

Master Thesis

Branding the European Parliament

The European Parliament's use of social media

Master Media Studies – Media & Business

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Preface

In this short note I would like to thank all those who helped me during the research and writing process of this thesis. To start with I would like to thank my supervisor, Payal Arora, who has guided me all along the elaboration procedure of this thesis. Throughout the process she has been a wonderful listener as well as a useful advisor. Not only did she help me to order my thoughts, she also pushed me to see and look beyond simple research. Second I would like to thank the whole of our academic staff for the insightful teaching they have displayed during this academic year. I also want to thank the faculty for offering us such an interesting programme. Finally, I would like to thank my family as well as my friends for their support and Luc Deroche for his precious help with Excell.

1. Introduction

Human dignity, freedom, democracy, equality, the rule of law and the respect for human rights represent the core of the European Union's (EU) values according to the Treaty on the European Union (TEU – Maastricht Treaty) (Treaty of Lisbon, 2014). Together they are endorsed by the 28 Member States of the Union and so, together, they forge the EU particular *raison d'être*, its identity. By being the core of the EU values, human dignity, freedom, democracy, equality, the rule of law and the respect for human rights, also represent the core of the EU's branding strategy: a bit like Liberty, Equality and Fraternity define France's core image. However, this specific *raison d'être* is quite new as the TEU was only ratified in 1992. Before that date, the EU used to define its *raison d'être* by using other core values that are dear to it. Sixty years ago, at its onset the EU stood for "peace" and "security". Those two values were important back then as, the European continent was getting out of its most destructive war and peace and security were the two values people aspired most at. The idea was that "the EU offers a haven of peace and prosperity in an otherwise rough and unpredictable world" (Van Ham, 2008, p.241). Therefore peace and prosperity represent the EU old brand, what the EU used to stand for. Over the years this brand had to be changed for it does not speak anymore to the youth of today. The chances of an inter-European conflict are if not impossible, barely thinkable. In 2012 the EU was even awarded the Nobel peace Prize for its achievement of peace, prosperity and stability. To the youth of today this is a sign that peace is something achieved, established and acquired. Therefore branding the EU as a realm of peace and prosperity does not have much sense to them as they are already living - and most probably born - in this comfortable state. Changing the EU values to accommodate them to the current days was thus an important and necessary task, so that the European citizens could again relate to something that made sense to them. However, this was not enough. In 2005 the French and the Dutch rejected, by referendum, the proposition of a European constitution and three years later, in 2008, came the ravaging economic crisis. Let us add to that the controversial establishment of the euro and the not much appreciated president of the European commission, Jose Manuel Barroso, and you have all the ingredients to have a Europe where the citizens distrust more than ever the power to function. Therefore, the EU needs to find a new way to talk to its citizens, a new way to be understood and loved by them. The feelings of distress, mistrust and incomprehension that Europeans currently have towards Europe have kept growing over those last years with the result that Europe does not stand at the right place in the heart of Europeans. Actually, in these circumstances, it is not only the

European project or concept that suffers but also everything that makes the “European machine” running. The diverse European institutions such as the commission, the court of justice and even the Parliament are distrusted by the citizens. For the last one this is a major issue since it is supposed to represent citizens all over Europe. This year, in 2014, those feelings will be put to a test: the elections of May will reveal where European citizens stand as far as the EU is concerned. This year’s election motto is “This time it’s different”. Indeed, these elections are the first ones since the ratification of the Lisbon Treaty which gives the European Parliament a certain amount of new powers. Among those new powers, the European Parliament has now the duty to elect the president of the European Commission. Consequently, these elections are seen as more important than ever: they will determine the next five years of the European political life. To sum up we could say that the EU is in a dark place and that its approach to EU citizens needs to be rethought.

It is for all the above mentioned reasons that my thesis will study one specific organ that constitutes the bulk of the EU institutions: the European Parliament (EP). More specifically the thesis will focus on the online rebranding mechanisms used by the EP. As we said, the EU needs to find a new way to talk to its citizens and so do the institutions that constitute it. This is why we will study the strategies used by the EP to regain the citizens’ trust. In its attempt to reach the citizens in a new and innovative way the European Parliament has gone online. This is why we will concentrate on its use of social networking sites. In order to test the ground, a preliminary research has been conducted. Its aim was to verify whether the material available was sufficient and whether there was an engagement on the part of the EU citizens at all. Once this base had been established, the ground was clear to conduct our study. The thesis will analyse engagement on the part of the citizens and what types of engagement are created by the EP, while the preliminary research was just conducted on the surface. The difference between the preliminary research and the research of this thesis is that the thesis analyses engagement deeper. Nevertheless the preliminary research was necessary as the thesis research builds upon it. So, one of the first findings of this preliminary research has shown that the European Parliament use Facebook, Twitter, Flickr, LinkedIn and Myspace. However, the number of social media platforms available is so numerous and the amount of data available so large that we will only analyse one social media platform used by the EP, namely, Facebook.

