

NATIONAL UNIVERSITY OF POLITICAL STUDIES AND PUBLIC  
ADMINISTRATION

BUCHAREST

DOCTORAL SCHOOL

DOCTORAL DOMAIN – COMMUNICATION SCIENCES

# The role of new media for the communication of European legislation

**-SUMMARY-**

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September, 2017

The focal point of my research, objectified in hereby thesis, concerned the relationship between new media and communication of public interest information regarding European legislation at an EU-member state level, generally, focusing on Romania, in particular.

Citizen involvement in the online space generates online communities seen as social groups which consist of internet users, thus becoming an essential part of contemporary culture.

Online communication has a great potential for debating subjects that are not usually addressed offline, due to several reasons: lack of time, knowledge, or even temporary lack of interest, etc. New media, *ipso facto* creates a proper environment for promoting Europeanization and legislative projects, or EU directives implementation, through citizens that are part of the European Community. Without augmented civic participation, with the help of competent institutions, I believe that massive support for the EU cannot be achieved.

Hereby thesis offers a new perspective over online society, exploring a socio-juridical dimension that does not solely focus on online communication within the EU, but also on the changes that human behaviour has suffered due to civic online participation, both through official EU websites and forums, but also through social networks like Facebook. The research has accounted essential factor in connecting with EU citizens and will represent a good basis for the implementation of communication strategies, capable of supporting the European legislative system and the European identity.

New media are the democratic response to the celerity required for the formation of debate groups, capable of formulating several ideas in order to change the course of political decisions at European level. New media presents the opportunity to convey information in a double sense: from the European Union to its citizens and from citizens to political actors capable of influencing European political acts, or directly, by transmitting messages from citizens to the Union through the official websites of EU institutions.

These methods of communication directly lead to the enhancement of democracy and help achieve positive results in the perception of the European public. Citizens select the information according to their own perspectives, but do not make a definitive selection and do not ignore other information, without good reason for such a course of action - they can change their opinions or initial choices if solid arguments are brought for another position. New media are a support for a broader spectrum of opinions. Everyone has, through the Internet, the freedom and the opportunity to express personal opinions, to contribute to the

public space through innovative ideas or responses, achieving a wider and more easily accessible public sphere.

Cybernetic space can be meritocratic since people who do not have the required adaptability for direct communication now have the opportunity to show their skills in communication, to create and develop a dialogue at European level. Trust can be achieved easier through new communication technologies thanks to the diversity of information sources that are no longer filtered by authorized agents, tangling a dynamic public sphere with opposed or similar poles, but with obvious democratic potential through analysis, dissemination and completing information through their own contributions.

Multilateral communication allows the simultaneous reception, modification and redistribution of political, legislative, economic concepts, through which a new political-legal and multicultural system is promoted. The key argument for using new media to highlight European identity is to mobilize media consumers in the communication process by publishing comments, qualifying actions, providing reviews, and mentioning topics for subsequent public debates or for specific online circles.

Basing the argument on the aforementioned premises and corroborating them with the cursory proliferation of online users and the considerable role of new media globally, I believe that the information gap on European legislation may be dimmed by identifying and exploiting publicly available online media and channels in an extensive way. Whether they will be targeted in the form of blogs or forums, in the form of virtual communities or wiki pages, whether they will be the subject of interest groups in online social networks, integration into online groups of interest for debating European legislative issues is contiguous to the development of European identity.

As far as the communication of European legislation is regarded (with particular reference to European directives and to European regulations), the importance of the subject is justified by the following objectives: 1) knowledge of European norms; 2) analyzing the norms from the users' perspective (at the societal level) and 3) raising awareness of European identity. Promoting European law through the virtual world also depends on certain factors that include the objectives of European institutions and national institutions, the preferences of media users and, last but not least, the financial, cultural, and technological abilities to access the online environment.

The main contribution of hereby thesis consists of the arguments resulting from the empirical research on the role and place of new media (through online platforms, social media, official websites of the European Union, private websites specialized in informing the

European Union), insisting on the need for enhanced bidirectional communication that not only conveys to citizens the actual legal forms or potential regulations, directives and projects, but which enables the European citizen to effectively contribute to democratic supranational governance under the collective will.

The thesis will demonstrate that such communication is possible by augmenting the force of factors such as social security, critical thinking, openness towards negotiation and democratic control. Likewise, with the help of the applied research method, through the used techniques, it attempts to diagnose current intercommunication, from the perspective of the experts in the field of European communication, on two levels: institutional communication and communication of European law. The uniqueness of this project is also highlighting the importance of horizontal communication of community policies, since although the basic principle of the European community is democracy through public participation, the latter can only be achieved through European discussion forums, linking European citizens, regardless of their state of origin.

Following the study of the relevant scientific literature, I propose a conceptual model that focuses on multilateral communication (community institutions, national public institutions, European individuals and legal entities) within the European Union. The identification of missing parts of the European communication structure in the sense of contributing to changing or strengthening the legislative plan can be achieved through virtual pragmatism, cultivating of responsibility, transparency, commitment and experimentation. Virtual pragmatism is determined by the intensity of using new communication technologies by the individual.

