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***“Regulating the Wild West ?”*: The legitimization discourse  
of the EU regulation on Big Data and its online media  
coverage**

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# Abstract

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## ***“Regulating the Wild West?”: The legitimation discourse of EU regulation on Big Data and its media coverage***

The thesis explores the growing discourse of Big Data and argues that political actors like the European Union are purposefully constructing the meaning of such an issue and promoting certain strategies. The study seeks to expand the spectrum of Strategic Communication by examining a supranational political institution and to add valuable insights to the knowledge of the critical stream of Data studies from a communicative perspective. Embracing van Leeuwen’s Legitimation in Discourse theory, this qualitative inquiry focuses on two key regulations - Digital Services Act and Digital Markets Act- introduced by the European Commission in 2020. The compass of this study is two research questions: First, analyzing the strategies used by the EU to legitimize the reshaping of the digital economy and the major changes in Big Data practices, in the debates on the European Parliament. Second, four online news media outlets have been scrutinized to understand the ways the parliamentary discourse is being covered and how the regulation of Big Data is being framed. The findings of this thesis demonstrated discrepancies in the aspects of the debate that were brought forward and the strategies used to legitimize the regulation in the spheres analyzed. However, an important insight is that the legitimation of Big Data regulation is strictly connected to the attribution of problem responsibility -to the Big tech companies- and to the attribution of solution responsibility to the EU institutions. The legitimation discourse, created in the interplay of political and media sphere, is of strategic importance since it shapes the collective understanding on a dynamic phenomenon like Big Data.

**Keywords:** Big Data, European Union, regulation, legitimation strategy, political discourse, media framing.

**Word Count: 18.675**



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# 1. Introduction

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## 1.1. The Era of Datafication

In the era of datafication, human behavior and social interactions can be translated into digital data, characterized by their extensive volume, great velocity of production and elaboration as well as variety (Richterich, 2018). It is claimed that this growing production and utilization of Big Data for commercial purposes moves side by side with the process of normalizing the ongoing phenomenon of datafication as the new paradigm in society as a whole (van Dijk, 2014). This lies in the fact that Big Data can be described as the phenomenon on the interplay of technological breakthroughs that permits the maximization of gathering and analyzing large quantities of data with algorithmic accuracy and their ability to draw conclusions based on these data on multiple levels (economic, technical, social or legal) with the dominant belief that data are an inherent knowledge and are accurate, objective and truthful (boyd & Crawford, 2012). Therefore, Big Data is coming along with a rhetoric of promises about profits and efficiency.

However this unquestioned superiority of Big Data has sparked controversies and raised ethical questions on the ways data are being collected and the purposes that they serve. During the last decade, algorithmic power and the digital social media have been proven as key contributors to public opinion formation and political changes (Sammut and Bauer, 2021). The Cambridge Analytica scandal in March 2018 brought to the surface the downsides of the use and abuse of Big Data for democratic institutions and users' rights. After the revelations of Christopher Wylie that the British firm Cambridge Analytica accessed the personal data of millions of Facebook users', without their informed consent, Facebook faced extensive backlash from the users but also key stakeholders like regulatory bodies and politicians. Even though there is no clear knowledge of the extent to which this data was, the information possessed by Cambridge Analytica attempted to influence the electoral outcome in many countries as

well as the Brexit campaign (Diaz, 2021). Facebook immediately distanced itself from the Cambridge Analytica and paid a \$5 billion penalty to the US Federal Trade Commission to avoid further investigation into its privacy practices, as well as a £500,000 (about \$643,000) fine to the U.K. government.

Three years later, in October 2021, Frances Haugen, a data scientist working on Facebook, shared thousands of documents to many news organizations revealing the problems that persist on Facebook platforms. In these documents, Haugen showcased, that despite its knowledge, Facebook did not act in order to prevent the spread of hate speech in countries of the Middle East and Myanmar as well as the inciting conflict in regions of risk such as Ethiopia and Myanmar but also the encouragement of the Capitol riots in January 2021, since the movements were predominantly formed on Facebook (Wolf, 2021). These recent revelations of Facebook Papers, as they have been named, stir the heated debate on the use and abuse of Big Data and the criticisms regarding users' consent and privacy as well as the growing phenomenon of misinformation, echo-chambers and political polarization (Christodoulou & Iordanou, 2021).

In November 8th, 2021, Frances Haugen addressed a speech in the European Parliament and discussed with the MEPs and Commissioners the importance of regulating technology companies like Facebook and urged European institutions to seize the unique opportunity “to align technology and democracy and create a safer online world” (Euronews, 9/11/2021). The Facebook whistleblower suggested that a new regulatory framework for these companies would reassure greater transparency and safety for the users, and therefore better functioning democratic societies. Haugen’s suggestion to the EU Institutions is critical since the European Union was allegedly affected by the abuse of Big Data, with the Big Tech company providing since 2018 to European political parties the platform to disseminate polarizing content via online campaigns. This is a problem for the EU since it contradicts its core mission to reassure the well-being and democracy of citizens across Europe as well as violates its own regulations and laws. At the same time, it is interesting to examine the discourse that accompanies the EU strategy on Big Data and legitimizes the regulation of the Big Tech companies, given that there has been a growing interest since 2020 for the European Union in creating a more concrete regulatory framework. These initiatives and regulatory processes will be presented more thoroughly in the following sections.

## 1.2. European Union on Big Data

Nowadays, there is no unique regulatory regime for data privacy and protection and, therefore, there is no unified “rulebook” for Big Data around the globe. Historically, the European Union has been monitoring carefully these technological changes and the importance of digital data; in 1995, the Data Protection Directive (Directive 95/46/EC) was adopted as a response to the technological developments and in order to guarantee the undisturbed flow of data in the EU internal market but at same time reassure that individuals would not be abused from the processing of these data, whether that was computerized or not. In less than a decade, the European Data Protection Supervisor (EDPS) was formulated in order to ensure that the EU institutions and involving bodies and agencies process personal data with respect to the fundamental right to privacy while in 2012, data protection has been established as a right according to the provisions of Article 8 in the Charter of Fundamental Rights of the European Union, including the ethical processing of data for concrete purposes, right to access and rectification by the users as well as external control (McDermott, 2017).

However, the regulatory initiatives fell short due to the discrepancies of the divergent data protection laws across the EU as well as the rapid change of technology. The need for a harmonized EU framework on data protection, efficient towards the emergence of novel technological advancements like data aggregation, led to the General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR) which was concluded in December 2016 and set in force in May 2018. This revision of the EU data protection framework was seen as an opportunity to reiterate the European strategy towards the ongoing development of Big Data and its practices so that a more efficient regulation could be achieved. Despite the imminent intention of EU lawmakers to address the issue of Big Data, the regulation text retained the same focus on the concepts of “personal data” like the 1995 Directive while leaving their processing to a plethora of rules and conditions (Pearce, 2017). As it has been proven by the Cambridge Analytica scandal and the most recent revelations about the Facebook Files, the GDPR is not efficient enough to tackle potential abuse of Big Data by tech companies and reassure that users’ privacy is respected online.



In the wake of these challenges, the Commission President, Ursula von der Leyen has stressed the critical role of the European Union as a leader to this transition to a new digital reality. The European Commission's Communication "Shaping Europe's digital future" underlines the importance of every citizen, employee or business person to reap the benefit of an increasingly digitized society whilst assessing and dealing with the malicious practices that undermine user's rights in privacy and data safety. As it is mentioned in the Communication, the Commission seeks to place Europe "in a position to be a trendsetter in the global debate on digital technologies and Big Data (EC, 2020b). This overarching goal is based on three pillars: i) technology that works for people, ii) fair and competitive economy, iii) open, democratic and sustainable society (EC,2020b). The key actions of the European Commission, serving the last two pillars, include the package of Digital Services Act (DSA), a regulation that aims to "upgrade the Union's liability and safety rules for digital platforms, services and products" (EDRi, 2020). This is an important element of the strategy since this regulation is legally binding for member-States and reshapes the way digital services and Big Data practices are being held out in the European market. At the same time, the European Parliament which has the legislative power on these regulations, calls for the maintenance of core values in the legislative text as the protection of fundamental rights online, transparency and accountability for digital services providers (EC, 2020a).

The DSA aims at facilitating the adaptation of commercial and civil law rules so that the entities operating online are more fair, transparent and accountable for their content and services. This regulation is closely connected to the European Commission's digital strategy since it aims to contribute to one of the three pillars, fair and competitive digital economy, as it is explicitly stated in the Communication "Shaping Europe's digital future". Key-provisions of the regulation include the control of "large platforms that increasingly act as gateways or gatekeepers between business users and end users and enjoy an entrenched and durable position (...) which leads, in certain cases, to unfair behavior vis-à-vis these business users and also leads to negative effects on the contestability of the core platform services concerned" (EC,2020a). The European institutions explicitly state that this initiative aims to bridge a concrete and controlled framework for the digital gatekeepers to reassure the contestability of the digital economic market while complying with former EU regulation (mainly the GDPR) on the users' data protection and privacy. In this way, the fundamental human rights will

be respected while the regulation will function as a “notice-and-action mechanism” tackling illegal content as well as providing the rulebook for online advertising, including targeted advertising (EC, 2020a).

Frances Hugen, Facebook-whistleblower who visited the European Parliament and discussed with EU officials, stated that “ the DSA has the potential to be a global gold standard and inspire other countries to pursue new rules that would safeguard our democracies” (European Parliament, 08/11/2021). And since Facebook is one of the digital providers that can be considered as gatekeepers, it is important that a former employee and whistleblower stresses the importance of the ongoing regulations in the European institutions. The proposal of DSA was introduced in December 2020 and currently the procedure of readings and consultation is for the dossiers 2020/0361(COD) Digital Services Act and 2020/0374 (COD) Digital Markets Act is ongoing between the European Council and the European Parliament, according to the Ordinary Legislative procedure. These dossiers are being discussed publicly in parliamentary debates where the MEPs and Rapporteurs present their opinions and suggestions before voting on the legislative text and its amendments. It is therefore a fruitful arena to examine the debates on Big Data and how the European institutions legitimize the regulation of Big Data practices.

### **1.3. Research Problem**

It is evident that Big Data and its practices are not separated from the socio-political context but they rather co-construct society and influence the political actors. Given the fact that Big Data practices have penetrated the spectrum of modern life in its totality, it is important to scrutinize and evaluate the impact of these practices in society, instead of blindly accepting a digital positivist paradigm. Critical Data scholars have stressed the importance of maintaining a more reflective stance in these breakthroughs and examining the context as well as the discourse on Big Data in order to comprehend the phenomenon and its impact. The body of scholarly work in the critical stream about Big Data highlights some focal points (Lupton, 2014; Andrejevic, 2014, Richterich, 2018), including the embedded meaning and “free to interpretation” nature of Big Data, power relations that it creates as well as the division between “data rich” and “data poor”

actors and the accompanied ambiguity that these discrepancies create. On the one hand, the Internet and tech companies have to a great extent the agency to control and use the data generated by and via their respective platforms; it is unsure however the extent to which this use of data takes into account the ethical issues of transparency and human rights. On the other hand, regulatory bodies and political institutions that possess the legitimate power for decision-making, aim to ease these modern anxieties by controlling these emerging actors. Both sides actively express their agency in the terrain of Big Data and the discourse of benefits but also threats is diffused through purposeful communication. Therefore, it appears purposeful for Strategic Communication scholars to dive into the communicative strategies and practices of significant actors in the ongoing debate on Big Data, a technological phenomenon that influences both the theory and profession of strategic communicators.

The conceptualization of these innovative socio-technical breakthroughs in the discourse employed in the political arena (and more specifically parliamentary arena) is of strategic importance since it permits to examine the argumentation in such a heated topic, which eventually is the legitimate base of voting a regulation or legislation.

## **1.4 Study Aims and Research Questions**

According to one of the fundamental definitions of the field, Strategic Communication is “the purposeful use of communication by an organization or other entity to engage in conversations of strategic significance to its goals” (Zerfass et al., 2018, p. 493). Following that principle, this thesis aims to contribute to the knowledge of Big Data studies from a communicative perspective by examining how Big Data practices are constructed in different social contexts and subsequently the way collective understanding is formulated on these technological advancements. The European Union is one of the key-actors and aspires to play a decisive role not only in the Big Data phenomenon, problematizing the implicitness of data and the ethical considerations of data use (and abuse) by tech companies but also formulate the context in which these tech companies can apply their Big Data practices by regulating them.

The nucleus of the present thesis is the communicative constitution of Big Data regulation in the EU discourse, and especially through the debates in the European Parliament regarding Digital Services Act (DSA) and Digital Market Act (DMA), which constitute the main components of the European Union's digital strategy. The legitimation discourse that is being developed in the debate and the representation of Big Data regulation in the parliamentary sphere is critical since it offers valuable insights in understanding how the communicative construction of legitimation in the EU strategy on Big Data. collective understanding about Big Data is being constructed.

To this end, the following research question has been formulated:

**RQ1:** How is the legitimation of Big Data regulation being discursively constructed in the parliamentary debates of DSA and DMA dossiers?