Among all the different social media used by the EP, Facebook has been chosen firstly due to its popularity. Numbers have shown that the social media platform has an amount of 802 million daily active users on average in March 2014 (Facebook, 2014) and that

approximately 81,2% of these daily active users are to be found outside the U.S. and Canada (Facebook, 2014). Actually, according to the Internet world stats (2014), Facebook in the European Union counted 192,746,920 users on the 31st December 2012 for a population of 503,824,373 inhabitants. This means that 38% of the European inhabitants were using Facebook on the 31st December 2012. Following those numbers we can say that Facebook has a broad success as a media platform and that its use within Europe is quite large. Its handiness and ease of use, as well as its possibility to be used as a political platform have also contributed to the choice of Facebook as our medium of analysis. “Despite on-going doubt about how much the European citizens are interested in participating in political communication, [...] the possibility for using SNSs in political communication on the European grounds exists, it is only a question whether and how it has been and will be used by political actors and institutions” (Vesnic-Alujevic, 2012b, p.49). Therefore the use of Facebook as a platform to express one’s own political opinions is a reality. Actually, our preliminary research has already shown that the EP uses Facebook and is quite active on it. Therefore this was also a factor influencing the choice towards this specific social media platform. Being on Facebook opens up a broad new world of meanings and possibilities for the European Parliament. Its previously one-sided communication becomes now double-sided. This change enables the Parliament to interact with its citizens and to react to their published comments. We believe that this feature has the possibility to render the Parliament more accessible to its citizens. Whether this is really the case will be verified throughout our analysis and through our attempt to answer our main research question. It should also be added that Facebook opens up the world of politics to any person who has an account on its platform. Being on Facebook and enrolled on the Facebook page of the EP gives you the possibility to intervene in the European Parliament’s debates in several new, different and interactive ways. Our preliminary research have demonstrated that the audience does engage with the EP on Facebook and co-creates new forms of political content. Determining whether there was an engagement at all between the EP and its citizens was, as we mentioned earlier, one of the aims of our preliminary research. Second we wanted to know whether the material available would be sufficient. This has been researched by superficially analysing the EP’s posts on Facebook. It came out of this study that new forms of political content are created, be it on the part of the EP or on the part of the citizens. For instance, the posts published by the EP aim at engaging the citizens through online activities. These can go from posting comments, to liking a post on a Facebook page to joining a conversation with a member of the European Parliament (MEP). However, these findings are still superficial: these new forms of

political content need to be analysed further. Actually, it is more specifically the engagement that will be analysed. The engagement on the part of citizens or the different types of engagement offered by the EP will be at the centre of our analysis. Hence the “nature” of the engagement will be studied.

This leads us to the heart of the thesis and the questions it will tackle. What probably constitutes the most important aspect of the EP’s new communication strategy is its attempts to go beyond the political. The EP does reach its citizens. We know it thanks to our preliminary research, but what is its strategy? By using riddles, games and contests in its posts, the EP endeavours to move away from politics. We contend that this move away from the political world in order to use a more social, playful and entertainment oriented communication represents the EP’s new communication strategy. The work of the thesis will be to investigate the nature of the engagements created by this new communication strategy. Thus, the main topic of the thesis concentrates on how the EP uses online social media – and more particularly Facebook – to sell its image and redefine itself. This brings us further to the question of participation on the part of citizens. How the latter is enacted will be the second point investigated through the help of our main research question.

