Manufacturing EU Consensus: The Reasons behind EU Promotional Campaigns

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Abstract:

This article provides a new interpretation of EU information and communication actions developed in the last 5 years from a public relations standpoint. This study responds to five main questions concerning EU promotional campaigns towards its different publics. Specifically it seeks to understand the reasons behind such campaigns, whether they have produced certain changes in EU image formation and increased trust in its institutions and whether they have increased Europeans' commitment and involvement in EU affairs. Firstly I will review the main concepts of image, collective identification, trust, commitment and involvement for public organizations. Then, I will present the data concerning Europeans' perception of the image of the EU, trust in European institutions, collective identification and overall support for membership. This date together with the theoretical framework will engage these five central concerns. I will then conclude with some comments and discussion about EU information and communication actions.

Introduction

In the last five years the European Union has increased its authority over diverse issues and its visibility and power among citizens. At the same time the number of reports in political sciences and social sciences dealing with the EU has flourished as well. The European Union has financed scientific research in order to find answers to these questions. On top of this, a variety of non profit organizations have engaged in similar studies in order to provide unbiased results. Many of these institutions have analyzed the EU either from socio-political backgrounds or from economical perspectives and still others, from mass communication standpoints. Many communication scholars (Anderson 2004; de Vreese 2003; Meyer 1999; Featherstone 1994) have highlighted the incapacity of the EU to communicate with its different publics and the somehow propagandistic connotation of the EU's communicational activities (Mullen and Burkitt 2004; Prokopijevic 2004; Ball et al. 2003; Sima 2001). However few of the previous studies and debates dealt with this problem from a public relations point of view (Valentini 2005b, 2005a).

On the other hand public relations scholars have given little attention to this phenomenon and very little research has been undertaken. The intent of this paper is to provide some explanations/considerations concerning the propagandistic critiques from a public relations standpoint, and to explore the reasons behind EU promotional campaigns in the light of previous studies that focused on concepts of image and collective identification and trust, and involvement and commitment to public organizations.

In this study EU promotional campaigns are understood to be all those activities developed at European and national levels by EU offices and national representations which aim at informing and promoting the EU cause among citizens and other important public – including non-governmental organizations (NGOs), civil societies and business organizations. These activities include web or hardcopy publications, meetings, forums and debates in universities, institutes of culture and other organizations, and EU commercials on major broadcasting networks.

All these activities are part of the EU promotional campaigns. Furthermore, theories of public organizations are considered the most appropriate to explain EU promotional campaigns, since European institutions have many characteristics of public organizations and hence they are affected by the same constituents. In these terms, European institutions behave as other public organizations although the context of influence and authority is much larger (25 member states at the moment) and is a multi-cultural and multi-linguistic environment. As a combination of different public institutions, EU has tried to reinforce its authority within the member states through different marketing communication strategies (Tumber 1995).

Marketing communication strategies have been considered the solution to the EU's problems of legitimation. Legitimating the EU means creating a stronger consensus and support. It means involving more and more citizens into the EU decision-making processes. It means being able to properly communicate with the EU's various publics by creating a stronger image and collective identification. When an institution needs to change its image, much more promotional work is required and sometimes propagandistic/educational actions are called upon. This is the case of the European Union and its promotional campaigns. The general idea of this study is to propose a different interpretation of EU behavior in relation to its information and communication actions. This study argues that EU promotional campaigns aim at creating consensus by attempting to intensify positive EU images and trust in its two major institutions, namely the European Parliament and the European Commission, and by enhancing citizens' identification with the EU and its institutions. Thus, the main research questions are:

- Have citizens' opinions changed during the period 2002- 2005 in regard of EU image and in what terms?
- Do Europeans trust the European Parliament and the European Commission more, or less, today than four years ago?
- How do citizens of Europe identify themselves? Do they feel more "Europeans"?
- Are Europeans more committed and involved to EU affairs today than four years ago?
- What can we infer from this data in relation to the EU promotional campaigns of the last four years?

In order to answer to these questions, we should look at the constituents of public organizations and their implications in the context of the European Union and its institutions. In the first part of this study I will reframe the main ideas of image and collective identification, trust, involvement and commitment to public organizations which are fundamental aspects of legitimacy, citizens' participation and support and thus necessary elements for the well-being of the European institutions. Then, data about Europeans' perception of the EU's image, Europeans' trust in European institutions, and their collective identification and support for membership will be presented to explain the need for European institutions to implement strategies aiming at managing EU consensus. This data together with previous studies in public relations will provide answers to the five main questions. Finally I will present some comments and points of discussions in relations to EU information and communication actions.