European Union communication in the online environment involves two systems: the formal system and the informal system. Through these, the developed connections have consisted of proposals and legislative appeals and / or augmentation of deliberations, but which, in essence, in various plans, lead to the formation of online communities. By transferring and sharing knowledge and coordinating activities, they give meaning to the notion of European identity, catalysing the acceptance and understanding of the different, edifying features of a supranational entity: distinctiveness and similarity. By combining the Member State-specific principles with the level of similarities existing between Member States, a common logic is formed, which is capable of influencing political decision-makers indirectly, through free and mindful opinions expressed in the online space.

The communication in the European Union, more or less, provides citizens through the new media system the opportunity to identify themselves with other Europeans, cultivating

openness to cultural diversity, conceptions and opinions that may even be sometimes conflicting. These are the subject of public or partial public debates before political decisions, and are later transformed into legislative components. The dimension of virtualization of European legislative themes is the component that determines the degree of actual access of EU-specific information, as well as an indicator concerning the exposure of online users to topics of a legislative nature, causing them to actively or passively participate in the process of Europeanization, implementation of European norms in the collective mentality.

Thus, the two channels of communication, both formal and informal, enhance transparency and attachment within the European Union, and the legal threshold can be overcome by the tripartite European citizen: contractor-acquirer, contractor-creator and contractor-catalyst. The tripartite European citizen is the individual willing to assume the role he considers appropriate according to personal interests, community's interests and to the European society as a distinct entity. Multilateral communication is a precursor to raising awareness of European identity inasmuch as a sense of belonging to a European community can be most easily strengthened by accessing information of public interest and by assigning a collective character to this information, targeting Europeans as subjects for the application of European rules and not just as tax contributors. This conceptual model, based on the analysed scientific literature, will be confirmed by the empirical research, and its validity is subsequently established.

The scientific concern for this issue takes in account a general lack of knowledge of the *acquis communautaire* among European citizens, which leads to the difficulty and even the impossibility of defending their own rights and freedoms (European Commission, 2013).

In line with the aforementioned ideas, the paper is structured in 6 chapters. The first 4 chapters address the subject of new media and the communication of European legislation from a theoretical perspective, and the last two chapters present the research carried out in order to confirm or refute the outlined conceptual model with the support of the scientific literature studied. The empirical investigation of the "Multilateral Communication Model" analysed the existing link between steps taken at a multi-level communication (European institutions - citizens, European citizens - experts, European citizens - non-experts) and the assumption of European identity (examining the roles of the tripartite European citizen); this being a precursor of the awareness of Europeanization in Romanian society.

The first chapter of the paper - A New Beginning for the Media - is conceived as a preamble for the presentation of new media as feasible tools for creating European online

communities and public centres for debating European policies and rules that bear a societal impact.

Chapter II - New Media - Models and Concepts Applicable to Multidirectional Communication Research - presents the theories and concepts applicable to new media that have great importance in communicating European law. The focus is placed on the deliberative democracy theory, highlighting the importance of building a new model, capable of being communicated to an extended area of participants in the new media, with the support of clearly recognized concepts for the implementation of deliberative processes such as interactivity, collaborative learning, social capital, allowing the exchange of knowledge between users and the dissemination in the European public sphere of major projects or ideas for the European legislative system.

The third chapter - New media - means to communicate information concerning the European Union - is made up of 4 subchapters and focuses on the communication methods used by the European Union to establish direct contacts with European citizens, on the development of the European social relations through the online environment, impacting on the understanding of European identity, whilst revealing the dimension of knowledge of European Norms in social media dimensions. Through this chapter, I have developed the area of participatory transparency as a first step in the implementation of the European norms in the national legislation and in the undertaking of efficient communication between the institutions and the Europeans, with the extension of the legislative field as a defining domain of the contractual citizen-multicultural Union relationship.

Chapter IV – New media’s functions in the communication of European legislation - sets out the main functions corresponding to the communication of European law at European society level, whilst presenting the functions: information, community and action, as well as the Multilateral Communication Model.

Chapter V - The perceptions of European communication specialists on online interactions on legislative issues - qualitative research - highlights the sociological inquiry based on interviews. It is composed of 3 subchapters explaining the research methodology, particularly the research design and research questions. The aim of conducting the sociological survey through the interview technique was to understand the projection that communication experts have about the communication of European norms through new media and the capacity of this multidirectional communication to increase European debates and to associate the European citizen with the European legislative structure.

The last chapter - Efficiency of online communication on European legal issues in the opinion of students with specialization in legal sciences - quantitative research - has as object the empirical operationalization of the presented concepts, being based on the sociological questionnaire survey. The sociological survey is designed to outline the effectiveness of existing channels of communication by referring to accessing European rules, engaging in discussion groups and further disseminating amongst European citizens, including civic participation online. The target group to whom the questionnaire was applied consisted of students and master students from certain Romanian Faculties of Law. This chapter is also divided into 2 subchapters (methodology, data analysis and interpretation of results), while pre-testing the questionnaire in order to improve its structure and composition with the proposed changes in the pilot test.