Nevertheless, before going any further we need to make a break and go through the work of Liesbet van Zoonen and Peter Van Ham as well as some other authors in order to comprehend the big picture we are dealing with. One of Peter Van Ham’s main claims is that the EU lacks “Der Wille zur Macht”. In our case we will extrapolate this claim and apply it to the European Parliament as well. Indeed, it has already been mentioned that when the European idea or concept suffers it is also the whole machinery behind it that is handicapped. Therefore if the EU lacks the will to power, we can say that the European Parliament also makes reserved moves to establish its authority and power. Consequently we can say that the first debate we are dealing with concern the EU and the EP’s image on the European stage. The EP’s weakness is a matter to discussion. With this topic comes the issue of its (re)branding. The bulk of Peter Van Ham’s work that is used in this thesis deals with the EU branding and its place on the international stage. Here again it is the EU’s and EP’s image that is at stake. Peter Van Ham goes back in history presenting us with the old EU’s founding myth and contends that the EU needs to rebrand itself. Therefore the second debate presented here revolves around the EU’s and the EP’s necessity to reshape their image and how this has to be done. Then, we are faced with the problem of the EP’s communication. Authors such as Peter J. Anderson and Aileen McLeod (2004) have coined the EP with the term “the Great non-communicator” in one of their article. Together they go through the history of the EP’s

communication and conclude on its poor skills. Consequently, the third debate at stake between our different authors concern the EP communication skills and its communication strategies. When it comes to debating about the EP's communication strategies we can let Liesbet van Zoonen (2005) enter our discussion. Her key work *Entertaining the citizen: When politics and popular culture converge* deals with the combination between politics and entertainment. This is of particular interest to us as we contend that the EP's new communication strategy is to go beyond the political and to foster playfulness. According to van Zoonen the question whether politics and entertainment can be a match has been coming back quite often over the past few years. This is due, still according to her, to the fact that our contemporary society is an entertainment society. Even the natural allies of politics, such as literature and the arts, tend to become increasingly moulded in entertainment formats (Van Zoonen, 2005). This will be seen later in our analysis when the arts such as music or sculpture are used to create engaging posts on the Facebook page of the EP. As it will be analysed the whole of politics is turned into entertainment, proof that politics does not escape the tendency of our society to entertain the citizen. "Following the work of the French philosopher Bourdieu, Liesbet van Zoonen describes politics as follow: "a field that coexists with other fields such as the arts and science, the field is structured according to a system of differences between what could be called left and right, progressive and conservative, change and stability, or libertarian and authoritarian" (2005, p.5). So, for her, politics is what politicians do, but not only. It is also a field that exists in its own right that "accommodates the continuous struggle about power relations in society" (2005, p.5). The EP inscribes itself in these definitions. The EP is indeed all about power relations. In the EP there are committees, political parties and political groups, different nationalities and different languages. Therefore the EP lives to the rhythm of the power struggles. These power struggles are not without consequences on the EP's communication. Languages and translation for instance are the first obstacles as they slow down the communication process. In the process of doing politics Liesbet van Zoonen acknowledges two meanings to the word representation and she concludes that both meanings currently fail in the political world. One meaning is "resemblance". Resemblance is the reason why people identify with individuals in a television program such as big brother, because those individual are "like us". The second meaning is "delegation". "In most democratic theory, the more common meaning is the delegation of one's opinion and interests to democratically elected politicians" (2005, p.3). According to van Zoonen those two ways of representing the citizens either by being "like them" or by "delegating them one's opinions" is not successful in current politics. "In both senses of

representation, then –resemblance and delegation – too big a distance between the representers and the represented is a breeding ground for a crisis that goes much further than straightforward political conflict” (2005, p.3). Currently the EP is in this described situation of crisis. We have already mentioned all the trust issues it has been through lately. The EP is currently disconnected from its citizens as its politicians are not very well connected to the people. Talking about politicians in general Liesbet van Zoonen referring to Coleman’s work writes “Politicians are seen as talking at rather than talking to, preaching rather than sharing. This does not feel like representation” (Coleman 2003, p.33 in van Zoonen, 2005, p.3). With the EP going online there is an attempt on its part to reconnect with the citizens, to talk directly to them and to share content together. Eventually van Zoonen goes on by stating that “Politicians have a bad name and are regularly accused of being ignorant, greedy and corrupt. They are among the least trusted group in society, and their ranking seems to be going down” (2005, p.5). This statement cannot be truer as all over Europe Euro-sceptics parties grow in reaction to the distrust that citizens have in current politicians. Therefore reaching the citizens while being playful in order to trigger a higher rate of citizens’ participation in the political matters is, we suppose, one of the EP’s new strategies to rebrand itself online. The exact workings of those rebranding strategies will be studied in the thesis.

