

# Public Affairs and Communication in the Digital Age

**Public Affairs Workshop**  
organized by GÉANT GCP and EaP Connect

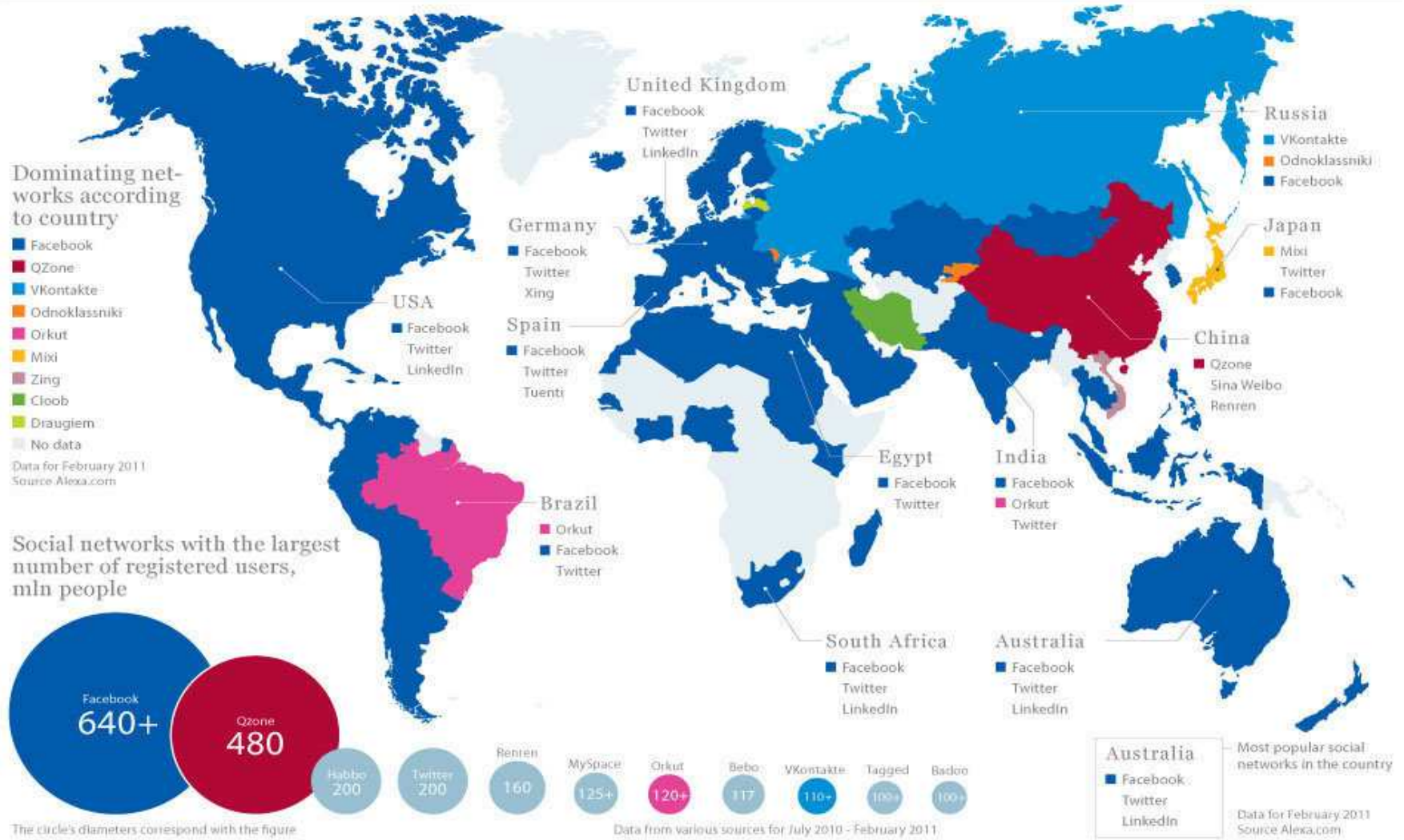
at DFN in Berlin on April 8, 2019

Lecture by Mechthild Bülow

## **The Digital World ...and Politics**

- 1. What can digitalization do today?**
- 2. What are the benefits and limitations of digitalisation for political issues?**  
*From attention to astroturfing*
- 3. How to communicate your issues – and make politicians listen to them**  
*Some Tools of the Trade*

# The world map of social networks



## The Digital World: Why do we like it so much?

Digital political campaigns impact directly on our **values**:

‘What do we believe in?’

