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## #VKLJUČEVANJE – VPLIV KOMUNIKACIJE NA DRUŽBENIH MEDIJAH NA LEGITIMNOST OBOROŽENIH SIL

## #INCLUSION – THE IMPACT OF SOCIAL MEDIA COMMUNICATION ON THE LEGITIMACY OF ARMED FORCES

**Povzetek** Švicarske oborožene sile so kot del demokratičnega sistema odvisne od legitimnosti, pri čemer so demokracija, legitimnost in javnost tesno povezane. Iz tega sledi, da morajo biti prepoznavne v javni sferi, saj jih tako državljani v okviru premišljene razprave nadzorujejo in upravičujejo ter sprejemajo sporazumne politične odločitve. V luči tega postane pomen političnega komuniciranja, vključno s komuniciranjem švicarskih oboroženih sil, očiten, saj je najpomembnejša podlaga za procese politične legitimacije. Z družbenimi mediji švicarske oborožene sile dobijo nov način komuniciranja in neposrednega sodelovanja s prebivalstvom, kar jih lahko približa ljudem in jih vključi v dialog. To prispeva k transparentnosti švicarskih oboroženih sil, s komuniciranjem na družbenih medijih pa lahko vplivajo na svoj boljši ugled in večjo legitimnost. Da bi se izmeril učinek komuniciranja na družbenih medijih, je bila izvedena raziskava pri švicarskih uporabnikih interneta. Na podlagi te je bil opredeljen model strukturnih enačb, ki s svojimi učinki utemeljuje trditev, da navzočnost na družbenih medijih švicarskim oboroženim silam koristi. Tako lahko širijo svoj doseg in vplivajo na povečanje svoje legitimnosti.

**Ključne besede** *Legitimnost, ugled, komunikacija, družbeni mediji, švicarske oborožene sile.*

**Abstract** The Swiss Armed Forces (SAF), as part of a democratic system, depends on legitimacy. Democracy, legitimacy and the public are closely connected. In the public sphere the SAF need to be visible; it is where they are controlled and legitimated by the citizens, as part of a deliberative discussion in which political decisions are communicatively negotiated. Considering this, the meaning of political communication, including the SAF's communication, becomes obvious as it forms the most important basis for political legitimation processes. Social media provide a new way for the SAF to communicate and interact directly with the population.

The SAF's social media communication potentially brings it closer to the people and engages them in a dialogue. The SAF can become more transparent and social media communication may increase its reputation and legitimacy. To measure the effects of social media communication, a survey of the Swiss internet population was conducted. Based on this data, a structural equation model was defined, the effects of which substantiate the assumption that the SAF benefits from being on social media in terms of broadening its reach and increasing legitimacy values.

**Key words** *Legitimacy, reputation, communication, social media, Swiss Armed Forces.*

**Introduction** In the past decade, social media have become an integral part of communication. The Swiss Armed Forces (SAF) were hesitant to communicate on social media for a long time. It was only in February 2017 that social media communication was introduced, with an official SAF Instagram account.<sup>1</sup> The launch of the channel was the first step in implementing the social media concept as a whole. So far, the Instagram communication by the SAF seems to be successful, and the community is growing steadily. But besides the quantitative numbers on the growth rate, there is also the question of how social media communication affects the SAF and its perception among the Swiss people in terms of their legitimacy. Social media are not simply different channels in a communication tool kit; being interactive and user-engaging platforms, they add a new element to corporate communication, in this way marking an intervention or even a disruption in the former communication behaviour of organizations, and so must be considered and included in their strategic communication. On social media, users discuss what is presented to them, and these discussions may entail positive aspects, but also critical questions, accusations, and falsification of facts. This risk has always been present even in oral conversations, but along with social media communication goes a certain degree of loss of control of written follow-up conversation, accompanied by the latent risk of public outrage, the so-called 'shitstorm'.

In these times, when communication has become one of the main legitimization mechanisms for an organization, this area of tension gains an importance beyond likeability. Communication, or in the case of armed forces political communication, is about conveying information to the public sphere and thereby creating room for public opinion to be formed. Establishing transparency by communicating more openly supports trust and legitimacy (von Bredow, 2008). These are affected by consent or dissent not only by the communication content of the SAF, but also by its communication strategy.

Thus, the question pursued in this paper is how social media communication affects the legitimacy of the SAF. It draws upon data from a study conducted in spring 2018. The paper begins by outlining the theoretical framework of the study before moving to a methodology chapter, in which the conducted study is described, including the

<sup>1</sup> *armee.ch, the SAF's official Instagram account.*

operationalization of the main concepts and the methods applied. Following this, the results are presented and discussed, and the paper concludes with some final remarks.