Now that the big picture has been set, it is time to turn to the last part of our research: the EP as a physical entity. Indeed, as we have mentioned the EP is now spread all over the web and its values (the same as the EU values) are endorsed by 28 different member states. 28 different states with different languages and cultures that, in the end, execute the values of human dignity, freedom, democracy, equality, the rule of law and the respect for human rights according to their own way. For instance, Belgium and France are both democracies however their electoral system, that is, their way of implementing democracy is totally different. Therefore the EP is not one but it is plural: it represents values and ideals that are scattered across the 28 member states. These values and ideals needed to be gathered in one place in order to be contained; one place that would represent them all without discriminating between language and culture. Thus at some point in time it became necessary to assemble all these European ideas in one physical location. This chosen location would represent the EP and what it stands for concretely. It would be more than a mere page on Facebook and more than a pledge to serve the rule of law in any European country. This location would be for the EP what Washington is for the US: the symbol of its power. In the case of the European Parliament the capital of Belgium, Brussels, has been chosen as the main headquarters of the EU. Thus, as many other European institutions, the European Parliament is to be found in

Brussels. Since several years now, the city has been associated with the European power. Therefore we can say that Brussels and the EP are inextricably connected. Actually both use the other for its rebranding purposes. The difference between both is that one uses the techniques of city branding and the other one uses the techniques of political organisation branding. As we will see in our literature section those techniques are not so different. Indeed, we will see that both apply the practices used by corporate branding, that is, an emotional value is attributed to a product and emotional ties are created between this product and the audience. This aspect represents the core of city branding and political organisation branding, however there are some more aspects of branding that are important and common to both. For instance the fact that branding presents and represents a city or political organisation *as a whole* on the market stage or the fact that both type of branding try to harmonise a set of different assets. These aspects will be dealt with in the literature review. Nevertheless what is the most important is that sometimes city branding and political organisation branding can be intertwined. In those cases the city uses the political organisation to brand itself and the political organisation uses the city to brand itself. This is the case of the city of The Hague, branded as the city of peace and justice. Similarly Brussels is branded as the city of the EP and the EP is branded as being a part of the city of Brussels. Thus city branding, physical location and political organisation are intermingled. Yet this thesis aims at analysing whether this connection between Brussels and the EP goes further. Indeed this thesis asks the question whether both brands relate to each other online. Is Brussels often evoked online as part of the EP's rebranding strategy? Can we find mention of the city in the comments of the European citizens? Media repeatedly associate Brussels with the EP and the EP with Brussels. When journalists talk about a decision taken by the EP they do not mention the EP but "Brussels has said that", "Brussels has decided that". Therefore Brussels seem to play a role in international politics but is it really the case online? How does the EP use the image of that city to reshape itself online will be a sub-focus of the thesis. Understanding how the Brussels city brand works is necessary. A better understanding of it will enable us to comprehend what is the place of the EP within this city and how important the EP is for the city's image. Furthermore studying the EP's use of that particular city brand can teach us more about the EP's own rebranding strategies. Indeed, studying whether it includes the city or not in its rebranding process can tell us more on the EP's way of rebranding itself. Also analysing the EP's use of the Brussels city brand will show us whether power needs to be connected to a physical entity in order to be efficient and what is the meaning of this physical entity for the exercise of

power. In the end, all those investigations will inform us on the place that the EP's host city occupies in the EP's communication strategy or whether it occupies a place at all.

In the light of all that has been said earlier the following research question and sub-questions have been devised: How is the EP rebranding itself through social media campaigns and how are its citizens engaging with these efforts?

- 1) – What are the different types of engagement created by the EP's social media campaigns
- 2) How are citizens engaging with the EP's rebranding efforts?
- 3) How does the EP use the Brussels city brand to reshape itself online?

When it comes to the existing literature examining the EP's use of Facebook we cannot deny its existence. There exist very specific works on the EP's use of Facebook in time of election. The work of Vesnić-Alujević *Political communication on Facebook: A case study of the European Parliament profile page for the elections 2009*, is an example of such specific work. Yet, our aim is to see how the EP's Facebook is used for its daily rebranding purposes and for this, no literature has been found. It is this gap, the lack of literature on the EP's daily rebranding strategies on Facebook, that the present thesis will attempt to fill in.

