

Pan-European Institutions and New Media: Pan-European or Counter-Pan- European Media Usage?

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Abstract: Technically, the online space seems to go beyond national borders and can serve for mass communication between Europeans, both European Union citizens and candidate countries' citizens. Because of high internet penetration rates and Web 2.0 tools availability, never before had there been such a huge potential of growth in communication. Does it mean that an European information society emerges? Or, on the contrary, doesn't it seem that pan-European institutions use online tools in non-pan-European or even counter-pan-European ways? Illustrations from Poland's first ten years following its EU accession, exemplified by Europa.eu popularity, as reflected in the data, suggest the misusing of online space and websites. The EU homepage clearly does not support building a pan-European layer of identity.

Keywords: *new media; European identity.*

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The importance of the research theme undertaken herein for postmodern studies lays in a double postmodern context. It is placed at the crossroads between a new European policy and, at the same time, a new European communication space. It is situated at the borderland of European studies and studies about the internet. It is based on a long-term empirical observation of the Polish online space, in order to better theorize the weak performance of the official European Union internet domain (Europa.eu) among Polish population. In order to keep an open perspective, I will begin by showing the relevance of placing a postmodern lens on the European Union, and next I will show the postmodern context in which the new media is situated. The framework consisting of a postmodern European Union and a postmodern new media will let me introduce the empirical part, focusing on the Europa.eu under-performance, within the - theoretically possible - "postmodern-new-media-EU" space.

1. Introduction: Between the European Union and its postmodern policy and new media as a postmodern communication space

To begin with, we mention that, as it is well known, the European Union is an unprecedented entity and endeavor (Golembki, 2008), immersed in postmodernity (Georgescu, 2018). Something that is unprecedented may require unprecedented conceptualization. As John Ruggie, as a law and international relations scholar noticed in his perspective, at the time of EU emergence, the European Community "may constitute the first 'multiperspectival polity' to emerge since the advent of the modern era" and "the first truly postmodern international political form" (Ruggie, 1993). In effect, it may be difficult to describe an integrating Europe without referring to postmodern studies. The European Union, in this theoretical perspective, is rooted in postmodernity both institutionally, legally, spatially and in terms of the community it builds.

According to Józef Niżnik (2017), a scholar in European studies whose work is at the crossroads of philosophy and sociology, postmodernity is correlated with processes such as globalization and Europeanization. Their effect on the symbolic universes is ambivalent: on the one hand, they construct a new symbolic world, but on the other hand, the cohesion of symbolic universes is disruptively damaged by both globalization and European integration. "Usually such aggressive interferences into the symbolic universe were spread out in time and were limited in space", Niżnik (2017) writes, so "it is no coincidence that globalization appeared

almost at the very moment when the state of our civilization became described as «postmodern»." (Niżnik, 2017).

Stefan Borg and Thomas Diez (2016), international relations scholars, noted that "the notion of the EU as a «postmodern» political entity has been repeatedly invoked by both scholars and EU policy-makers," which leads them to describe the EU as a "postmodern promise." (Borg & Diez, 2016). They believe that the project of European integration is built on the postmodern promise. What is, thus, postmodern about the European integration and its promise? In their words, the concept of postmodernity refers to the issues of fluid borders and identity, but also to the relations between states. Postmodernity refers to organizing political life anew, with neither physical borders, nor national identity excluding other identities, nor the traditional ways in which a state relates to other states. Postmodernity is a catalyzing force: it unbounds identities, which were territorially bounded before, and it changes the international system normatively and ethically (Borg & Diez, 2016).

Let us leave the European Union and its postmodern context for a while, and focus on another potentially postmodern space, which is new media. Similarly to the unprecedented European integration process, the online space, which is widely (although not universally) available for the increasing population of digital creators, observers and consumers since the 1990s, constitutes in the 2000s a set of unprecedented communication tools, that are sometimes named the "new media."