*Respect for the environment, e.g.*

... on our **normative systems – our opinions**:

‘What do we think is right or wrong?’

*A 16-year-old girl who speaks out on a political issue, mobilizing her peers*

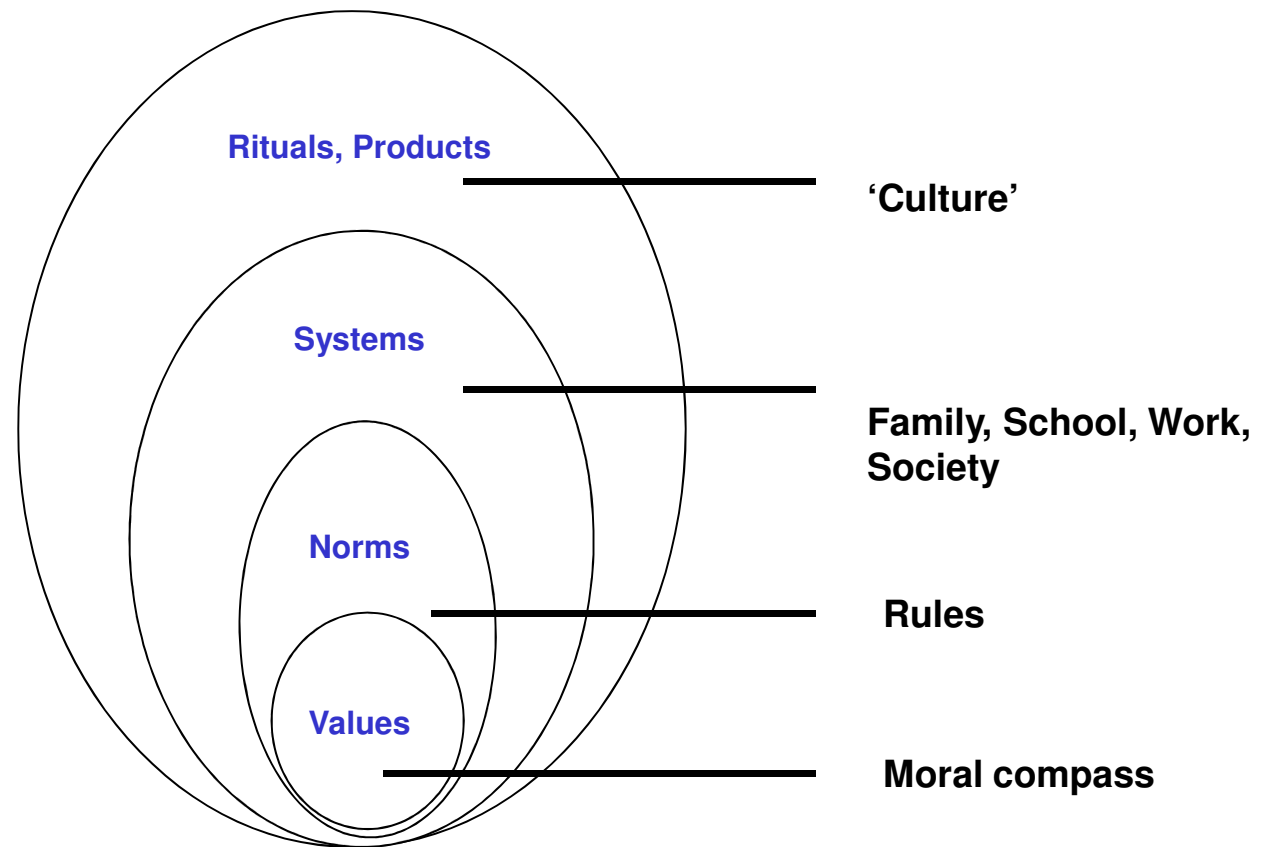
... and on our **emotions** + needs

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## Values? Normative Systems?