At first this thesis will attempt to enter the very closed world within which most EU affairs are said to take place. Understanding how the EU and its current day practices work on the Internet will bring us at the heart of the EP's rebranding strategy; a strategy that has not been sufficiently studied by the existing literature. Thus, studying the EP it is also studying the use made of social networks in an International organisation. The EP is important as it represents the centre of EU politics and it is now in a crucial situation in which it needs to reach its members more than ever. Few other International organizations can brag to have such a legislative apparatus. Furthermore, as it has been mentioned earlier, Europeans maintain more than ever a love/hate relationship with the EU and its Parliament. Studying the European Parliament will enable us to understand deeper this relationship. Still concerning this matter, Elizabeth Linder (2014), politics and government specialist for Europe, has written "Europe's citizens are ready to connect and willing to participate in political discussion online". This will of the citizens to be closer to their politicians can be better comprehended thanks to the analysis we will make of the EP's Facebook page. Possibly, studying this page will also teach us more on the role of social networks in promoting European ideas through the Internet. The rebranding of the EP and the understanding of this rebranding are important for the diffusion of the European thought. Indeed, rebranding the EP comes down to rebranding this very thought. Presenting it under a new light, enhanced,

clearer for the citizens is what the EP attempt to do by rebranding itself. Understanding properly European ideas corresponds to properly understand Europe and its project. If citizens understand those ideas better, they will trust the EP in an easier way. Also in the light of the elections of May 2014 and the continuous use it makes of the news, this thesis inscribes itself in the current affairs.

Let us finish our introduction by a review of what will follow in this thesis. The previous introduction has given you the big picture, however it is time to get into more details. The following section will present you a literature review that will go from the general to the particular. First we will go through the EP in general and its communication strategies. Then the literature review will go on with the connection between politics and social media and go through the exact role played by the Internet and social media platforms in politics. This section is necessary in order to understand why the EP, which is a political organisation, has decided to use social media and what do social media platforms bring to the EP. We will then continue with a section on branding and political organisation. This section will tell us more on branding in general and will also focus on the branding of political organisations. Thanks to this section we will better understand how and why the EP is rebranding itself. Following this section, there is a part on the specific case of the EU and the EP communication and branding. This part focuses on the specific aspect of the EU and the EP communication and branding strategies. In this section we will find a specific part dedicated to the use of entertainment as a new communication strategy. This point comes after the previous ones as it puts into practice what has been mentioned in the other sections. We finish this literature review with a part about connecting city branding and political institutional branding. Starting with the generalities about city branding, this section crosses the characteristics of city branding with the ones of political organisation branding. This section will be helpful in answering our last sub-research question which mixes city branding with political organisation branding. The literature review being done, the next section is the method section. First some literature on the chosen methodology will be applied. After that, the methodology used for the purpose of this thesis and the methodological framework that have been set up for the research will be explained. With the methodology explained, we can then go on and start our analysis section. This part is divided into four main parts, some of those parts being themselves divided into sub-sections. The first part introduces general facts about the EP's Facebook page such as its number of followers. Then we enter into our topic as such: the analysis of the posts and comments of the EP's Facebook page. First the posts are generally content analysed. Second, the comments are analysed. Those are divided into five

categories: Positive-Negative-Neutral, the comments classified by theme, the comment classified by genre, the comments classified by sentiment, the EP's replies. All those subsections analyse the comments of the EP's Facebook page under various angles. Subsequently we go to the last part of this section which analyses what does Brussels mean for European citizens. Following the analysis, the limitations of the thesis are presented in the Discussion/Conclusion section. The second part of the Discussion/Conclusion section provides us with a recap of the findings and attempts to answer our first research sub-question. The following section will each, in turn, attempt to answer the different sub-research questions. Eventually, we will finish with a concluding word. This is our programme, so let us start right away by a word on the European Parliament.

2. Theoretical Framework

As it has been mentioned in the introduction our main research question is "How is the EP rebranding itself through social media campaigns and how are its citizens engaging with these efforts?" In order to better comprehend this question and to be able to answer it in the following section some review of the literature is necessary. Some concepts, such as politics and social media, branding and political organization or the rebranding of the EP, need to be explained and the current state of affairs needs to be examined. Therefore we will start with general knowledge about the EP and continue with theory on politics and social media, followed by branding and political organization and then we will go into the branding of the EU as a whole and encompass the European Parliament within this framework. In this section, the historical state of the EP's communication strategy will be examined and explanation on its need to rebrand itself will be given. Then we will have a closer look at the particular rebranding through the use of social media campaigns and eventually we will analyse how citizen engage with these efforts. The examination of this last point will be based on the work of Liesbet van Zoonen's book *Entertaining the citizen: When politics and popular culture converge*. However in order to maintain the debate alive other scholars will be consulted too. Finally, in order to close this literature section we will go into the general workings of city branding and its combination with political organisation branding. This section is necessary in order to comprehend the link that unites the city of Brussels and the EP.