Notwithstanding, the ongoing debate on Big Data is not limited to the parliamentary arena but it is of utmost importance for the general audience. As Laver (2020) argues, the key audience for MEPs is situated outside the European Parliament. To the same end, very few citizens are informed about the parliamentary debates and the institutional procedures directly from the official records, since debate statements and reports are published in various media channels and ultimately informs the general audience. And since the media outlets usually publish the debate "highlights" instead of the parliamentary debate in its totality, it appears purposeful to analyze how the legitimation of the EU regulation is being constructed in the news media outlets covering the issue. This approach would permit a more holistic approach on the ongoing Big Data regulation issue since the acknowledgement that the news media informs the voters on the legislative debate can influence the ways MEPs are expressing their position in the debate and legitimizing or delegitimizing the regulation. In order to examine the interplay of parliamentary and media sphere on the legitimation of Big Data regulation and the collective understanding of these advancements, the following research question has been formulated:

**RQ2:** How do the EU news media outlets frame the legitimation of the EU regulation on Big Data?

## 2. Literature Review

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In this chapter, the literature review is divided and presented based on key areas of scholarly, linked to the study in question. First, it provides an overview of the emergence of Big Data studies, including the use of Big Data in many domains of society. Secondly, it puts great emphasis on the critical perspective of Data studies, which is concerned about the discourse on these emerging practices, the actors involved and the power relations in the interplay of these actors in the digital era. The critical perspective highlights the role that political institutions and stakeholders possess in the unfolding and controlling of these technological advancements as well as touches upon the moral values embedded in the practices. Having said that, the scholarly work on Big Data is explicitly connected to the case of this thesis and aims to contribute to the knowledge of the topic under study.

### 2.1 Big Data studies

According to boyd and Crawford (2012), Big Data is not a linear evolutionary phenomenon but is expressed in the interplay of technology, analysis and mythology; the power that computational technology offers in gathering, comparing large amount of data but also analyzing and making claims on political, economic and legal level is accompanied the widespread belief that these data are “framed” as superior form of knowledge, claiming to fulfill the tenets of truth, objectivity, and accuracy (p.663). This definition offers a more comprehensive approach to this phenomenon since it includes - exempt from the data themselves- the procedures under which the data are retrieved and manipulated and the implications on what we perceive as knowledge. The long-standing “myth” of data offering a higher form of intelligence is connected to promises of benefits such as efficiency and high profitability, which are significance assets for corporations but also for political institutions (Pries & Dunnigan, 2015; Kim, Trimi, & Chung, 2014; Bertot et al., 2014).

The discourse of promises and future benefits from Big Data is developed in parallel with the discourse of fear and uncertainty due to the opacity of the methods used to collect and analyze the data. The ever-growing datasets, analyzed by quantitative methods are not always easy to grasp and raise questions regarding the conditions under which Big Data is manipulated as well as the context to which they are implemented and the goals that aim at serving. These questions are raised by Critical Data scholars, who shift the focus from the utility of Big Data to the evaluation of these practices to the broader socio-political context.

## **2.2 Critical Data studies**

The critical perspectives in Big Data studies reject the idea of data “speaking for themselves” and emphasize on the conditions under which stakeholders - from Big Tech companies to government institutions and academia- collect, analyze and utilize large datasets while suggesting alternative ways of conduct in the digital era. This perspective prioritizes actively scrutinizing and challenging the social practices that include Big Data instead of solely using these technologies as “given”, neglecting the context and the ethical ramifications as such practices.

A more critical stance towards Big Data examines the ecosystem created by the large data sets and the insights they offer, composed by three main actors: i) Big Data collectors, ii) Big Data utilizers and iii) Big Data generators (Zwitter, 2014). According to this ecosystem, Big Data collectors are the stakeholders that delimitate the data collection, storage and usage of Big Data while Big Data utilizers reiterate the purpose of the data based on their overarching goal which might vary to a large extent; from defining a behavioral outcome to new rules and regulations or producing knowledge and innovation, Big Data utilizers rely on the insights gained from datasets. In other words, these insights are retrieved from the last category of actors, Big Data generators which are either physical actors (users) that produce massive amounts of data consciously or unconsciously, or artificial actors whose sole function is to produce data or, ultimately, physical phenomena which per se produce a flow of data.

The above-mentioned categorization echoes the asymmetric relations and the power divide, as coined by Andrejevic (2014), between those that collect, analyze and utilize Big Data and those whom this collection and manipulation of data actually affects. It is argued that these discrepancies will not disappear by simply providing complete data access to users, in terms of “ownership” since they lack the expertise of those who can recognise the patterns and make prediction based on the data aggregated by various computational activities such as data mining and micro-targeting (Andrejevic, 2014). The Data-rich and Data-poor divide leads subsequently to a sentiment of powerlessness that individuals experience in terms of ownership and control over the data that they generate but also in terms of lack of transparency on the goals of certain knowledge-based decisions (boyd & Crawford, 2012). This sentiment is justified since such data can be accessed, to a large extent, exclusively by technology companies and their partners in different sectors including commercial, academic and governmental.

In this ecosystem, according to one of the tenets of Critical Data studies, there is an imperative of contextualizing Big Data and recognizing that its nature cannot be “raw” since the actors who access and control the usage of Big Data have agency on them. That point is critical and very relevant for the present study since not only Big tech companies have a massive advantage but political and institutional actors like national government and supranational institutions such as the European Union have the potential to regulate the ways these tech companies use Big Data. It is therefore equally important to examine the agency of political institutions in the Big Data debate. As Dalton and Thatcher (2014) argue the Big Data are not “neutral” but they shape social dynamics and influence multiple spheres, including the political one. In that end, it is purposeful for the present study to examine the stance that political institutions like the European Union adopts in the ongoing debate concerning Big Data and its regulation through the lens of Critical Data Studies since that permits us to address the strategic goals and how the ideological agenda is being communicated.

The notions of control, ownership and transparency are crucial in Big Data studies, especially from the more critical standpoints toward the immersion of these technologies and the concerns that they arise on socio-political and ethical level. In the scholarly, great focus is placed in the concept of transparency, not only per se but also as

a communicative strategy by political and institutional actors that aim at controlling what is being disclosed and what not to the general public (Bass, 2015; Levy & Merritt, 2016). The growing use of Big Data tools and procedures for political and institutional decision-making goes in parallel with legislative and regulatory efforts in order to achieve good digital governance and respect the fundamental human right to privacy.

However, it is argued that the notion of transparency is purposefully used by various stakeholders, including political actors and institutions, as a means towards the fulfillment of diverse goals. As Kitchin (2014) argues, Big Data forms knowledge systems which constitute power relations. In other words, Big Data is not “naturally given” and neutral but it is subject to interpretation and normative influence of meaning-making (Lupton, 2015). Given the political valence of Big Data, it is important to examine the ways that key actors, such as the European Union which has regulatory power over these technologies, are legitimizing their Big Data strategy and how notions of transparency, control and accountability are being used in the discourse. The opaque nature of these technologies - so called “blackboxing”- makes it difficult to track, evaluate and communicate publicly how these data are being used. And since it is argued that these technologies are neither imposed in a uniform way nor totally controlled by human actors, we understand the mutual shaping of social actors and technologies as a dynamic process (Bijker, 1995; Oudshoorn & Pinch, 2003). Therefore, through the present study, the aim is to examine how the European Union is legitimizing the Big Data regulation in the parliamentary discourse, taking into account its pivotal role as a supranational organization with concrete strategy and regulatory agency towards this issue.



## 2.3 Values in Big Data discourse

As it has been mentioned beforehand, the critical perspective on Big Data studies underscores that data that are controlled and used by corporations, governmental institutions and researchers derive from individuals, without victimizing the latter. Instead, this approach acknowledges that individuals can actively and critically engage in Big Data practices, by raising not only technical issues of accessibility and ownership to their data but also on social issues. By recognizing the power asymmetries that are embedded in these technologies, it is important to examine the agency of related actors towards these data. The pervasiveness of these new technologies provoke debates in which different actors develop a discourse aiming at justifying, negotiating and/or regulating their utilization in corporate, political, institutional and academic context (Rip, 2013). This is a reminder that Big Data is not just a technological phenomenon but it is accompanied with a discourse in which social values are embedded in.

The discourse on Big Data focuses and challenges issues of transparency, accountability and fairness as well as democratic legitimacy. The principle of transparency and accountability is critical in collection and usage of personal data since any abusive practice infringes the fundamental human right in privacy (Nissenbaum, 2017). Transparent practices on Big Data are argued to serve in two ways -offering the possibility of monitoring the whole process and permitting the dialogue and contestation of these practices. The value of transparency is present in the discourse accompanying the regulation process of Big Data technologies by political actors; regulations such as the GDPR as well as the recent DSA/DMA are highlighting the need to build mutual trust between the Big tech companies and other social actors. Both values are used to construct the urgency to hold the actors involved accountable, through checks and balances, given the opacity of these practices.

Similarly, fairness is strictly connected to transparency and accountability, being a call for argument-based explanation of these technologies as well as a reminder to avoid - or at least minimize- the digital divide (Wong, 2020). Lastly, many political actors vested their practices on Big Data to democratic legitimacy, emphasizing the need for citizens' awareness and critical reflection on Big Data practices. In order for citizens to be aware,

political actors should actively enhance the digital literacy of citizens. By avoiding the creation of a technocracy that will be the only entitled actor for decision-making, and instead fostering citizens' digital literacy, democracies can reap the benefits of technological breakthroughs but also addressing the pitfalls and ethical issues that these innovations occult.

From a communicative perspective, these values can be “weaponized” in the unfolding of the Big Data discourse and construct the strategies of different actors to legitimize or delegitimize these practices (Puschmann & Burgess, 2013). In the context of the present thesis, focus is being placed on the institutional level of the European Union, and especially the discourse that is being constructed in the European Parliament debates on the regulation of Big Data, as well as how this discourse is being presented in the media coverage. Having in mind the strategic nature of the above-mentioned values in the legitimation-delegitimation of Big Data practices, examining the European Union's discourse would offer valuable insights, contributing to both the Big Data studies but also to the field of Strategic Communication .

# 3. Theory

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This chapter offers the theoretical framework that serves as the analytical lens for the present study, in close connection to the research questions. Theo van Leeuwen's theory of legitimation in discourse is used in order to answer the research questions presented earlier. In the parliamentary sphere, van Leeuwen's theory is explicitly used, addressing the communicative strategies that MEPs use on the Big Data regulation debates. More implicitly, in addressing the media coverage of the EU regulations, the typology is the conceptual compass that guides the analysis of the topic under study in the media sphere. Before discussing the methodological choices made in addressing the topic under study, a thorough presentation of the theoretical approach is important, offering the conceptual foundation in which the analysis will be anchored.

## 3.1 Legitimation in discourse: Theo van Leeuwen typology

Theo van Leeuwen, in his seminal article on legitimation discourse (2007), presents the framework of legitimation strategies - a typology that permits the analysis of the legitimation from a communicative perspective and critically reflects on issues that face legitimation. Before presenting van Leeuwen's typology, it is important to provide a definition of the term "legitimation". According to the definition coined by Berger and Luckmann (1966), legitimation offers the justification for elements in an institutional tradition that are salient and explains the order and the practices of a specific institution by giving a normative dignity to its practical imperatives (p. 111). Other scholars refer to legitimation as the social process of rendering a practice or institution in-agreement with specific norms and moral predicaments (Dowling and Pfeffer 1975; Johnson et al. 2006; Suchman 1995). It could be argued that legitimation functions as the rationale for specific measures and actions, explaining the reasons why an institution acts in a certain way.

Institutions -within the scope of the present- are considered the structures, formed by society, that are highly resilient. This institutional resilience, according to Scott (1995), resides “in the cultural-cognitive, normative and regulative elements” (p. 33) that construct a stable and meaningful social life. This thesis focusing on the institution of the European Union, seeks to examine how the legitimation of one of its practice - producing legislative and regulatory text- in a contested topic as Big Data is being constructed communicatively.

There are four major categories of legitimation; authorization, that includes the legitimation that derives from an institutional authority-being tradition, law and custom as well as the persons that are connected to these institutions; moral evaluation, which vests legitimation in specific values; rationalization, that is, legitimation by referring to “the goals and uses of institutionalized social action, and to the knowledge society has constructed to endow them with cognitive validity” (van Leeuwen, 2007, p.92); mythopoesis -which derives from the Greek words *μύθος* (legend) and *ποιέω-ω* (to create)- that is, legitimation conveyed through narratives whose outcomes reward legitimate actions and punish non-legitimate actions .

### ***3.1.1 Authorization***

In this category, the legitimation stems from the authority. The nature of authority can be personal - ascribed to a specific person who is part of a particular institution (van Leeuwen, 2007, p.94) - or impersonal - deriving from something intangible such as tradition or conformity. More specifically, in the category of personal authority is expert authority and role model authority. The distinguishing feature between expert and role model authority is that, in the former, legitimation derives from the expertise, instead of the status or fame. While these subcategories are personifying authority legitimation, the impersonal authorization resides in the tradition - that being a law, a regulation, a custom- or conformity - the belief that one should comply with the practices most people exercise. According to van Leeuwen, the authority of tradition and authority of conformity are closely linked since it is increasingly argued that if a

practice is followed by many, there is a reason to conform with it (p. 97). The impersonal dimension of authority is closely connected to the topic of this thesis since it examines the communicative construction of the regulatory framework on Big Data.