European Institutions as a Type of Public Organization

The European institutions represent a clear example of public organizations since they have many characteristics of public organizations and they are affected by the same constituents, such as bureaucracy versus efficiency, cost saving versus social model expenditures, high versus low relationships management of different publics, transparency and accountability of information versus security and high versus low public involvement. The European institutions are blamed for being extremely bureaucratic and complex and with little visibility among their different publics. Some scholars (Anderson 2004; de Vreese 2003; Meyer 1999; Featherstone 1994) claimed that EU invisibility and relationships' problems are partly caused by its information and communication actions, which have not been tailored to the different audiences. From an organizational and public relations' point of view, these problems are a consequence of EU lack of proper internal and external communication planning (Valentini 2005b). They have direct influence on the image of the EU also.

A good level of support to EU policies and citizens' participation is the result of trustworthy behavior, and trust in this sense is the "economically rational decision to do exactly what you have contracted to do or promised to do because otherwise you would suffer an eventual loss in reputation and hence, in contracting opportunities" (Hosmer, 1995, p. 386). Some of the EU's opportunities can be considered for example the approval of the European Constitution, more integration for EU programs about enlargement, security and defense, international diplomacy, etc. All of them are deeply determined by Europeans' support. Supporting an institution means trusting it, being involved in its decision-making. Supporting an institution means creating strong relationships with it. Trust is considered to be an element of relationships, while reputation is the experience of the relationship. Prior research has shown that a negative reputation and poor trust are much harder to rebuild and repair than damage to an otherwise good reputation and trust (Sjovall and Talk 2004; Bentele 1994). Besides, distrust would signal a lack of legitimacy in public organization.

In this study, theories of image and commitment as well as collective identification, trust and involvement are considered the fundamental elements to evaluate the status of public organizations. Public organizations with good public-organization relationships aim at producing organization's positive images, trusting publics, and employing transparent and accountable information, but also they create the organizational capacity to commit and involve different publics into organizational decision-making processes and the expertise to enhance citizens' collective identification with the organization itself. Previous studies (Eskelinen 2005; Luoma-aho 2005; Sztompka 1997; Fombrun 1996) have shown the importance for public organizations to have good levels in all five aspects in order to survive to the current market trends, to be recognized and legitimated as democratic institution by its publics and to provide some sort of security and protection to its publics.

This study aims at discovering the positions that the main European institutions, namely the European Parliament and the European Commission, have in relations to these aspects. Their positions will explain EU behaviours regarding promotional activities and its information and communication actions. These elements will be briefly presented in order to clarify where this study stands for and will be considered as parameters for

analyzing the current situation of these European institutions and their levels of assets and for providing answers to the five main research questions.

Image of and Collective Identification with Public Organizations

The concept of image and moreover that of collective identification are considered to be key elements for public institutions. Public organizations need to communicate their identities to their publics, in order to establish good relationships. These communication actions create different opinions of and attitudes towards the organization in each public. Opinions and attitudes are the images of the organizations. An image is conceptualized as any and all opinions, pieces of information, attitudes, and behaviors that an individual holds regarding an organization (Moffitt, 2001 p. 348). Image is an entity composed of experiences, assumptions, information and impressions (Lehtonen 1998; Rope and Mether 1991). With time, various images of the organization are formed, and they together form the perceived organizational image. These images are theorized as historical event or as products of personal, environmental, and organizational factors that are nevertheless changeable because they always are historically and culturally contextualized (Moffitt 2001). For an organization it is important to understand how its publics receive and process the organization's intended images, since this understanding will lead the organization to plan effective campaign strategies and to design campaign messages. Organizations look for creating positive images among their different audiences for example to get support in conflict issues, to be legitimatized and to have a competitive advantage. Positive images can also lead to the creation of a collective identification of public organizations' publics with the organizations themselves.

Simon and Klandermans (2001) consider collective identification as first and foremost a statement about categorical membership. For them a collective identity/identification[1] is one that is shared with a group of others who have, or are believed to have, some characteristics in common; it is "a place in the social world" (ibid, 320). Such commonality may be based on ascribed characteristics, such as ethnicity or gender, or on achieved states, such as occupation or political party (Deaux 1996; Sedikides and Brewer 2001; Simon and Klandermans 2001). This shared position does not require direct contact or interchange with all others who share category membership; rather, the positioning is psychological in nature.

According to the social identity approach, social or collective identity represents a more inclusive form of self-definition ("we" or "us") than does personal or individual identity ("I" or "me"). A person can have many different collective identities depending on the number of groups to which he or she belongs. However, not all of these collective identities are salient at the same time. Which specific collective identity moves into the perceptual foreground is a joint function of personal variables and more immediate social contextual variables (Turner and Reynolds 2001; Oakes et al. 1994; Turner et al. 1987). Collective-identity salience also depends on the immediate social context because a particular in-group/out-group categorization is more meaningful in some contexts than in others (Oakes et al. 1994; Turner et al. 1994).