2.1 The European Parliament

The European Parliament's power is mainly legislative. However throughout the years, the different treaties have progressively reinforced its powers. This culminates in 2009 with the Lisbon Treaty which gave the European Parliament a number of important new responsibilities. The EP exercises its legislative power in cooperation with the Council of the European Union (The Council) and the European Commission. Therefore the European Parliament is called a co-legislator and it has basically a say in almost every area of the European legislation going from the single market to civil liberties. Shortly, the process works as follows: The European Commission submits a law proposition to the EP and the Council and together those two organs adapt or modify the proposition. Besides its legislative work the EP has a budgetary competency. This means that every year it draws up the budget of the EU in accordance with the Council. Finally it has a role of control and democratic monitoring, that is, it supervises the work of the Commission and it has a say in the office taking of the President of the European Commission.

The European Parliament is the only European institution directly elected by the European citizens. The elections held between May 22nd and May 25th 2014, are the 9th election of the European Parliament since 1979; date when the parliamentarians were elected for the first time by the people of Europe. All over Europe citizens in age to vote elect national parliamentarians that will represent them at the European level. These national representatives are elected for a period of 5 years, after which they can be re-elected. Due to Croatia's accession in July 2013 the members of the European Parliament (MEP) are 766, but this number will be scaled down following this year's elections. After May 2014 a total of 751 European deputies will be appointed. This number will stay at that level in the future as it has been established according to the Lisbon treaty. "The number of seats allocated to each member state depends on the number of inhabitants in the country. Thus, Germany, which is the biggest European state counts the most representatives, they are 99. As for Italy and the United Kingdom, they have each 73 seats. The smallest countries like Malta, Cyprus, Estonia or even Luxemburg have only 6 deputies. This way of attributing political seats is called 'degressive proportionality' and is to be found in the treaties" (Belgrado, 2014, p.20).

The current president of the European Parliament is Martin Schulz. He entered into mandate in 2012 and this for a period of two years and six months which is renewable. As for the politicians sitting in the European Parliament, once elected they group according to their political affinities and not according to their nationalities. This results in seven political groups within the European Parliament. "GUE/NGL represents the Confederal Group of the European United Left/Nordic Green Left while S&D is the Group of the Progressive Alliance

of Socialists and Democrats in the European Parliament. The Green/ European Free Alliance are named Verts/ALE and the Alliance of Liberals and Democrats for Europe Party is named ALDE. The Christian democrats are to be found in the EPP group, namely, the group of the European People's Party. The European Conservatives and Reformists Group are represented in the ECR, and the Europe of Freedom and Democracy Group is called EFD. Finally, there are the NA or non-attached members. Those are politicians who do not attach themselves to any particular political ideologies” (Belgrado, 2014, p. 20). Eventually, for the first time the EP will have a direct impact on the choice of the president of the commission. The latter will be elected by the Parliament on the basis of the choices proposed by the Council. Furthermore some political parties have the right to propose candidates to the presidency of the Commission.

It is now time we turn to the EP’s communication and the numerous channels it uses to convey information “about itself, its activities and its relevance to people’s everyday lives” (Anderson and McLeod, 2004, p.902). In order to structure the information that will be conveyed to the European public the EP has a press and information directorate named DG-III and it has press and information offices in the capitals of each of the Member States. The DG-III’s job is to organize and supervise all the information material, be it written on paper or broadcasted, that comes out of the EP and that will inform the citizens. The press and information directorate’s activities contain: “press briefings and statements to the press by the Brussels arm of the press and information directorate, DG-III, and by its national and regional representations within the Member States; its [the EP’s] information services provided on the Europarl website; its [the EP’s] Visitors’ Programme; events organized within Member States by the external offices to help increase public awareness of the European Parliament; assistance with and encouragement of broadcast media coverage of the EP’s work that DG-III’s specialist audio-visual unit provides; and the press, PR and representational functions undertaken by MEPs and their political groupings” (Anderson and McLeod, 2004, p.902). In the late 1990s the Presidency and Secretary General set up the Rapid Response Unit. “It was seen initially as a means of trying to deal with the large number of factually inaccurate reports concerning the European Parliament that had been appearing within the media of the UK and the 14 other Member States. This part of its overall role was to be performed by the provision of correct information through such means as supplying fact sheets, etc” (Anderson and McLeod, 2004, p.908). These ways of communicating to the European public are the traditional means employed by the EP. The new means brought about by the advent of the Web 2.0 such as Facebook, Twitter or Pinterest are to be found on the website. This is due to