## 1 LEGITIMACY AND REPUTATION

In a democratic society, with its different systems of economy, education or politics, the public sphere and the media are closely connected, as the media is the one system which is about conveying information. The media system functions as a bridge between the different systems and the public, while all of these systems are social phenomena of mutual interdependence, with a strong connectedness between the political and the media system (Sarcinelli, 1998). In the past few decades, the interdependence of the two systems has grown into a true fusion of political and media reality, understood as the mediatization of the political system (ibid). This term includes the reception of the political system as imparted by the media, and the orientation of all political action through the means of the media system's logic (ibid). Considering this background, the importance of political communication and public news coverage is explained, as it forms the most important basis for political legitimization processes. The organizations of the political system are especially dependent on communication taking place. Citizens need information about the political system of their country in order to fulfil their civic duties (Brainard & McNutt, 2010). Such information can be imparted not only by the media system but also by the political system itself. Direct communication offers an organization an opportunity to address the citizens and to steer communication in the direction they prefer. Social media is a superb tool for direct communication, especially when wanting to convey a modern image of the organization.

### 1.1 The licence to act: legitimacy

Legitimacy is a prerequisite for a political organization in a democratic society. The literature differentiates between a *claim* for legitimacy, which if fulfilled implies that the organization is based on rightful and commonly binding principles, and the *conviction* of legitimacy, meaning the citizens also recognize the organization as rightful and binding (Braun & Schmitt, 2009). During the Cold War, the legitimacy of the armed forces was unquestioned (Deverell et al., 2015), but with the end of that imposed threat, a need for new legitimization mechanisms became necessary. Communication as an instrument to convey information about the armed forces became one of the main mechanisms to foster legitimacy (ibid). It contributes to the development of the openness and transparency of the organization. By having access to information about an organization, the public can debate it and exercise its controlling function (Imhof, 2006). This public control and its inherent possibility of intervention if things go wrong creates legitimacy (ibid). Legitimacy is defined as “a generalized perception or assumption that the actions of an entity are desirable, proper, or appropriate within some socially constructed system of norms, values, beliefs, and definitions.” (Suchmann, 1995, p 574). It is the belief in the moral right of an organization to possess and exercise power and influence (Dogan, 1992).

Legitimate organizations are perceived as more valuable and meaningful, with a higher degree of predictability and therefore also trustworthiness (Suchmann, 1995). Social media communication, with its huge potential audience, however, has often been associated with a risk to the armed forces' legitimacy that goes beyond the possible loss of control of follow up-discussion (Olsson et al., 2016).

If an organization engages in new activities, such as social media communication, it needs legitimacy for the activities themselves (Suchmann, 1995). However, the legitimation process of innovative fields or activities is usually accompanied by a parallel de-legitimation process of the existing or former organizational mechanisms, precisely because of the innovative activities (DiMaggio, 1988), which will not please everybody. With the armed forces being on social media, there is a conflict between the traditional values generally associated with armed forces: authority, hierarchy, formality and a certain degree of secrecy, and the values of openness, informality and deliberation associated with social media communication (Olsson et al., 2016). For those clinging to the latter values, social media communication might potentially strengthen the legitimacy of the armed forces.

## 1.2 The political capital: reputation

Reputation serves as the reduction of complexity, and is of fundamental importance for the economic or societal system of a nation by contributing substantially to the maintenance of the social order (Eisenegger & Schranz, 2015). In this paper, the term reputation leans on a concept rooted in the sociology of the public sphere. It understands reputation as a three-dimensional concept, consisting of functional, social and expressive reputation (Eisenegger & Schranz, 2015). These three dimensions are in line with a Habermasian view of the world and the corresponding objective, social and subjective worlds (Eisenegger & Imhof, 2007). According to Habermas, actors must always succeed in all three worlds, due to the fact that *»the rationalization of modern thinking has led to a differentiation of three worlds«* (Eisenegger & Imhof, 2007, p 245, translation by the authors). In the objective world of cognitive facts, competence and success are measured through expected performance and manifest themselves as functional reputation. The social world of norms and values is judged upon moral integrity. Social reputation is about good citizenship or governance and respecting the prevailing norms and values. Expressive reputation is formed in the subjective world and is mainly based on emotional taste (Eisenegger & Schranz, 2015). It is about the emotional attractiveness, trustworthiness and uniqueness of an actor. The way an actor is portrayed in the media is thus decisive in the development of their expressive reputation. Thus, reputation – if high – generates a favourable attitude towards an actor, which public sector agencies can dispose of as political capital. In this paper, expressive reputation does not rely on how the SAF are portrayed in public communication, but on the impression they evoke by cultivating their social media channels. This impression, however, is not created by the SAF's social media communication alone. It is subject to other influences, such as one's opinion about social media in general or, more specifically, about a person's perception of the political potential inherent in social media. Social media are often discussed as either

an opportunity for or a threat to democracy (Foos et al., 2015), which again supports the thesis that new activities need legitimation themselves (Suchmann, 1995).