A strong sense of collective identity is necessary for group members to engage in collective behaviours aimed at improving their in-groups' situation (Tajfel and Turner 1986; Tajfel 1981; Brown 1978). Support for this hypothesis comes from a range of empirical studies that strongly suggest that highly identified group members are prepared to stand and fight collectively when their in-group is disadvantaged or threatened, whereas low identifiers typically attempt to disassociate themselves from the in-group to improve their personal situation (Mummendey et al. 1999; Ellemers et al. 1997; Lalonde and Silvermann 1994; Wright et al. 1990). Past research has suggested that three components of social identification- cognitive, evaluative, and emotional - are empirically distinct and relate differently to key outcome variables (Bergami and Bagozzi 2000; Ellemers et al. 1999). Of these three components, the emotional component has been shown to most clearly "supply the motivational force" leading to action or the "readiness to engage in or disengage from interaction" (Bergami and Bagozzi, 2000, p. 563). For the European Union creating and supporting Europeans' collective identification to their institutions, policies and officers is a pre-requisite for legitimation and for further progress in the process of integration. In these terms, the European Union has developed activities and programmes which aim at establishing this collective identity. For example the European anthem, European Union flag, and the celebration of European Union day are some of the EU symbols of this collective identification (Valentini 2005a).

Trust, Involvement and Commitment to Public Organizations

According to different literature, trust is the firm belief in the honesty and reliability of another. Trusting a person means believing that when offered the chance, he/she is not likely to behave in a way that damages us (Gambetta, 1993, p. 219). Trust in this definition, is situational and/or rational, something that develops between two or more actors in a particular context or relationship. Trust is formed as a result of past experiences, the history of interaction (Kramer 1999) and reputation (Luoma-aho 2005; Pizzorno 2004; Misztal 1996). Trust can

also be seen as a result of attributes of the other party such as that party's competence, concern, openness and reliability (Rousseau et al. 1998). Trust and social capital are also seen as key ingredients underlying good government (Putnam 1993; various contributions in Braithwaite and Levi 1998), good schools (Schneider et al. 1997; Coleman 1998), the provision of quality health care (Cattell 2001) and even the resolution of ethnic conflicts (Varshney 2001).

Trust in public organizations is an essential bound for good functioning and is a sign of democracy. It has been said that democratic societies are trusting societies. In fact trust leads to better governance and to a public that is happier with government's performance. Or maybe good government makes people more likely to trust each other. Government can also produce trust (Rothstein 2000; Levi 1996). Trusting publics will also produce more responsive governments and are more likely to adopt policies that will promote economic equality- and thus create more trust. Trusting societies have bigger governments that redistribute wealth from the rich to the poor, spend more on education, and pursue policies that will stimulate economic growth. Trusting societies in democratic regimes pursue programs that indirectly will boost faith in others. Those nations capable of creating a culture of trust are reported to be on many levels the most successful (Ilmonen and Jokinen 2002: 20). Trust affects the level of involvement too.

Trustworthy organizations are more willing to cooperate with communities and to listen their publics. Especially public organizations are required to become more responsive to citizens as clients and engage in effective collaboration with them as partners. The new public service means the kind of collaboration where citizens are treated as partners (Eskelinen, 2005, p. 40). Involvement as part of the collaboration process is an important element for public organizations. Besides it determines the visibility of the institution and its legitimacy. The interest of publics in what a specific organization is doing and how it is doing, sets up the quantity and type of information searched. High involved publics search more information than low involved do. High involved publics believe that their voice makes a different in the process of decision. In fact public participation is considered to be the "involvement of the public in the process of decision-making" (Stewart and Claker, 1987, p. 172).

High involved publics, who either participate to the decision process or affect it through different actions, legitimate the organizations' existence. Legitimacy is meant here to be "a generalized perception or assumption that the actions of an entity are desirable, proper, or appropriate within some socially constructed system of norms, values, beliefs, and definitions" (Suchman, 1995, p. 574). According to Peltola (2006) public involvement is the key factor for public organizations in order to communicate properly with their different publics. Involvement is defined by this scholar as "the level of personal importance and interest shown toward an object in a specific situation" (ibid. 95). Citizens' involvement can be described according to a high-to-low scale, to its typology, that is as cognitively-based, individual-state-based and response-based (Eskelinen 2005; Laaksonen 1994) or in relation to the issue of interest. In this case involvement is defined either as position involvement, or issue involvement or decision involvement (Palm 1994). Palm's definition of involvement describes better the situation of public organizations since it emphasizes the contextual factors which create citizens' involvement.

Position involvement is described as the type of involvement which occurs if a citizen is actively interested about some concrete target or some conflicting social issue (ibid. 201). A citizen with a clear position filters all information which is against his position and gets involved with the information which supports his standpoints. Position involvement in the case of European institutions requires on the one hand good citizens' feelings and perceptions of EU and on the other a type of EU information which creates and supports citizens' positions. Differently issue involvement occurs when a citizen decides to get involve only in a specific matter, for example only on EU international affairs. This means that highly issue involved citizens are willing to handle all information connected to the matter they are interested in (Lehtonen 2002: 83.). This type of involvement requires that European institutions understand how to make the European Union become a relevant issue for Europeans.

