Not all roads lead to Rome (or Paris):
How channels of diffusion contribute to far right party development and trans-national diffusion patterns between them

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The most complex dimension of diffusion process between far right parties (FRPs) is the channel of diffusion. The road through which an innovation travels can have a sizeable influence on both diffusion patterns and FRP development. This paper provides an extensive framework of the channels of diffusion, indicating which channels are used to diffuse, how they operate, when they operate and to what extent they can facilitate or impede diffusion outcomes. Overall, this framework differentiates between interpersonal and impersonal channels of diffusion. The first relate to organisational structures, often facilitated when social distances between FRPs are limited. The second uses an updated two-step-flow model and further specifies the role of mass and new media in the diffusion process. Combing the different channels, this chapter distinguishes between two key observations: Although the relationship is not necessarily linear, impersonal diffusion channels are more prevalent in the early stages of FRP development, whereas interpersonal channels dominate the diffusion process once FRPs have consolidated. Furthermore, impersonal channels are more suited for emulation mechanisms, whereas interpersonal channels are more appropriate for learning mechanisms.

1. Introduction

Since the early 1980s, the development of far right parties (FRPs) has been a widely studied socio-political phenomenon in the political science literature. Since the defreezing of Lipset and Rokkan’s traditional cleavage structure (Mair, 1997), the study of their continuous development and their relationship with (liberal) democracy has greatly contributed to the general understanding of the success and failure of FRPs. Not only have they experienced extensive electoral and political successes, their influence has grown exponentially. The FRP literature discusses FRP influence on party systems, electoral agendas, policy-making, traditional parties, party strategies, and overall political behaviour (Mudde, 2013). However, scholars have not yet examined the influence FRPs have on one another.

Given the growing societal impact of evolutions such as globalisation and internationalisation, the significance of trans-national diffusion cannot and should not be underestimated. It is important to examine to what extent specific trans-national diffusion patterns between FRPs exist, and what role they might play in FRP development. Within a larger research project of trans-national diffusion between FRPs, this paper specifically
analyses how different channels of diffusion (see Rogers, 2003) can influence FRP development, and what the role of diffusion mechanisms is in this process.

This paper differentiates between interpersonal and impersonal channels so as to analyse if and when these channels are most prevalent in the FRP development process. It would be an intuitive claim to argue impersonal channels are predominant in the early stages of FRP development, whereas interpersonal channels are more present once an FRP has emerged. However, rather than being strictly linear, diffusion is a dynamic process that theoretically recognises distinct and independent channels, but empirically allows for the interaction and overlap between them. Simultaneously, following organisational behaviour literature, emulation is more prevalent in the early stages of FRP development, whereas learning is predominant in later stages of FRP development. This could indicate certain diffusion mechanisms are more likely upon the presence of certain channels of diffusion, just by the nature of those channels. Overall, a careful examination of these presumptions brings time and agency back into the analysis so as to provide a more dynamic framework that can help explain FRP development.

First, this paper provides some background by discussing the two most important accounts of diffusion channels in the literature. Second, based on the differentiation between channels of diffusion, this paper proposes a detailed analysis of the diffusion channels used by FRPs throughout their development. Each channel is discussed extensively and in detail so as to provide a careful account of its role throughout FRP development. Last, this paper analyses the possible connection between diffusion channels and mechanisms. It becomes clear that there are some analytical similarities, yet not as clear-cut as one might expect.

2. The foundation: Roger’s original framework and Tarrow’s adjusted framework

Due to its complexity, the literature that discusses diffusion channels is extensive, yet not always consistent. Two essential frameworks stand out: Rogers’ (1983) and Tarrow’s (2005). The former briefly refers to the original theoretical framework, whereas the latter provides some critiques and updates to this framework. Together, this serves as the general foundation on which this chapter builds its specific analytical account of diffusion channels FRPs use in their diffusion efforts between one another.

Rogers (1983, p.18) originally defined a diffusion channel as “the means by which messages get from one individual to another”. It is the nature of this relationship that largely determines the conditions under which diffusion occurs and what the possible effects of this process are. Rogers divides these conditions in two possible categories: mass media channels
and interpersonal channels, which indicate a more direct means of diffusion. Within the context of mass communication models, Rogers (1983) systematically refers to the two-step flow model (Lazarsfeld e.a., 1944; McGuire, 1986, Case, 2002), which examines the roles of and interactions between mass media and the public (Katz, 1999). The model argues that political attitudes and public opinion (e.g. vote decisions) are most frequently influenced by direct contact with other individuals (Lazarsfeld and Menzel, 1963) and hence, are only rarely directly influenced by mass media. It hypothesises that information often flows from mass media to so-called opinion leaders, and only then to the public. Regardless, Rogers (2003) already recognised that even though the two-step model was a vast improvement of mass media channels, further specification and differentiation were necessary.

Since its publication, Roger’s seminal study has been both an essential building block and a source of criticism throughout the diffusion literature. Often scholars combine both, by building on Rogers’ original model and then further specifying it to narrow down the scope. Tarrow (2005) describes a model specifically for trans-national diffusion between social movements [see Appendix 1]. He starts from an existing repertoire of contention (Tilly, 1986), embedded in a local context, which may or may not be successful. A successful repertoire might diffuse following increased levels of internationalisation by agents and networks alike, and communication of similarities and differences between these agents.

According to Tarrow (2005, p.103), internationalisation and communication are “the large impersonal processes that lie in the background of all forms of transnational diffusion”. Once a repertoire of contention diffuses trans-nationally, it does so alongside three distinct yet non-exclusive pathways. Attribution of similarity refers to the development of social bonds and personal networks to serve as the basis for interaction. Theorisation refers to the simplified interactions with individuals abroad, mostly through mass media or the Internet. Brokerage describes how the connection of individuals and institutions can forge linkages among previously unconnected agents, thereby stimulating the diffusion process. These three so-called mechanisms can then lead to relational, non-relational and mediated diffusion processes. He finalises his model by arguing these three channels of diffusion all produce emulation, which in its turn results in diffusion beyond the original local or national setting.

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1 What Tarrow actually refers to are the channels of diffusion, and the processes surrounding them. By restricting his “mechanisms” to one particular channel of diffusion, Tarrow considers them to be mutually exclusive. This is not necessarily true (see below).
To a certain extent, Tarrow’s model is more extensive and more detailed than Roger’s four basic components of diffusion\(^2\). Nonetheless, both authors’ models suffer a general underestimation of the role of agency, i.e. the agents of diffusion (Chabot, 2010). First, in Tarrow’s model, structural similarities claim to facilitate diffusion. This can theoretically help explain the abstract processes of diffusion, however, it does not explain how individuals interpret an innovation, or how they adjust the innovations for the practical application in their own socio-cultural setting (see frame alignment, Benford and Snow, 2000). It restricts how agents can alter an innovation and implement it with the highest possible success rate.