### ***3.1.2 Moral evaluation***

In this category, the legitimation is not imposed by any time of authority but from moral values (van Leeuwen, 2007, p.97). Nevertheless, it can be combined with other types of legitimation since the moral evaluation can be more implicit in the discourse, since they are just uttered without elaborating on the moral system that they derive from. Therefore, they can only be recognized based on the common-sense cultural knowledge on moral values (van Leeuwen, 2007, p. 98). The subcategories of moral evaluation legitimation are the evaluation, abstraction and analogies. In the first subcategory, the evaluation based on moral values is serving the purpose of avoiding any debate or contestation, by presenting something as “normal”. This form of legitimation, naturalization, aims at removing any moral and cultural order as “natural order”, blurring the lines between morality and nature (p.99). The second subcategory - abstraction- is the reference to specific aspects of a practice, in vague ways that includes extracting a quality that is linked to moral values and therefore be legitimized based on these values. Lastly, analogies -positive or negative- are used as comparisons in order to legitimize or delegitimize social practices.

### ***3.1.3 Rationalization***

The rationalization as a category of legitimation, has a sine qua non relationship with moralization; even though the moral values are not explicit, the legitimation via rationalization cannot occur without morality. In his theory, van Leeuwen (2007) distinguishes two types of rationality; instrumental rationality which focuses on the goals and uses of a practice to legitimate it and theoretical rationality which places emphasis on the “natural order of things” more explicitly than the subcategory

explained in the previous section. The first type of rationality is divided into subcategories whether the focus is being placed on the goals, the means or the effects in order to offer the legitimation in a practice. The second type, theoretical rationality, legitimation is neither anchored to moral values nor claims of efficacy, but rather in “some kind of truth on the way things are” (p. 103). The theoretical legitimation can be seen in three forms; by offering definitions of the practices that are legitimized, by thoroughly presenting and clarifying the actors and the practices and by predictions. This category can be connected to the notion of expert authority that was mentioned earlier. The theoretical rationalization can be distinguished as “experiential” and “scientific”; the first subcategory is linked to the explanatory schemes deriving from “common knowledge” and therefore are more open to debate and contestation while the latter are more complex and derive from trusted bodies of knowledge that ensure that these practices are legitimized (Berger & Luckmann, 1966, p.112).

### ***3.1.4 Mythopoesis***

The final category of legitimation, mythopoesis is achieved - as its name reveals- by narratives or, as van Leeuwen mentions (2007), tales. These tales highlight the rewards or the losses that are embedded in engaging or not to legitimate practices. More specifically, the moral tales emphasize the rewarding outcomes of conforming to legitimate social practices or to the positive outcomes that the restoring of legitimate order would entail (van Leeuwen, 2017, p.105). On the other hand, cautionary tales invert the former category by presenting the possible (negative) outcomes of not conforming to the social practices. Both categories are using symbolization to convey their meaning and finally achieve the legitimation of a practice.

The typology described above highlights the importance of specific concepts - rationality, authority, moral values - in the construction of legitimation. These basic concepts are socially constructed and used to describe and attribute meaning in social practices. As van Leeuwen (2005) argues that a semiosis is ascribed to the concepts, deriving from the social context in which these concepts are employed. It is also argued that the specific institutional and social contexts - that being the European Parliament or the media sphere - influence the use of these concepts and the subsequent

meaning-making. The epistemological standpoint of van Leeuwen's theory resonates with the social construction of reality; as coined by Berger and Luckmann (1966) legitimation is the construction of cognitive and symbolic validity to an institution's objectivated reality. Therefore, the epistemological assumption guiding this thesis is grounded in the social constructivist perspective where legitimation as well as the discourse that accompanies it are largely formulated by the institutional and social context as well as the agency of those employing the discourse.

# 4. Methodology

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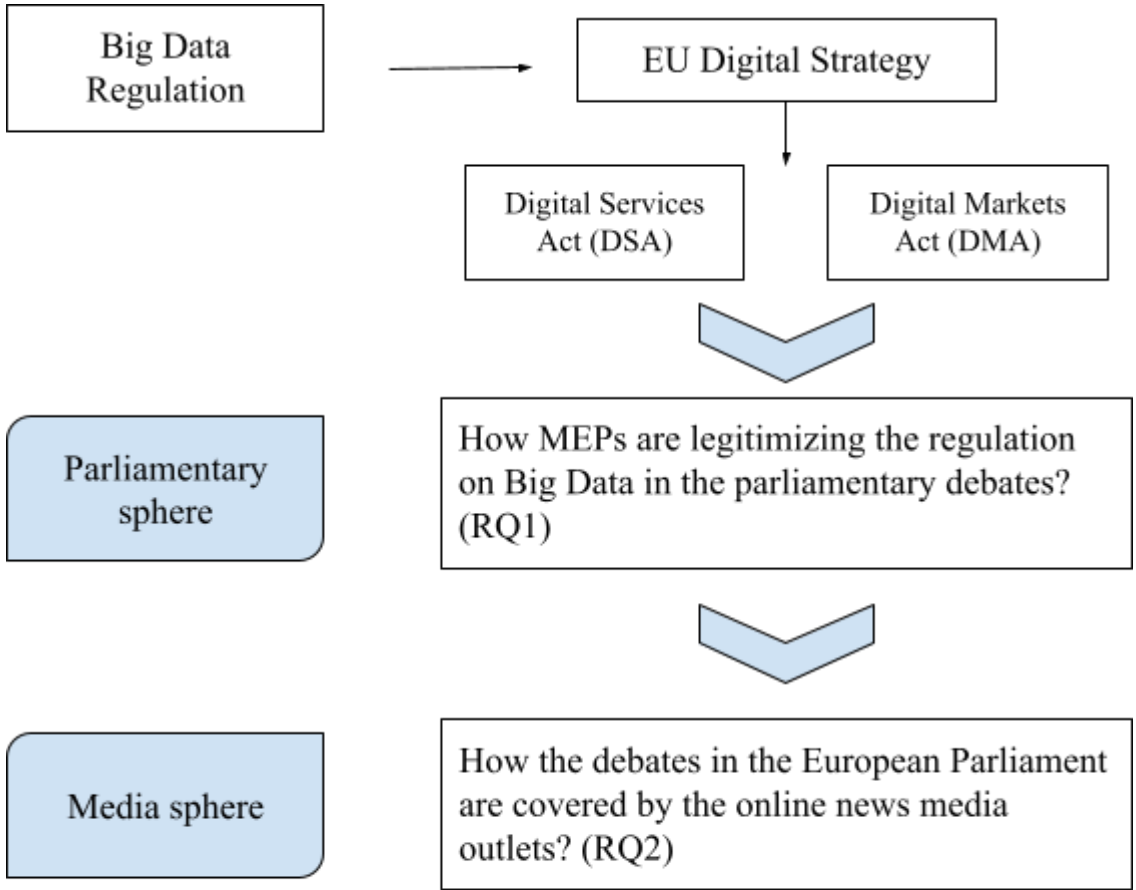
This chapter provides a description of the research strategy and the methodological framework that would permit to answer the research questions. It serves as a thorough description of the research design in terms of sets of data, data collection as well as the approach of analysis. It is important to mention that the analysis is based on the two research questions proposed; therefore different data-sets were used in order to answer the respective parts of the present study. Firstly, it analyzes the legitimation discourse in the parliamentary debates on Big Data and, subsequently, it explores the ways in which these strategies are framed in the news media that cover the ongoing debate. An overview of Critical Discourse Analysis and Framing offers a comprehensive explanation on the methodological and analytical steps followed, given the use of different datasets for the analysis. Lastly, the chapter concludes with some reflection on the means to reassure credibility and trustworthiness.

## 4.1 Research Design

Following the aim of the present thesis to examine the legitimation strategies of EU regulation on Big Data practices and its media coverage, it is grounded in the perspective of social constructionism. Since the nature of this study is to shed light to the ways institutions construct the worldviews about specific issues and how they attribute meaning; these questions would call for a qualitative design, as Merriam would argue (2009, p. 5). More specifically, for addressing the first research question regarding the construction of legitimation discourse on Big Data regulation in the EU institutional level, discourse analysis was employed on selected debates conducted in the European Parliament. Subsequently, in order to address the second research questions, content analysis was employed on selected media outlets that covered the regulation debate on Big Data by examining the framing of the topic under study, including the legitimation strategies employed on the parliamentary debates.



By dividing the scope of the present study into two research questions, the aim is double: to examine how the EU constructs discursively the legitimation on Big Data while exploring the interplay between political actors and the media in the construction of meaning on this specific issue. In order to offer a comprehensive analysis of the phenomenon in question and not a mere description, it appeared necessary to use different data sources such as debates and online news articles as well as operationalize critical discourse analysis and framing theory. Thus, the nature of data is inextricably linked to the lenses used in the analytical process, described in the following sections of this chapter. The scheme below gives an overview of the research design:



*Figure 1: Research Design*

## 4.2 Data Collection

### 4.2.1 Parliamentary debates

As it has been mentioned in the introductory parts of the present study, the European Commission has presented its digital strategy with the respective Communication “Shaping Europe’s digital future” in the beginning of 2020, showcasing the main legislative actions regarding Big Data practices. According to the Commission’s Communication, there are three key dossiers concerning Big Data and big tech companies’ practices; Digital Services Act (DSA), Digital Market Act (DMA) and Data Governance Act. At this point, it should be noted that the first two dossiers have been discussed in the plenary session of the European Parliament as debates while the last one is still awaiting for the European Parliament’s position on the first reading. Since the data collection period is from January 2020 to March 2022, the Data Governance Act was not included in the analysis. That said, the data collection included two dossiers that have been completed in 2020: *Digital Services Act - Improving the functioning of the Single Market and Digital Services Act and fundamental rights issues posed* since they are thematically relevant and are components of the European Union’s strategy on Big Data practices.

The material collected is constituted by the parliamentary debates, available on the official website of the European Parliament (<https://www.europarl.europa.eu/portal/en>) and its respective committees (IMCO and LIBE). In order to reassure material redundancy, data was collected by accessing the official websites of the MEPs and rapporteurs involved in the debates in the European Parliament website. The table below offers an outline of the data collected:

Date	Dossier title	Status	Parliamentary debate
16/01-20/10/2020	2020/2022(INI) Digital Services Act and fundamental	Completed	19/10/2020

	rights issues posed		
16/01-20/10/2020	2020/2018(INL) Digital Services Act: Improving the functioning of the Single Market	Completed	19/10/2020
08/02/21-now	2020/0361(COD) Digital Services Act	Ongoing	14/12/2021 19/01/2022
08/02/21-now	2020/0374(COD) Digital Markets Act	Ongoing	14/12/2021 19/01/2022

#### ***4.2.2 News media data collection***

The second research question seeks to understand how the parliamentary debates and the legitimization discourse of the EU regarding Big Data regulation is constructed in the online news media outlets. More precisely, the focus of the analysis is positioned on the online news media outlets that are broadcasting in the European Union in its totality and are covering topics related to the EU and its institutions. Therefore, the sources that have been selected fulfill the criteria of topic relevance (EU institutions and affairs) and the geographic territory of the EU member-states. The choice of “European” media outlets, instead of national media outlets is purposeful since the aim of this study is to dive into the ways the issue of Big Data emerges in media whose main interest is the EU affairs. The online media outlets that are included in the analysis are the following: Politico EU, EurActiv, Euronews and EUObserver. The data collected were articles published in the respective websites from 01/01/2020 to 28/02/2022, placing great focus on the coverage of relevant issues.

The search of relevant articles has been conducted, through the websites of the new media, using the following key-words: Big Data, big tech companies, Digital Services

Act (DSA), Digital Market Act (DMA), European Commission, European Parliament. In order to complement the research and collect all the relevant articles the name of the key rapporteurs in the dossiers under research: Andreas Schwab, Christel Schaldmose, Kris Peeters, Alex Agius Saliba. From the articles collected, the principle of  $\frac{1}{3}$  was applied so that the sample remains relevant and the following analysis is credible: the articles in which the topic was covered in  $\frac{1}{3}$  or less, they would be removed from the sample. Ultimately, the analysis is conducted on data covering a two-year span (2020-2022), from the announcement of the EUs digital strategy until now.

Source	Articles (2020)	Articles (2021)	Articles(2022)
<a href="http://www.euractiv.com">www.euractiv.com</a>	22	63	15
<a href="http://www.politico.eu">www.politico.eu</a>	3	28	3
<a href="http://www.euronews.eu">www.euronews.eu</a>	12	16	1
<a href="http://www.euobserver.com">www.euobserver.com</a>	6	15	6

### 4.3 Analytical methods

#### 4.3.1. Critical Discourse Analysis

Discourse as a term is widely used in various disciplines (Fairclough, 1995; Foucault, 1977; van Dijk, 1985), with two prevailing senses. On the one hand, in language studies, discourse represents the interaction of people in concrete social situations while on the other, from a post-structuralist stance, discourse is a form of knowledge, leading to the social construction of reality. The first approach focuses on the function of language at an interpersonal level while the latter focuses on the ideas that are conveyed through discourse.

The Critical discourse analysis places emphasis on the relationship between the society and the media news (perceived as texts) which is seen in a dialectic manner (Fairclough, 1995, p. 34). According to van Leeuwen (1993), a communicative event - such as a parliamentary debate - is being “recontextualized” based on the goals, values and priorities of the new “context”. The goals, values and priorities formulate this social context with the use of language; this language used can be described as discourse (Fairclough, 1995, p. 56). In that essence, the news media stories, covering the European regulation on Big Data, offer a “mediatized political discourse”, providing an overview of the political discourse. By examining both discourse of the MEPs and the media coverage of the ongoing regulation process, this study aims at providing a more comprehensive understanding of the phenomenon of Big Data, from the communicative perspective of the political and media actors.