### 1.3 Interrelationships of reputation and legitimacy

The impact communication has on legitimacy goes mainly through reputation. The extent of the reputation an organization retains, be it favourable or not, is decisive for the trust it enjoys (Eisenegger & Imhof, 2007). Trust is an integral element of legitimacy.

Reputation and legitimacy are closely related; legitimacy stands for the social acceptance of an organization (Deephouse & Carter, 2005), whereas reputation comprises the general estimation of it (Fombrun, 1996). In contrast to private sector enterprises, which are in a constant condition of competition and therefore heavily reliant on reputation as a distinction factor, for public sector agencies legitimacy is the crucial factor (Waeraas & Byrkjeflot, 2012). They depend on legitimacy as their licence to act (Deephouse & Carter, 2005). For public sector agencies, a good reputation serving as political capital is not an existential need, but substantially strengthens legitimacy (ibid). For reputation to be formed, information about the agency is needed, comprising knowledge of its performance for functional reputation, an impression of its societal prestige (social reputation) and emotional impressions created through its communication (expressive reputation). These factors generate trust, which is a precursor of legitimacy. Thus, public sector agencies should focus on building a strong reputation supported by as many groups as possible (Waeraas & Byrkjeflot, 2012).

Following these theoretical assumptions, the way in which the SAF are perceived functionally, socially and expressively influences the legitimacy of the organization. Based on these considerations, the question pursued in this paper is whether the official social media communication of the SAF has an impact on legitimacy through reputation. Of particular interest is the potential effect of expressive reputation on legitimacy. It is the concept which specifically measures the effect of the image and impact which the SAF creates by its social media presence.

### 1.4 The shaping effect of attitudes

Attitudes largely affect the perception and behaviour of a person (Ajzen and Cote, 2008). Figuratively, they are the glasses through which one perceives reality and filters all sensations. In the case of the SAF, attitudes towards the necessity of the SAF heavily affects the three dimensions of reputation and legitimacy. People who see the existence of the SAF as an absolute necessity will filter all information about it differently from those who judge its existence as less necessary.

Furthermore, a person's attitude towards the political potential of social media affects expressive reputation in the same way. People who believe social media carry an inherent potential to intervene in political events in a positive way will perceive the SAF's social media presence differently from those who think of social media as manipulating or a threat to democracy. Such attitudes will even affect the legitimacy of the SAF.

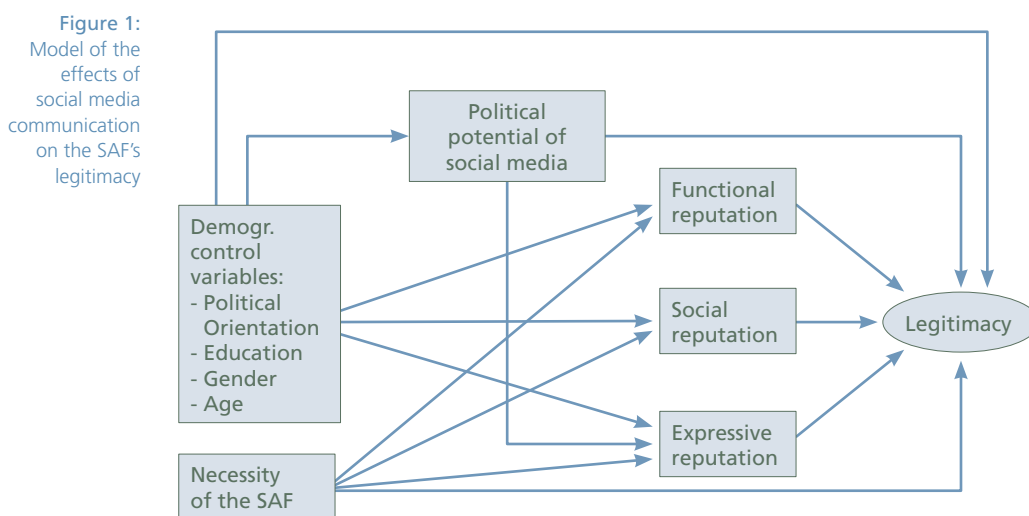
## 1.5 Demographic influences

The demographic characteristics of gender, age, education and political orientation are associated with the level of reputation and legitimacy a person attributes to an organization. Women tend to evaluate public sector agencies which are related to public safety more highly in terms of reputation and legitimacy than men (Lee & Van Ryzin, 2018). Older people generally favour law enforcement agencies more highly in terms of reputation and legitimacy than younger cohorts (ibid). A higher education is, generally speaking, accompanied by a lower reputation and legitimacy of armed forces (ibid). Political orientation also influences the reputation and legitimacy of armed forces. Conservative people evaluate these concepts more highly for armed forces than liberals (ibid). On the left-right scale of political orientation, those who are more towards the right end of the spectrum assess the armed forces' reputation and legitimacy more highly (Szvircsev Tresch et al., 2018).