Second, according to Tarrow, diffusion only occurs when there is a high degree of (institutional) similarity between the different agents. Where this can certainly facilitate the diffusion of rather technical innovations, this does not necessarily apply to knowledge and practices. In other words, this specification does not necessary hold for the trans-national diffusion of an FRP master frame\(^3\). The notion of similarity is given too much importance, particularly because there is always a minimal notion of identification between FRPs.

Third, Tarrow’s framework is often considered incomplete because of his suggestion that trans-national communication leads to diffusion in the restricted form of emulation, i.e. the imitation of the innovator. Following the analyses and specifications in the diffusion literature, such a framework is not only highly problematic but also far too restrictive in its description of a complex diffusion process. Diffusion is not always unilateral, and its mechanism cannot be limited to ‘copycat’ behaviour. This underestimates the role of agency, as well as the creativity and complexity of the process. It also assumes channels of diffusion are mutually exclusive rather than complementary, and some form of linearity between agent development and diffusion channel. All these assumptions are grounds for further model adjustment and specification.

3. A framework of diffusion: Two primary channels of trans-national diffusion

Overall, this paper distinguishes between two possible channels (see Klandermans and Oegena, 1987; Snow, Zurcher and Ekland-Olsen, 1980; McAdam, 1986). First, an innovation

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\(^2\) The transmitting agent and the adopting agent represent the “who” of diffusion. The innovation represents the “what” of diffusion. The channels of diffusion represent the “how” of diffusion.

\(^3\) Master frames play the same role as collective action frames do, only on a bigger scale (Snow and Benford, 1992). Collective action frames have an interpretative function by simplifying and condensing aspects of the “world out there”, but in ways that are “intended to mobilise potential adherents and constituents, to garner bystander support, and to demobilise antagonists” (Snow and Benford, 1988, p.198). It is an “action-oriented set of beliefs and meanings that inspire and legitimate the activities and campaigns of a social movement organisation” (Benford and Snow, 2000, p.614). Particularly for FRPs, the master frame consists of a combination of xenophobia, nationalism, authoritarianism and populism.
can diffuse between agents with pre-existing (interpersonal) relationships. Second, agents can adopt information through more indirect, non-relational channels, often referred to as mass media or ‘cultural linkages’ (Strang and Meyer, 1993). The sections below discuss the differences and similarities between both channels.

A. Interpersonal channels

Most of the diffusion literature specifies personal interaction between agents as an important diffusion channel (e.g. Rogers, 1983; Tarrow, 2005). They argue that frequent face-to-face interaction between agents indicates a large exchange of information between them. Besides master frame information, such personal interactions can also provide social trust, political alliances and a common path (among others) to create a more structural interpersonal network among those FRPs that identify with one another. Hence, interpersonal networks not only transfer information between FRPs alongside existing channels, they also increase the strength of the network as diffusion increases (Lee and Strang, 2006).

Strang and Soule (1998) argue that strong interpersonal networks are most likely when social distance between agents is limited. However, strong interpersonal ties can also exist when identification between agents is low (e.g. McAdam, 1999). Therefore, the causal direction of this relationship should be reconsidered. More precisely, interpersonal ties make social proximity and identification more likely, particularly compared to impersonal networks (McAdam and Rucht, 1993). A dense interpersonal network indicates a network’s identity and its cohesion, but it leaves little space for diffusion with agents outside that network or the expansion of that network. Therefore, one should not underestimate the power (and the role) of weaker ties in the diffusion process, particularly before any structural identity or social cohesion has been formed (Gould, 1991; Putnam, 2000). Granovetter (1973, p.1366) argues that innovations “can reach a larger number of people, and traverse greater social distance when passed throughout weak ties rather than strong”.

These interpersonal networks often lead to the formation of shared organisational structures. The resulting memberships of agents that identify with one another expand the interaction among them (Strang and Chang, 1993; Strang and Meyer, 1993). Participating

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4 To be complete, it is also possible to specify a third channel: Mediated channels of diffusion. This refers to diffusion patterns in the absence of any direct relational channels between FRPs. The extent to which mediators (or brokers, see Tarrow, 2005) can link unconnected agents warrants discussion (Bunce and Wolchik, 2005), however, given the individualisation and personalisation of the media, combined with processes of globalisation (i.e. shrinking distances and small-world models), the available (direct and indirect) diffusion networks for FRPs have increased exponentially. These increasing opportunities for diffusion reduce the presence and impact of mediated diffusion to an absolute minimum. Mediated diffusion is extensively discussed in the original research project, however, given the limitations of the research paper format, such specifications are not included here.
agents observe and/or monitor other members, which provides ample opportunities to reinforce their interpersonal network. Furthermore, an organisation (or a leading member) can also promote homogenisation of its members around certain founding principles. In the case of FRPs, such trans-national structures exist, both as formal and informal entities.

*Formal organisational structures*

FRPs have formed an official Group in the European Parliament on three separate occasions\(^5\). The official recognition of a parliamentary group provides (participating) FRPs with extensive logistical and financial opportunities in support of their communication and interaction.\(^6\) It would give them the opportunity to come together and discuss common proposals, ideological strategies, public responses, cooperation efforts, and future plans\(^7\). Such a formal organisation allows FRPs to cooperate with each other, and for certain FRPs to influence others. On all three occasions, the FN chaired the Group\(^8\), mostly based on its status as *primus inter pares*. This dominant and influential position increased the FN’s perceived prominence and allowed it to monitor the development of other FRPs.

The overall participation in formal organisational structures provided the FRPs with an opportunity to strengthen interpersonal networks and to maximise their utility, and often credibility. The early success of the VB, the nature of its initial master frame, its participation in the second and the third FRP Group in the European Parliament, and the mutual respect between Le Pen and Dillen, strengthened and consolidated the cooperation between the two FRPs. This privileged interaction and communication led the FN to visit Brussels in 1987, where the VB confirmed its support for the FN over Harlem Désir (van den Brink, 1994). Similarly, in the fall of 1989, Le Pen and a small FN delegation visited the REP in Bavaria, where they publicly expressed sympathy for one another, and Schönhuber stated his principal intention was to protect German national interests, much like the FN did (Osterhoff 1997).

The role of an FRP’s youth-wing in the creation and strengthening of international ties is often underestimated. Numerous FRP youth movements have a longstanding tradition of cross-European contacts and even diffusion, most notably through the organisation of their equivalent of a summer school (e.g. FNJ since 1989, VBJ since 1993, etc.). For example, in

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5 These groups included the Group of the European Right (1984-89), the Technical Group of the European Right (1989-94), and Identity, Tradition and Sovereignty (Jan -Nov 2007).

6 In 2007, the ITS group received a little over one million Euros for administrative and staff expenditures.

7 The guaranteed seats on committees, the ability to chair debates and the influence on the plenary sessions’ agenda play an important factor in the influence FRPs try to exert on other parties and policy, however, this is less relevant for the trans-diffusion patterns between them.