The paper includes the conclusions related to the theoretical and the applied part, derived from the crystallization of the specifics of online communication concerning European legislation and the impact that the online civic participation produces on the Europeanization of the Romanian society from the perspective of the communication experts and students, potential magistrates, who will apply European law, and will or will not emphasize European identity in their own decisions and actions.

Research suggests that citizens have greater confidence in online experts, rather than in information campaigns led by contemporary political representatives. Deliberative processes are underway, being in an early online form, without being able to discuss their current development. However, the results suggest that deliberative processes have a direct impact - even if limited - on the engagement of citizens in the institutionalized or conventional political-legislative system through online communication channels. Respondents' online experience on European information has clear potential for justifying the involvement of Europeans in expressing opinions on European policies and rules and on collecting online information capable of forming a civic basis for equal participation in European deliberative democracy.

New media launch the opportunity to revive European democracy and to create a new electorate, one that is active and willing to participate in legislative discussions, not only during the European Parliamentary elections, but also during the implementation of the European norms, through citizen intervention. The research results show that online interaction goes beyond state borders and that the use of new media can be a condition for civic participation, as online civic participation highlights the level of information on European legislation. From the perspective of respondents with specialization in legal science,

the online environment is an easy way to be informed about European norms, to comment on them through the social media or to get feedback from both the European institutions through representatives and from other online users involved in the same fields, with a certain degree of interest, marked by distinct intensities.

Deliberative online experiences can contribute to the effectiveness of deliberations and identification with other Europeans, by providing new communication spaces for civic and political participation, with community-based commitment and legislative information. Encouraging online debates on European legislative issues or just by affiliation with interest groups for European norms is yet to be sufficiently developed in Romanian space, but the majority of experts believe that it can lead to influencing more citizens in taking a proactive attitude towards the rules' elaboration and even to the application of European law in the Member State, similar to an online information flow. The frequency of the information flow also determines the speed of access to the European legislative space and of the real adherence to the European norms in order to contribute to the process of Europeanization, through exhibiting beliefs, common principles and not an exclusive will of a single person or of a single state.

The context of integration into a European community (*eg.* study, practice, etc.) is relevant to online access to circles where students' access would have been more difficult to achieve only through direct educational programs. The results of the research confirm the trust that online users have in European legislation, European regulations or directives presented online by the European institutions, as well as to the European Union's intentions of open communication, which have great success in assuring that users accept the existing rules and criticize them in semi-open groups.

Likewise, the fact that the interviewed specialists are concerned about the freedom of online communication and the access of citizens to the online communication environment cannot be ignored, from a triple perspective: lack of user identification, communication errors, and domination of not declared experts' discussions, aspects that do not reveal a true public sphere.

As some specialists from the interviewed group argued, exposure new media would raise citizens' interest concerning topics that were initially not in their main area of interest. The results of my research show that with the use of new media, citizens have greater opportunities to become active from the point of view of communicating their views on European legislation or European policies. Furthermore, they are being easier and in a quicker fashion informed, in contrast to appealing to an institution with capacity of communicating

EU information directly to citizens, but not undermining this ultimate communication. Although it has been confirmed that online civic participation determines the level of information of online users, my research did not record any prominent public debates on European legislative issues.

Although the participants have a predominantly positive image of new media, as far as the communication of the European norms, they claim that some citizens do not have access to these communicative forms, the traditional media being the main source of information. This means that they will not have the possibility to compare some European subjects or even of local interest, rather than through physical close proximity and not virtual. For these reasons, some participants specify that new media can achieve social inclusion just partially.

The consequence of online interactivity accentuates citizens' attachment to the European Union and it is significant in attracting citizens' interest in EU-specific topics. Information dissemination is a distinct procedure for offline broadcasting opportunities available to any European who owns a communication tool connected to the Internet. Among Romanian students with specialization in legal sciences, the evaluation and analysis of a European norm is easily achievable in the online space through the official websites and through the circles of social media friends - when they are part of the same study community.

The uniqueness of the work consists in the distinct approach of the European citizen (subjects of the law) relationship with European Union (which has normative power). Thus, it is essential to analyze the importance that citizens attribute to European norms through online interaction with organized institutional structures (*eg.* through official pages of the European Commission and the European Parliament) and online social networks governed by the principle of free communication. The personal interest in the research was to diagnose online communication, examining whether it takes the proportion of models of interaction on European legislative issues (with the potential of creating online debate and legislative creation communities), or whether it is only generating legislative information.

The conceptual model compiled and presented in the paper is partially validated through research conducted through the interview techniques and the questionnaire. If European identity and Europeanization are directly linked to the use of new media and accessing legislative information from an online user perspective, the intensity of online multilateral communication and the degree of access to the online environment becomes crucial for the need to join communities of interest, styles, and concepts and transform them into an entity favourable to European development.