In case of a decision involvement, the decision of involvement is relevant only in specific cases, such as during the elections period or during referenda. Highly decision involved person is willing to search and compare information to make the final decision. This type of involvement is a short term one and it does not provide good lasting relationships between EU institutions and their citizens. However understanding decision involved citizens can help to engage citizens during the EU Parliament elections for example. The knowledge of involvement's dynamics is important as well for the selection of public information and of the method of its diffusion. In fact the first aim of public information is to turn low involvement citizens into higher involvement citizens (Eskelinen 2005), for such reasons all public organizations should offer different kind of information to citizens with different levels and typologies of involvement.

Public involvement and support are important factors perhaps more for public organizations than for private organizations. Good levels of public involvement and support affect public organization's existence for three main reasons, good levels of public involvement: 1) legitimate the organization and its work and by legitimating they give credibility and power to the organization too, 2) attract shareholders and investors and by attracting

them the funds available for further activities may increase 3) are pre-requisites of democratic and effective systems, where the organization looks at its publics participation as a possibility to grow and improve.

The concept of commitment for public organizations has a special connotation and relation with the concepts of support and involvement. Commitment is defined as "force that binds an individual to a course of action of relevance to one or more targets. As such, commitment is distinguishable from exchange based forms of motivation and from target-relevant attitudes and can influence behaviour even in the absence of intrinsic motivation or positive attitudes" (Meyer and Herscovitch, 2001, p. 301).

In commitment theories, individuals choose the actions they would most prefer everyone would choose (Laffont 1975; Harsanyi 1980). Thus they choose the action which maximizes their private payoff assuming that everyone else chooses the same action they do.

Commitment has been studied as voluntary cooperation in social dilemmas like water conservation (Laffont 1975), tax evasion (Baldry 1987), and voting (Struthers and Young 1989) as well as voluntary contributions to public goods (Ledyard 1995; Davis and Holt 1994; Marwell and Ames 1979). The most studied field for commitment is organizational. Organizational commitment theories have been discussed in order to explain employee's relations with organizations (Tett and Meyer 1993; Mowday et al. 1982), employees' involvement and commitment to the organization (Kammeyer-Mueller and Wanberg 2003; Meyer and Herscovitch 2001; Meyer and Allen 1997; Keller 1997) and career developments (Allen and Meyer 1993).

Organizational commitment is defined as the loyalty to, and the acceptance of, organizational goals and values; the willingness to exert effort on behalf of the organization; and the acceptance of the choice of organizational membership (Morris and Sherman 1981; Mowday et al. 1979; Porter et al. 1974). In the study of organizational behavior, organizational commitment is the extent of an individual's commitment to an organization.

According to Meyer and Allen's three-component model of commitment (1997, 1991) there are three major types of organizational commitment, such as affective commitment, continuance commitment and normative commitment. In affective commitment, an individual strongly identifies with the goals of the organization and desires to remain a part of the organization. In continuance commitment, the individual remains with an organization because of a perceived loss of sunken costs.

The individual believes that he has invested a great deal of effort/time and has to remain in the organization. And in the normative commitment, the individual remains with an organization because of feelings of obligation. For instance, the organization may have invested resources in training an employee who then feels obliged to stay with the organization to "repay the debt".

Meyer and Herscovitch (2001), in a comprehensive review of the workplace commitment literature, found that despite the use of different labels, considerable research support has been established for three dimensions of commitment originally proposed by Meyer and Allen (1997) - affective, continuance, and normative - and that these dimensions were appropriate regardless of the target of commitment. The concept of commitment and its three-component model provides grounded theories for explaining in part the reasons beyond EU promotional campaigns. EU promotional campaigns are perceived in this study as an attempt to commit Europeans to EU cause. Affective commitment is the desired output of these promotional campaigns, but it is as well the most difficult to achieve.

Research Method and Sample

The questions of EU image and collective identification, Europeans' trust in European institutions and Europeans' involvement shall be examined using a meta-analytical approach since, for pragmatic research reasons, it is not possible to perform one's own extensive interview to all people leaving in the EU member states, and encompasses a fairly long period of time.