8 Le Pen chaired the first two occasions, whereas the ITS Group was presided by Gollnisch.
2003, the FNJ’s 14th *Université d’été* welcomed representatives from “nationalist movements” across Europe (e.g. VB, SD, Forza Nuova, PRM, SNP, and several other smaller movements). During these meetings, information such as media strategies, debate tactics, and the FRP master frame are important objects of diffusion. Most often, such trans-national cooperation efforts are initiated by FRP youth movements themselves and serve as the foundation of interpersonal networks between FRPs, rather than vice versa. At certain occasions, these interpersonal networks between FRP youth movement have served as the foundation of (formal) organisational structures, which allows for a more structural channel of diffusion between them. In September 1987, Carl Lang and Martial Bild created the *Mouvement de la Jeunesse d’Europe* to support the FRP faction in the European Parliament. In 1993, Samuel Maréchal created the *Bureau de Liaison des Jeunes Européens* to serve as the framework of European cooperation between FRP youth movements.

*Informal organisational structures*

Not all organisational efforts have been in a formal structure however. More informal organisational structures have the advantage of not being restricted by electoral results, which usually allows for a more extensive membership. Simultaneously, those FRPs who are not elected (either on the national or the European level) are often smaller, possibly ideologically more extreme, which allows for a more heterogeneous membership. Very often there is a direct trade-off between organisational membership and organisational homogeneity.

In absence of a third consecutive Group in European Parliament, the FN formed Euronat in 1997. The FN’s principal purpose was the connection between Eastern and Western FRPs, and the trans-national alliance of all nationalist parties (Mareš, 2006). However, at that time, some of the more sizeable (West European) FRPs such as the VB and the FPÖ did not see an advantage of aligning themselves with smaller (often East European) FRPs. They did not see any advantages of such cooperation; moreover, they feared the electoral backlash of association with ideologically more extreme parties.

Despite its relatively long tenure (more than a decade), its success and practical impact were minimal, particularly in Western Europe. In 2009, what was seen as its successor, the Alliance of European National Movements (AENM), limited (and homogenised) its membership. Its founding charter indicates five founding parties (FN, FNb, SD, Jobbik and FT), substituted by a number of nationally elected officials. As of recent, membership has expanded both within and outside Europe (see Jobbik, 2012). Yet, movements considered as ideologically too extreme continue to be rejected (e.g. Svoboda, see Shekhovtsov, 2009).
alternative informal organisation, the European Alliance for Freedom (EAF), was founded in 2010. It differs from the AENM in the characteristics of its primary agents (individuals rather than FRPs) and its primary purpose (Euro scepticism rather than nationalism). Another important difference is its recognition by the European Parliament since 2011 and the corresponding grants it received (European Parliament, 2012; Agence Europe, 2013). In both instances, their meetings and cooperation provide participating FRPs the opportunity to debate and exchange ideas. It is the prospect of dialogue within such an organisation that facilitates the diffusion of the master frame and its components (see below).

Another example of such an informal organisation was the Freiheitliche Akademie, founded in 2005 with a permanent office in Vienna. Its main purpose was to set a common FRP agenda in a globalised and nationalist Europe. One of the most tangible expressions of such an informal structure was the 2005 “Vienna Declaration of Patriotic and National Movements and Parties in Europe”, which articulated what can be thought of as the founding principles of the organisation. This informal structure also increased levels of interaction between participating FRPs, while converging their ambitions and unifying their positions on certain nationalist policy issues. In other words, direct ties were strengthened and interpersonal networks expanded, thereby making (future) diffusion more likely.

The membership of these informal organisations is often much more extensive than in its more formal counterparts, but it is also more (ideologically) heterogeneous. This can be advantageous in that it allows smaller, yet influential or important FRPs without formal representation on higher governmental levels to adhere as well (e.g. BNP). At the same time, it can also be detrimental for dialogue, and diffusion in general, when master frame heterogeneity leads to conflicts between members. For example, Krisztina Morvai left the EAF in July 2011 because of a disagreement about the membership between her and party-leader Gabor Vona. Additionally, there were several altercations between her and the FPÖ elite following some of the FPÖ’s (and particularly Heinz-Christian Strache’s) pro-Israel comments (Jobbik is heavily pro-Palestine) (Kuruc, 2011a, 2011b).

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9 Despite its funding, it would still be more accurate to consider the EAF a think-thank rather than to a policy-influencing tool, hence its organisational structure remains rather informal.

10 Its members comprised the FPÖ, VB, Ataka, the FN, the Azione Sociale, the MS-FT, the PRM and the Alternativa Española. The DFP, the LN and the PiS sent their official greetings, but did not attend the original congress.
Contributing to interpersonal networks: The weight of social proximity

The characteristics and dispositions of FRPs contribute to the social distance between them (Kriesi et al., 1999; Rogers, 2003). This, and not necessarily the geographical distance (Braun and Koopmans, 2010), contributes to the extent and the characteristics of the diffusion patterns between FRPs. This is particularly the case for the formation of interpersonal networks. In this regard, several observations can be made.

First, when attributes between FRPs are rather similar in nature (e.g. organisation, rhetoric style, communication patterns, and mostly ideology), the social distance between them is likely to be rather limited. This limited social distance allows FRPs generate interpersonal channels of diffusion or strengthen an existing interpersonal network. In its turn, this contributes to the effectiveness of trans-national diffusion patterns between them. For example, the social distance between the FN and the VB, the FPÖ and the VB, and the FN and the REP, and recently between East and West European FRPs, can be considered rather limited (particularly compared to some of the examples below).

The great mutual respect between its original leaders Jean-Marie Le Pen and Karel Dillen, and their continuous presence in the European Parliament since 1989, allowed the FN and the VB to construct and maintain one of the longest lasting FRP interpersonal networks in Europe. Additionally, they both shared extensive master frame similarities, not the least following the VB’s advantages status as one of the earliest adopters of the new FN master frame. Even though in the 2000s, the distance between both parties grew (according to the VB, mostly following Jean-Marie Le Pen’s extreme stances), since 2011 and the leadership of Marine Le Pen, the ties of the networks have been once again strengthened (Brinckman, 2011). Together with the VB, the REP established early and extensive connections with the FN. Their master frames showed high degrees of similarities (perhaps more than that of the VB) and both parties’ elites enjoyed a close relationship (Jaschke, 1994; Minkenberg, 2002).

The VB and the FPÖ have consistently shared a common view on how Europe and the EU should be structured, and representatives of both parties have met on several occasions to discuss the creation of a unified list for European elections (Heinisch, 2003; Salzborn and Schiedel, 2003). Their interpersonal network also grew cold for a brief moment when Haider split from the FPÖ to found the BZÖ. However, since Strache’s leadership, the interpersonal network continues to be strengthened (as recent as February 2013, see Dewinter, 2013).