Political discourse is important since it is embedded with power to constitute and mobilize social forces that either maintain or revise the status quo. In the phenomenon of Big Data, the discourse of MEPs on the regulation of the digital sphere is strategic since it conveys the shift of power in the personal data, from the Big Tech companies to the European institutions. According to Bourdieu’s analysis, the discourse of politicians is doubly determined (Bourdieu, 1977): On the one hand, it is determined internally, by the political and ideological affiliation while on the other hand, the audience outside the political institution - media and the people whom politicians represent- influence whether or not these politicians would retain their office. However, given the fact that Bourdieu has not taken into account the role of mass media when taking into account the political discourse, the present study seeks to address the interface between political and media discourse. By analyzing the Big Data regulation discourse, via the parliamentary debates and the media coverage, this study seeks to shed light to the legitimation strategies used by the politicians and subsequently the way this discourse is being mediatized in the general public.

The “recontextualization” of legitimation discourse is taken into account while analyzing the data deriving from different sources and representing different spheres. This way, the analysis is more reflective of the nature of the actor under study, avoiding generalizations and untheorized conclusions.

### ***4.3.2 Framing Theory***

As mentioned in previous sections, the second research question emphasizes how the legitimization discourse of the EU regulation regarding Big Data is constructed in the news media. Therefore, Framing Theory, which explores the relationship between public policy issues in the news media sphere and the perceptions on these issues, is operationalized.

As eloquently coined by Robert Entman (1993), the frames are overarching contexts that define problems, delimitate the causal relations, evaluate ethically and suggest possible solutions. By offering a determined explanation of isolated features from a topic, source biases can influence the way facts are being presented, aiming either at influencing the target audience or fulfilling strategic political goals. Certain frames are motivated by a plethora of reasons and serve in the formation of a common understanding for a given topic.

The frames as interpretative schemas are collective construction, dependent by specific contexts. The choice, significance and knowledge are important components of a schema as cognitive construction; as Graber (1984) argues, a schema is structured by our knowledge of situations and persons, deriving from past experiences and emerging to “fill” the cognitive gap when information is insufficient (p.23). Similarly, Cappella and Jamieson (1997) argue with the model of “effect framing” that the news framing is activating certain conclusions, opinions and judgments as far as some issues, politicians and politics are concerned. In other words, the frames are the apparatus that the media purposefully use to construct a specific issue. Therefore, it is useful to operationalize this theory to address the second research question, the construction of legitimization discourse on Big Data regulation in the media sphere.

According to Entman’s (1993) classic definition the process of framing includes the selection of concrete aspects of the perceived reality and the strategic exaggeration of these aspects in order to increase its salience in a communicative format so as “to promote a particular problem definition, causal interpretation, moral evaluation, and/or treatment recommendation” (p. 52).

There are two genres of framing: frames coming from the media and the frames deriving from the individuals. On the level of individuals, framing an issue or a policy is connected to strategically highlighting or emphasizing a narrow piece of a bigger issue so that the receiver's judgments and opinions are influenced by the ideas presented in the argument and not others (Nelson, 2004). It is also argued that the frames are used to "narrow the political alternatives" (Tuchman, 1978, p.156). Respectively, media frames develop a dynamic relation between media outlets and audience: The use of frames from the professionals involved in the media, are transmitted to the audience. Subsequently, these frames are -to some extent- accepted by the general public and affect their choices and behaviors and, in the long run, both the media logic and the audience's feedback solidify the initial trends and contribute to the perpetuation of similar content (Cappella and Jamieson, 1997). Van Gorp (2010) argues that frames are not neutral but circulated by "frame sponsors" in order to foster a specific interpretation of a given issue and put forward a specific policy.

Semetko and Valkenburg (2000) suggest a typology of five news media frames, prevailing from early studies. Firstly, the **conflict frame** focuses on the clash between individuals, groups or institutions as a means to gain audience attention (p.95). It has been argued that this frame is simplifying complex issues and hiding critical aspects while Capella and Jamieson (1997) highlight the connection between the extensive use of this frame by news media and political cynicism of the audience. Secondly, the **human interest frame** brings to the frontline an emotional angle to the issue covered by focusing on the personalization and dramatization of the news. Thirdly, the **economic consequences frame** present an issue from the lens of the economic consequences that might affect a specific individual, group or even region and country. Fourthly, the **morality frame** covers an issue from the perspective of religious tenets or moral evaluations that are being presented in a more implicit way by the media professionals so that it is not clashing with the norm of objectivity that they have to respect. Lastly, the **responsibility frame** presents an issue by attributing to specific actors the responsibility for the cause or the solution of this issue. This frame is of strategic importance since it creates clear lines between the actors that are causing a specific issue and the actors that could potentially offer a solution or redeem any wrongdoings.

## 4.4 Analytical process

In full alignment with the present study's aim, van Leeweun's legitimation discourse theory constitutes the theoretical framework for the analysis while Critical Discourse Analysis and Framing Theory are methodologically operationalized. Content and discourse analysis are the methods utilized to approach the data collected, deriving for the parliamentary debates and press releases but also for online news articles. On the one hand, through the discourse of the MEPs and EU officials, this study can shed light to the construction of the legitimation in the parliamentary sphere. On the other hand, examining the online news media and how the parliamentary discourse on Big Data is framed by them contributes in delimiting the hegemonic notions and the collective understanding in the discourse of Big Data. In qualitative research, it is highlighted that a theoretical framework can partly address or answer the research question (Merriam, 2009). However, it is important to have in-depth knowledge of the theory relevant to the study and apply a preliminary framework which at the same time is reflective and flexible to the emergence of new knowledge. Therefore the methodological approach to the present study is abductive.

In order to analyze the parliamentary discourse, the debates formulated a corpus presenting the MEPs statements. The statements were scrutinized in order to find inductively the topic covered in the debates and more general themes were formulated. Then, van Leeweun's typology in order to code the data and create a matrix of the themes that conceptually fall into the theoretical framework. Lastly, a final thorough reading of the corpus is conducted to reassure the validity of the coding process. In the dataset deriving from the parliamentary debates, the table below illustrates the coding schemes that guide the analysis:



<b>Legitimation strategy (van Leuween typology)</b>	<b>Themes emerged from the MEPs statements</b>	<b>Color coding</b>
Rationalization	The arguments are referring to the competition, innovation and protection of consumers that is succeeded by the regulations.	Purple
	The arguments are showcasing the benefits that derive from digital innovations.	Blue
Authorization	The arguments are presenting the abusive practices of Big Tech companies that render the regulation necessary.	Yellow
Moral Evaluation	The arguments are highlighting the moral obligation of the EU to act for a more fair and transparent digital sphere	Orange
Mythopoesis	The arguments are presenting the EU as the legitimate actor to regulate Big Data, according to its strategy	Green

*Figure 2: Coding scheme for parliamentary discourse*

The approach of coding the dataset collected from the news media outlets is based on the Semetko and Valkenburg typology (2000). By applying an a priori set of frames, it is possible to analyze a large sample of news stories and contribute to identify the salience of specific frames while it provides greater reliability. The five frames mentioned earlier are the compass of analyzing the news media articles. Similarly to the first dataset, the process of coding has concrete steps. Firstly, the texts collected are closely read and the key concepts of each frame are identified. Subsequently, the frames identified form a preliminary list (David et al., 2011). Then, the preliminary list of frames is being

utilized for the second round and guided by the questions for identifying the framing typology, the framing matrix emerges. Finally, a third reading of the dataset is conducted to reassure the validity of the coding. After the coding process, the key concepts are extracted by the data based on the theoretical framework and can provide insight on the salience of the frames identified. In the table below, there is frame description as well as the questions that guided the coding process:

<b>Frame (Semetko &amp; Valkenburg typology (2000))</b>	<b>Description</b>	<b>Guiding questions</b>	<b>Color-coding</b>
<b>Conflict Frame</b>	The issue is presented through conflict between individuals/groups/institutions.	<i>Does this article reflect the Big Data regulation as disagreement between the different actors?</i>	Yellow
<b>Human Interest Frame</b>	The issue is presented through the human face or emotional angle.	<i>Does this article emphasize on how individuals are affected by the Big Data regulation?</i>	Orange
<b>Economic Consequences Frame</b>	The issue is presented in the context of consequences, especially in the ways an individual/group/institutions/region or country is affected economically.	<i>Does this article involve financial losses/gains now or in the future?</i>	Green
<b>Morality Frame</b>	The issue is presented in the context of religious tenets, moral prescriptions and values.	<i>Does this article contain any moral message?</i>	Blue

<b>Attribution of Responsibility Frame</b>	The issue is presented in a way to attribute responsibility - for its cause and/or solution- to either the government or to an individual/group.	<i>Does this article suggest that the cause or the solution of the issue is in the hands of one or multiple actors?</i>	Purple
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*Figure 3: Coding scheme for news media articles*

## 4.5 Ethical considerations

As it has been mentioned, the epistemological ground in which the thesis is situated is social constructivism. This implies that the paradigm followed is interpretive, acknowledging that the world is a social construction and the reality is not unique but there are multiple realities that coexist and even collide (Giliani, 2021). This way, according to Becker (1967), social research cannot be totally objective since the nature of the social world is subjective. However, the researcher can still conduct a trustworthy analysis by being “reflective regarding the methods, values, biases and the implications of those in the knowledge produced” (Bryman, 2008, p. 712).

In order to reassure that reflexivity and trustworthiness, this thesis was conducted having in mind Lincoln and Guba’s (1985) four criteria: credibility, transferability, dependability and confirmability. Firstly, credibility refers to the level of transparency that the research has to fulfill, by providing a thorough description of the methodological choices that were made, from the data collection and the analytical process of the data. The present thesis is informed by the theoretical framework which is relevant to the study and is able to conduct an inquiry “richly descriptive” (Merriam, 2009, p. 16) and transferable; in other words, the insights drawn from the research can be generalized and used for future research. Following, dependability shows that the study is emergent and flexible, dependent on the process of the study (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Ultimately, confirmability demonstrates that the methods used for a qualitative inquiry are solid and other researchers can follow the same pattern and gain valuable insights while at the same time, the results can resonate with the data obtained and analyzed.

# 5. Analysis

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This chapter, divided in two sections, presents the analysis of the empirical data. Following the research design, the first part is dedicated to the analysis of the parliamentary sphere and the legitimation discourse of Big Data regulation in the European Parliament debates. Subsequently, the second part of this chapter showcases the analysis of news media outlets, by presenting and explaining how the legitimation discourse is recontextualized in the media sphere with the use of frames. The arrangement of the chapter aims at offering explicit answers to the research questions and reassures a greater understanding of the empirical material.

## 5.1. RQ1: Legitimation Discourse of Big Data regulation

By analyzing the debates on DSA and DMA, the following themes emerged: i) EU's strategy to protect users-online consumers, especially minors from targeting ads (rationalization), ii) EU's strategy to boost competition and innovation (rationalization), iii) EU's control over the data, and not Big tech companies' monopoly (authorization), iv) algorithmic accountability and transparency (moral evaluation), v) EU's role as a global regulatory power (mythopoesis). However, in terms of delegitimizing EU's regulation on Big Data, four themes emerged: i) risk of censoring political actors with different ideology, ii) the violation of fundamental human rights such as the freedom of expression online, iii) conflict with existing EU legislation and iv) disempowerment of Member-State national institutions.

In the DSA debate, the focus placed on the prominent role of the Big tech companies not only the digital economy but also politics is greater than in the DMA debate which was more technically oriented. The issues of disinformation and targeted political advertising to minors were brought forward but also arguments regarding the role of national institutions to regulate the digital media sphere and the content diffused online. Especially, the risk that this regulation might waive the control of what is online from national to the EU level was the

predominant source of dissent from certain MEPs. In the following section, there will be a thorough presentation of the themes and their linkage to van Leeweun's theory.

### **5.1.1 Rationalization**

#### ***EU's responsibility towards European consumers***

The first theme regarding EU's responsibility to protect users resonates with the scope and the goals of the regulations DSA and DMA; promoting a digital economy which prioritizes competitiveness, innovation and consumer protection. This theme reflects the way EU institutions communicate the ongoing regulations, anchoring it to the European digital strategy, part of the European Commission's priorities for the 2019-2024 term. According to the European digital strategy (EC,2022), the two regulations are critical components for reassuring the EU's transition to the digital age in a safe, fair and transparent way. Therefore, consumer protection can be considered as instrumental rationalization that legitimizes the ongoing regulation on Big Data. Aligned to this argument, many MEPs refer to the ignorance of the citizens about Big platforms operation, stating that ***"Citizens are often unaware of how big platforms profit from our data (...) It would be illegal for someone to follow us on the street, but everything is allowed on the Internet."*** (Biljana Borzan, 14/12/2021). As it is demonstrated from the extract, consumers' protection is not only important for the goal of a competitive digital internal market but also quintessential for democratic institutions.