The new media space - the same as European space and all the media - can be either public or private, and also in the forms of semi-public or semi-private. As long as a layer of the internet is not password-encrypted, we should consider it to be public. While focusing on the new media, it occurs to us it is very useful to apply an organizing tool based on Yochai Benkler's work, "From Consumers to Users", first published as early as 2000, where three fundamental layers were named: the physical infrastructure, the logical infrastructure, and the content layers (Solum & Chung, 2003). Solum and Chung (2003) write, first, about The Content Layer, i.e. the symbols and images that are communicated. The second layer, the „logical”, consists of programs that are used on the Internet (e.g. the Web), followed by breaking the data into packets and handling the flow of data over the network, as well as the interface between the computers of the end users, and the third, The Physical Layer, consisting of the wires, cables, satellite links, etc. (Solum & Chung, 2003). To simplify it for conceptualization, these three layers can be simply seen as the content, the software and the

hardware. The content is determined to a certain degree by both the physical and the logical layer.

Within the content layer of the new media, there is the so called "social media" subcategory, which seems to be postmodern by definition. For some scholars, postmodern media and social media are just similar concepts. Caroline G. Austin and Justin W. Angle (2014) say that "in the current, postmodern/social media era", the empiricism becomes fragmented and without centrality, which leads media users to see truth only as a "subjective construct" (Austin & Angle, 2014). In the self-reflection on current librarians' work, we find the mention of social media as a marker of postmodernity. George G. Njoroge and Patience Kang'ethe (2013) write: "Since we pride ourselves in being a postmodern library the incorporation of social media to our services is important as it enables us to maintain our status quo" (Njoroge & Kang'ethe, 2013).

Finally, in the second decade of the 21st century, media scholars Amanda Kennedy and Erich J. Sommerfeldt (2015) have been convincing when arguing that the "postmodern lens" is the tool with which we need to rethink social media practice, especially because "postmodern approaches" may deliver practically useful insights. They mention postmodern theories of language games and differential consciousness as possible tools to advance both the theory of social media and new media practice. One of the fields which may be infused by postmodern perspectives is public relations, in regard to which the postmodern lens leads to acknowledging "seemingly nonsensical or reactive contributions from social media users ... as passionate and intense engagement," with snarky, ironic, humorous, parodial, satirical, and other new styles of participating in the increasing public debates. These styles of communication are more and more effective in what Kennedy and Sommerfeldt (2015) name the "postmodern-social-media-world." Apart from the shift in communication styles, they see it as a set of adaptive strategies, which result in bringing on the attention of social media in a much more serious manner than through radicalised or hating online discourses. For them, it is a strategy "postmodern in its flexibility, in taking various, even disparate positions in order to maintain relevance and make real social change" (Kennedy and Sommerfeldt, 2015).

In the above mentioned notion of "postmodern-social-media-world", we can see the unity between postmodernity and the new media. Given that both the European Union and the new media, in its social media form, are almost by definition seen as postmodern constructs, my aim in this research paper will focus on the crossroads between the EU and the new

media sphere. The new media space for the online hub of Europeanness in its EU-related domain, is "Europa.eu." This online domain could have become a social medium or could have embraced other social media, but it remained less than this. The reason was the EU communication strategy, apparently blind to the postmodernity in which it has existed since its beginnings.

2. Methodology

The secondary data analysis will show patterns of interest for the Poles in the symbolic EU homepage and the Europa.eu domain as a whole, as well as the overall attitude towards the EU.

2.1. Data.

There are two data sources taken into consideration for this study. The first is data which allows checking how many Polish internet users visited Europa.eu website, and thus constituted its Polish audience. We refer to the panel data which was named after two companies that set out this endeavor in the early 2000s - see Megapanel PBI/Gemius (<https://audience.gemius.com/en/>), 2005-2013. Their data have been accepted as the internet market audience research referring to the population who connects to the internet while being present on the territory of Poland. According to the data obtained from panel monthly results, seen in a yearly perspective, it can be determined how intensive the usage of Europa.eu was in Poland in the analyzed period. Poland's internet traffic data is available almost since May 2004, the month when Poland joined the EU. However, the website "Europa.eu" is noted in the research as late as three years after Polish accession to the EU (see Table 1).