The formation of the AENM has facilitated the conception of interpersonal channels of diffusion between West and East European FRPs. The homogenisation of its membership has certainly reduced the social distance between members. FRPs like Jobbik and Ataka have
moderated their rhetoric and engaged themselves internationally (Karácsony and Róna, 2011; Barlai, 2012), thereby expanding interpersonal networks and increasing the likelihood of diffusion between them, as exemplified by the formation of the AENM in Budapest (AFP, 2009; Tomashitz, 2005) and the presence of Ataka’s president Siderov and one of its MEPs Desislav Chukolov at the eve of Marine Le Pen’s first presidential election (Ataka, 2012).

Second, when certain important aspects of a party family, or more specifically elements of the master frame, show considerable dissimilarities, the social distance between parties will increase. When FRPs have substantial social distance between them, it becomes increasingly challenging to establish or strengthen interpersonal networks between them. Moreover, it becomes increasingly unlikely for FRPs with a relatively large social distance between them to construct interpersonal foundations for diffusion. Such patterns would be ineffective at best, and quite possible even counterproductive.

The traditional illustration of the effects of limited social proximity between FRPs is the (absence of) diffusion patterns between the two Belgian FRPs, the VB and the FNb. Despite their operation within the same country, there has never been a substantial or systematic pattern of diffusion between the two FRPs. The occasional interaction was mostly on an individual basis and never structural, for the most part because the VB’s ‘Flemish nationalism’ does not appear to align with the FNb’s ‘Belgicist nationalism’ (Coffé, 2005a). Overall, the VB considered the FNb a fringe party, with an opportunistic, power-hungry and extremist Daniel Féret as their leader. The master frames between the two FRPs were too different to bridge any sort of social distance.

A similar observation can be made regarding the social distance between East and West European FRPs. Before the 2000s, their interaction patterns were mostly limited to some provisional (and often illicit) funding, and even then, mostly initiated by the FN (Hunter, 1998a, 1998b). The limited nature of any form of structural networks between them can be largely contributed to their differences in master frame and the possible electoral backlash West European FRPs would experience. Overall, the social distances between them were too sizeable for interpersonal networks to be effective. It has only been in the past decade that several East European FRPs have modernised and moderated their master frames, thereby reduced the social distance between them and their West European counterparts.

Third, and perhaps most importantly, social distance is not an absolute explanatory factor. As indicated, social distance can have an important facilitating or impeding nature, however, even when social distance is limited, this does not guarantee the creation of interpersonal diffusion channels, or diffusion patterns more generally. The absence of social
proximity does make trans-national diffusion highly unlikely, mostly because diffusion (in this case) is a voluntary process. In other words, social proximity is certainly a necessary factor for the formation of interpersonal diffusion networks, however, it not a sufficient or decisive factor. Other factors can also (indirectly) influence its explanatory value.

The interpersonal interaction patterns between the FN and the FPÖ, or the FN and the DFP have been relatively scarce. Nonetheless, the social distance between these pairs of FRPs is extremely limited, particularly when it comes to ideology. Hence, other factors must contribute to the absence of structural interpersonal diffusion. Since the 1990s, the FPÖ, and particularly Jörg Haider, has distanced itself from the FN arguing the FN “did not have the same content” and was simple “not like them” (Libération, 1999). Both Haider and Le Pen, both charismatic and strong leaders, saw themselves as the leading figures of the far right, thereby making any form of structural interpersonal networks rather difficult (Van den Brink, 1994; Belien, 2005). Since both parties’ leadership change, this has recently changed and initial steps are being made to form a more structural interpersonal network, both within (e.g. AENM) and outside the European Parliament (e.g. EAF) (Phillips, 2011; Stolz, 2012).

Interpersonal networks: A time and place for everything

Following these specifications, interpersonal networks and dialogue appear to be mostly absent from early stages of FRP development, and rather present past its original emergence. Logistically, it is difficult for an FRP to engage in systematic dialogue until it has developed sufficiently to actively pursue and construct interpersonal network. Upon an FRP’s emergence, its interpersonal networks might not be as comprehensive yet and different mechanisms might operate. Thus, it is a fair assumption that interpersonal connections such as those described in the previous sections (i) do not constitute the full range of diffusion channels between FRPs, and (ii) are built as an FRP develops.

Given these observations, trans-national diffusion patterns in the earlier stages of FRP development might have a less interactive character, such as a monologue. A possible example of such a channel is a speaker (or listener) invitation. In the early 1980s, Le Pen gave countless speeches to other FRP audiences and invited several FRP leaders himself. For example, in March 1990, the FN invited Schönhuber to its congress in Nice. He later stated that, in terms of organisation of such a congress, the REP could learn much from the FN. He also said the FN showed quite impressively what it is: a ‘Siegerpartei’ (a winner’s party) (van

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11 Before the 1990s, there were several meetings between the FPÖ and FN (see IRR, 1991).
den Brink, 1994, p.55). Le Pen discussed topics of their choosing, whereas Schönhuber passively absorbed the information, hoping to reproduce and integrate this knowledge later.

Another form of monologue is debate, as participating individuals offer personal opinions and perspectives in an attempt to win the debate, not to obtain new perspectives and insights by incorporating the opposition’s positions (Chabot, 2010). In other words, even though there is often a back-and-forth in discourse, there is no exchange of information between the participating agents; hence no dialogue can be established between them. When debates between FRPs occur (e.g. at a congress), they can be more accurately described as round-tables, for the simple reason these FRPs are relatively similar to one another, and they have no benefit whatsoever so try and win a formal debate (as they are not in competition with each other). Therefore, the practical application or impact of debate as a diffusion channel is rather limited. More often it is used to inform the public, i.e. the FRP’s electorate.

In short, when FRPs are members of the same (formal or informal) organisational structures, the structural development of interpersonal networks is more likely. In its turn, it then becomes more likely for these channels to serve as a successful foundation of trans-national diffusion between FRPs. At the same time, when social distances between FRPs are limited, they are more likely to form and develop interpersonal diffusion channels. Overall, it appears such interpersonal networks are more common once FRPs have emerged. However, in earlier stages of FRP development, the absence of interpersonal networks indicates there are most likely other, more impersonal channels of diffusion at work.

**B. Impersonal channels**

When an innovation diffuses trans-nationally, it does not necessarily travel through interpersonal networks (Tarrow, 2005). It is quite possible the innovation and its components travel through more impersonal channels, which refers to the channels between agents who share few ties, and are mostly connected through more indirect channels. This cannot be simply understood as the absence of interpersonal channels, rather a separate set of channels comprise this notion (McAdam and Rucht, 1993). The following sections discuss some of the more relevant impersonal channels for the trans-national diffusion between FRPs.

*Identifying the route of impersonal diffusion*

Lazarsfeld and his colleagues (1944) specify a two-step flow model with mass media as the primary source agent to describe impersonal networks. Opinion leaders are active media consumers, often held in high regard, who interpret media content for so-called ‘lower-
end media users’, and this with a relative frequency (Lazarsfeld e.a., 1944, p.151). The first step, from mass media to opinion leaders, is mainly a transfer of information, whereas the second step, opinion leaders interpret and contextualise media’s messages before the public internalises them. These two steps indicate that mass media’s influence might not be as significant, or as direct, as previously hypothesised. Given the multitude of technological and socio-political evolutions in the past decades (Franklin, Mackie and Valen, 1992), the problematic nature of some of its underlying assumptions (Bennett and Manheim, 2006), the changing relations between the audience and its heuristics (Lau and Redlawsk, 2001) and the ambiguous nature of the innovation (Chabot and Duyvendak, 2002), further specifications are in order (see also Bennett and Manheim, 2006).

