



HOW EUROPE USES SOCIAL MEDIA
TO CONNECT WITH ITS CITIZENS

SHARE EUROPE ONLINE PROJECT TO CONNECT THE EUROPEAN COMMISSION AND PARLIAMENT WITH THE EU'S CITIZENS



In February 2013, the European Parliament and the European Commission kicked off the Share Europe Online Project. In cooperation with communication agency ESN, this is the first project of its kind to use social media to interact directly with European citizens in their own countries and in their own languages. The European Commission and European Parliament are fully aware of the potential social media holds to communicate with citizens, especially those that have not been reached before. In the past, examples of the power of social media for professional purposes have focused on the private sector. However, social networks also hold enormous potential for political and public institutions.

The challenge for the European Commission and European Parliament lay in reaching those people that do not feel any connection with the EU, including those who are passionate about topics the EU is working on, such as the environment, the economy, or traffic congestion. Both institutions already had a well-developed central social media presence. Now, they wanted to engage citizens more directly using social media accounts operated locally by their offices in each EU country.

MAP THE STATE OF SOCIAL MEDIA IN EU MEMBER STATES AND DRIVE ENGAGEMENT

To meet this challenge the European Commission and European Parliament sought the support of ESN, a Brussels-based communications agency. Together they determined the basic needs and how to address them.

MONITOR

The first step was to monitor and measure the state of social media in the different EU member states. How actively were the different countries already using social media? Was there an existing social media community?

ENGAGE

Based on these mapping efforts, the European Commission and European Parliament defined the particular European audience they wished to connect to and involve in EU activities.

MONITORING AND ANALYTICS

To actually engage with the European online community, the Commission and Parliament needed to learn more about the trending topics, to discover where the conversation was focused and lastly to identify influencers to bridge the gap between the EU and the people.

REPORTING

Finally, they need to be able to prove the value of social media to the policy makers; to show them social media was making a difference.

COMMUNITY MANAGERS TO MONITOR, TRAIN AND BOOST EU SOCIAL MEDIA ENGAGEMENT

The first step in activating the Share Europe Online Project was to hire community managers. Their job was to build communities in each of the EU's 28 countries and coach local European Commission and European Parliament officers in the different countries, most of whom have never used social media in a professional capacity before. The community managers had to work in both the Commission and Parliament offices and **help create close cooperation and synergy** between the two on the main social platforms.

At the time the Share Europe Online Project was initiated, both institutions were already using the Engagor social media management platform to monitor their own social profiles and online reputation. After an intensive evaluation, Engagor also proved to be the perfect partner in this new venture.

1. First up on the to-do list was **mapping the state of social media** in each of the different member states. Based on the monitoring results that Engagor provided, it quickly became clear that the current engagement efforts were too impersonal. Most of the conversations in the different member states were taking place on a very local level. People were interacting with their local mayors, but not with the MEPs. This taught a very valuable lesson: social media engagement starts with the people. To reach them, you must engage in the conversations taking place on a local level.

2. ESN assigned community managers to **train the local representatives of the European Commission and the European Parliament** for each country. Their task was to build and engage with the community and actively monitor progress. Engagor enabled the accurate monitoring of local keywords and trends and the ability to jump in on those conversations. The representatives are then able to connect with the people through topics that really concern and interest them. Representatives also use Engagor to monitor EU event hashtags and thus engage with people that do not or are unable to attend the event live. The result is that their community enjoys uninterrupted growth.

3. The European Commission and European Parliament use Engagor not only to discover trending topics, they also use it to **identify influencers** in certain subjects. Once identified, they reach out to these influencers to help them reach the largest possible audience and engage them in EU affairs.

4. Finally, the European Commission and European Parliament are **creating extensive reports** on the success of their social media efforts. This enables them to clearly **show policy makers the difference that social media makes**. Engagement KPIs and fan growth are only a few of the insights included in such reports. In some member states, Community Managers provide local Political Reporters with daily reports to keep them aware of the trending topics on social media. This helps them **keep a finger on the pulse of all political evolutions in specific countries in real-time** and — perhaps even more importantly — without mediation from the traditional media.

SOCIAL MEDIA BRIDGES THE GAP BETWEEN EU INSTITUTIONS AND THE PEOPLE OF EUROPE

Engagor has helped the European Commission and European Parliament bridge the gap between the EU and its citizens. By zooming in on the social media activities of different member states, Engagor identified the need for local, personalized conversations. Now that Engagor is in place, the European Commission and European Parliament can easily determine the trending topics and jump in on the conversation. Social media is bringing the EU much closer to its citizens.

Engagor helps reach and engage a larger community than the European Commission and European Parliament ever did before. Thanks to social media, they can involve people in the EU events that are not or cannot be physically present. People can follow everything via a hashtag; they can ask questions and give feedback, watch videos, et cetera.

Furthermore, all of these social media activities have triggered EU representatives to start using social media on a more profound level. And, of course, the more EU representatives are active on social media, the more Europe becomes a familiar face to its people.

Thanks to Engagor, the European Commission and European Parliament have turned their initial 'fear' of social media into something positive and constructive. By accurately monitoring and reporting on social media activities, they have learned that a quick response to negative messages can both educate and convert people because they are surprised and pleased with such a personal approach.

EU IS SUCCESSFULLY SHARING EUROPE ONLINE

The European Commission and European Parliament are the living proof of why a comprehensive social media management tool provides such enormous added value. By monitoring and analyzing, they gained valuable insights into their audience. They are using this knowledge to better engage with them and build out their online community.

The EU now presents a friendly face to many citizens who before did not really care. The Share Europe Online project has never been actively promoted because it is not actually a campaign. It is however a very powerful way to connect to and engage with the people and build a relationship based on what they are talking about and what they are genuinely interested in. Thanks to Engagor, the European Commission and European Parliament are building important bridges on social media.