#### ***Regulation as a booster of competition and innovation***

Competition and innovation goes hand in hand with the consumer's protection since by creating a more fair and competitive digital sphere, the consumers are protected and free to make their own decisions. Strictly related to the core of the European values, and more specifically to the Internal Market and Consumer Protection committee which is responsible for the ongoing dossier, MEPs are extensively using the economic argument in order to support the regulation of Big Tech companies. Additionally, the theme of competition and innovation is connected to the fact that Big Tech companies have been monopolizing the

European digital market and it is important to set the rules that would permit start-ups and SMEs to flourish. The following examples illustrate the above mentioned theme:

***“It is a complex proposal, but it has a very simple aim: to make sure that markets are open, are fair, and contestable so that every business has a fair chance of making it to their customers. Unfortunately, as you will know from our competition cases, this is not necessarily the case today.”***

***(Margrethe Vestager, 14/12/2021)***

***“The DMA will create more freedom for consumers to choose between platforms and applications. Consumers will have more choice over how their data is used and for what purposes. The DMA will create more freedom to innovate, by setting clear and fair rules for the most powerful players in the field.”***

***(Andrus Ansip, 14/12/2021)***

In parallel, the competition and innovation boosting via the regulation is presented to remove obstacles for SMEs and start-ups. As Rose Thun und Hohenstein (Renew Group) expressed on the debate, the regulation is ***“about ensuring fair competition on the market and giving European start-ups and small companies a chance in a collision with Europe's technology giants”*** (19/01/2022). The competition on the market will be reassured if a regulation is set in practice so that the small companies can coexist with the “giants”. Similarly, Angelika Niebler (EPP) highlighted the fact that the great majority of European companies are small and medium sized and therefore, ***“they too must have fair opportunities on the Internet”***. At this point, it is interesting to note that the economic benefits and the competition as themes were brought forward in the debate from MEPs of the more liberal groups, highlighting the alignment between parliamentary discourse and party affiliation.

### **5.1.2 Authorization - EU or Big Tech companies should control data?**

The EU's authority to control Big Tech companies and their Big Data practices is the second theme emerging from the analysis. The Big tech companies, referred to in the regulation text as "gatekeepers", are presented as companies that possess a large portion of the digital sphere and the services that they provide form an "ecosystem" in which they develop abusive practices. These abusive practices are the main reason why the EU claims to have the "obligation" to regulate the digital sphere. The following statements express this "obligation" of the European Parliament to act and control the business model of the digital platforms when the online activities are not serving the democracy but promote illegitimate interests:

***"But if algorithms exploit human curiosity for attention-grabbing content for profit reasons and fake news, hate and hate speech are the wrapping paper in which personalized advertising is packaged online, then we as legislators have to step in and take action against this business model." (Timo Wölken, 19/10/2020)***

***"The responsibility for resolving disputes between users and platforms should not lie with the platforms themselves. We also do not put the fox to guard the geese! Online platforms have given us countless opportunities, but we need to address the challenges they face and tackle the challenges properly." (Karen Melchior, 19/10/2020)***

As it is explicitly stated, there is a bipole of "we", the ingroup of legislators against "them", the digital platforms which profit from activities such as fake news and hate speech through personalized advertising. Especially in the second statement, it highlighted that Big Tech companies have given to the EU many reasons to regulate them, targeting their malpractices that range from the selling of illegal products and targeted advertising for commercial purposes to disinformation, data mining and illegal content removal. However, personalized advertising, or micro-targeted and targeted advertising as it appears in the debate corpus, is one of the areas within the scope of the regulation, but also an area of conflict between the MEPs. It is especially important to pay attention to this dimension of the debate, given the strategic importance that social media platforms have to the politicians nowadays. Many politicians are using their social media platforms to express their opinions on specific issues,

communicate with their supporters and attract prospective voters; therefore, the limitations on what is possible to be done online affects them tremendously. That is the reason why they debate on to what extent the EU has “the authority” to regulate these activities.

***“Governments should not get in the way of a global system that is working well. Governments should especially not get in the way of freedom of speech online. This must be equally true for the EU as a whole. (Dita Charanzová, 19/10/2020)***

***“Attention should be paid to the danger of content being censored in terms of its compliance with political correctness imposed by the left-liberal elite. It cannot be agreed that the right to freedom of expression, e.g. in matters of ideology, would be restricted under the slogan of combating dangerous, unlawful content”  
(Joachim Stanisław Brudziński, 19/10/2020)***

As the statement mentions, there is a need to reconcile the freedom of speech and the online censorship. The draftsman for the opinion of the Committee on Transportation and Tourism, Roman Haider argued that ***“the new rules in the area of freedom of expression on the Internet and the exchange of views between citizens on online platforms are far too strict and excessive”***, creating new ***“censorship rules that are incompatible with the basic values of a free and democratic society” (19/01/2022)***. As an answer to this criticism, MEPs clarified that the purpose of the regulation is not aiming to censor legal speech but to hold the Big tech companies for their practices. Alexandra Geesee (Verts/ALE Group), addressing her fellow MEPs from the right wing parties, that DSA is not censoring but ***“shedding light on the platforms’ practices, collecting evidence and telling the stories of how targeting and engagement-based ranking tampers with democracies, and we will be able to build a better and freer internet”***.

The Big Tech companies or GAFAM (referring explicitly to Google, Apple, Facebook and Amazon) are largely mentioned and mostly in negative terms. These platforms are presented as monopolizing the digital market, leaving no space for SMEs to flourish and fair competition to prevail and abusing the access to European citizens’ data. This is a more negative argument that is repeatedly used by MEPs as the direct reason for adopting the DMA and DSA pack. Especially after the revelations of Frances Haugen about Facebook enabling



problematic user behavior, MEPs arguments are centered on the negative consequences of these platforms' immense power to the democratic institutions. The following statement demonstrates the negativity that the practices of Big Tech companies have incited to the European institutions:

***“Globally, Google searches 5.6 billion times a day. 1.6 million Amazon packages are sent every day. It shows that our digital economy is running at full speed and that people have indeed found their way to the internet. But it also shows how huge those companies are and what impact they have on our society. Because with such a large size and such influence comes a great responsibility. And unfortunately that is still too often missing today. What's more, the "Facebook Papers" that whistleblower Francis Haugen has exposed have only fueled mistrust, and the Commission's many lawsuits against those tech giants are proof of that.”***

***(Tom Vandenkendelaere, 14/12/2021)***

The European Union is presented as the “safeguard” of democracy and the actor that has “the right” to set the rules so that the Big tech companies do not challenge the democratic institutions and the freedom of users. Thierry Breton, one of the key Commissioners in the regulation of the technological field, supported his statement on the urgency of regulating the Big tech companies to Frances Haugen’s testimony in the European Parliament. Claiming that ***“a handful of large platforms that have now become systemic public spaces”*** is not tolerable, he makes a parallelism of Big tech companies with banks and the regulations will act as ***“prudential rules”*** (Thierry Breton, 19/01/2022).

By “exposing” the abusive behavior of the Big tech companies, the statements presented seem to highlight the conflict over the Big Data; “fight”, “control”, “power” and “hegemony” prevail in the positioning of MEPs and express that the EU has the authority over the modus operandi of these companies. In Schaldemose’s statement below, there is an important contrast between ***“dictating the rules”*** and ***“the rules must be set democratically”***. It builds up the argument that so far the Big tech companies have been acting in the authoritarian way regarding the data collection and use and now it is time for the EU to set the rules in a more democratic way.

***“The Digital Markets Act is a genuine attempt to limit the enormous hegemony of the great technology giants. Platforms such as Google, Apple, Facebook and Amazon simply have a monopoly on the market.” (Jessica Stegrud, 14/12/2021)***

***“Then we are in the process of taking back the fight and control from the big tech giants. When we vote later today on the Digital Markets Act, the DMA, we will set foot in front of the very biggest tech gatekeepers who have been able to dictate the rules of our digital single market for far too long. We here in the European Parliament want it to stop now. The rules must be set democratically.” (Christel Schaldemose, 14/12/2021)***

### ***5.1.3 Moral evaluation: Algorithmic transparency and accountability***

The third theme that is persistent in the debates showcases the importance of algorithmic transparency and the accountability of Big tech companies. These notions are key concepts in the Big Data studies, especially from the most critical standpoint, and are being operationalized as claims for supporting the ongoing regulation. Analogies such as “blackboxing”, “dark patterns”, are repeated in the statements, evaluating negatively the unquestioned influence of digital platforms and the risks that the opaque nature of these platforms imply for the economy but also for democracy. Consequently, the necessity of a regulatory framework emerges as a natural outcome of these practices and ethical ramifications are embedded in the statements in favor of the regulation. The following examples are indicative of this theme:

***“Political manipulations and battles of interests in the field of our personalities are the greatest threat to democracy. Therefore, the key highlights of the Digital Services Act reports are the requirements for the transparency of algorithms, the indication of the origin of advertising and misleading information, and clear rules for moderating online content.” (Irena Joveva, 19/10/2020)***

***“And in a world in which big data and algorithmic decisions are playing an ever greater role, we are faced with a paradox, so to speak (...) However, the public knows less and less about the mechanisms and influences that shape the formation of political opinions.” (Petra Kammerevert, 19/10/2020)***

The regulation is argued to provide transparency and accessibility so that users are aware of the digital mechanisms that are embedded in many domains of their daily lives, from shopping to voting. Transparency, accountability and a human-centric approach on these technologies are key concepts, repeatedly emerging in the MEPs statements. From top-level executives like Margrethe Vestager and Thierry Breton to MEPs, it is communicated that the overarching purpose of this regulation is to empower European citizens in these fields so that the EU can claim itself as a digital pioneer in the global scene. Tiamo Wölken, one of the lead MEPs in the DSA and DMA dossier, pinpointed another hue of the algorithmic transparency; the way that Big Tech companies should not be opaque when it comes to the user's expression. Instead, citizens need to be aware of the algorithmic procedures and Big Tech companies need to demonstrate accountability:

***“An online platform must not be a black box. Its actions must be transparent, justified and comprehensible, especially when it makes such important decisions about users' freedom of expression.” (Tiamo Wölken, 19/10/2020)***

The Big Tech companies are urged to provide algorithmic transparency and be accountable towards citizens. The phrase ***“what is illegal offline must be illegal online”*** evaluates the Big tech companies practices as questionable “black boxes” that now need to open up and reveal their mechanisms. Arguing that the Big tech companies have been profiting from the opacity of the algorithmic mechanism, the EU aims to provide more transparency and “empower” citizens. An indicative example of this argument is Kim Van Sparrentak from Verts/ALE Group:

***“Let's take back control from big tech and put it firmly back into the hands of the people. We need to break big tech's power over our information before it erodes our democracy. But for some colleagues, it seems a step too far to make the necessary fundamental changes. Yes, as the text stands there will be good improvements for users, and I'm happy to see that our proposals have been taken on board for strong notice and action procedures and a ban on manipulating people's choices online with dark patterns.”***  
***(DSA Debate, 19/01/2022)***

The transparency and accountability from the Big Tech companies is predominantly linked to the targeted advertising, disinformation and hate speech online. Therefore, the regulation is

not solely aimed at formulating “codes of conduct” for the digital market but it aims to control the content that circulates in the online sphere and raise the awareness of users regarding what is in the online platforms. In other words, by asking for more “accountable” social media platforms, the EU is claiming the power from the Big tech companies on what European citizens are exposed to online. The argument of transparency and the promise of empowering citizens serves a positive moral evaluation on the EUs regulation on Big Data.

#### ***5.1.4 Mythopoesis: EU as a global actor in the digital sphere***

Lastly, the theme of the EU as a regulatory power is of utmost importance since it expresses one of the strategic goals of the European Union. The digital sector, and especially the Big Data technologies, constitute a crucial field in which the European Union seeks to establish its “strategic autonomy” from the USA and China which constitute the main competitors. The Digital Services Act is presented as the main tool of the European Union to achieve its strategic positioning in the global scene. Therefore, the regulation is legitimizing by showing the “rewards” that Europe will gain in the global scene.

***“And is it possible, are we able to invent a European model which is different from that of the United States, where we really notice the pursuit of profit at all costs, and which is also different from the Chinese model, where we see although technology is put to the service of mass surveillance so that the dictatorship continues?”***

***(Emmanuel Maurel, 19/10/2020)***

This statement is indicative of the distancing that the European Union wants to achieve: setting a global standard that differs from the US business-oriented model and the Chinese model that has been largely criticized as the apparatus that perpetuates the authoritarian regime. The narrative of the EU as an “alternative way” is used by many MEPs, demonstrating a different view of the growing digital phenomenon that does not serve either the business or those who possess political power. In this narrative, Big Tech companies are portrayed in a negative way; either as the “*Wild West*” (Kris Peeters), a dangerous and unpredictable territory or a “*lethal weapon*” (Geoffroy Didier) that could cause great harm to

users and society in its totality. These negative analogies are providing moral evaluation to the debate and legitimize the ongoing strategy of the EU to regulate Big Data.

***“The future will be more digital, not less, and it brings incredible progress that we, as policymakers, should embrace. But... It also brings dangers that we cannot ignore anymore. Let us be honest with each other, colleagues. The EU has done more to regulate the online world than any other continent. Yet, even here, it is still the Wild West!”***

***(Kris Peeters, 19/10/2020)***

Given the fact that the majority of the Big Tech companies are from the USA or China, the regulation influences the modus operandi of global actors. This theme can be seen as legitimation basis for regulating a very critical point since the democratic procedures offer the justification for formulating the rulebook on a very strategic field; data and digital economy. Andreas Schwab, the main rapporteur for DMA explicitly set that this regulation ambition is to be applied globally, not only in the European continent:

***“And I believe that the Digital Markets Act will then find acceptance far beyond Europe. And that would not only help the citizens of Europe. It would contribute to fair competition being a concept that we are exporting from Europe to the world with the aim of creating equity and fairness in digital markets.”***

***(Andreas Schwab, 14/12/2021)***

Following a similar line of argumentation, both the Commissioner Breton and Christel Schaldemose, the main rapporteur for DSA are highlighting the opportunity that the ongoing regulations offer to the EU to upgrade its positioning in the global scene as a leader in the digital sector. The EU is considered as a regulatory power whose legislative texts have important implications to other actors. As it is mentioned in the debate, the DMA and DSA can be considered as a natural continuation of the GDPR Regulation and a spill-over of “European way” in areas of interest such as the digital economy and the Big Data agenda.