A first specification concerns the redefinition of the role and importance of opinion leaders. Rochon (2000) refers to them as ‘critical communities’ because he suggests their roles as mere recipients and transmitters are too restrictive. They identify important information, frame information as they see fit and develop solutions along those frames. Their original role as a simple authority figure has expanded to that of a more autonomous and independent media expert (see Manin, 1995). In short, information does not just pass through critical communities; their role has become much more proactive and interactive, most notably in the first step. In the particular case of trans-national diffusion, their role has been decreasing as a direct consequence of the increasing ability to directly access the desired media rather than having to rely on a critical community to search and interpret it. When FRPs do rely on critical communities in this process, some of the more relevant ones have been academics, FRP MEPs and some of the more internationally oriented FRP leaders.

Second, critical communities help the larger community of FRPs generate a perception and an evaluation of the master frame and its components. Based on the cognitive assessments of these critical communities, an adopting FRP develops certain heuristics, which help to reduce decision costs (Sniderman, Brody and Tetlock 1991; Lupia 1994). The wealth of political information and the increasing complexity of the political environment and the diffusion process make heuristics increasingly important (Lau and Redlawsk, 2001), particularly because they can influence the credibility of critical communities.

Third, the original model only included traditional mass media, with a particular emphasis on television. Whereas television is certainly an important element of mass media, other channels like the Internet, and most recently social media, are currently increasing their

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12 These model specifications are important, however, a cognitive analysis of trans-national diffusion does not fall within the scope of this project.
market share (DiMaggio e.a., 2001), particularly when it comes to the news and among younger age groups (PEW, 2012). Considering that FRPs were, and still are, stigmatised, their use of mass media, the extent of it, and its role in the diffusion process are particularly interesting, and perhaps not as straightforward as theorised for social movements.

**Traditional mass media**

Originally, mass media’s most common and immediate channels were audio-visual (since the 1960s), written, and to a lesser extent audio. Even though early scholars have long realised mass media’s importance (e.g. Singer, 1970; Spilerman, 1976; Rogers, 1983), its role and attributes have significantly evolved since then. Originally, mass media could be seen as an important source of information and familiarisation. This generated newly formed associations between individuals or groups of individuals (also referred to as cultural linkage or weak ties), which facilitated the diffusion process. However, following an extensive mass media revolution, many of its characteristics have changed (see Norris, 2000, chapter 7).

Since the 1970s, one can observe a second paradigm shift in political communication. More specifically, McCombs and Shaw (1972) argue media now has an agenda-setting function, whereas Noelle-Neuman (1973) refers to it as “the return of the powerful mass media”. Since the postmodern era of political communication in the 1990s, mass media became more fragmented, more complex and more incoherent by a sizeable increase in channels, outlets and levels (Norris, 2000). This evolution contributes to the current complexity of the trans-national diffusion patterns between FRPs.

Television evolved from general broadcasts to more specific and targeted broadcasts, each with their separate audiences. Newspapers and other journalistic and academic sources have become more global, since they cover a larger geographic area (e.g. online editions), and more personal, since they have also diversified their approach and audience. Despite its decreasing market share, television remains the most important and immediate mass media outlet. Given the increasing levels of education (and linguistic knowledge), globalisation and the spread of the Internet, one cannot underestimate written media as a diffusion channel.

Particularly in an FRP context, the scholarly attention to media has been limited and the direction of causality between media and FRP success is often difficult to determine. Generally, scholars recognise media plays an important role in FRP development (e.g. Ellinas, 2010; Mudde, 2007; Carter, 2005), and hence influences FRP success and trans-national diffusion patterns (Rydgren, 2005). As to how and in which direction it does this, the
literature is less clear\textsuperscript{13}. Therefore, it merits distinguishing further between different mass media sources, most notably based on their un/official affiliation.

A first category constitutes politically independent mass media with no perceived political affiliation. Some of these are consistently hostile toward FRPs (e.g. Belgian \textit{De Morgen}, French \textit{Le Monde}). Others are at times critical and at times favourable (e.g. German \textit{Bild Zeitung}, Italian RTL Group). A second category includes politically independent mass media with an apparent FRP preference (e.g. Austrian \textit{Kronen Zeitung}, Italian Mediaset) (see Biocio, 2003; Statham, 1996). Often, some of the less sophisticated written media (e.g. tabloids) and non-public media share FRPs’ attitudes and issues (Mazzoleni, 2008; Decker, 2004; Deutchman and Ellison, 1999). A final category constitutes mass media directly affiliated with or dependent on FRPs. They can either be official FRP publications (e.g. newsletters, manifestos, editorials, etc.) or unofficial party-friendly publications (e.g. \textit{Minute} and \textit{Présent} in France, \textit{Voorpost} in Flanders, \textit{Junge Freiheit} (der Spiegel, 1996) and \textit{Preußische Allgemeine Zeitung} (Maegerle, 2004) in Germany, etc.). In this latter case, it often concerns publishing houses or magazine editors with strong FRP ties. For several of these, the lines between official and unofficial FRP attachment are rather blurred. For example, \textit{National Hebdo}, a supposed independent, yet FN-friendly newspaper, had its headquarters in the FN’s building and most of its editorial staff and writers were FN officials.

This classification allows for an indication of how certain mass media can have an influence on the trans-national diffusion between FRPs. On one hand, the role of the first category as a diffusion channel between FRPs, particularly in the early stages, would be negligible. The media-boycott, which FRPs experienced in the early stages of their development (Meguid, 2008; Mudde, 1996), can even be seen as impeding the diffusion process between FRPs. On the other hand, the second and third categories can serve as sources of information on how other FRPs develop, what symbols they use, how they formulate their speeches, who they publicly interact with, and more implicitly, what their master frame looks like. They also provide the opportunity to highlight the development and identity of other FRPs (e.g. \textit{National Hebdo} publications had a separate international header). Despite these favourable conditions, the geographical scope of party-favourable publications has often been limited, thereby restricting its potential role in trans-national diffusion between FRPs, but extending its role in diffusion processes between FRPs and their electorates.

\textsuperscript{13} Some scholars even go beyond this and claim FRPs and the media have an interdependent relationship, as illustrated by Ritterband (2003, p.28): “Haider needed the media and they needed him”. Despite its high intuitional validity, this theory remains yet unproven and is not particularly relevant for the discussion of the impersonal diffusion, as the media is seen as a channel, not an agent (see also mediated diffusion).
In short, it is difficult to determine the exact influence media has on the diffusion process. Two preliminary conclusions can nonetheless be drawn. First, pure dependence and independence of mass media do not favour diffusion processes between FRPs, but rather they play an important role in the diffusion processes with the electorate. Second, when there is a favourable affiliation between mass media and an FRP, or a clear preference for that FRP, this can facilitate trans-national diffusion between FRPs. These mass media report on evolutions of the FRP phenomenon, and they provide condensed, yet often biased, accounts of successful changes to the master frame, different tactics, new slogans, etc.