The second source of data is the survey conducted among Poles, which questioned a random sample of approximately 1000 respondents nationwide. Its function in our study is supplementary, aimed at enabling comparisons with the general approach of Poles regarding the European Union and its institutions. The internet users panel data is thus enriched by some data points filed as a result of the data collected by the Public Opinion Research Center from samples of Poles nationwide (Roguska, 2013).

2.2. Time frame of ten data points.

The period chosen for measurement is 2004-2013. There are several reasons for this. First, this is the period following Poland's and other Central European countries' triumphant EU accession in 2004, until the first official mentions in the United Kingdom about the EU referendum in 2013,

which later on turned into the Brexit. Brexit is certainly a postmodern phenomenon and results from new media activities. Its reception in Poland has been polarized since the very beginning, but the main reason for choosing it as the closing date for our analysis is that the debate on Brexit has been a landmark in the EU history, opening a new chapter.

In the ten data points, both the Euro-enthusiastic and the Euro-sceptical periods of EU enlargement are covered. Only such archival data are currently available for analyses and are intended to be published open access. Of course, the availability of internet traffic measurement in Poland continues after 2013, but it is used for current market-related decisions made by internal consulting teams and as such cannot yet be shared publicly. Despite the fact that it rather has a historical, than a present-day value, the unique 2004-2013 data gathered is still enough to inspire some thoughts on the European Union communication strategy in the 2020s.

2.3. Analyzed material: Europa.eu.

The website which we will analyze herein - “Europa.eu” (see: Figures 1a and 1b) - does not seem to be a part of the so called Web 2.0 and it may be somewhat close to one-way advertising in a bureaucratic, non-commercial way, rather than a multidirectional exchange of information and communication. It is, however, the top landing page of the EU, and as such it has a symbolic value.

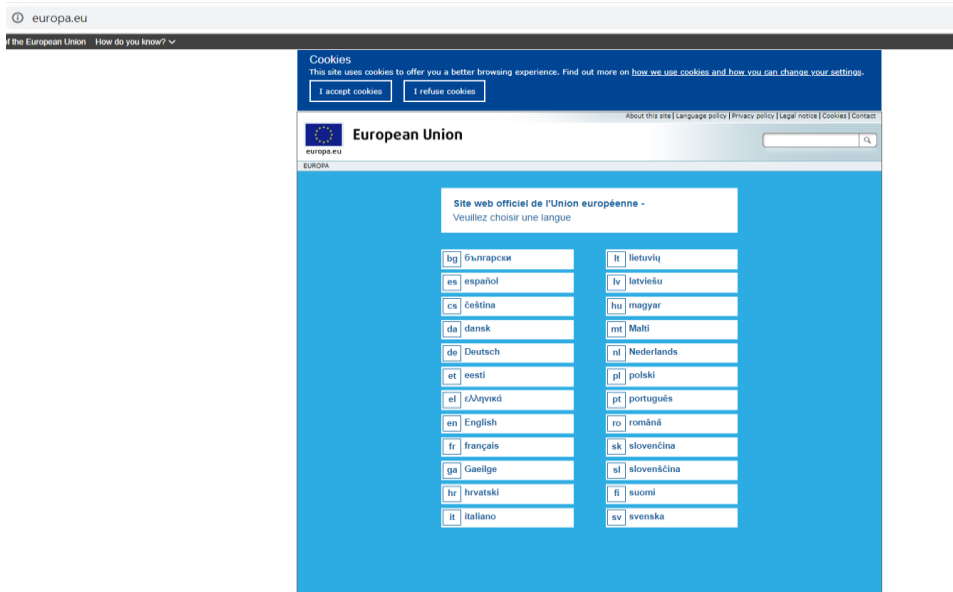


Figure 1a. European Union Europa.eu website as seen in June 2020 (computer version)
Source: Europa.eu, homepage