***“Ladies and gentlemen, make no mistake about it, with the DMA and the DSA, which are, moreover, two sides of the same coin – the regulation of the information space – Europe is taking the lead in defining global standards for our digital space.”***

***(Thierry Breton, 14/12/2021)***

***“The DSA can become the new gold standard for the tech field, not just in Europe, but worldwide. Major technologists such as the United States and China are closely following what we are now agreeing on. Just like they did when we made the GDPR. With the DSA, we take a basic showdown with the Wild West, to which the digital has evolved.”***

***(DSA Debate, 19/01/2022)***

### **5.1.5 Delegitimation of DSA**

By examining the debate and analyzing the statements of all the MEPs, the delegitimation of EUs regulation of Big Data is identified in the following themes: i) violation of fundamental human rights, ii) censorship of politicians based on their ideology, iii) excessive EU authority and disempowerment of national institutions. The delegitimation discourse of the regulation was significantly minor to the legitimization discourse on Big Data regulation.

Before explaining with greater detail the deligitmation discourse, it should be noted that the scope of the regulation has also been a source of dissent; some MEPs focused on the need for clarification of the term “gatekeeper” and urged that DMA-DSA package should include European companies and not only American or Chinese. However the issue of targeted advertising and freedom of expression online were semantically more prevailing.

The regulation was connected to violation of human rights and online censorship, alleging that a hidden political agenda is promoted. It has been noted that this theme of delegitimation discourse derived from the far-right and the far-left wing of the European Parliament. On the one hand, the MEPs representing a far-right ideology describe the regulation as an attempt to silence opinions that deviate from the “political correctness” which according to them, is nothing more than censorship. By presenting the European institutions as “totalitarian”, the legitimization of the ongoing regulation is undermined. The following statements are illustrative of this positioning:

***“The only problem is that there is no democracy without freedom of speech. And when you look at the position of social monopolists, social media, theoretically, you can say anything, except for abortion, unless it is about gender, unless it is about vaccination, unless it is***

*about gender reassignment, etc. These are the reasons why large accounts are blocked on social media, including that of one of the political parties.”*

*(Patryk Jaki, 19/01/2022)*

*“Censorship is unacceptable in a democracy, whether by the state, digital service providers or even non-profit organizations, as proposed. These are called "trusted notifiers". Every totalitarian wants to have a monopoly on influencing people's consciousness, just like the totalitarianism you build.”*

*(Ivan David,19/01/2022)*

The analogy of the EU as the Orwellian “Ministry of Truth”, an apparatus that decides what is desirable and what is not is conflicting with other MEPs discourse regarding citizens’ empowerment, transparency and human-centric approach. The following examples are stated by Christine Anderson, an MEP from Identity and Democracy Group which is a far-right wing party and by Tomislav Sokol, an MEP from EPP, the biggest party in the European Parliament which is considered center-right, pro-European. This is particularly interesting since it demonstrates that there is no specific correlation between the party affiliation and the argumentation of the MEPs in the present debate. By giving a negative evaluation to the ongoing regulation, these examples question and delegitimize the EUs authority in controlling what is online.

*“The next step towards Orwell's Ministry of Truth are the so-called upload filters, which ensure that politically undesirable opinions are not published in the first place. We already saw how this works in the USA last week: Apparently, presidential candidate Joe Biden is involved in a serious corruption scandal in Ukraine, which the New York Post wanted to address in a publication. But because what shouldn't be can't be, the article in question was quickly blocked on Facebook and Twitter using upload filters. ”*

*(Christine Anderson, 19/10/2020)*

*“Of course, this does not mean that we need a "Ministry of Truth", it does not mean that we are for censorship, it just means that we must strike the right balance between freedom of expression on the one hand and hate speech, which is very dangerous and can lead to tragedies in the future.” (Tomislav Sokol, 19/10/2020)*

The allegations that the ongoing regulation serves a “hidden EU agenda”, and not the consumer’s rights is strictly connected to the narrative of the EU aiming at upgrading its role in the global scene. It is claimed that Big Data regulation is an outcome of the competition between EU and its opponents, namely the USA and China, and the aim is not the citizens’ well-being but the profitability of capitalism. This dichotomous approach of the “EU vs. citizens” is weakening the legitimization discourse of the regulation which is to a great extent based in the European values of democracy, transparency and accountability towards EU citizens.

***“The wishes for the protection of "consumer rights" do not obscure the real aims of the regulation, namely the creation of more favorable profit conditions for European technology groups, in conditions of fierce competition with the United States of America, China, with monopolies of other powerful capitals.”***  
***(Lefteris Nikolaou-Alavanos, 19/01/2022)***

As far as the disempowerment of Member-States, there are statements that associate the emergence of digital technologies with the liberal and capitalistic ideology. The rise of a post-human society is produced by the digital monopolies and are perpetuated with the aid of the present regulation which aims at defining whether the actors that dominate in the market are the EU or China and the United States. This liberal economic model that is split over the digital sector needs to be fought, according to the MEPs that express such statements. The interesting aspect is the ideological affiliation of the MEPs since they come from the different ends of the political spectrum: Lefteris Nikolaou-Alavanos is a Non-Attached MEP but he is a member of the Greek Communist Party (KKE) while Jean-Lin LaCapelle is MEP from Identity and Democracy Group which is a far-right wing party. These examples confirm that there is no clear connection between the ideology of the MEP and the legitimization discourse.

***“ The rivalries of European groups with others - mainly Chinese and Americans - are fierce for market dominance on the uncertain ground of the capitalist crisis. European monopolies are rewarded with tens of billions of euros, from the Recovery Fund and the Multiannual Financial Framework, which are all money from the toils of the peoples, to make the monopolies profitable.”***  
***(Lefteris Nikolaou-Alavanos, 19/10/2020)***



*“Others imagine a post-human world where man will be one with the machine, where liberalism will have gone so far as to modify the place of man: these apostles of transhumanism must also be fought.” (Jean-Lin Lacapelle, 19/10/2020)*

## **5.2 RQ2: How the legitimation of the EU regulation is presented in the online media?**

In this section, the aim is to answer the second research question, centered on the news media coverage of the ongoing regulation. By examining the online news articles, we seek to understand which aspects of the legitimation discourse are brought forward and in what ways this issue is being mediatized to the general audience.

In order to examine the representation of the political discourse in the media sphere, conceptual connections are drawn between van Leeuwen’s legitimation theory and Semetko and Valkenburg (2000) framing typology: i) conflict, ii) human interest, iii) economic consequences, iv) morality and v) attribution of responsibility. The morality frame is analyzed in close connection to the moral evaluation strategy since both are prioritizing the moral prescriptions in the construction of meaning. The economic consequences frame is connected to the rationalization, and more specifically the instrumental rationalization as legitimation strategy, since it showcases the tangible aspects of an issue -benefit and losses- that are used for legitimizing or delegitimizing a practice. In the remaining frames - conflict and attribution of responsibility - the connection is less evident since from the analysis, they seem to be linked with different strategies conveying the authorization and mythopoesis strategy; especially the attribution of solution responsibility can be linked to the strategy of authorization while the conflict frame can create a narrative which serves the mythopoesis strategy. It should be noted, at this point, that authorization strategy is usually emerging with the moral evaluation strategy while Semetko and Valkenburg (2000) emphasized that the frames can be overlapping. Lastly, the human interest frame is connected to the moral evaluation strategy since it has cues of subjectivity and abstraction.

The issue of Big Data regulation, as the coding process showed, was predominantly framed from a conflict and attribution of responsibility perspective. While all the frame types were identified in the dataset, these two were prevailing while the economic consequences and morality frames were significant too. The less salient frame was that of human interest, highlighting that the focus of media coverage is on the main actor related to the ongoing issue as well as on explaining the cause and the possible solutions in the issue under study.

In the following sections, a detailed analysis of the predominant frames as well as explanatory extracts are presented.

### ***5.2.1 Conflict Frame***

The conflict frame has been the most prevailing way that the news media outlets under study covered the issue. The regulation of Big Data has been significantly portrayed as a battle between the European Institutions and the Big tech companies. The two parts of the conflict remained the same throughout the period of the analysis, focusing on the fact that the ongoing regulations will alter power relations regarding Big data and the ways that are collected and used by the Big tech companies. The ongoing issue has been framed with notions of “control” and “power” as well as the bipole of the conflict is clear; Brussels -that portray the European Institutions- are acting against the Big Tech companies. The following three examples illustrate the conflict frame by showcasing the bipole EU- Big Tech companies:

***“Tech giants are likely to be rocked by the scale of the EU’s ambitions to curb companies’ powers, with 30 paragraphs of prohibitions or obligations.” (Euronews,01/10/2020)***

***“The EU wants to take back control of data, and harness it to benefit citizens, societies and companies. (Euronews, 26/11/2020)***

***“Brussels vowed on Tuesday to “put order into chaos” as it unveiled plans to limit the power Big Tech companies have in the sector.” (Euronews, 15/12/2020)***

The conflict between Big Tech companies and EU institutions is mediatized in mainly negative terms while the strategy of the latter is mostly “justified” by previous malpractice of the tech giants. Therefore, the conflict frame is connected to the authorization as legitimation discourse; the issue is presented as a conflict over who has the authority on Big Data practices - Big tech companies or the EU. In many articles, there is explicit reference to the regulators’ experience in examining and revealing abusive behavior from the Big tech companies, from online malpractices regarding the digital market to privacy breaches that affect democratic institutions. The following example illustrates the urgency for EUs regulation on Big tech companies, given the presence of these companies in multiple cases of privacy abuse.

***“Digital giants are not just nice companies with whom we need to cooperate, they are rivals, rivals of the states that do not respect our economic rules, which must therefore be regulated,” (Euractiv, 14/12/2021)***

***“For tech companies like Facebook, Europe (...) is at the vanguard of pushing for aggressive new laws to rein in the excesses of the digital world. Its regulators, too, have more than a decade of experience in finding some of Silicon Valley’s biggest names for both antitrust and privacy abuses. (EurObserver, 11/02/2021)***

Nevertheless, there is an additional dimension in the frame of conflict. In the sample, it is highlighted that the ongoing regulation unravels an internal conflict among the entities that operate in the digital sector. There are smaller entities, especially non-profit organizations (like Luminate in the example) that perceive the ongoing regulation as an opportunity to fulfill their strategic goals of tackling Big tech companies’ abusive practices. This is extremely important since it reveals how the ongoing process of regulating Big Data has multiple layers and the relations between the different actors is dynamic.

***“Alluding to the rush of tech legislation coming from Brussels, including rules on content moderation, digital competition and a ramp-up of privacy enforcement, Tisné said “there is a window of opportunity” to fight the tech platforms. Luminate’s five-year strategy to tackle the biggest tech companies revolves around taking them to court, publicly campaigning against their practices and lobbying governments to strictly regulate them.” (Politico, 13/10/2021)***

However, from the sample collected, it appears that the conflict frame is not limited between the Big Tech companies and the EU institutions; instead, many articles highlighted the intra-institutional conflict, and more precisely the disagreement between Margareth Vestager and Thierry Breton, regarding the content and the scope of the regulation as well as the communicative strategy that the EU would follow regarding the proceedings of the regulations. More precisely, Breton believed that Vestager's team of experts ***“did not understand industry dynamics or the potential impact on the supercomputing sector.”*** (*Politico, 14/12/2020*), highlighting the importance of reaching a consensus before proceeding on the adoption of the regulations. The following extract is indicative of this internal conflict in the European Union:

***“In Breton's view, the announcement fell squarely into his remit of protecting European digital businesses from unfair foreign takeovers. But Vestager, who was in charge of those proposals, pushed back against Breton's plan to hold a news conference. Annoyed over what her team felt was another attempt to steal the limelight from his hierarchical senior, the Danish politician conveyed her displeasure through senior officials to Breton's camp, and successfully requested that he cancel the briefing.”*** (*Politico, 14/12/2020*)

This conflict can be linked to the authorization since it demonstrates a lack of consistency among the leading figures on this issue. A mediatized image of the EU to the general public as fragmented could question the legitimation of the ongoing regulation and nurture the critical voices regarding that issue. Lastly, the conflict frame was identified as the collision between EU and its main competitors in the digital sector, USA and China. The digital sector is presented as a “battle” that the EU might be able to win with its regulatory power and the creation of rules for the companies that operate in Europe. On the other hand, USA as the main competitor in the digital field is presented as an actor that would promote its own interests and not cooperate with the EU for the creation of a unified stance towards Big Data and Big tech companies. This frame echoes the mythopoesis of legitimation discourse since there is the narrative of prospective benefits for EUs engagement in this sector.