For example, the FN’s use of the slogan *Les Français D’Abord* has been diffused to several other FRPs through media (e.g. VB’s *Eigen Volk Eerst* and PxC’s *Primero Los De Casa*, the REP’s *Deutschland den Deutschen, Ausländer Raus*!). The FN’s use of the French tricoloured flame as a party symbol and its festivities around it (*la fête des Blue-blanc-rouge*) has originally been diffused from the MSI. However, after its popularisation by the FN, the FNb and the REP (among others) have also implemented similar festivities. In Italy, the FT (literally tricoloured flame), although a neo-fascist party, has even used it in its principal party name and logo. Similar arguments can be made for communication strategies, organisation of summer schools, foreign visits (most notably to the Republican party in the United States), the festivities on the traditionally socialist Workers’ Day on May 1st, etc.

In the early 1980s, limited media coverage of the FRP phenomenon allowed (a limited number of) FRPs across Europe to observe the FN’s successful emergence: Le Pen’s 1982 election to the local council in Paris, the FN’s 1983 success in Dreux, Le Pen’s 1984 prime time debut in *l’Heure de la vérité*, the FN’s 10-seat victory in the 1984 European Parliament elections, the FN’s 35 seat victory in the 1986 parliamentary elections, etc. One FRP functionary describes the FN at that point as “an ideological pioneer who quickly accepted being a role model for those FRPs who were still operating in marginality”.

Towards the 1990s, the increasing FRP success and their growing presence in the media allowed other FRPs to also take on this role and serve as examples for a wider range of FRPs. Traditional parties’ severe losses and the VB’s electoral gain in the 1991 elections anchored the VB and its master frame in the Belgian political landscape. The LN declared the “Federal Republic of Padania” in 1996, thereby emphasising its secessionist (i.e. extreme nationalist) character. The Bern faction gradually lost its grip over the SVP, and from the 1990s on, Blocher’s Zurich faction became the SVP’s dominate political current, representing the new FRP master frame (similar to the evolution Haider’s FPÖ went through in the 1980s). The 2002 Knittelfeld Putsch concluded the political differences between a relatively moderate
policy-seeking faction and a more ideologically driven FRP faction in favour of the latter. All these instances were broadly covered via all media channels, serving as examples of the new master frame’s success and inspirations for emerging FRPs.

Mass media does not only have an identity-creating or reinforcing function. It is also possible for FRPs to challenge one another, publicly reject master frames or components of it, or even personally attack other FRP leaders. The diffusion of such information can damage the creation or development of collective identities. Overall, it amplifies the social distance between FRPs, thereby decreasing the opportunities of trans-national diffusion between them.

In a 1994 interview in Le Monde, a French newspaper, Fini indicated he did not want anything to do with the REP since “they don’t believe in Europe and they don’t even know what it means to have respect for foreigners” (Decamps and Fini, 1994). In an interview in 1997, both Pia Kjærsgaard (Conradi 1997) and Carl Hagen (Financial Times, 1997) publicly rejected the comparison of their parties with the FN. Around the same time, Peter Sichrovsky, an MEP for the FPÖ, asked for Jean-Marie Le Pen to be banned from the European Parliament following his gas chamber comments (Der Standard, 1997). In a 2002 interview in Profil, an Austrian newspaper, Haider was quoted saying “Le Pen has positions which one cannot support. He has racist positions in his program, which seem not to have changed at all in the modern world”. Even though his objections are often considered pragmatic and tactical rather than fundamental, his explicit misspecification of the FN’s master frame (i.e. calling its program racist rather than ethno-centrist or pluralist) increased the social distance between the two parties and challenged any sort of possible common identity. In 2005, Filip Dewinter stated in the Austrian newspaper Kurier that Haider had always been his “great example” but that he had been “disappointed” in him: “He is no longer the Haider that I knew” (Belien, 2005). In 2009, in an interview with a Jewish magazine, Filip Dewinter criticised some of the anti-Jewish statements made by Jean-Marie Le Pen (Joods Actueel, 2009). The translation of this interview in Alliance, a Jewish online magazine for the French community, diffused to the Jewish blog of Le Monde.

The Internet and new media: Reinventing traditional mass media

Considering the importance of media in the development of any political actor (see Zaller, 1992), Raschke (1985) argues that if an agent does not present itself in the media, it does not exist. For example, media strategies are not a principal concern for many social movements, which often leads to an inefficient use of (new) media as an impersonal diffusion
channel (Van Aelst and Walgrave, 2002). These observations are not necessarily accurate for FRPs. They are usually battling to acquire media presence or they are already omnipresent in the media. This is usually accompanied by detailed communication strategies, possibly even experts on staff (e.g. the FN’s Florian Philippot). Certain scholars have examined the diffusion process between an FRP and the electorate (e.g. Caiani and Parenti, 2009); however, the role of new media and the Internet as an impersonal channel of diffusion between FRPs remains unspecified.

The new postmodern communication paradigm indicates the decreasing role of traditional mass media and the increasing importance of media structures such as the Internet (PEW, 2012). The polycentric structure of the Internet and the expansion of the web-based infrastructure change diffusion patterns. This is particularly so in a loose network of centralised agents, such as the majority of the FRP community in the 1990s, until even the early 2000s (Bennett, 2003). The majority of media now offer an online version of their output, and some media have even restricted themselves to online production (e.g. The Huffington Post). The increasing use of these online sources has an important implication in global communication, yet it goes beyond the personalisation of impersonal diffusion efforts, reducing the costs of communication, or transcending temporal and geographical barriers.

Following the Internet’s polycentric organisation, combined with the complexity of diffusion, it can be difficult for a network to control what is diffused and when. If an innovation is not diffused properly, it could prohibit the generation of a coherent and common identity, particularly when the network is fragmented. A community’s identity is based on shared attributes, such as the master frame, and can be illustrated by the social proximity between agents. So, when certain FRPs diffuse master frame components that contradict or challenge other FRPs, this could reduce FRPs’ sense of commonality and possibly put them in the defensive vis-à-vis their challengers. Together, this could only be harmful for FRP consolidation and the possible creation of interpersonal networks. Such disputes could be mediated when there is a clear hierarchy within the network, however, within a relatively horizontal network such as that of FRPs, this is rather difficult. Any verticality in their international network is not accompanied with political power over other.