Meta-analysis enables a large part of the existing studies on this topic to be summarized systematically and analysed with regard to the research questions. A meta-analytical research strategy has been little applied in communication and media science (Machill et al. 2006). In the related disciplines, (Hunter and Schmidt 1990; Glass et al. 1981) meta-analyses frequently relate to the comparative evaluation of almost completely identical investigations, e.g. the results of extremely similarly designed experiments. A rough definition of meta-analysis is provided by Kiecolt and Nathan:

> *Meta-analysis integrates the findings from a universe (or sample) of investigations of some phenomenon. That is, the study itself becomes the unit of analysis. ... Meta-analysis has been used primarily to evaluate experimental research in psychology and education, but the technique may also be applied to research in other disciplines' (ibid 1985, p. 10).*

For this study meta-analysis is considered a good method for comparing the situation in different EU member states. The time-frame for this study is a four-year-period, from 2002 to 2005. The choice on this time-

frame corresponds at the specific EU acknowledgement of the importance of communication for its process of integration (Brüggemann 2005). The 2001 White Paper of the European Commission is considered to be the first attempt to involve citizens and member states into EU decision-making though different communication actions. The choice represents the author's interest to evaluate data from a period of time where concepts such as image, collective identification, trust, involvement and commitment became important factors for EU decisions in information and communication actions. On the other hand, the choice of this time-frame has limited the selection of the countries studied to the 15 old member states, since the 10 new member states from the Easter block joined EU only on May 2004. The subject of this meta-analysis are existing reports on European's opinions and concerns, which, in the widest sense, deal with the phenomenon of the European Union, its institutions, its policies and its information programmes. The selection criteria were as follows:

- the report should have similar questions on the topic studied
- the report should consider for its sample more than one EU member state, possibly all 15 member states
- the report should include data from 2002 to 2005 and/or the report should be available on yearly basis with same patterns of investigation
- the report must be in a language which the author master (English, French and Italian)

Eight reports[2] were selected and they were those produced by Eurobarometer surveys, since they matched with the selection criteria. Each Eurobarometer survey comprises 15,000 face to face interviews with a random sample of respondents which is selected to be representative of the population in each country. All interviews were conducted face-to-face in people's homes and in the appropriate national language[3]. Considering the quantity of interviews, the specific cultural and linguistic features, the method of interview and size of sample enables a good deal of reliance to be placed on the results. In addition each Eurobarometer survey contains some questions which are repeated on a regular basis in order to provide systematic data about the extent to which attitudes are changing about various aspects of the EU.

In this analysis only the answers related with EU image and trust in the European Parliament and the European Commission and those of citizens' collective identification with EU are considered and compared in a four-year-period. Involvement and commitment are not considered simply because there is not specific data about them.

Only in the Eurobarometer survey 64 some questions about involvement of the citizens has been included. In this study the data related with Europeans' support to EU membership has been added as well as dependable variable of involvement and commitment' concepts. Both involvement and commitment conceptualisations require a certain level of citizens' support to the European project. Thus analysing the data about support could show some possible correlations with these concepts and in part the effects of EU promotional campaigns. Additionally, for the purpose of this study, image and trust analysis are considered to be sufficient to explain the reasons behind EU promotional activities and their effects.

In fact good images together with proper organizational behaviours lead to citizens' support and commitment and levels of involvement most of the times depend on publics' trust on the European institutions and on publics' EU images.

Findings

The data collected from different reports give a portrait of possible changes and shifts in the four parameters- image, trust, collective identification and support- which are important for public organizations. These findings present the position of Europeans towards the EU and its institutions and they provide a foundation to evaluate EU promotional campaigns through public relations lenses in order to weigh this strategy for increasing positive values among Europeans.

The data on these four parameters have not changed much during the four-year-period (2002- 2005). There have been small inflections between positive, negative and neutral positions, but the findings are generally constant in time and percentage.

The positive image of the EU has slightly decreased, while negative images have gained consensus. According to various scholars the incremental increase of negative images is due partly to the EU's previous non-communication actions (Anderson 2004; Meyer 1999) and partly to its incapacity to answer to concrete Europeans' necessities and fears (de Clerck- Sachsse 2005).

The European Union before the Maastricht treaty was not committed to a specific communication plan. It has generally not considered it necessary to involve its publics in its decision-making processes nor has it

attempted to establish good relationships with its publics (Brüggemann 2005). This may lead to some variation on public perception of the EU image, however the data related with image does not offer sufficient evidence to correlate the increment of EU negative image with the statement of these scholars (see *Fig. 1. EU image between 2002 and 2005*).

Fig. 1. EU image between 2002 and 2005

EU Image *				
Period	**Positive %**	**Neutral %**	**Negative %**	**Don't know %**
Spring 2002	49	31	14	7
Autumn 2002	50	32	13	5
Spring 2003	48	32	17	5
Autumn 2003	44	31	18	5
Spring 2004	44	31	22	4
Autumn 2004	50	33	15	2
Spring 2005	47	32	19	2
Autumn 2005	44	33	21	2

Sources: Standard Eurobarometer 57, 58, 59, 60, 61, 62, 63, 64

If we look at the results on trust of the two most important institutions of the European Union, we can see a common trend. Both the European Parliament and the European Commission have increased their negative results in trust (see Fig. 2. *Trust in the European Parliament between 2002 and 2005* and Fig. 3. *Trust in the European Commission between 2002 and 2005*).