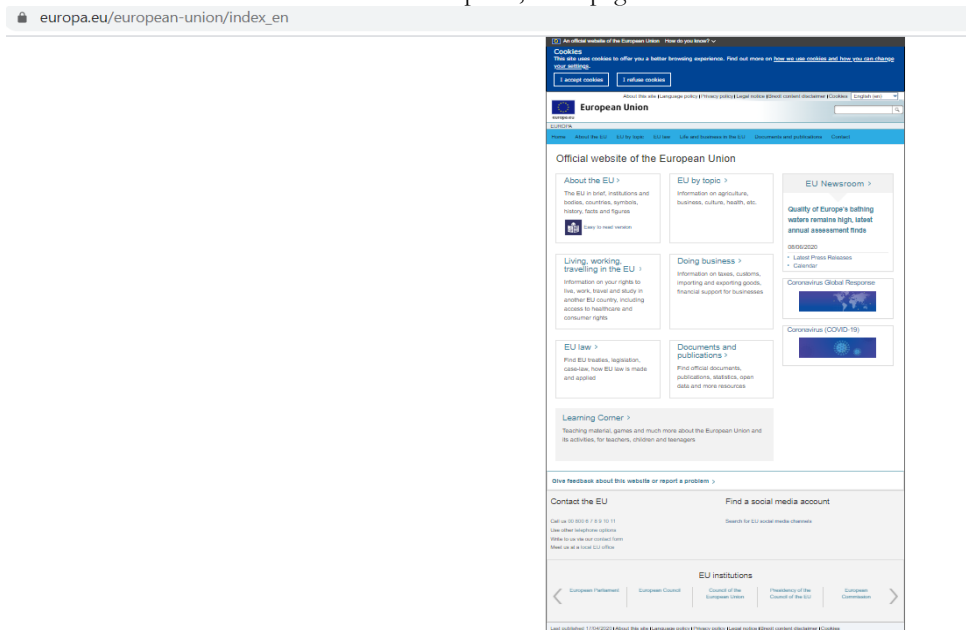


Figure 1b. European Union Europa.eu website as seen in June 2020 (computer version)
Source: Europa.eu, homepage

Consequently, official internet-based properties related to the European Union have both the domain suffix “.eu” and the word “Europa”, or usually a low case “europa”, in their names. For the European Parliament it is thus “europarl.europa.eu” and for the European Commission “ec.europa.eu”.

As Kaisa Koskinen (2013) notes, this website has a prominent function in the EU online presence:

"during the first decade of the 21st century, the European Union institutions have also been increasingly active in various participatory media that can be labelled as part of Web 2.0 . . . As a result, for many citizens of Europe the most direct route to the European institutions (assuming that they have the necessary digital literacy and the necessary hardware and connections) is via the Internet, either by navigating the Europa web portal or by landing on a particular site directly from search engine results." (Koskinen, 2013)

2.4. Analyzed audiences of Europa.eu.

In this analysis, the “new EU-ropeans,” meaning those who became citizens of the EU in 2004, are exemplified by Poles. Polish society and culture are situated in a country placed in a semi-peripheral location between the East and the West, participating in Europeanization, both by being Europeanized and by forwarding Europeanization - in the many meanings of this process - to future centuries (Bartlett, 1993). Aiming to establish how some of the “new EU-ropeans” - although not “new Europeans” - do regard “Europa.eu”, those who communicate European ideas need to begin by treating their citizens, both voters and consumers, as an audience, and especially (for the sake of diffusion of the European identity) as an EU audience who can be:

". . . redirected to social media due to their [ie. social media] comparative advantages as regards their great visibility, their notable level of penetration into current social groups and their potential of targeting specific audiences and becoming an integral part of these audiences' everyday life." (Karantzeni & Gouscos, 2013)

It is worth reminding here that, despite the widespread use of the term “audience”, currently it is not solely the “audio” activity that the recipients are subjected to, but mostly to textual and audiovisual activities, and in the presented case, mostly textual.