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14 One could even argue that regardless of the absence of a physical face-to-face, the Internet can serve as an interpersonal channel of diffusion, for example in the form of email, Skype or any other messaging service. This specification is important, particularly in future analyses of diffusion patterns in the later stages of development. However, since the empirical analysis of this specification lies far beyond the possibilities and the scope of this project, it suffices here to make the reader aware of this possible double-function of the Internet.
Technological specifications and media evolutions resulted in new media formats beyond the Internet, which are currently becoming more important and begin to influence diffusion patterns as well. Examples of this are social networking sites (e.g. Facebook, Twitter, etc.), blogs, podcasts, RSS-feeds, video sharing sites, etc. The diversification of diffusion channels significantly increased while their cost of communication decreased. The quality of reporting and publications has consistently decreased, and the gate-keeping role of the traditional media weakened by the continuous struggle for an audience (Bennett, 2003).

All FRPs have websites, often even translated in other languages. In several cases, this includes explicit references to other FRPs (e.g. REP, Pro Köln), although recently, this has been removed on most of them (e.g. VB, FN, BNP, FPÖ). All FRPs have facebook and twitter accounts, and use them extensively. Most FRPs have an electronic newsletter to which anyone can subscribe, some more active (e.g. VB, SVP) than others (e.g. BNP, LN). To a lesser extent, other new media channels include a YouTube channel, an RSS feed, Google+ account, etc. Such a variety of new media channels are largely aimed at the electorate, thereby limiting their potential role as a diffusion channel between FRPs. Nonetheless, with the developments of this format of political communication in the past years (e.g. 2008 Obama campaign), its influence in the future will only increase.

To finalise this brief discussion of the Internet and new media as an impersonal channel of diffusion, it is important to mention new media can also play the role of a critical community between an FRP and the more traditional mass media. In the particular case of FRPs, this is rather rare since there are only few new media outlets that have the potential to serve as a critical community. Nonetheless, interesting examples of new media that can uphold such a role are the Belgian website Rechts Actueel (a right-wing news website promoting nationalism and supporting various far right causes) and a French blog François Desouche (promoting nationalism and la nouvelle droite). The most important restriction here would be the linguistic barrier, together with FRPs’ general distrust of media. Assuming English could serve as a common langue among them, the American conservative blog Blogmocracy could resolve part of this.

So, on one hand, the decentralised nature of the Internet and new media, the increasing fragmentation, the increasing audience and the decreasing ability of media to fulfil their roles as gate-keepers have certainly not facilitated diffusion efforts, or the development of a common identity for that matter. On the other hand, Internet and new media can facilitate impersonal diffusion efforts by lowering its costs, lowering barriers and increasing its flexibility, while also smoothing the process to a more interpersonal network.
4. Connecting FRP development, diffusion channels and diffusion mechanisms

Considering the similarities between FRPs and social movements (Caiani, della Porta and Wagemann, 2012), the horizontal nature of diffusion between FRPs, and the extensive role of ‘social network’ diffusion in social movements’ trans-national diffusion patterns, it is no surprise similar channels also predominate trans-national diffusion patterns between FRPs. The new FRP master frame and its components largely diffuse through interpersonal and impersonal channels of diffusion. The question remains whether both channels operate simultaneously, whether they are mutually exclusive or whether there is some interaction between the two. Some of the earlier social movements literature argues for the prevalence of either interpersonal (e.g. McAdam and Rucht, 1993) or impersonal diffusion (e.g. Strang and Meyer, 1993). However, such a structural and one-dimensional interpretation of diffusion channels would not allow for the explanation of the temporal and geographical differences in specific diffusion mechanisms, general diffusion patterns and eventually FRP development.

In the early 1980s, no real structural networks existed between FRPs. The media allowed FRPs across Europe to observe the emergence of the FN and the success of its master frame\(^{15}\). Critical communities in other countries received this information, each shaping it according to their own needs and desires, to then further diffuse it to the adopting FRP. Such needs and desires could include translation, adjusting vocabulary, aligning frames, or even using it as a foundation for their further research into the phenomenon. This updated two-step model generated a set of impersonal ties between the FN and some of the emerging FRPs across Europe. Simultaneously, the FN’s extensive presence in the media and its continuous campaigns allowed it to systematically adjust their master frame for other FRPs to observe

At that time, few channels existed between FRPs, and the majority of them were rather weak\(^{16}\). Inherently, these channels were rather unilateral and dominated by monologue, meaning that if diffusion occurred, it was mostly unilateral from the FN to emerging FRPs. The FN’s master frame represented the principal source of its success (or at least emergence), and constituted the primary interest of other FRPs wanting to experience the same. The impersonal diffusion of master frame components did not necessarily require the FN to be aware of the construction of channels of diffusion, which meant the FN’s role in this process was mostly passive. The FN’s media presence mostly focused on increasing its vote share,

\(^{15}\) Certainly the media’s use is not limited to a channel of diffusion between FRPs. However, the analysis of mass media’s multi-functional role (e.g. as a channel of diffusion between the FRP and the electorate) does not fall within the scope of this paper.

\(^{16}\) Observation through the media can also occur when there are strong ties present, however, this is highly improbable. When stronger ties exist, they are usually associated with a more direct nature of interpersonal diffusion (although they are not a necessary requirement).
not the construction of impersonal channels of diffusion. Regardless of intent, its media presence does not necessarily preclude trans-national diffusion between FRPs.

In the early stages of FRP development, impersonal networks form largely in the absence of more interpersonal ones, simply because they have not been formed yet. This indicates that in the early stages of FRP development trans-national diffusion mostly occurs through impersonal channels. Emerging FRPs observe the FN and its master frame, and adopt its components, as they perceive they are applicable. Since the role of the transmitting agent is relative passive, and unilateral communication is most common, one can easily argue that mechanisms of passive emulation are most prevalent.

The notable exceptions to the predominance of impersonal channels of diffusion in the early stages of FRP development are the early-stage networks between the FN and the VB, and the FN and the REP. As early as the mid-1980s, interpersonal networks between them existed, mostly following their mutual participation in the Group of the European Right in the European Parliament. This immediate creation of more structural and formal organisational networks between them made impersonal channels of diffusion redundant. Typically, these more interpersonal networks are more widespread in later phases of FRP development.

Following the adoption of the FN’s master frame, several FRPs also experienced some (electoral) success, which sometimes resulted in their emergence in the mid- to late 1980s (e.g. VB, REP)\(^\text{17}\). It is their emergence that directly contributed to the development of more interpersonal networks between FRPs. As more FRPs emerged, the social distance between them declined and opportunities for more interdependent forms of interaction presented themselves. Le Pen directly expressed his desire to form a trans-national alliance between different FRPs. Simultaneously, most FRPs felt that a more extensive relationship with the FN (or later, a more comprehensive communication network with other successful FRPs) could greatly benefit their development. It is through the shared desire of this mutually beneficial dynamic that emerging FRPs developed more interpersonal networks. This can be illustrated by the formation of a formal Group in the European Parliament as early as 1984. Later, additional (and more inclusive) efforts have been made to trans-nationally connect different FRPs. The failure of most of these organisational attempts does not necessarily

\(^{17}\) Following the emulation of the FN’s master frame, initial minor (local or regional) electoral successes did not always contribute or lead to FRP emergence (e.g. FNb). This indicates the emulation mechanism by itself is not necessarily a sufficient condition for FRP emergence.
indicate a failure to form or maintain interpersonal channels\textsuperscript{18}. Contrarily, during these attempts, several interpersonal networks were formed and strengthened.