## 2 METHODOLOGY

### 2.1 Path model

The theoretical considerations postulate interrelationships between legitimacy and the three-dimensional concept of reputation (functional, social, expressive; see Figure 1). These constructs, however, do not stand in isolation, but are affected by demographic variables (political orientation, education level, gender and age) and the perceived necessity of the SAF. As outlined in section 2.4, one's attitude towards the political potential borne by social media as communication platforms shapes the perception of social media communication, and therefore in the present model the expressive reputation of the SAF (see Ajzen & Cote, 2008).



## 2.2 Survey, data collection and sample

To analyze the effects of the above path model, an online survey was created. The survey contained questions regarding the social media usage of the Swiss online population; attitudes towards the general, political and specifically the SAF's use of social media; knowledge of and interaction with the SAF social media channels; and questions pointing to the SAF's reputation and legitimacy.

The survey was conducted in May 2018 through computer-assisted web interviews with an original sample of 1213 people.<sup>2</sup> The sample included the three main language regions of Switzerland (the German, French and Italian speaking areas). Of the sample, 78% actively used social media and 22% did not, where active social media use was defined as exceeding mere written communication such as email or WhatsApp messages and passive Youtube use. The 22% not using social media were a control group for the effects of social media use on the reputation and legitimacy of the SAF. The overall sample was representative of the resident population of Switzerland between 15 to 60 years, who consulted the internet privately at least once a week, and who could be interviewed in German, French or Italian. It was defined according to language region, age, and gender quotas.

Due to the nature of the statistical method applied, which asks for all cases to be complete, the sample needed to be reduced to 693 cases. There were 277 female (40%) and 416 male participants (60%). Of these, 79% used social media (21% did not use social media), and 17% of the social media users knew at least one social media channel of the SAF (23% in the original sample).

## 2.3 Operationalization and item analysis

### 2.3.1 Endogenous predictors

The opinion on the political potential and use of social media platforms is built as a battery of eight items, such as whether social media are a means to rise up to the political elites, or whether they allow the manipulation of voters. These were divided into the 'positive and negative attitudes towards political use of social media' indices (6 items; 2 items). They are formative constructs following theoretical considerations (Weiber & Mühlhaus, 2014).<sup>3</sup>

As explained in the theoretical part, the present paper distinguishes reputation in different dimensions corresponding to a Habermasian perception of the world (Eisenegger & Schranz, 2015). Representing the social perspective on the world, social reputation reflects the prevailing values and norms of a society, and therefore consists of both the personal and the perceived societal prestige and of the general impression of the SAF. This suggests that norms and values are implicitly present in

<sup>2</sup> Survey conducted by LINK Institut, Switzerland.

<sup>3</sup> For more information concerning the composition of the different indices in the model, please contact the authors.



the overall impression one has about an organization. Social reputation is a reflective model with a Cronbach's  $\alpha$  of .818 (3 items).

Expressive reputation is the dimension mirroring emotional judgements in the subjective world, generally conveyed by the media. It is operationalized by forming an index of four items measuring the participants' attitude towards the impression the SAF creates in developing and maintaining a social media presence, such as the SAF is becoming more modern, more transparent, and closer to the people, and whether they are more open to current developments by being on social media. The expressive reputation index was confirmed by factorial analysis and shows a good Cronbach's  $\alpha$ -value of .879 (4 items).

The third dimension, functional reputation, stands for the objective perspective on the world and is about measurable success. In this study, it is operationalized as satisfaction with three specific missions of the SAF (besides its overall mission to protect the country and its people). Functional reputation is a formative construct and was formed as a sum index (3 items).

### 2.3.2 Dependent construct

Legitimacy requires trust and a certain degree of satisfaction with the performance of the organization (Deephouse & Carter, 2005). The indicator's measurement model therefore consists of the 3 items 'trust in the SAF', 'satisfaction with the overall performance of the SAF', and 'general satisfaction with its mission to protect the country and its people'. It thereby largely follows the operationalization of legitimacy of the police by Grimmelikhuijsen and Meijyer (2013). Another item, 'attitude towards the necessity of the SAF', which in theory belongs to legitimacy, was excluded in order to control the influence of personal conviction of the necessity of the SAF. Although legitimacy is included in the statistical analysis as a latent construct and therefore treated as a factor, it was subjected to a factorial analysis and a reliability test (Cronbach's  $\alpha$  of .878).

