



EuroPCom session report

Inclusive communication: content for everybody

Friday, 8 November, 11h15 – 12h45

Speakers: **André Felix**, External communications officer, EU Disability Forum, Belgium; **Karim Debbah**, Media Manager, Expert Paid Media, Union Belge des Annonceurs; **Celine Fabrequette**, Head project and communications manager at the African Diaspora Youth Forum in Europe (ADYFE); **Sarah Halls**, Segment producer, Bloomberg TV, United Kingdom

Moderation: **Anna Troëng** (DG COMM, European Parliament)

People are certainly more aware of gender and minority concerns in communication than they were a decade ago. Increased efforts and formal agreements are being made to improve the current situation. Let us discuss what we can do to make our overall public communication more inclusive. What questions should we ask ourselves for our communication to be relevant to different parts of society? In this session, we will examine how to apply an inclusive, intersectoral approach to communication and how to go about applying those insights in practice. Share your views and experiences!

Anna Troëng gave an introduction of the topic in relation to the public and private sectors. She started by mentioning the role that the European institutions are playing. She stated that inclusive communication is a matter of democratic representation, anti-discrimination, legitimacy and moral obligation and that we need to challenge stereotypes. For example, all-male panels are no longer accepted at the EuroPCom event. Initiatives such as the EU Panel Watch and the Brussels Binder have helped to make event and conference organisers aware of the risks of having an all-male public event. For the private sector, however, it is not only about sales and figures and access to diverse consumers, it is also about brand reputation. **Ms Troëng** then proceeded to introduce the panellists, and they shared their insights to launch the debate with the audience.

Sarah Halls spoke about how to improve diversity and inclusion in imagery and audio-visual media. As a segment producer, her role deals with booking guests for shows, keeping up-to-date with the daily news, interviewing people, etc. When looking for a guest, both looking for someone who has the expertise and someone who is the best editorial fit for a show are important. Her role therefore has a lot to do with increasing diversity and inclusion, because it is important who reports, who edits and who tells the story. The source from which you obtained the story must also be considered.

Ms Halls shared how, in 2017, they realised that only 10% of Bloomberg's external sources were female. They then took tangible steps to improve gender diversity and inclusion across all of their platforms. The "New voices initiative" provided four hours of one-to-one tuition to get women TV-ready. By the end of 2019, globally, they will have trained about 150 women, who have already appeared on TV over 193 times. This has been rolled out in eight cities (including New York, London, Hong Kong, Dubai and Mumbai). The percentage of women guests brought in as expert commentators on Bloomberg TV has climbed to over 21%. For them, having that diverse group of sources, whether in terms of gender, sexual orientation, political association, ethnicity or any other underrepresented voice, is imperative to ensure fairness and balance in their coverage.

Karim Debbah explained how the advertising industry is starting to pay attention to inclusive communication. He started his speech by stating some facts about Belgium: 20% of the Belgian population have origins from outside of Belgium, the age pyramid is slightly reversing, the LGBTQI+ community is growing and the share of highly skilled women is exceeding men. Nevertheless, the majority of advertising shows white, 25-40 year-old heterosexual males. What can we do to make a change in terms of communication?

The Union Belge des Annonceurs (UBA) represents advertisers' interests. UBA is working at several levels on international initiatives, self-regulation, regulation and local initiatives. They celebrate an annual event dedicated to inclusion, where the CEOs of the major advertising companies meet to discuss inclusivity and how we can improve it in the future. This is done for several reasons: they believe that advertising has a social role to play, that values like multiculturalism or gender equality are now a daily fact and that being inclusive also means a boost for companies. There is still a lot more to do, such as educating advertisers, monitoring the situation and imposing penalties if necessary. On a positive note, there are several good examples such as Dove showing women of different body shapes.

André Felix talked about inclusive communication from the perspective of people with disabilities. He began by commenting on why people with disabilities should have access to the same communication as everyone. First of all, this is the right thing to do. The EU Disability Forum represents more than 100 million people in Europe, which means over 15% of the population. Secondly, the EU Member States have already ratified the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, which means binding obligations to make communication accessible to and inclusive of people with disabilities. Finally, for businesses, money is the main reason (a study in the UK called the Purple Pound showed that businesses lose GBP 24 billion per year because they are not accessible to customers with disabilities and GBP 11.75 billion per year just because people do not have access to their websites). He talked about three key points for achieving inclusive communication:

- **Accessibility:** the documents "How to make your elections campaigns accessible" and an "EDF guide for accessible meetings for all", where you can read about the requirements for making communication accessible, are available on their webpage. Subtitles and transcriptions, for example, are not only very useful for people with disabilities but for everyone.
- **Representation:** not only are people with disabilities rarely represented, depictions of them are also mostly based on stereotypes. They often appear to tell their "overcoming the disability" story just to make people without disabilities feel better or inspired (see Stella Young's TED Talk).
- **Participation:** nowadays, people with disabilities do not receive enough money from the government, they are not included in the labour market and they are not consulted for election campaigns. They

should be able to participate not because they have a disability, but simply because they are part of society.

Lastly, a final recommendation from the EU Disability Forum is to follow their motto: "Nothing about us without us!"

Celine Fabrequette told us about the #DiasporaVote initiative, the goal of which was to encourage the African youth diaspora to vote in the European elections. For them, #DiasporaVote was the conclusion of a very long and frustrating process of trying to explain to the Diaspora that they are part of the EU and to explain to the EU that these citizens do not look the same, that they are diverse so the institutions should make an effort to talk to them. After eight months of campaigning, one training course for ten young ambassadors, seven events and thirteen videos – of two minutes each, explaining what the EU is for those featured – 16 Europeans MEPs with African backgrounds and thirty people of colour (double the previous amount) were elected. Participation by citizens was at its highest level with over 50% of EU citizens going to the poll. Throughout the campaign, the main challenges were getting funding and media visibility, and facing hate speech on social media.

In order to achieve inclusive communication, we should all ask ourselves some questions. The EU institutions should ask questions such as: "When was the last time I spoke with locals/minorities?", "How can we maintain intersectionality when we do not have diversity among our staff?", "Are the words that I am using understandable for the everyday citizen?"

Media experts should ask themselves: "Am I being impartial?", "Are we making sure that the loudest voices are not the only ones being heard?" and "Am I spreading hate by repeating and diffusing hate messages?" Lastly, we all should ask ourselves: Am I the right person to communicate that message?

Finally, Ms Fabrequette shared her personal thoughts on inclusive communication. For her, one is being inclusive when communicating and remembering that EU citizens are diverse. Inclusive communication has to take into account economic and social backgrounds. Inclusive communication is also about images, pictures and the people that you use to convey various messages.

In the Q&A section with the audience, comments on how quotas are needed, as they are reasonable, were made. The fact that inclusivity does not come naturally and that some people in society struggle even to enter in the labour market, makes them necessary. We should help people to reach their potential within the society. Moreover, the speakers also emphasized that the real issue is not being different, but creating an issue from a difference. Lastly, Mr Felix expressed the need to embed the topic of inclusivity in the curriculum at universities.

Several key conclusions were made by the moderator: participation is key, speak to the people concerned, share good practices with those around you, find your allies, do your networking, accessibility is useful for everyone, there are cheap and handy solutions that can improve situations, ask the people with disabilities what they need to be able to take part, address the problems that exist through participation and testing campaigns with focus groups, and last but not least, the importance of representation, the idea that "what you can see, you can be".