The increase in network intensity, the expansion in network size and the increasing developmental similarities within the network, all contributed to diffusion channels becoming more interdependent and dialogue more prevalent. Together, this indicates that both the transmitting and the adopting FRP are active participants. In other words, interpersonal diffusion channels are more likely beyond the emergence stage, not only because such networks did not exist upon emergence, but mostly because FRP emergence (based on the FN master frame) increases social proximity between these parties. This allows FRPs to develop and sustain interdependent relationship and transcend emulation. It provides them with the opportunities to both adopt and contribute to the master frame, while serving as either an adopting or a transmitting agent. Hence, learning mechanisms are (more) predominant once an FRP has emerged and established itself in the FRP community. An FRP cannot learn from another FRP without the mode (i.e. interpersonal diffusion channels) or opportunity (i.e. participating in a FRP network) to do so. In other words, for learning mechanisms to occur, FRPs must have emerged and transcended impersonal networks.

Beyond an adopting FRP’s emergence, impersonal diffusion channels do not disappear; rather they develop and transform. Since the shift in communication paradigms in the 1990s, media expanded its role and its reach. Not only are FRPs the subject in televised broadcasts and written media, they are also the subjects of Internet-based applications like facebook, twitter, podcasts, or simply Internet-based written media. This evolution allows impersonal channels to reposition themselves. The increasing number of emerging FRPs has allowed other FRPs than the FN to serve as transmitting agents, thereby diversifying the FRP network and expanding the number of impersonal channels. Often this occurs when an emerging FRP finds the social distance with another FRP to be smaller than that with the FN. For example, the REP served as the role model for most East European FRPs, following their socio-political similarities and their geographical proximity. In such a case, an adopting FRP looks to emerge and a transmitting FRP remains relatively passive in the process. It confirms the earlier observations that, regardless of the expansion of the FRP network, impersonal diffusion channels are most prevalent in an adopting FRP’s early development, and most closely connected to a mechanism of emulation.

\textsuperscript{18} Most often the failure of more structural forms of organisation between FRPs is attributed to two key problems: (i) the inherent conflict of international cooperation based on nationalism and national identities, and (ii) the presence of too many strong personalities.
5. Concluding remarks: The non-linearity of diffusion channels

Diffusion literature’s primary focus on the impersonal channels and the exchange of information between agents (e.g. Strang and Soule, 1998) leaves several questions about the nature and the characteristics of the diffusion channels unanswered, even unexamined. Therefore, this chapter engaged in a two-folded analysis of diffusion channels. First, this chapter examined which diffusion channels are most prevalent and how exactly they operate. Second, it examined how this diversified offer of diffusion channels shapes trans-national diffusion patterns between FRPs and whether the previous differentiation has any particular effect on those patterns of diffusion.

Interpersonal diffusion channels can be formal (e.g. Group in the European Parliament) or informal (e.g. international associations or alliances), each with their own advantages and limitations. This chapter substantiates the strength-of-weak-ties theory, suggesting that strong ties are not necessarily more beneficial for interpersonal diffusion, perhaps even quite the opposite. The social distance between FRPs can play an important role. When this distance is limited, the formation of an interpersonal network is more likely than when social distance is extensive. However, social proximity is not a sufficient factor for the formation of an interpersonal network. Other factors can play an important role in the creation of interpersonal networks as well (e.g. strength of personalities).

An adjusted two-step-flow model can describe the operationalisation of impersonal diffusion channels. The first step of such a model describes a summarising step from the “intermediate agent” to one or multiple critical communities. The second step describes the evaluation of the master frame by those critical communities and its subsequent diffusion to the adopting FRP. Whereas Lazarsfeld’s original two-step-flow model indicates traditional mass media as the sole “intermediate agent”, this chapter expands this to include the Internet and new media. Globalisation, internationalisation and a new political communication paradigm have all contributed to a more extensive role of those two components. Impersonal channels limit the opportunities for (direct) interaction, thereby often allowing it to be described as monologue, i.e. diffusion when the transmitting FRP remains passive.

One of the primary purposes of this entire research project is to reemphasise time and agency in the analysis of FRP development. Interpersonal networks often rely on interdependent relations, which can be defined by the active involvement of both the transmitting and the adopting FRP. Therefore, learning mechanisms most frequently travel them. Impersonal networks are more unilateral or indirect, by nature. The possible passive nature of the transmitting FRP allows adopting FRPs to adopt the master frame, yet remain
absent of implicit techniques, strategies, adjustments, etc. Therefore, such channels stimulate the more limited emulation mechanisms.

A second important observation here is that for FRPs, impersonal channels (and emulation mechanisms) are more prevalent in earlier stages of diffusion, while interpersonal channels (and learning mechanisms) are only formed throughout the development and come into play once FRPs have emerged. The intuitive explanation for this is the clear absence of interpersonal networks before an adopting FRP has properly emerged. Yet, looking beyond this, social distance also has an important explanatory role. Before the (successful) adoption of the FN master frame, there is no systematic indicator for social proximity, whereas the implementation of a properly aligned master frame reduces social distance between FRPs with that master frame. This increasing social proximity allows for the formation of more interpersonal networks. Even though this is not an exact indicator for presence, it does increase the likelihood of interpersonal networks.

Closer analysis of the diffusion channels (and the mechanisms that travel these channels) indicates their evolution does not necessarily follow a linear path. Each mechanism uses a preferred diffusion channel, indicating these are two distinct channels. Even though they are often considered mutually exclusive, both channels can overlap and can complement one another. While a consolidated FRP is a member of an interpersonal network and engages in dialogue with other FRPs of that network, it can simultaneously serve as a passive transmitter of its master frame to another (emerging) FRP through impersonal channels of diffusion. The inherent distrust and conflict between FRPs could even suggest it is possible for two FRPs to share interpersonal and impersonal channels simultaneously.

Hence, the creation of interpersonal channels does not necessarily indicate an automatic loss of impersonal networks\(^{19}\); it just stimulates FRPs to interact with and learn from one another. It is even possible to go beyond the argument that both channels of diffusion are complementary. When social distance is relatively limited, interpersonal networks build on or develop from impersonal networks. Therefore one can argue the expansion of interpersonal channels enriches and reinforces the impersonal diffusion channels. It allows FRPs to expand their overall network and become less dependent. In the end, this contributes to the evolution from an egocentric to a more polycentric network of trans-national diffusion channels where different channels coexist, overlap and interact.

\(^{19}\) Given today’s all-penetrating presence of both traditional and new media, this would be almost impossible.
Appendix 1: Tarrow’s transmission model of communication and transnational diffusion

Source: Tarrow (2005, p.105, Figure 6.2)
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