Fig. 2. Trust in the European Parliament between 2002 and 2005

Trust in the European Parliament *			
Period	**trust %**	**not trust %**	**Don't know %**
Spring 2002	54	24	22
Autumn 2002	59	23	19
Spring 2003	57	23	20
Autumn 2003	54	27	20
Spring 2004	54	29	17
Autumn 2004	57	26	16
Spring 2005	52	31	18
Autumn 2005	51	34	16

* Sources: Standard Eurobarometer 57, 58, 59, 60, 61, 62, 63, 64

The European Parliament, especially, has seen an increment of 10% in people who do “not trust” its institution over a four-year period, while the percentage of those who “don’t know” has decreased by 6%. Similarly for the European Commission the percentage of those who “trust” this institution has not significantly changed but the percentage of those who do “not trust” (+ 8%) and “don’t know” (- 6%) have modified. The data studied present a clear trend of polarization between those who “trust” and those who do “not trust”, while the percentage of people who do not have a clear opinion of these institutions has decreased.

Fig. 3. Trust in the European Commission between 2002 and 2005

Trust in the European Commission *			
Period	**trust %**	**not trust %**	**Don't know %**
Spring 2002	47	25	27

Autumn 2002	53	24	24
Spring 2003	50	24	26
Autumn 2003	46	28	26
Spring 2004	48	29	23
Autumn 2004	52	27	21
Spring 2005	46	31	23
Autumn 2005	46	33	21

* Sources: Standard Eurobarometer 57, 58, 59, 60, 61, 62, 63, 64

The increase in percentage of the "don't trust" group for both institutions could be explained with the increment of EU power upon different aspects of Europeans and the not corresponding increment of citizens' empowerment in political life. Citizens perceive the European Union as unfriendly and elitist, distant from ordinary people and using a bureaucratic language that make it difficult for people to understanding it (Friends of Europe 2004: 14). They also believe that EU institutions communicate poorly with them (Penn et al. 2006: 10). A recent Gallup study on Europeans' involvement in EU and their willingness to participate to EU debate shows that 71% of Europeans feel uninvolved with EU affairs and 48% of the same sample would like to be more involved but does not how to do it (Eurobarometer 64 2005: 40- 41).

If we look at the data which refers to Europeans' collective identification with Europe there is not a consistent variation. Still the majority of people (47%) feel their national identity first and European second, followed by those who see themselves only in terms of their national identity (41%), and finally, those 3% who see themselves as only European (see Fig. 4. *Collective identification with Europe*).

Fig. 4. Collective identification with Europe

In the near future, do you see yourself as…? *

Period	only National %	National and European %	European and National %	only European %
spring 2002	38	48	7	4
autumn 2002	38	49	7	2
spring 2003	40	44	8	4
autumn 2003	40	47	7	3
spring 2004	41	46	5	2
autumn 2004	41	47	7	3
spring 2005	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.
autumn 2005	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.

* Sources: Standard Eurobarometer 57, 58, 59, 60, 61, 62, 63, 64
n.a. = not available

This data clearly shows that the last four years of EU promotional campaigns had little influence on the process of European collective identification. Nevertheless collective identification, as literature tells us, is considered a very important factor for the European Union since it determines levels of involvement and support. Confirming the importance of enhancing EU identification in the recent decision of the European Parliament, a commitment has been made to invest € 200 million to promote citizenship during the period 2007-2013. This has also created some criticism from MEPs[4] and Eurosceptics groups who call it a new propaganda strategy (Kubosova 2006).

Finally when we look at the data supporting membership, the dependable variable of commitment and involvement theories, we can see that, similarly to previous results, Europeans have not increased their support for the European Union over this period of time (see Fig 5. *Support for the membership of the European Union*). Just half of the sample (52%) perceives some benefits from their country's membership in the European Union, while those who see no benefit in the relationship have risen by 10 percent from 26% to 36%. At the same time the group of people who "don't know" has dropped to 11%. Again there is a clear polarization between those who support EU from those who do not support it.

Fig. 5. Support for the membership of the European Union

Support for the membership of the European Union *

Period	Benefited %	Not benefited %	don't know %
spring 2002	51	26	23
autumn 2002	50	28	22
spring 2003	50	29	21
autumn 2003	46	34	19
spring 2004	47	35	18
autumn 2004	53	34	12
spring 2005	55	33	12
autumn 2005	52	36	12

* Sources: Standard Eurobarometer 57, 58, 59, 60, 61, 62, 63, 64

All four parameters studied have very similar trends. The positive data is generally stable, while the negative has slightly increased and the "don't know" group has generally decreased in percentage. We could assume that Europeans have increased their knowledge of the EU in order to position themselves either as supportive or unsupportive. However, this does not necessarily mean that Europeans are more involved in EU affairs or that their knowledge corresponds to a clear comprehension of EU decision-making processes, functions and the duties of different EU institutions and so on. The decreasing percentage of the "don't know" group most likely has some correspondence with an increment of EU visibility among Europeans' network of information.