### 2.3.3 Exogenous variables

Besides these constructs, the theory postulates relationships between the demographic control variables and the reputation and legitimacy of public sector organizations (Lee & Van Ryzin, 2018). The demographic variables used in the present model are gender, age, level of education and political orientation (left-right, liberal-conservative and ecology-technocracy scales), which to a certain degree shape a person's perception of the government and its agencies (ibid). As elaborated in section 2.4, the variable 'attitude towards the necessity of the SAF' is used as a predictor in order to control for personal attitude towards the SAF.

## 2.4 Structural equation model

The theory postulates interrelationships between the demographic and control variables, the attitude towards the political use of social media, the three-dimensional



concept of reputation, legitimacy and knowledge of the SAF channels. In order to mirror these complex interrelationships, a structural equation model (SEM) was set up. By the application of a SEM, indirect effects can be calculated, and at the same time the effects of the different variables are isolated from correlations and further disturbances (Kline, 2005).

It is assumed that the SAF's social media presence affects the expressive reputation of the organization and, through that, its legitimacy. In order to isolate such an effect and the subsequent differences between those who know the SAF social media channels (Group 1), those who use social media but do not know the SAF channels (Group 2) and those who do not use social media (Group 3), a multiple group analysis was performed.

### 3 RESULTS

The following section first presents the descriptive characteristics of the sample and subsequently illustrates the calculated model.

#### 3.1 Bivariate analyses

Of the 693 people interviewed in the course of the survey, 79% use social media. Of these, 17% know at least one social media channel of the SAF. These are mainly young (53%, as compared to 26% middle-aged and 21% old), politically leaning towards the right (60%, as compared to 20% centre and 20% left) and see the SAF as absolutely necessary (54%, as compared to 23% quite necessary, 17% somewhat necessary, and 6% not necessary at all).<sup>4</sup>

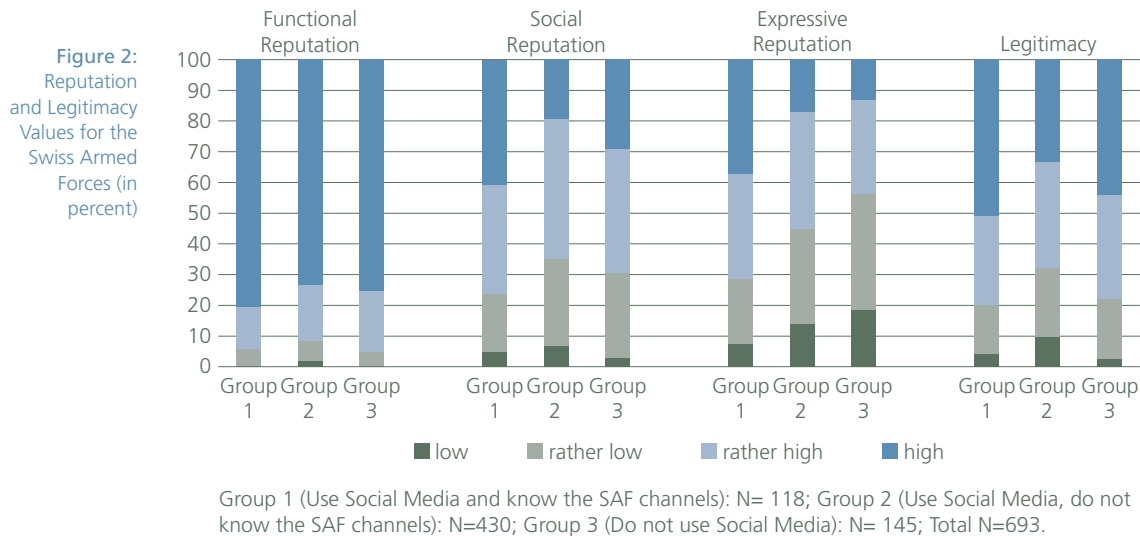
The SAF enjoy high legitimacy in Switzerland (see Szvircsev Tresch et al., 2018). Of the participants, 72% evaluate the SAF's legitimacy highly (high: 39%; rather high: 33%, rather low: 21%; low; 7%).<sup>5</sup> There are significant group differences when comparing the reputation and legitimacy values aligned with the social media use of the respondents and their knowledge of the SAF's social media channels (see Figure 2). Those who know the SAF's social media channels differ significantly from the remainder in their assessment of the expressive, social and total reputation of the SAF (CC<sup>6</sup>: .224\*\*\*, .194\*\*\*, resp. .231\*\*\* for total reputation)<sup>7</sup>. For functional reputation, there are no significant differences between the three groups. Finally, the values of the legitimacy index differ significantly from social media users who do not know the SAF's channels to the two other groups (CC: 0.172\*\*).