3. Results

The results are presented in Table 1. First, let us look at the size of population. Is a population of half a million “Europa.eu” Polish users a huge one? For an overall population of over thirty-million Poles aged 15-75, it is not. It is relatively low, when we compare its dynamics to the audience growth of all Polish governmental websites, which ranged from 1,60 million users in May 2005 to 4,82 million users in May 2012. The triple number of users of all governmental websites - including supranational ones - is unparalleled by the almost unchanged number of users who accessed “Europa.eu” in the same time period.

Table 1. “Europa.eu” performance as a relative performance of all governmental and supranational websites’ - performance measured by number of ‘real users’ in a yearly interval within Polish online population.

<i>Sources of data:</i>										
<i>(1) Megapanel PBI/Gemius (audience research market standard panel),</i>										
<i>(2) Public Opinion Research Center (national representative random samples of over 1,000 Poles). Rankings and comparisons are the author's own elaboration.</i>										
Source (1)	2004	2005	2006	2007	2008	2009	2010	2011	2012	2013
Year and month of measurement		V	V	V	V	V	V	V	V	V
Number of Europa.eu ‘real users’	n/a	n/a	n/a	531,927	408,010	673,322	1,043,615	826,503	708,591	573,691
Number of governmental and supranational websites’ ‘real users’	n/a	1,605,426	2,929,814	3,576,295	2,688,158	2,688,158	3,912,132	4,564,629	5,495,458	4,824,733
Europa.eu ‘real users’ as percentage of governmental and supranational websites’ ‘real users’	n/a	n/a	n/a	14,9%	15,2%	25,0%	26,7%	18,1%	12,9%	11,9%
Source (2)	2004	2005	2006	2007	2008	2009	2010	2011	2012	2013
Year and month of measurement		V	IV VIII X	I IV VII	IV VII XI	I III IV VI	IV	IV	I VII XII	II IV
Average measured percentage of support for European Union	n/a	n/a	83,6%	87,7%	84,3%	84,5%	86,0%	83,0%	79,6%	75,5%

<i>Year and month of measurement</i>	<i>2004</i>	<i>2005 IX</i>	<i>2006</i>	<i>2007</i>	<i>2008</i>	<i>2009 III</i>	<i>2010</i>	<i>2011</i>	<i>2012</i>	<i>2013 IV</i>
Social assessment of the European Parliament	n/a	57%	n/a	n/a	n/a	63%	n/a	n/a	n/a	48%
Social assessment of the European Commission	n/a	53%	n/a	n/a	n/a	58%	n/a	n/a	n/a	46%

In May 2007, there were 0,53 million internet users who visited “Europa.eu”. In 2008 and 2009 there were, respectively, 0,40 million and 0,67 million “Europa.eu” users. And, suddenly, in May 2010 there are one million of “Europa.eu” visitors. It is a peak in the interest of users which is not repeated next May. In May 2011, there were 0,82 million users who visited “Europa.eu” and 0,70 million in May 2012. The last period taken into account - May 2013 - shows 0,57 million internet users who visited “Europa.eu”. Thus, five hundred thousand Polish internet users seem to be quite constantly interested directly in what the European Union wants to communicate to them and reveal this in their online behavior.

To better understand the decrease of Europa.eu popularity – caused not only by growth of user-generated content sites such as Facebook and Wikipedia – one can see the number of "real users" as a percentage of governmental and supranational websites’ number of "real users." This indicator first grew to over 25%, but then decreased to 12,9% and less (between May 2009 and May 2013). The weak results of the website “Europa.eu” among Poles who went online may be seen as reflecting the weaknesses in communication of the European Union: its non-relevance for the pan-European challenge of solidarity.

As can be seen in the section of Table 1 containing data not related to new media, the EU crisis affected the way in which Polish people approach the EU. First, in the survey research of the Public Opinion Research Center, it is observed that since 2011 the attitude towards EU is less positive. It was more and more positive until 2010 (when 86% Poles supported the EU), but the trend reversed and the percentage of supporters decreased constantly, leading to 75,5% in 2013 (an average of two available measurements: from February and April). Second, the survey shows a decrease in the assessment of both the European Commission and the European Parliament. European institutions had become less appreciated, which was confirmed by the Web behavior of their stakeholders - those

participating in Polish online audiences, be it a private or a public sphere for those in question.