What determines our behaviour?

'The onion'



## The Digital World: Why do we like it so much?

Human attention span decreases..

2000: 12 seconds

2015: 8.25 seconds

An average person reads 20 words per page

Goldfish: 9 seconds



Source: Time Magazine, May 14, 2015

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## Emotions?



### **Plato: Mind the elephant!**

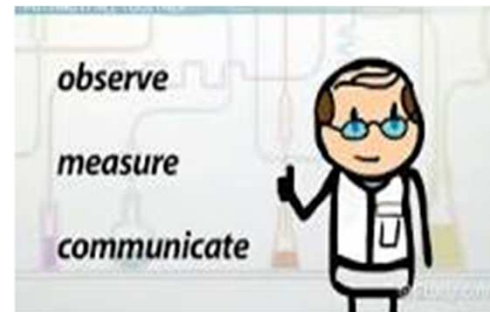
“Rider” – Reason, Rationality

“Elephant” = Emotions

If elephant and rider disagree  
on the direction, who will win?

## But... we are scientists!

**Scientists use** their senses when solving science problems. They **use** their eyes to spot details. They **use** their noses to detect if something is stinky. They **use** their hearing, touch, and even sense of taste.



**How do we involve the emotions of our stakeholders?**



## **The Digital World ...and Politics**

## The Digital World

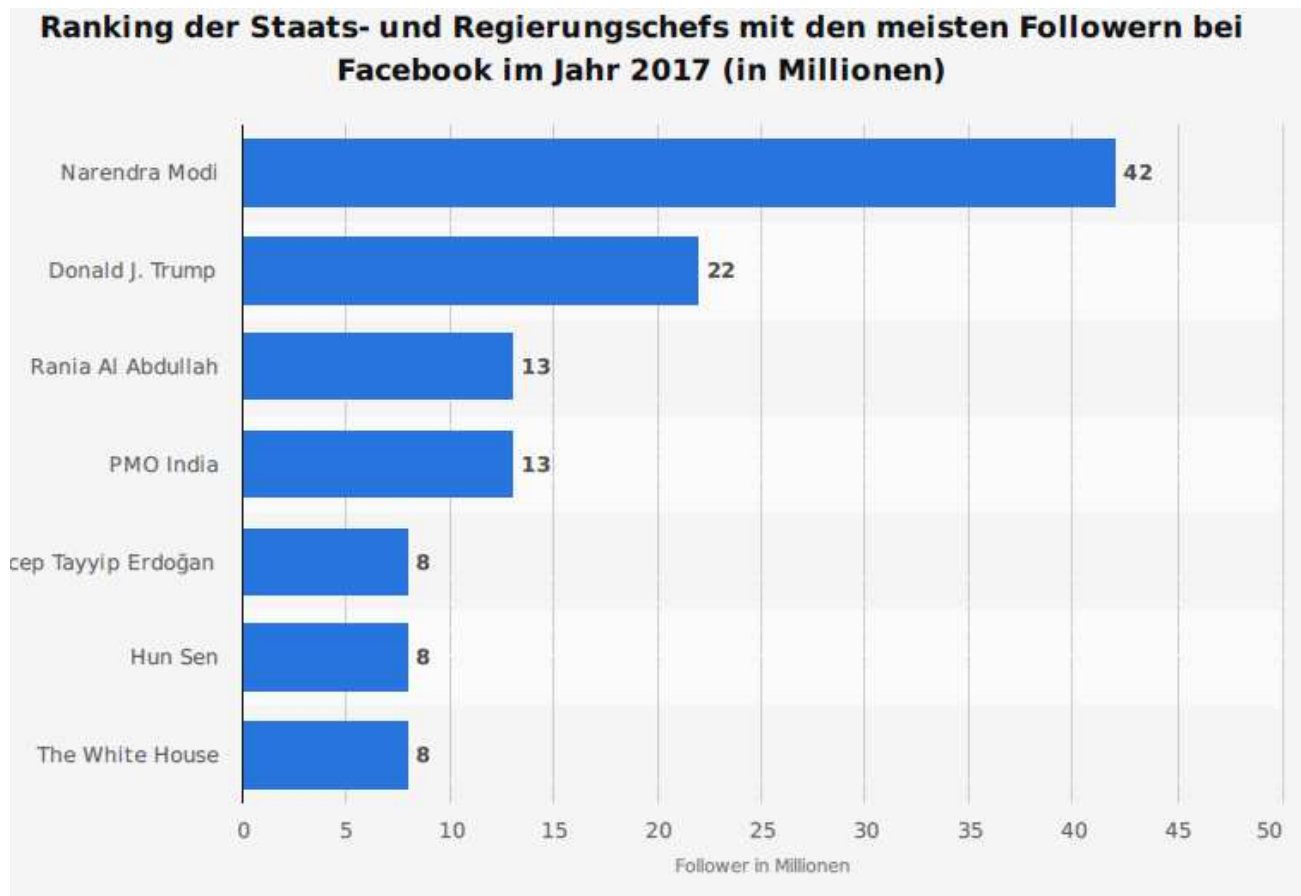


*Facebook user community is bigger than the population of China (1.5 billion)  
Germany: 30 million users*

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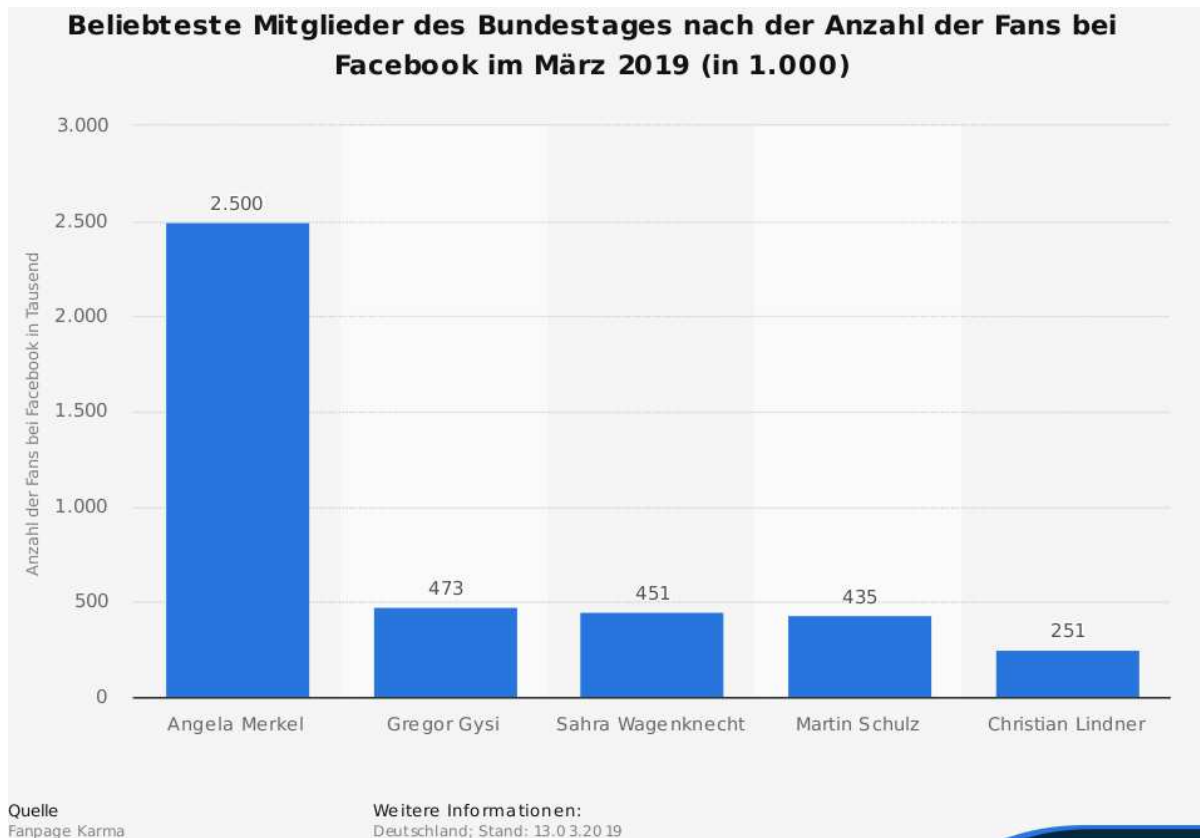
## The Digital World and Politics