***“Europe may have lost the battle to create digital champions capable of taking on US and Chinese companies harvesting personal data, but it can win the war of industrial data, Europe's industry policy chief said on Saturday”*** (*Euractiv, 17/2/2020*)

***“The US pressure will ultimately result in watering down the DMA or at least reshaping it in a way that hits Chinese companies more and the Americans less” (Euractiv, 11/02/2022)***

### ***5.2.2 Human interest Frame***

From the news media articles analyzed, the least prevailing frame was that of human interest. In the media coverage, the issue of Big Data regulation was not presented through the lens of a person but rather from an institutional lens. The reference to people was more generic and conceptualized in terms of “consumers” and “users” that are either affected by the malpractices of the online platforms and marketplaces or that the ongoing regulations are aiming to benefit them from controlling any activity that is against their interests. This way, the regulation on Big Data is presented as a step that the EU “has” to take to benefit the users while the practices of Big Tech companies until the regulation are presented as going against the human interest. Therefore, the legitimation of this regulation is presented as something positive (moral evaluation) but also is designated to a specific actor, the EU.

***“As a result, people can end up being subject to scams and have dangerous products in their homes. The status quo is unacceptable. But that could all begin to change for the better if the European Parliament sets some stronger obligations for marketplaces.”***

***(Euronews, 6/12/2021)***

### ***5.2.3 Economic consequences Frame***

As far as the economic consequences frame is concerned, the data collected showed that it is mainly used to describe the consequences that the Big tech companies are going to face, after the adoption of the regulation. It is important to highlight that the Big tech companies are not presented solely as the companies from the USA and China but also the European companies that use Big Data practices. Nevertheless, the focus is placed on the Big Tech companies since the regulations are going to affect to a great extent the business model that they have employed so far. The following example illustrates the above-mentioned argument.

***“The set of draft legislation that, if adopted, will have a major impact on the business practices of digital service providers in the EU, as well as those based outside Europe serving users in the bloc, including Google and other Big Tech like Facebook.”***

***(Euronews, 14/12/2020)***

More precisely, the frame detected in articles highlights the repercussions of the regulations to the Big tech companies. The articles provide information regarding the context of the regulation, emphasizing on the magnitude of the fines that these companies would face in case they fail to comply with the legislative text:

***“The Digital Services Act, presented by the European Commission in December, outlined content moderation rules for online platforms, including hefty fines that can go up to billions of euros if the companies fail to act.” (Político, 18/01/2021)***

It can be argued that this frame is less explicitly connected to the legitimization discourse employed in the parliamentary sphere. However, references to small and medium enterprises (SMEs) are linked to the EU’s goals to protect these enterprises and reassure a competitive digital economy. In this way, the legitimization of the regulation is constructed discursively by rationalizing this initiative, by showing the need to regulate the dominant position of Big Tech companies and protect the smaller entities. The economic factor is instrumentalized to offer the legitimization basis of the ongoing regulation.

***“The key to any regulation is to ensure that the platforms continue to be useful for our SMEs, but also that any rules that apply to the platforms do not trickle down to SME users. While the large platforms have the money and time to implement regulations, SMEs do not have the lawyers or staff to be implementing transparency reports and many other rules.”***

***(EurActiv, 9/11/2020)***

#### ***5.2.4 Morality Frame***

The conceptual connection between Semetko and Vlakenburg’s typology (2000) and van Leeuwen’s theory is more evident in this type of frame: morality and moral evaluation. In

both lenses, the reference to values is rather indirect, even though notions such as “freedom of speech”, “democracy” and “transparency” are identified in the online articles. This demonstrates the moral and social dimensions embedded in the process of grasping the implications of new technologies and the transition to a digital reality.

***“Freedom of speech is one of the most obvious examples here — no regulation whatsoever would mean people's ability to take part in the public debate would essentially be determined by companies who could set their own rules of participation.” (15/12/2020)***

This frame category highlights aspects that prevailed in the legitimation discourse such as algorithmic transparency and accountability from the Big Tech companies. Especially after the revelations of Frances Haugen about the “Facebook Papers”, the news media are highlighting aspects of the debate such as the importance of clear procedures in the data collection and use by the Big tech companies. At the same time, it is shown in the previous section that these notions are embedded in the discourse of the MEPs pushing for a stricter regulation. As it is illustrated by the examples provided, the stricter regulation of Big tech companies is claimed to be positive for the general interest since the digital sector will be more fair, transparent and sustainable.

***“Conservative and liberal lawmakers view Haugen’s revelations as concrete evidence that the European Commission’s original proposals provide the right answers for the stumbling blocks outlined in Facebook’s internal documents, including claims the company put profits ahead of people’s safety.” (Politico, 07/11/2021)***

***“European Union countries approved the Digital Services Act and Digital Markets Act — landmark proposals aimed at rebalancing the online world in favor of consumers, while also holding Big Tech firms more accountable for what is posted online and how they compete against smaller rivals.” (25/11/2021)***

The legitimation of the regulation is vested in the notions of algorithmic transparency and the empowerment of digital users that are evaluated as positive. By evaluating the practices of Big Tech companies as “bad” and the EU regulation as “good” since it claims to serve moral values such as plurality, transparency and accountability, the legitimation is constructed discursively.

*‘Jourová did also stress the importance of ensuring the transparency of algorithmic processes as part of future rules, she also noted that the overall debate on platform regulation should be more centered on the “plurality of debate, openness, and ability of people to have more control and understanding of what they see and why they see it.’*  
(Euractiv, 23/9/2020)

### **5.2.5 Attribution of responsibility Frame**

The attribution of responsibility - either of an issue’s cause or solution- emerged from the data in two different ways: On the one hand, the issue of Big Data regulation was attributed to the technological giants, with their malpractices being the cause of the ongoing regulation and on the other hand, the solution of this issue was attributed to the European institutions through the regulation. It can be argued that this frame is connected both to the authorization and moral evaluation that was used in the political discourse. On the one hand, by mediating the EU as having the authority to restore the “order” that has been deranged by the Big tech companies that took advantage of their predominant position. On the other hand, this attribution of responsibility is not value-free; the practices of Big Tech companies were evaluated negatively while the EU regulation, seeking to create a transparent and safe digital sphere, is evaluated positively.

*“The Digital Services Act would require digital platforms to take responsibility for taking down illegal content, from hate speech to counterfeit goods. It would also create some “safeguards” for users whose content has been erroneously deleted by platforms.”*  
(Euronews,15/12/2020)

*“This is clear intimidation. Europe needs to learn from what happened in Australia: Facebook may try to blackmail other nations, but a European Union, if united, cannot be bypassed. It is clear that we need to create a fair European Facebook regulation.”*  
(Euronews, 26/02/2021)



It is important to note that the revelations of Facebook Papers in October 2021 and the following testimony of Frances Haugen in the European Parliament affected the media discourse on the EU regulation. As it has been stated in an article, according to the whistleblower, ***“the risk posed by Facebook is a systemic one, hence the DSA should not be limited to illegal content”*** but be expanded (Euractiv, 9/11/2021). Frances Haugen's testimony in the European Parliament ratified the attribution of responsibility to the Big Tech companies, especially the problematic strategy of Facebook, and legitimized the EU regulation. The following example illustrates that it is the lack of initiative by the Big Tech companies to address the malpractices online renders the EU law responsible for acting accordingly:

***“Now, revelations about Facebook’s inaction to tackle harmful abuse of its platform have given more ammunition for European lawmakers wanting to come down hard on Big Tech such as Facebook.” (Politico, 4/10/2021)***

The DSA and DMA are presented as an answer to the problematic practices of the online platforms but also as a remedy to the “dominance” of tech companies over politics. An article, quoting the MEP Cavazzini that argues that the Capitol Riots in January 2021 were the aftermath of those malpractices and the inadequate response of these platforms questions their capability to properly control the digital sphere. Therefore, it is presented that the Big tech companies are the source of the problem and its solution resides in the regulation.

***“Cavazzini also noted that the actions of the platforms in the aftermath of the riots raise some ‘serious questions’ for the role of social media in policing online speech.” (Euractiv, 11/01/2021)***

## 6. Discussion - Conclusion

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Reaching the final chapter of this thesis, there are some reflections and discussion, deriving from the findings. Firstly, by addressing the research problem and aim, it discusses the knowledge that the findings add to the prior scholarly within the legitimation and framing research, and how these theories can be utilized in the scope of strategic communication. Following, explicit conclusions in the research questions are presented as well as suggestions for future research. The present thesis wishes to underline the importance of strategic communication in the exploration of emerging phenomena, such as the regulation on Big Data, and the potential expansion of the field, by focusing on the political actors and the discourse they employ in order to legitimize their strategy.

### 6.1 Discussion and Knowledge Contribution

The starting point of the present thesis is that political actors, like the European Union, use purposeful communication to achieve their overarching goals, including legitimizing policies and regulations. From a communication perspective, and in accordance to Hallahan et al. (2007), legitimation can be considered strategic for the European Union since it serves the advancement of its mission and the realization of institutional endeavors. Therefore, the analysis of the current regulatory process by the European institutions on Big Data falls under the umbrella of strategic communication. Additionally, given the legislative power that the European Union has on many issues, including Big Data practices, it constitutes an important actor in shaping the collective understanding of these technologies. As it has been extensively discussed in previous chapters, Big Data as a technological phenomenon is not “naturally given” but rather dynamic, influencing and being influenced by multiple spheres (Dalton & Thatcher, 2014). For that reason, the analysis was not solely focused on the institutional level but it included the media sphere.

Aiming to explore the emerging issue of Big Data regulation from a communicative perspective, this qualitative study is driven by two research questions that are anchored to van

Leuween's legitimation discourse theory and framing theory to analyze two respective datasets. On the one hand, examining the legitimation as it is being constructed in the MEPs discourse during the debate; by analyzing the debates in the European Parliament for DMA and DSA. Concerning the media coverage, on the other hand, framing analysis has been conducted in four different news media outlets covering the regulations' debate in order to comprehend which legitimation strategies and which aspects of the debate were brought forward and mediated to the general audience.

The findings of the study revealed that Big Data is not a simple and linear technological issue but it needs to be carefully examined along with the discourse that is developed around it. As it has been shown by the Critical Data scholarly, the agency of specific actors - that being technological corporations or political institutions - on Big Data is being addressed. The concept of agency is the connective nod between strategic communication and discourse as practice since both focus on power and control and these are communicatively constructed (Hallahan, 2007). This is confirmed by the analysis of parliamentary debates since the MEPs were raising the issue of authority over Big Data, underlying the danger of leaving the power of users' data in the hands of a few Big Tech companies. Additionally, the assumption that moral values are embedded in Big Data practices is substantiated by the findings. More specifically, transparency and accountability are prevailing in the parliamentary discourse, constructing the legitimation of a European regulation on Big Data. As it is argued by Puschmann & Burgess (2013), moral values are being "weaponized" by different actors in order to legitimize certain strategies. Similarly, Theo van Leeuwen (2007) argues that the moral evaluation -as legitimation strategy- is more covert and therefore, it is difficult to be contested or criticized.

As far as the media coverage of the debates is concerned, this study aims not only to present the dominant frames in the coverage of the policy but to also discuss what aspects are "transferred" from the parliamentary sphere to the media. The findings ratify the claims of Framing Theory scholars (Entman, 1993 ; Nelson, 2004) that, especially in issues and policies, the presentation is mostly placing the focus on specific aspects, in terms of causes and potential solutions. Specifically, from the typology of Semetko and Valkenburg (2000) proposed, the attribution of responsibility frame was prevailing in the media coverage; with this frame, the reason behind the Big Data issue - the abuses and malpractices of Big Tech companies- is presented more clearly while the solution in this issue is placed in the ongoing

regulation. Therefore, it can be argued that the media coverage is supporting to some extent the legitimization of the ongoing regulation.

## 6.2 Conclusions

Concluding, the purpose of this study was to investigate how the European Union legitimizes its ongoing strategy on Big Data and how this process has been covered in the media sphere. The nucleus of the study was two research questions focusing on two spheres; the parliamentary and the media sphere. In the first research question - that being "*How the legitimization of Big Data regulation is being discursively constructed in the parliamentary debates of DSA and DMA dossiers?*" - there were four themes that emerged in the debate: i) economic innovation and competitiveness (rationalization), ii) EU's responsibility to protect user's from Big Tech companies' abuse (authorization), iii) necessity for algorithmic transparency and accountability (moral evaluation), iv) EU as a global actor in the digital sector (mythopoesis).

The themes that emerged from the analysis matched van Leeuwen's typology and represented the main standpoints MEPs used to legitimize the ongoing regulation. It is understood that the European Union is constructed discursively as the actor with the authority, deriving from its regulatory and policy-making power, to control and define the digital sector, including Big Data practices. The rationalization as legitimization strategy stems from the claims of expertise by MEPs and the regulation of the digital sector as a natural evolution of the European Single Market. Nevertheless, as van Leeuwen (2007) argues, different legitimization types can overlap and that is the case of moral evaluation as legitimization strategy. The moral values of transparency and accountability imply that the Big Tech companies' lack of these values legitimizes the EU's strategy to act correctively by regulating these platforms. The authorization of the EU to regulate is positively constructed since it aims at protecting the before-mentioned positive values. Lastly, the regulation is closely connected to the overarching goals of the EU and its aspiration to play a leading role in the global scene; the "European way", as it has been mentioned by Ursula von der Leyen and MEPs, differs from the American and Chinese digital strategy. The upgrade of the EU into a global actor resides in its regulatory power and, therefore, the regulation on Big Data is legitimized.