4. Discussion: Can public EU communication embrace pan-European culture?

An effective process of social communication is a prerequisite for an effective collective identity-building process. It is also a prerequisite for a postmodern identity-rebuilding, would one assume it as the rebuilding that Europeans were facing at that time. On a supranational level, in Europe, such an identity, either built or rebuilt, would need to be pan-European. The question is whether institutional attempts of EU communication do promote pan-Europeanism. It seems that they do not. “Europa.eu” performance among Poles since 2004 (the year of EU accession) until 2013 (the time when the EU-Leave idea was expressed by British acting prime minister) revealed a lack of EU mass communication effectiveness from the viewpoint of Central-East European society, being a distant echo of the crisis.

The problem of online communication, discussed here, is certainly located interdisciplinarily: at the crossroads of European studies, human-computer interaction studies and mass communication studies. It takes into account the context of emerging new media, ever-changing new media usage, multi-directional computer-mediated communication and the decreasing perceived value of traditional journalism. The unquestioned advances in postmodern communication intensiveness may also lead to what some theorists name disinformation order (Bennett & Livingston, 2018). Such activities have been the part of a campaign surrounding Brexit, symbolizing the EU crisis.

In such a context, defined as dynamic, the main research question is: how do nationally rooted elements of cultural heritage re-emerge within new media content and transit towards progress or regress in developing an European identity?

One of the prerequisites of such a pan-continental identity is for cultural communities to have their common cultural heritage. Both young and old European generations' approaches towards cultural heritage are interesting, given that the generational shift is the only means to promote the idea of pan-European continuity. One can imagine that nowadays these are especially new technologies that facilitate transmission and possible appropriation, enrichment, promotion – or opposite processes – of the cultural heritage. What, thus, should be done to increase the effectiveness of

pan-European communication? Incorporating the elements of pan-European heritage into public EU communication seems to be the answer.

Among the goals of postmodern European online presence should be the strengthening of the European identity, at least on a superficial level. Logically, the misuse of communication seems to be counter-effective for identity building. What content strategy should thus be applied by European communicators in order to achieve identity strengthening? One could look for strategies such as “euro-medievalism” (Hoenicke-Moore, 2002), but it is too superficial. Another strategy would be incorporating the “*acquis mythologique*” (Toczyski, 2018) into communication, in order to make communication involve deeper layers of thought, especially “mythical thought” (Cassirer, 1955). Such reflection, appealing to the online audience forming the postmodern public, may lead to Jungian ideas, such as the notion of an European psyche:

"The nations of Europe form a European family, which like every family has its own special spirit. However far apart the political goals may lie, they rest ultimately on the common European psyche, with whose aspects the practising psychologist should be familiar." (Jung, 1964).

As identity is not built solely on rational thought, such communication would need to be emotionally "colored", while encompassing European values. Interestingly, the United Kingdom "Leave" campaign followed by the Brexit seems to be more emotionally inductive and to provoke more of the mythical thinking than the EU pro-European communication activities. Cassirer's notion of myth has already seemed to be helpful in providing a psychological perspective on

". . . how feelings were both expressed and organised in the Brexit referendum, showing how multiple, overlapping organisations of feelings created a set of emergent rationalities." (Cromby, 2019)

Thus, should the EU communicators learn from Brexiteers? Will EU cultural and political myth re-emerge? And will it convincingly touch Central and Eastern European emotionality? From the EU-desired strong European identity viewpoint, EU communication efforts could and should be made much more effective than they are. One can always ask whether Europe is more public and external or more private and emotional. Is Europe a subject for thought or is it also the object of emotions that constitute identity? The

least expected would be the "social absence" of Europe. It is not impossible, given the expanding position of nation states in contemporary human emotions.

