



EuroPCom session report

Getting information across with emotion and humour

Thursday, 7 November, 16h30 – 18h00

Speakers: **Pablo Perez Armenteros**, Head of the Social Media Sector, DG COMM, European Commission; **Matteo Maggiore**, Director of Communication, European Investment Bank; **Chief Brexit Memer**, DG MEME; **Lore Oxford**, Global Head of Culture & Insights, We Are Social, London, United Kingdom

Moderator: **Anthony Lockett**, Head of the Communications Unit, European Research Council Executive Agency

Social media is an open window to share information and hold dialogue with millions of people. But how can communication on social media be more attractive and engaging? One key element is personalisation and finding a way to balance facts and practical information with emotion and humour. Users want to be treated as individuals and they interact much more with content if it is relatable. Social media experts will share specific examples of how emotion and humour can improve social media use in public communication.

The moderator of the session, **Anthony Lockett**, explained the science behind humour and laughter. He stressed their importance for our physical and mental wellbeing, but also for the development of stronger social relations.

He then gave the floor to **Pablo Perez Armenteros**, who defined the term humour broadly as a mood or state of mind, making it deeply connected to the context in which it is created. It is always necessary to find the right balance and the right moment to use humour as everyone has different kinds of humour and ways of perceiving it.

As the European institutions are perceived as formal and old-fashioned, they can benefit from the surprise effect and deliver messages more effectively when applying humour to their communication strategy. However, as the EU has a duty to relay information to its citizens, the communication online is serious. The opportunity for humour can be taken, but always with caution and only when appropriate. He suggested that a better approach would be to focus on emotion rather than humour, giving the example of the success of the #EUandME campaign in promoting shared European values.

Matteo Maggiore began by showing the *Tell me about the future* video produced by the European Investment Bank in 2018 as an example of communication with emotion. The video reached 15 million

views and brought about a major cultural change inside the organisation, with a move towards more emotional and humorous communication.

As **Mr Maggiore** explained, the three elements of communication are logos, ethos and pathos or, respectively, message, credibility and impact. Institutions are not good at pathos as it requires being audience-centric. This takes more effort and can be riskier because it enhances impact. However, he pointed out that ethos and logos without pathos do not work. The message will not be noticed if the sender does not engage with people emotionally. This is almost worse than getting it wrong as it shows a lack of relevance.

The next speaker presented the **DG MEME** project, born in 2018 from the desire to narrate the values and stories, but also the contradictions of the EU institutions in a different way. The success of the page lies mainly in the innovative communication style and the use of memes. The communicative advantages of using memes are the ability to be consumed quickly because they are easily recognisable, their relatability and their viral potential. "To be successful a meme needs perfect audience knowledge in order to make relatable cultural references with the right comedic timing, patience, interactivity and a good dose of cheekiness and irreverence."

The **Chief Brexit Memer** went on to explain that users like to share content that they enjoy. Memes have become so powerful because they represent an effective way to spread information because the message is able to travel further and faster. The key is "infotaining" – informing plus entertaining. When the content is good, people read it and get informed, but what is needed are funny and catchy titles.

Lore Oxford focused on the cultural context and highlighted the reasons why we need more communication through humour. "The world is a very anxious place right now; there are some polarising characters in power and the world is in the midst of a mental health crisis. The internet has been held accountable for it and social media has been regarded as the number one enemy. Humour can be used for better communication and to make the world a better place."

As she explained, psychological studies show that humour and empathy are connected because being funny requires human connections and people understanding each other to be effective. Observational humour is perfect for showing solidarity. It uses humorous messages to convey to the audience that they understand their struggles while creating a level of complicity. Moreover, in social media, authenticity is the key word. Self-deprecating humour is able to turn authenticity into likability by demonstrating self-awareness. This is particularly interesting for generally non-relatable people like celebrities, corporations or politicians.

The debate that followed remained focused on the more practical issues connected to the process of merging the seriousness of topics surrounding the institution with the use of humorous messages while maintaining professional standards and a coherent social media presence.