<sup>4</sup> In the structural equation model, the values of "somewhat necessary" and "not necessary at all" were combined into one value group due to low case numbers.

<sup>5</sup> Grouped values of the index legitimacy (3 items)

<sup>6</sup> CC stands for Contingency Coefficient. It is a measure of association that indicates whether two variables are dependent or independent of each other.

<sup>7</sup> Statistical significance is specified as \* $p < 0.05$ , \*\* $p < 0.01$ , \*\*\* $p < 0.001$ .



### 3.2 Impact of reputation on legitimacy: structural equation model

The model, shown in Figure 1, is a recursive one with manifest indicators and is positive definite without Heywood Cases (Weiber & Mühlhaus, 2014). All the indices acting as predictors were created before integrating them into the model. The dependent entity of legitimacy is a latent construct, consisting of three items, so the empirical anchoring of the latent variable is given (Baltes-Götz, 2008).

With a Chi-Square value of 317.6 after 25 iterations and 128 degrees of freedom, the model is over-identified. It shows good model fit with a CMIN/DF of 2.481, a CFI of .976 and a RMSEA of .033.<sup>8</sup> The overall model was calculated with a sample of N=693 and explains 85.9% of the variance of the legitimacy the SAF has in Switzerland.<sup>9</sup> The strongest direct effects<sup>10</sup> on legitimacy are observed in social reputation (.716\*\*\*), followed by functional reputation (.121\*\*\*), expressive reputation (.120\*\*\*) and attitude towards the necessity of the SAF (.098\*\*\*).

#### 3.2.1 Group 1: Knowledge of the SAF social media channels

For Group 1, those who use social media and know the SAF social media channels (N=118), the model explains 87.6% of the variance of legitimacy. Social reputation shows the strongest effect on legitimacy (.847\*\*\*; see Table 1). Expressive reputation affects legitimacy directly, but with a lower value (.209\*\*\*). Functional reputation does not have a significant direct effect on legitimacy.

<sup>8</sup> The goodness of fit of a model is indicated by certain key figures such as the Minimum Discrepancy divided by its Degrees of Freedom (CMIN/DF), the Root Mean Square Error of Approximation (RMSEA) and the Comparative-Fit Index (CFI).

<sup>9</sup> For the overall model, please contact the authors of this study.

<sup>10</sup> All coefficient values are standardized values.

The highest predictor for social reputation is the attitude towards the necessity of the SAF (.529\*\*\*). Political orientation shows a direct effect within Group 1. The more to the right a person places themselves on the political left-right scale, the higher the value of social reputation of the SAF to that person (.179\*). On a scale of liberal to conservative, the more conservative people are, the higher social reputation will be (.174\*\*). Attitude towards the necessity of the SAF is the principal predictor of functional and expressive reputation (.383\*\*\*; .219\*). Political orientation on the left-right scale affects expressive reputation almost the same (.205\*). The more politically right people are, the higher they will perceive the expressive reputation of the SAF. Attitude towards the political use of social media affects expressive reputation both in its positive (.202\*) and in its negative evaluation (.197\*\*). In both cases, higher values signify a higher expressive reputation. The more critical the judgment of the political potential of social media, the higher the values of expressive reputation become.

**Table 1:**  
Significant  
paths group 1  
(Knowledge  
of SAF social  
media channels)

Dependent variable	Predictor	Standardized coefficient	S.E.	C.R.
Positive attitude towards political use	Education (low level)	-0.289**	0.908	-3.175
Functional reputation	Necessity of SAF	0.383***	0.166	4.298
Social reputation	Necessity of SAF	0.529***	0.167	7.426
Social reputation	Education (low level)	0.148*	0.715	2.205
Social reputation	Left vs right	0.179*	0.063	2.546
Social reputation	Liberal vs conservative	0.174**	0.055	2.784
Expressive reputation	Necessity of SAF	0.219*	0.221	2.426
Expressive reputation	Left vs right	0.205*	0.083	2.302
Expressive reputation	Positive attitude towards political use	0.202*	0.087	2.575
Expressive reputation	Negative attitude towards political use	0.197**	0.069	2.654
Legitimacy	Social reputation	0.847***	0.092	7.169
Legitimacy	Expressive reputation	0.209**	0.046	3.405

N=118; \*<0.05 significant, \*\*<0.01 very significant, \*\*\* <0.001 highly significant

The total effect of attitudes towards the necessity of the SAF shows strong effects on legitimacy through reputation. There is no direct effect of the predictor on legitimacy, but neither is there an indirect effect of the perceived necessity of the SAF through functional reputation. The only indirect effects of attitude towards the necessity of the SAF are through social reputation (.448)<sup>11</sup> and positive expressive reputation (.046), adding up to a total effect of .494<sup>12</sup>.