The second research question of the study focused on the media sphere, examining “*what are the prevailing frames used by the EU news media outlets to present the ongoing debate on Big Data as it is expressed in the proceedings of DSA and DMA?*”. The emphasis was placed on the frames used by four online news media outlets, following the Semetko and Valkenburg typology. From the five proposed frames, those of conflict and attribution of responsibility were more prevailing, while the moral values - more evident in the parliamentary sphere- were less used in the media coverage. It can be argued that the attribution of responsibility frame is very critical since it exerts powerful influence on social attitudes by emphasizing on the source of an issue and its potential solution (Iyengar, 1996).

From the data, the responsibility for Big Data malpractices was attributed to the Big Tech companies while the responsibility for the solution of the problem was attributed to the European Union and its regulatory processes. Similarly, the conflict frame focused predominantly on the bipole “EU-Big Tech companies” while less evident was the coverage of the conflicting arguments presented in the parliamentary debate. Nevertheless, even though in the parliamentary debate the references to the citizens -as users and as consumers- and the protection of their digital rights were main components of the legitimation construction, this aspect was not “mitigated” to the media sphere. The human interest frame was marginal; this could be explained, on the one hand, by the journalistic norms for objectivity and on the other hand to the fact that the majority of the articles covering the issue, were simply transmitting the process with no additional commentary.

### **6.3 Suggestions for Future Research**

The present thesis touched upon the ongoing phenomenon of Big Data regulation, examining its discursive construction by strategic actors and expanding the scope of strategic communication to political entities. That said, further research - focusing on specific political actors or comparing multiple- could unveil valuable insights on the strategies used by them addressing uncharted territories such as these emerging technologies. It has been argued that the collective understanding of these technologies is not a linear process but a dynamic one,

including multiple overlapping spheres. Another possible avenue for further future inquiries would be to examine the stances and discursive construction of Big Data employed by other actors, such as the Big tech companies, academia and expert groups involved in the ongoing regulation. A multi-stakeholders analysis could provide a more holistic view on the collective understanding of the Big Data phenomenon. Lastly, regarding the media coverage of the issue, it would be interesting to dive further by examining how national media are covering this policy or conduct a comparative analysis. By the time this thesis is published, both DSA and DMA will be approved by the European Parliament and the member-States of EU would need to adopt the *acquis communautaire*; therefore the “field of contestation” is transferred from European to national level.

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# Appendix

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## MEPs participating in the debates

### *DSA Debate 19/10/2020*

<b>Name</b>	<b>Country of Origin</b>	<b>Political Affiliation</b>
Alex Agius Saliba	Malta	Social & Democrats (S&D)
Tiemo Wölken	Germany	Social & Democrats (S&D)
Kris Peeters	Belgium	European People's Party (EPP)
Marcos Ros Sempere	Spain	Social & Democrats (S&D)
Stéphane Séjourné	France	Renew Europe Group
Axel Voss	Germany	European People's Party (EPP)
Dita Charanzová	Czech Republic	Renew Europe Group
Alexandra Geese	Germany	Group of the Greens/European Free Alliance
Josianne Cutajar	Malta	Social & Democrats (S&D)
Izaskun Bilbao Barandica	Spain	Renew Europe Group
Petra Kammerevert	Germany	Social & Democrats (S&D)
Patrick Breyer	Germany	Group of the Greens/European Free Alliance
Assita Kanko	Belgium	European Conservatives and Reformists Group
Marina Kaljurand	Estonia	Social & Democrats (S&D)
Margrethe Vestager	Denmark	European Commission
Lina Gálvez Muñoz	Spain	Social & Democrats (S&D)
Adam Bielan	Poland	European Conservatives and Reformists Group

Svenja Hahn	Germany	Group of the Greens/European Free Alliance
Cláudia Monteiro de Aguiar	Portugal	European People's Party (EPP)
Andor Deli	Hungary	Non-Attached Members
Łukasz Kohut	Poland	Social & Democrats (S&D)
Pablo Arias Echeverría	Spain	European People's Party (EPP)
Christel Schaldemose	Denmark	Social & Democrats (S&D)
Karen Melchior	Denmark	Renew Europe Group
Gilles Lebreton	France	Identity & Democracy Group
Sergey Lagodinsky	Germany	Group of the Greens/European Free Alliance
Kosma Złotowski	Poland	European Conservatives and Reformists Group
Emmanuel Maurel	France	Left Group (GUE/NGL)
Sabrina Pignedoli	Italy	Non-Attached Members
Geoffroy Didier	France	European People's Party (EPP)
Sylvie Guillaume	France	Social & Democrats (S&D)
Lisje Schreinemacher	Netherlands	Renew Europe Group
Alessandra Basso	Italy	Identity and Democracy Group
Marcel Kolaja	Czech Republic	Group of the Greens/European Free Alliance
Eugen Jurzyca	Slovakia	European Conservatives and Reformists Group
Katerina Konecna	Czech Republic	Left Group (GUE/NGL)
Clara Ponsatí Obiols	Spain	Non-Attached Member
Andreas Schwab	Germany	European People's Party (EPP)
Maria-Manuel Leitão-Marques	Portugal	Social & Democrats (S&D)
Moritz Körner	Germany	Renew Europe Group
Christine Anderson	Germany	Identity and Democracy Group



Kim Van Sparrentak	Netherlands	Group of the Greens/European Free Alliance
Geert Bourgeois	Belgium	European Conservatives and Reformists Group
Sandra Pereira	Portugal	Left Group (GUE/NGL)
Lefteris Nikolaou-Alavanos	Greece	Non-Attached Member
Edina Tóth	Hungary	European People's Party (EPP)
Eva Kaili	Greece	Social & Democrats (S&D)
Irena Joveva	Slovenia	Renew Europe Group
Jean-Lin Lacapelle	France	Identity and Democracy Group
Gwendoline Delbos-Corfield	France	Group of the Greens/European Free Alliance
Joachim Stanisław Brudziński	Poland	European Conservatives and Reformists Group
Tomasz Frankowski	Poland	European People's Party (EPP)
Evelyne Gebhardt	Germany	Social & Democrats (S&D)
Sandro Gozi	France	Renew Europe Group
Gunnar Beck	Germany	Identity and Democracy Group
Dace Melbārde	Latvia	European Conservatives and Reformists Group
Pilar de Vera Castle	Spain	European People's Party (EPP)
Adriana Maldonado López	Spain	Social & Democrats (S&D)
Maximilian Krah	Germany	Identity and Democracy Group
Robert Roos	Netherlands	European Conservatives and Reformists Group
Henna Virkkunen	Finland	European People's Party (EPP)
Brando Benifei	Italy	Social & Democrats (S&D)
Jadwiga Wiśniewska	Poland	European Conservatives and Reformists Group
Ivan Štefanec	Slovakia	European People's Party (EPP)

Javier Zarzalejos	Spain	European People's Party (EPP)
Arba Kokalari	Sweden	European People's Party (EPP)
Antonius Manders	Netherlands	European People's Party (EPP)
Tomislav Sokol	Croatia	European People's Party (EPP)
Andrus Ansip	Estonia	Renew Europe Group
Patryk Jaki	Poland	European Conservatives and Reformists Group
Ondřej Kovařík	Czech Republic	Renew Europe Group
Eva Maydell	Bulgaria	European People's Party (EPP)
Beata Mazurek	Poland	European Conservatives and Reformists Group
Victor Negrescu	Romania	Social & Democrats (S&D)
Sirpa Pietikäinen	Finland	European People's Party (EPP)
József Szájer	Hungary	European People's Party (EPP)
Mihai Tudose	Romania	Social & Democrats (S&D)
Carlos Zorrinho	Portugal	Social & Democrats (S&D)

*DMA Debate 14/12/2021*

<b>Name</b>	<b>Country of Origin</b>	<b>Political Affiliation</b>
Andreas Schwab	Germany	European People's Party (EPP)
Stéphanie Yon-Courtin	France	Renew Europe Group
Carlos Zorrinho	Portugal	Social & Democrats (S&D)
Margrethe Vestager	Denmark	European Commission
Thierry Breton	France	European Commission
Markus Freber	Germany	European People's Party (EPP)
Petra Kammervert	Germany	Social & Democrats (S&D)
Tiemo Wölken	Germany	Social & Democrats (S&D)
Ondřej Kovařík	Czech Republic	Renew Europe Group

Adam Jarubas	Poland	European People's Party (EPP)
Evelyne Gebhardt	Germany	Social & Democrats (S&D)
Andrus Ansip	Estonia	Renew Europe Group
Marcel Kolaja	Czech Republic	Group of the Greens/European Free Alliance
Virginie Joron	France	Identity and Democracy Group
Adam Bielan	Poland	European Conservatives and Reformists Group
Martin Schirdewan	Germany	Left Group (GUE/NGL)
Miroslav Radačovský	Slovakia	Non-Attached Member
Pablo Arias Echeverría	Spain	European People's Party (EPP)
Christel Schaldemose	Denmark	Social & Democrats (S&D)
Dita Charanzová	Czech Republic	Renew Europe Group
Alexandra Geese	Germany	Group of the Greens/European Free Alliance
Alessandra Basso	Italy	Identity and Democracy Group
Eugen Jurzyca	Slovakia	European Conservatives and Reformists Group
Marisa Matias	Portugal	Left Group (GUE/NGL)
Clara Ponsatí Obiols	Spain	Non Attached Member
Ivan Štefanec	Slovakia	European People's Party (EPP)
Biljana Borzan	Croatia	Social & Democrats (S&D)
Svenja Hahn	Germany	Renew Europe Group
Kim Van Sparrentak	Netherlands	Group of the Greens/European Free Alliance
Tom Vandendriessche	Belgium	Identity and Democracy Group
Beata Mazurek	Poland	European Conservatives and Reformists Group
Emmanuel Maurel	France	Left Group (GUE/NGL)
Edina Tóth	Hungary	Non Attached Member

Tom Vandenkendelaere	Belgium	European People's Party (EPP)
Paul Tang	Netherlands	Social & Democrats (S&D)
Sandro Gozi	France	Renew Europe Group
Rasmus Andresen	Germany	Group of the Greens/European Free Alliance
Geert Bourgeois	Belgium	European Conservatives and Reformists Group
Anne-Sophie Pelletier	France	Left Group (GUE/NGL)
Andrzej Halicki	Poland	European People's Party (EPP)
Maria-Manuel Leitão-Marques	Portugal	Social & Democrats (S&D)
Vlad-Marius Botoș	Romania	Renew Europe Group
Gwendoline Delbos-Corfield	France	Group of the Greens/European Free Alliance
Jessica Stegrud	Sweden	European Conservatives and Reformists Group
Angelika Niebler	Germany	European People's Party (EPP)
Alex Agius Saliba	Malta	Social & Democrats (S&D)
Luis Garicano	Spain	Renew Europe Group
Anna Cavazzini	Germany	Group of the Greens/European Free Alliance
Pilar del Castillo Vera	Spain	European People's Party (EPP)
Adriana Maldonado López	Spain	Social & Democrats (S&D)
Nicola Beer	Germany	Renew Europe Group
Deirdre Clune	Ireland	European People's Party (EPP)
Lisje Schreinemacher	Netherlands	Renew Europe Group
Claudia Gamon	Austria	Renew Europe Group
Josianne Cutajar	Malta	Social & Democrats (S&D)
Eva Maydell	Bulgaria	European People's Party (EPP)

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Geoffroy Didier	France	European People's Party (EPP)
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Margrethe Vestager	Denmark	European Commission
Thierry Breton	France	European Commission
Mikuláš Peksa	Czech Republic	Group of the Greens/European Free Alliance
Roman Haider	Austria	Identity and Democracy Group
Sabine Verheyen	Germany	European People's Party (EPP)
Jadwiga Wiśniewska	Poland	European Conservatives and Reformists Group
Arba Kokalari	Sweden	European People's Party (EPP)
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Dita Charanzová	Czech Republic	Renew Europe Group
Alexandra Geese	Germany	Group of the Greens/European Free Alliance
Alessandra Basso	Italy	Identity and Democracy Group
Adam Bielan	Poland	European Conservatives and Reformists Group
Martin Schirdewan	Germany	Left Group (GUE/NGL)
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Tiemo Wölken	Germany	Social & Democrats (S&D)
Sandro Gozi	France	Renew Europe Group
Kim Van Sparrentak	Netherlands	Group of the Greens/European Free

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Jean-Lin Lacapelle	France	Identity and Democracy Group
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Miroslav Radačovský	Poland	Non Attached Members
Vladimir Bilcik	Slovakia	European People's Party (EPP)
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Karen Melchior	Denmark	Renew Europe Group
Rasmus Andresen	Germany	Group of the Greens/European Free Alliance
Ivan David	Czech Republic	Identity and Democracy Group
Geert Bourgeois	Belgium	European Conservatives and Reformists Group
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Edina Tóth	Hungary	Non Attached Member
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Laurence Farreng	France	Renew Europe Group
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Sylvie Guillaume	France	Social & Democrats (S&D)
Stelios Kybouropoulos	Greece	European People's Party (EPP)
Clara Aguilera	Spain	Social & Democrats (S&D)
Eugen Tomac	Romania	European People's Party (EPP)
Stanislav Polčák	Czech Republic	European People's Party (EPP)
Andrea Caroppo	Italy	European People's Party (EPP)
Miriám Lexmann	Slovakia	European People's Party (EPP)
Antonius Manders	Netherlands	European People's Party (EPP)
Andrus Ansip	Estonia	Renew Europe Group
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Eva Maydell	Bulgaria	European People's Party (EPP)
Urmas Paet	Estonia	Renew Europe Group
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