Most popular heads of state and government on Facebook in 2017



## The Digital World and Politics

### Most popular German politicians on Facebook in March 2019



## The Digital World and Politics

### Political parties in Germany on Twitter

- 73% of MPs have a Twitter account
- 30.000 new tweets are being written per month
- Every MP has an average of 10.000 followers
- Twitter is the most important tool for MPs



## 1. What can digitalization do today?

### **Structure and mobilize communities, spread ideas**

Generate interest in a public affairs topic worldwide, activate followers

Greta Thunberg: Fridays for Future Campaign



*850.000 abo on Twitter @GretaThunberg*

## 1. What can digitalization do today?

**Give real time information!**  
Provide fact-checking tools



- 2. What are the benefits and limitations of digitalization for political issues?**  
From attention to astroturfing



## 2. What are the benefits of digitalization for political issues?

**Structuring:** Sorting, selecting and exchanging information  
Installation of communities for relevant topics,  
documentation

**Mobilization:** Activating followers to act

**Precision:** Less wastage, social targeting, gaining information  
about profiles, geo-targeting

**Real time:** Direct contacts

 **Attention for political issues: opinions + judgement**

## 2. What are the limitations of digitalization for political issues?

**Communication via social media channels cannot adequately**

**Manage complexity**

**Give orientation**

**Prepare decisions**

**Carry conviction to your target groups**

**➡ Influence understanding of issues**

## 2. What are the limitations of digitalization for political issues?

Communication via social media channels might even serve to **soften the public face** of organizations: *'We are the good guys'*.

The screenshot displays the Barilla Center website. The header includes the Barilla Center logo (FOR FOOD & NUTRITION) and a navigation menu with links for MAGAZINE, RESEARCH, DISSEMINATION, PUBLICATIONS, EDUCATIONAL PROGRAMMES, AGENDA, and ABOUT US. Below the navigation is a horizontal menu with categories: FORUM, BCFN YES!, DOUBLE PYRAMID, FOOD & MIGRATION, FOOD & CITIES, FOOD SUSTAINABILITY INDEX, and MEDIA AWARD. The breadcrumb trail reads: Home / Dissemination / Milan Protocol. The main content area features a large blue banner with the text 'MILAN PROTOCOL' and a sub-headline 'Practical solutions for the food paradoxes.' The background image shows a hand holding a large amount of grain against a blue sky.

## 2. What are the limitations of digitalization for political issues?

Communication via social media channels might even serve to **manipulate**:

*Astroturfing, first coined by US Senator Lloyd Bentsen of Texas in 1985, is when companies/individuals mask their motives by disguising themselves as a grassroots movement.*

### Exxon Mobil was behind a YouTube video spoofing Al Gore's "An Inconvenient Truth"

The release of Al Gore's documentary "An Inconvenient Truth" in 2006 was followed by outpourings of either support or criticism, depending on which side of the global warming theory one chose to take. One man apparently felt so strongly that Gore's view was wrong -- but more importantly, boring -- that he created a video on YouTube called "[Al Gore's Penguin Army](#)," spoofing the ideas set forth by the film and portraying Gore as some sort of Batman villain.



Flickr - nyc dreamer

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## 2. What are the limitations of digitalization for political issues?

- Political campaigns via social media channels rarely reach ‘the system’: political bodies.

But: In representative democracies, decision-making takes place in political bodies; parliaments and governments

- Social media channels foster the – often anonymous – exchange of opinions (not arguments)
- Users are encouraged to think in terms of ‘right’ and ‘wrong’ rather than in terms of different ‘interests’

### **3. How to communicate your issues – and make politicians listen to them**

Some Tools of the Trade

## **What is it we do in Public Affairs again?**

**Public Affairs is defined as the political analysis and contact work of organizations.**

**Using analysis and communication tools, organizations influence political decision-making processes on a strategic level.**

## Public Affairs: Organization questions today:

### What is vital to influencing political decisions?

Up to the 1980s:

Policy change was primarily explained by interacting combinations of

- Interests & Systems  
(pluralistic perspective and institutionalist approach)

Today:

- Ideas play a key role in politics  
(academic knowledge, arguments, convictions, paradigms)

*'Politics finds its sources not only in power but also in uncertainty – men collectively wondering what to do... Governments not only „power“ ..., they also puzzle. ... Policy-making today entails both deciding and knowing of larger groups of people, a process of social learning.'* (Heclö)



**3. How to make politicians listen to your issues  
– and communicate them**

**In order to influence political decisions, you have to**

Get into 'the system': manage objection

Mind your language

Prepare the right 'product' for conviction – and communication

**Get into the system**

**Consider emotions!**

**Please listen to:**

**The Statue of Liberty Story vs. The Story of the Many Legs**

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## Get into the system

### Consider emotions – manage objection

“This is something we’ve never done before!”

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“It’s out of the question!”

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“You can’t be serious about this!”

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“I don’t understand what you mean!”

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“We’ll have to discuss this in your organization!”

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“We can’t wait that long.”

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## Mind your language

A small example:

*“You don’t know the situation. And under no circumstances are you close enough to this issue to judge it correctly.”*

Source: Michael Kretschmer, Minister President of Saxony, on ‘Anne Will’ Talkshow, ARD, September 2018

## Mind your language

Use respectful language,  
avoid ‘dangerous speech’

*Any form of expression  
(e.g., speech, text or image)  
that increases the risk  
of its audience condoning  
or committing violence against  
members of another group.*

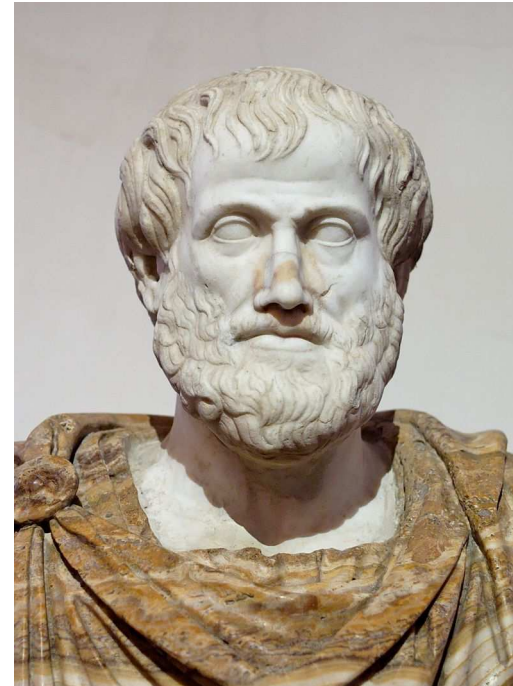
The screenshot shows the website for the Dangerous Speech Project. At the top left is the logo with a speech bubble and the text 'DANGEROUS SPEECH PROJECT'. To the right are navigation links: HOME, ABOUT, COUNTRIES, RESOURCES, FAQ, BLOG. Further right is a language selection dropdown menu set to 'Sprache auswählen' and social media icons for Facebook and Twitter. The main content area has a date 'December 31, 2018' and the title 'DANGEROUS SPEECH: A PRACTICAL GUIDE' in large white letters on a dark background. Below the title is the author information: 'by Susan Benesch, Cathy Buerger, Tinei Glavinic, and Sean Manion'. On the left side, there is a 'TAGS' section with a list of clickable tags: anti-semitism, Brazil, Censorship, Content moderation, Counterspeech, Cybercrime, Dehumanization, Donald Trump, Elections, Europe, Facebook, France, Genocide, Germany, Google, Hate speech, Immigration, incitement, India, International Law, Islam. The main text area on the right starts with an 'Introduction' section, followed by two paragraphs of text.