Discussion

These findings suggest that over the four years of EU campaigning, no significant changes took place in terms of enhancement of image, trust for the two major institutions, or on citizens' identification with Europe. One effect, although in small scale, was that the EU promotional campaigns may have reduced the number of citizens with no opinion. These findings confirm the importance of implementing better communication strategies with the aim of image management and increasing EU credibility. What can we infer from these results in relation to EU promotional campaigns?

The European Union has implemented different promotional campaigns for improving its image and credibility and for encouraging approval and legitimation from its different publics. Legitimacy for public institutions is the right to exist and conduct operations. It is established, maintained, challenged and defended through dialogues between an organization's activities and their relation to social norms and values. Thus, organizational publics grant legitimacy to the organization and make the organization dependent on them in this respect (Metzler, 2001, p. 322). The European Union is seeking this legitimation and this approval and it has believed for many years that simple promotional messages distributed around the Union to its different publics would have made some positive changes in the short-term (Pollendri 2003). This seems a quite naïf answer to larger problems, but if we do consider that for many years the European Union has invested so little in communication actions and has mostly considered communication and public relations' functions secondary aspects of its public management, this choice of strategy does look coherent to EU perception of the importance of communicational activities[5].

Promotional campaigns have been considered the solutions for EU credibility problems since they are feasible activities, they have been successful in different business activities, they have been largely implemented in political campaigns with rather good effects on citizens' voting decisions, they are somehow easier to plan and to manage, since they are based on image management and not on reputation management. Promotional campaigns work on image formation and consolidation. Image is a visual concept and often this visuality leads to an impression of artificiality. Image has often been talked about as something easy to alter and thus easy to affect. According to literature, a significant image can be formed faster than a good reputation. For example, a significant image can be achieved through coherent communication and campaigning (Gray and Balmer 1998).

Goffman (1959) speaks of possible manipulations of appearance and setting, describing the way people present themselves, build fronts and stage their behavior in order to achieve the desired results, even seducing others into trusting them. Understanding how an organization creates and delivers its images to relevant audiences that relate to it and understanding how these target audiences receive and process the organization's intended images are of great importance for those organizations that want to promote themselves. In fact, a comprehension of the power and the limitations of how organizations plan and deliver their images, and of how the audience members receive and process intended and unintended images, serves as a guiding principle (Moffitt 2001).

For the European Union, promotional campaigns could have helped to create a positive image among Europeans, if publics and other influential people had been listened to more carefully. Positive images would have created a chain-reaction that could have helped to develop higher levels of collective identification, trust and involvement. These aspects could have affected Europeans' support and participation to the integration process.

The European Union's promotional campaigns did not work because they were based on a press agentry model of communication and not on the two-way-asymmetrical model (Grunig 1992). The press agentry model is a persuasive, one-way form of communication whose goal is to attract the attention of the organization in any way possible. The two-way asymmetrical model has the same goals, but it requires scientific research to determine how to persuade publics to behave in the way organizations wish. In this sense the two-way asymmetrical model is the more effective in image building, since it bases its planning in studies of public opinions and behaviour.

According to Grunig, press agentry and the two-way asymmetrical models are not as effective in establishing good relationships or good reputations. Generally a mixed motive of two-way asymmetrical and two-way symmetrical models is the best solution (Grunig 2000). According to other European scholars two-way symmetrical model describes the situation in Europe much better.

PR practices and activities in Europe are understood to be reflective, educational and based on societal commitment (Valentini 2006; van Ruler et al. 2004; Holmström 2004; Verčič et al. 2001). The job for public organizations that aim to establish good relationships with their publics is then based on mutual dialogues between public organizations and their different publics and not only on persuading tactics. Nevertheless the two-way symmetrical model is utopian in that it does not consider the role of power information holders in establishing relationships with different publics. The two-way symmetrical model bases its idea on a society where everybody is equal and everyone is perceived to have the same power and influence as others. In these terms, a pure two-way symmetrical model of communication is neither possible nor reliable for the European Union.

Europeans will never feel equal as some European countries are perceived to be more influential than others. Likewise, some EU officers and politicians are considered to hold more power and information. Likewise, various private and public organizations that may have stronger organizational interests and values may attempt to direct the EU agenda. The most suitable model for the European Union is the mixed motive of two-way asymmetrical and two-way symmetrical models. This mixed motive should take into consideration EU goals on information and communication actions but also take into account the EU publics' needs and cultural values and their levels and types of involvement and commitment.

Conclusions

Over the last five years, the European Union has implemented various communication strategies aimed at improving its credibility and image. These activities have had a mainly promotional character and the goals were to build a stronger, more positive EU image and to increase Europeans' trust in their institutions.