<sup>11</sup> Indirect effects are calculated as the product of the coefficients of the regression of the endogenous on the exogenous variable and the coefficient of the regression of the dependent construct on the endogenous variable.

<sup>12</sup> Total effects are calculated as the sum of direct and indirect effects affecting the specified variable.

As the explanatory power of the attitude towards the necessity of the SAF falls, political orientation steps in. Classification on a left-right scale gains an indirect effect through social (.152) and expressive reputation (.042), resulting in a total indirect effect of .194. A politically right orientation leads to higher legitimacy values of the SAF. Being liberal or conservative shows some effect too, as an indirect effect through social reputation on legitimacy. The more conservative a person is, the higher the legitimacy of the SAF will be (.147).

### 3.2.2 Group 2: No knowledge of the SAF channels, but social media use

Group 2 consists of those people who use social media, but do not know the SAF's channels (N=430). Again, the strongest and direct predictor for legitimacy is social reputation (.725\*\*\*; see Table 2), followed by the direct effects of expressive (.132\*\*\*) and functional reputation, which now shows a highly significant effect on legitimacy (.113\*\*\*). Attitude towards the necessity of the SAF has a weak, but direct and significant, effect on legitimacy (.074\*). Overall, the model for Group 2 explains 87.5% of the legitimacy of the SAF (Group 1: 87.6%).

**Table 2:**  
Significant  
paths group 2  
(No knowledge  
of the SAF  
channels, but  
social media  
use)

Dependent variable	Predictor	Standardized coefficient	S.E.	C.R.
Negative attitude towards political use	Left vs right	-0.101 *	0.048	-2.016
Functional reputation	Necessity of SAF	0.382***	0.097	7.873
Functional reputation	Age (young cohort)	-0.144**	0.176	-2.747
Functional reputation	Gender (male)	-0.145***	0.136	-3.320
Social reputation	Necessity of SAF	0.607***	0.093	15.442
Social reputation	Age (young cohort)	-0.165***	0.169	-3.900
Expressive reputation	Necessity of SAF	0.371***	0.132	7.615
Expressive reputation	Liberal vs conservative	-0.100*	0.042	-2.218
Expressive reputation	Gender (male)	-0.126**	0.186	-2.859
Expressive reputation	Positive attitude towards political use	0.123**	0.058	2.963
Legitimacy	Functional reputation	0.113***	0.029	3.953
Legitimacy	Social reputation	0.725***	0.041	15.074
Legitimacy	Expressive reputation	0.132***	0.020	4.985
Legitimacy	Necessity of SAF	0.074*	0.062	2.416

N=430; \*<0.05 significant, \*\*<0.01 very significant, \*\*\*<0.001 highly significant

Attitude towards the necessity of the SAF affects social reputation the most (.607\*\*\*). Belonging to the youngest cohort of 15-30 years results in a lower social and functional reputation of the SAF (-.165\*\*\*; -.144\*\*). Compared to Group 1,

attitude towards the necessity of the SAF gains a stronger effect on expressive reputation (.371\*\*\*), while the influence on functional reputation remains nearly the same (.382\*\*\*). High values in the positive political assessment of social media’s potential affect positive expressive reputation (.123\*\*)

The total effect of the predictor attitude towards the necessity of the SAF gets stronger in Group 2 compared to Group 1. The model for Group 2 shows indirect effects of attitude towards the necessity of the SAF through social (.440), functional (.043) and expressive reputation (.049). The total effect of necessity of the SAF amounts .606.

### 3.2.3 Group 3: Do not use social media

For Group 3, those who do not use social media, the model explains 83.8% of the variance of legitimacy, 3.8% less than in Group 1. Legitimacy is mostly affected by the direct effect of social reputation (.654\*\*\*; see Table 3). Functional reputation also affects legitimacy (.188\*\*). The third direct and very significant effect is carried out by the attitude towards the necessity of the SAF, with a higher direct effect than in Group 2 (.181\*\*). Attitude towards the necessity of the SAF affects functional reputation the most, compared to the other groups (.456\*\*\*).

In Group 3, political opinion on the left-right scale affects expressive reputation, which is operationalized as the participants’ attitude towards what impression the SAF creates with its social media presence (.201\*). The more right, the higher the expressive reputation becomes.

