosca and Quaranta and Conti and Memoli in this volume.