Promotional campaigns were considered to be the solution to problems of low public involvement and support. Although promotional campaigns could have had a positive effect on the publics' perceptions and attitudes, they failed to take into consideration public opinions and concerns. The European Union implemented the press agentry model which aims at increasing attention on the organization and in this case on European institutions, but without considering the differences of its publics. In order to promote the European Union properly, EU commissioners in charge of the information and communication activities should have conducted in-depth studies and research on public opinions at national, regional and local levels.

In any case, promotional campaigns have been considered by different scholars as insufficient to the establishment of good relationships and constructive dialogues: all of which are major constituents of a democratic society. The approach should have considered mutual understanding and negotiating discourses as primary aspects of communication strategies. EU communication actions should also have included good governance and coherent organizational behavior.

The EU cannot promote the benefits of membership to its publics if it cannot show with factual and concrete actions that it can cope better with difficult problems than national governments can. In addition, EU collective identification depends on the reputation and trust of those who work for it. According to Peters, three components are critical for establishing, maintaining and increasing trust and the credibility of the officials: 1) perceptions of knowledge and expertise, 2) perceptions of openness and honesty, and 3) perceptions of concern and caring. Each of these are closely connected to communication (Peters et al. 1997 in Drevensek 2004).

EU promotional campaigns, often criticized and sometimes referred to as a new form of propaganda, are simply an amateurish attempt to establish public involvement and support. From a public relations point of view they show the lack of understanding in the European institutions regarding information and communication actions. They represent a poor effort to inform different publics about EU activities and policies as they aimed to

comply with the democratic principle of access to information, public participation, and legitimation. These were the aims, but not the results.

Limitations

The limitations of this study concern the type of data used. The data about the EU image Eurobarometer surveys provide only a general opinion of what Europeans think about the European Union. There is no specification of what a positive, neutral or negative image is. In these terms the decrease of a positive perception of the EU's image cannot be completely associated with the claim that EU communication activities and campaigns were not effective. Nevertheless the phenomenon is a consequence of the lack of a proactive approach to the EU's different publics. Another problem concerns trust. The information provided by Eurobarometer does not differentiate the level of trust between the different publics. According to Luoma-aho (2005) and other scholars (Prêtre 2000; Sztompka 1997) there are at least 6 categories of trust, namely burning trust or faith, blind or naïve trust, keen or sensitive trust, reasonable or healthy trust, confidence or cool trust and critical or suspicious trust. Each of these implies different levels of commitment and involvement and determines the status of public organizations' relationships with their publics. It is said that public organizations should aimed at a level of trust that is reasonable, healthy, confident or cool. When officials do not achieve total agreement for all actions, they should aim for understanding and reasonable trust (Prêtre, 2000, p. 117). This is called neutral commitment.

The idea of neutrality is nevertheless beneficial in understanding stakeholder trust in public organizations, as it defines the critical distance for democratic action and equality. Hence, further studies on the meanings associated with positive, neutral and negative EU images together with studies about the levels of trust should be considered. This date is more useful in developing new proposals for enhancing EU image and trust in its institutions.

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End Notes

[1] In this study the concepts of "collective identification" and "collective identity" are considered synonymous. Although the idea of identification does generally not imply a creation of an identity among people who identify themselves with a specific group, it does contain all elements for a possible acceptance of the group's identity as its own. In these terms identification with a group is a process that can lead to the acquisition of the group's identity too. This study does not aim at establishing the extends of identification versus identity of the Europeans, but it tries to consider whether or not there are some elements among Europeans that can recall the idea of identification with Europe.

[2] The 8 reports considered for the meta-analysis were Eurobarometer 57, 58, 59, 60, 61, 62, 63, and 64. All this data about EU's image, trust in the European Commission and Parliament, collective identification and support for the membership is available at URL: http://europa.eu.int/comm/public_opinion/standard_en.htm

[3] More information about the methodology used for the collection of this data can be founded in the European Commission, Directorate-General Press and Communication webpage at URL: http://europa.eu.int/comm/public_opinion/description_en.htm

[4] MEPs are a common abbreviation for Members of the European Parliament.

[5] Communication and public relations' functions were a secondary aspects of the European Union's public management until mismanagement and corruption brought down Jacques Santer's commission in 1999 (http://www.telegraph.co.uk/htmlContent.jhtml?html=/archive/1999/03/16/weur16.html). The European Commission dissolved DG X and later established a new DG called Press and Communication with the goal of establishing a unit within the EC in charge of media and public relations. The first document assessing this change dates 2001. 2001 is the year when EU acknowledge the need for a more coherent and clear strategy for information and communication policies although this acknowledgement has not been followed by corresponding funds or in employing professional communication officers (see for example "Action plan to improve communicating Europe by the Commission", available at URL: http://ec.europa.eu/dgs/communication/pdf/communication_com_en.pdf).

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