To achieve success in EU postmodern communication, a more symbolic than bureaucratic content should be employed. Such is the proposal inspired by the data presented in this paper. This kind of synergy between cultural policy and content strategy makes it relevant to return to a cultural Europeanization-and-Americanization hybrid – reaching beyond Americanization of Web tools. Online space delivers examples that Americanized content does not always have to be counter-pan-European. The bureaucratic reflexivity of EU communication, as reflected in Europa.eu, may be counter-pan-European, whereas a lot of American content – even the content from Hollywood – can be supportive for pan-European identity building.

Cultural content, including symbolic-mythical pieces of cultural content and bigger content conglomerates, may be usable even if it is remediated into online video content such as short films. Online space shows that content should be spreadable and we know that some media environments enable spreadability more than others. Content management and content editing towards pan-European identity building is not only about information or persuasion focused on political institutions and current policy. It may and it should deliver content that illustrates the common roots of EU countries and other European commonalities. Even some parts of current film series can be suggestive for pan-European imagination, such as the motion pictures which support the emotionally moving medievalism of Europeans (Gerner, 1999).

To sum up: it is this renewed content strategy which current EU online presence needs. The data obtained from sources such as audience research may and should be taken into account in defining, implementing and evaluating new European communication in order for conditions to change and especially for achieving the unprecedented strong potential of the transnational and supranational goals of European identity-building, that have been confirmed by the scholars of postmodernity.

5. Conclusions

Studies focused on European Union communication show a deficit in the institutional communication skills of EU agencies. For example, the research based on interviewing Brussels-based correspondents and EU officials reveals that:

". . . specific communicative patterns are aroused from the various institutions, the EU inter-institutional cooperation is negatively evaluated, and non-official information channels are a key asset for communicating in Brussels." (Martins et al., 2012)

My research, which is based on a secondary data analysis, is positioned close to Hans-Jörg Trenz's (2009) attempts of theorizing digital media and the representative public sphere. The author discusses the "Habermasian tradition" and postulates in his statements the shift from top-down communication - the "principle of representativity" - to bottom-up communication, embedded in the "principle of discursivity", namely: "the replacement of the courts by the institutions of the bourgeois public sphere" (Trenz, 2009). The stage of the public sphere's "re-feudalisation" focuses on the image, which replaces arguments, and on advertising, which replaces the discourse. The conclusion arising from the data is maybe even less optimistic than Trenz's vision of the internet's limited potentiality in developing a pan-European or a global media space. His work is dated in 2009, whereas the Polish data are from a later period: that of the forthcoming EU crisis. The data suggests a certain disintegration of the EU communication, rather than following Trenz's ideas, which would be good to adjust with the data presented in this article.

The European public seems familiar and positive towards the tools of American origin. These tools are specific in reinforcing certain communication styles, which define the online space of the Europeans in the way it had previously been established among Americans. One should not expect transatlantic communication (especially its content) to flourish just because of transatlantic physical and logical layers' transfer. It can be, however, said that online tools are Americanized, but not necessarily that they are Europeanized. In the postmodern era, the Americanization of the media can still lead to the Europeanization of identity.

The Web 2.0 entities based on user-generated content (such as Wikipedia or Facebook) are the structures one associates with Silicon Valley, rather than with the Old Continent. Due to such user-based new media popularity, Europe's and EU's presence in this environment should be part of a communication strategy. However, the European online space may not remain unreflected in Europa.eu Web domain – the fundamental EU fixed website. For the whole entity - "Europa.eu" - the question remains whether it is a popular source of information, a popular contribution for reflexivity and a popular source of entertainment. Or, maybe, given the contemporary

transformations of the media, the source of infotainment and intellectual entertainment?

As Kennedy and Sommerfeldt (2015) remind us:

"Postmodernists have argued that Internet media actually increases resource gaps, creating new classes of consumers and producers of technology around the globe - the foundation of the digital divide." (Kennedy and Sommerfeldt, 2015).

Leaving Europa.eu as it is, we can paradoxically exclude whole groups of EU citizens from the pan-European communication. However, they deserve to have access to high-quality communication. It is one of the European citizens' rights.

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