Table 3:  
Significant Paths  
Group 3 (No  
Social Media  
Use)

Dependent variable	Predictor	Standardized coefficient	S.E.	C.R.
Positive attitude towards political use	Liberal vs conservative	-0.274**	0.057	-3.277
Functional reputation	Necessity of SAF	0.456***	0.143	5.681
Social reputation	Necessity of SAF	0.633***	0.143	9.209
Expressive reputation	Positive attitude towards political use	0.418***	0.105	5.358
Expressive reputation	Left vs right	0.201*	0.079	2.475
Legitimacy	Functional reputation	0.188**	0.058	3.256
Legitimacy	Social reputation	0.654***	0.075	7.465
Legitimacy	Necessity of SAF	0.181**	0.118	2.722

N=145; \*<0.05 significant, \*\*<0.01 very significant, \*\*\*<0.001 highly significant

In the group of those who do not use social media at all, the total effect of the predictor attitude towards the necessity of the SAF shows the most powerful total

effect. Again, there is a direct effect of attitude towards the necessity of the SAF on legitimacy, higher than in Group 2 (.181\*\*). In Group 3, there is no more influence of expressive reputation on legitimacy, but only indirect effects of attitude towards the necessity of the SAF through social reputation (.415) and functional reputation (.086), adding up to a total effect of the necessity of the SAF on legitimacy of .682.

## 4 DISCUSSION

The results presented in the above section show that the SAF enjoy high legitimacy amongst the Swiss, a long-term phenomenon (see Szvircsev Tresch et al., 2018). Almost 88% of the variance of legitimacy are explained by the structural equation model. This is not surprising, as reputation and legitimacy are entangled concepts, so the explanatory power of reputation for legitimacy is by definition high.

### 4.1 Do good and make it known

In Group 1, functional reputation does not have a significant effect on legitimacy, but expressive reputation does. This is an astonishing result. Functional reputation stands for satisfaction with performance linked to the missions of the SAF. As Figure 1 illustrates, those who know the SAF's social media channels show high values for functional reputation; however, this does not significantly affect legitimacy. Expressive reputation conversely has a highly significant effect on the SAF's legitimacy. Performing to the best of the SAF's ability is not enough. The services need to be made visible to have an effect on legitimacy. The SAF need to both deliver, and to make their performance known.

In doing this, they need to keep in mind that the public perception of their social media communication cannot be completely controlled, but is constantly subjected to an ongoing debate about social media.

### 4.2 The uniting power of social media communication

One of the two principal predictors for the legitimacy of the SAF is the attitude towards the necessity of the SAF. Of those who do not use social media, the indicator shows the strongest influence on legitimacy. Those who find the SAF to be a necessity show higher legitimacy values. The indicator loses power if the participants use social media, and even more if they know the SAF channels. What does this mean? On social media platforms, people are subjected to a broad range of different opinions (Barbera, 2015). Despite the often cited effects of filter bubbles or echo chambers (Pariser, 2011), social media use does not necessarily result in a single-edged opinion-forming eventually leading to polarization, but may result in the opposite effect (Barbera, 2015). Being confronted with different opinions to one's own stimulates reflection and enhances further opinion-forming. This reflective process further fosters a functioning deliberative public sphere, which profits democratic societies. Decisions become more legitimate and more rational (Habermas, 1984) and thereby political comprehension increases (Habermas, 1998).

For those who use social media and know the SAF channels, the effect of the indicator attitude towards the necessity of the SAF becomes even weaker. This group is reached by the information the SAF publishes on their channels. Even if they do not actively consume the information, they perceive the SAF as communicating. Ho and Cho (2016) have shown that the mere visibility of communication contributes to trust in the communicating party. Trust is a precursor of legitimacy (Suchmann, 1995).

**Conclusion** The present findings show that the SAF and their social media presence enjoy high legitimacy, not only with those who are in favour of the SAF anyway, but also with those whose attitude towards the SAF is of a more sceptical or critical nature. This is of fundamental importance. To be legitimate, actors in the political system should aim for the support of all population groups, not only of the largest ones (Imhof, 1996). If the SAF tried to only serve those who are already convinced of their necessity, it would lose sight of important target groups for strengthening its legitimacy. If it manages to reach those who need to be convinced of the legitimacy of the SAF, it will effectively increase trust and legitimacy. A weakening effect of the attitude towards the necessity of the SAF by merely knowing the SAF's social media channels was shown. This does not mean that a strong conviction of the necessity of the SAF loses its meaning. Neither does it equal a strong conviction of the necessity of the SAF being wrong. What it does mean, though, is that through social media communication, the SAF is managing to reach those who do not share a strong conviction of the necessity of the SAF. Still, legitimacy values are the highest amongst this group. This is corroborated by findings of Sicherheit's 2018 study (Szvircsev Tresch et al., 2018). They show that one of the particularities of social media as a communication channel of the SAF is that whereas more traditional communication channels are principally known by people in favour of the armed forces, social media reaches population groups which are neutral or not in favour of them. Thus, social media clearly need to be considered in strategic communication. Obviously the SAF should continue to expand their social media communication and to make their performance known to the public.

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