



EuroPCom session report

Exploiting the Media Mix

Friday, 8 November, 11h15 – 12h45

Speaker: Alexandra Ekkelenkamp, Advisor to the Director for Media and Communication at the Council; **Soňa Mellak**, European Parliament Press Officer, Slovakia; **Katleen Deraymaecker**, DPG Media, Belgium; **Dr David Fernández Quijada**, Manager of Media Intelligence Service (MIS), European Broadcasting Union (EBU), Switzerland

Moderator: Dennis Abbott, former Managing Director, Communications and Media Relations, BCW Brussels, Belgium

For some time now, one of the key channels for improving communication and increasing outreach has seemed to be social media, but opinion polls show that people perceive traditional media as the most trusted source of news. Therefore, when planning communication strategies, communicators should exploit the full media mix of traditional and new, offline and online channels. How can we go about this? Learn more in a discussion with our panellists!

Soňa Mellak, focusing specifically on Slovakia, explained how the European Parliament used a media mix to increase turnout at the most recent EU elections. Their methods included enhanced communication and more cooperation with journalists, who were invited to take part in interactive activities at the Parliament. In addition, the Parliament decided to act as a news agency itself, rather than going through an external one. As a result, they created a series of initiatives, like joint seminars between journalists and social media influencers, or the "Walk for Europe" volunteer initiative as part of the "This Time I'm Voting" campaign. The fact that "VIPs" like actors or singers were involved in the outreach activities, and the fact that TV programmes about the EU were made, also caught the attention of the media and contributed to the cause. Utilising all media might have had positive impacts on overall media interest, a higher turnout and greater participation from young voters.

Alexandra Ekkelenkamp spoke about how the Council's strategy had evolved in the past. Initially, communications activities at the Council used to be press conferences. This changed over the years, largely thanks to technological developments, and led to the increased use of social media. The Council had recently been investing in their audio-visual technology, and its communication strategy kept evolving as time went by. One of the Council's challenges, however, was ensuring that the institution worked for the various political stakeholders. Therefore, the communication strategy had to be flexible in order to support the needs of all of them in the same way. Alexandra believed that a successful media approach should be creative, strategic, user-centric, data-driven, flexible and fast, innovative and adaptive,

optimised for impact, and supported by all. This could be achieved by focusing on three key areas: increasing the impact of communication activities, mainstreaming communications and fostering continuous innovation.

Katleen Deraymaeker explained the approach adopted by DPG Media when dealing with client requests. Nowadays, it was most common to suggest a "full fennel" approach, meaning that the aim was to reach as many people as possible and make them feel engaged. To do this, the first step was data collection: in order to target the right audience, data about their preferences had to be collected, which had become possible thanks to the use of digital media. In the digital era, we are also witnessing a change in the media outlets themselves. What used to be traditional newspapers were now shifting to digital content, or creating video or audio content (i.e. podcasts). Moreover, people kept watching TV but through different devices like smartphones or tablets; magazines tended to keep their original format but were now creating communities or opportunities for their audience to meet during in-person events.

Dr David Fernández Quijada tackled the importance of trust for the audience. He shared the results of a study aimed at understanding which media were the most and least trusted in countries around Europe. According to the results, the radio tended to be trusted the most, while the internet and social media were considered to be less trustworthy. In addition, the research showed that not even half of the general public trusted news. Despite this, the participants believed that they were good at selecting the news they consumed. Another interesting finding is that the level of trust towards media outlets varies depending on the geographical area. The northern European countries tended to trust their national news, while the southern countries trust them less. In general, there also seemed to be a correlation between the level of trust in the media and the perception of democracy in a specific country. David also pointed out that while the use of social media was increasing rapidly, the trust the users had in it was decreasing at the same pace.

During the final debate, **Ms Ekkelenkamp** made it clear that communication was a serious business and, as such, should be carried out by trained professionals. Furthermore, regulating social media should be a priority moving forward, to increase the level of trust that users had in it.

On this note, **Mr Fernández Quijada** added that traditional brands (i.e. the BBC) were now also using social media platforms to share their news, and it was interesting to notice how the same piece of news was perceived as less trustworthy when shared on certain platforms (i.e. Twitter, rather than on traditional TV or radio). He mentioned that the budget for communication activities seemed to have increased in private-sector companies, but this might not be the case in public-sector institutions.

When concluding the debate, the panel also addressed the importance of investing in both human resources and technology to improve communication strategies. Nowadays in this field, it was important to have good knowledge of technology and artificial intelligence, as well as virtual reality or graphic design. Other transferrable skills, though, for example teamwork and leadership, were equally important.

Ms Mellak agreed with this point and added that it was also crucial to maintain good relationships with journalists.

Mr Abbott concluded that while communication strategies and the platforms used had changed drastically over the years, there was still one fundamental point that would always make a piece of news successful, which was a journalist's instinct!