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## Prepare the right product for conviction – and communication

**Follow a popular scientist and philosopher:**

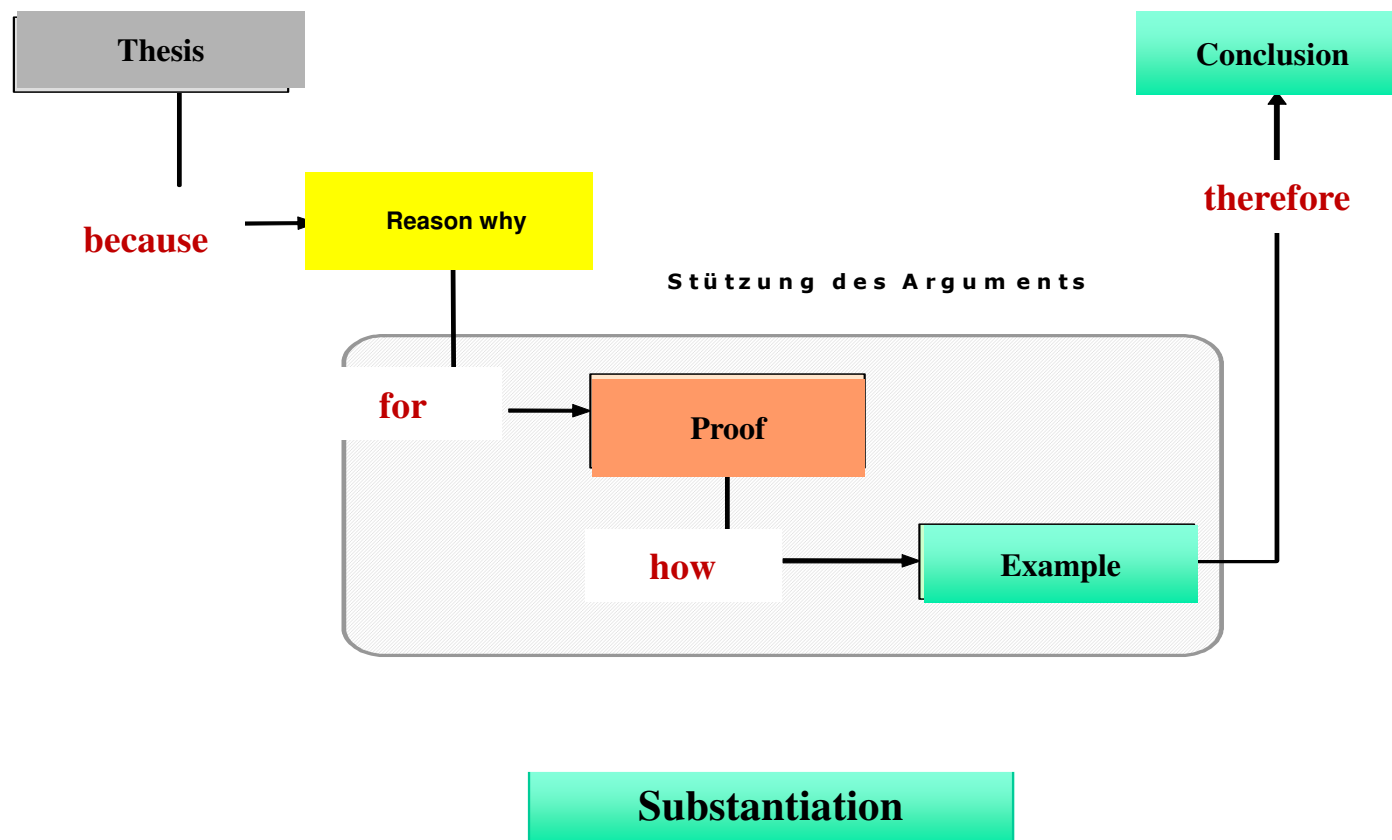
**Aristotle**



By:After Lysippos - Jastrow (2006), Public Domain,  
<https://commons.wikimedia.org/w/index.php?curid=1359807>

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## Use argumentation







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## Use argumentation in 5 steps – and ask for it!

I/We \_\_\_\_\_ *Thesis*

because \_\_\_\_\_ *Reason*

for \_\_\_\_\_ *Proof*

how \_\_\_\_\_ *Example*

therefore \_\_\_\_\_ *Conclusion*

What is the main point of your opinion?

Reasons for your opinion?

Which proof can you give me?

Which example will illustrate your point?

What is your conclusion? Which step do you see next?

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Thank you!

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