the fact that “The Parliament’s website pages are one of the most obvious means by which it communicates with the EU public and the media” (Anderson and McLeod, 2004, p.905). Therefore putting the link to Facebook or Flickr on the website ensures the EP to reach a wide audience. Most of the EP’s social media accounts such as YouTube or Facebook are only accessible since 2009. Consequently we can say that they are quite new in comparison to other EP means of communicating such as the press releases. Nevertheless there is a hiccup with the website: it is quite exclusively used, it “tends to be the preserve of specialist minorities and those within adequately resourced and enlightened educational institutions” (Anderson and McLeod, 2004, p.905). Thus, not every citizen accesses the EP’s website. To the contrary, Facebook is much more open and much more accessible giving more citizens the opportunity to access EP’s information. A medium like Facebook is necessary nowadays as EU officials informed Anderson and McLeod (2004) “that the contents of the EU websites are primarily conveyed to the public through the print and broadcast media within the various Member States” (p.905). Facebook enables citizens to get the information quicker, directly from the Parliament and to react to it. These things are not feasible through traditional media. Besides, in the absence of a truly media-friendly website the EP had to find other ways to reach its citizens. It seems that Facebook has become one of those media-friendly ways of reaching them.

2.2 Politics and social media

We will continue this literature review by the link that exists between politics in general and social media in general. Let us have a look at what exact role does the Internet and social media platforms play in politics. Numerous are the scholars who argue nowadays that “the Internet can be used as a mean to widen the citizens’ participation” (e.g. Dahlgren, 2004; Chadwick, 2006; Gane& Beer, in Vesnić-Alujević, 2008, p.47). Enlarging the audience of the political sphere is the first advantage of using the Internet and social media platforms in politics. For instance, young citizens who may not have been previously taken into account by some political campaigns are now, more than ever, included in the political process. This phenomenon will be analyzed in a few sections below. Kitchener and Kushin (2009) agree with the previously mentioned authors and emphasize the key role of social networks when they state that “social network sites (SNS) in particular have created unique arenas for online discourse”. Facebook, as a social media platform, represents an example of one of those unique arenas. In these arenas everything is being discussed, and so are politics. “The emergence of the Internet, not unlike other technologies before it, created a popular avenue

for discussion of political and social issues” (Holt, 2004; Puopolo, 2001 in Kitchener and Kushin, 2009). Thus, the opening of new ‘spaces’ for openly discussing politics is a second asset of the Internet. According to Smith and Raine (2008, p. ii in Kitchener and Kushin, 2009) “10 percent of all Americans who use social network sites use them “for some kind of political activity ” and Dahlgren, (2004 in Vesnic-Alujevic, 2012a, p.467) argues that a significant part of civic discussion today takes place online. All those quotes converge in one direction as far as our case is concerned: they underline the utility of social media platform – hence Facebook – as a technology that opens up the world of the Internet to the discussion of political issues.

Another significant aspect of the Internet concerns the type of exchanges one can have online. Vesnic-Alujevic (2012a) emphasizes the “possibility of direct feedback” that differentiates the Web 2.0 from other media. Instant communication and many-to-many communication are characteristics of the Internet that have given birth to new types of communication. Therefore politicians, political parties and political campaigns should use this feature as a possibility to interact and chat with citizens. In that sense, Lusoli et al. (2006, p.40 in Vesnic-Alujevic, 2012b, p.37) emphasized that if the Internet and social media platforms have the power to “attract citizens and widen the participation”, it is only “under the condition that citizens receive a response that “their participation and communication is valued and listened”. Furthermore, this many-to-many communication has the effect that the user turned from passive into active creating content and engaging online. Van Zoonen (2004 in Vesnic-Alujevic, 2012a, p.467) “argues that the emergence of new interactive technologies have contributed to an active role of Internet audiences through discussions, participations and voting.” Increased engagement is one of the positive effects of the Internet on citizens in general. And so is the creation of new political content. Indeed be it on Facebook or YouTube, citizens have the possibility to debate, discuss and create new forms of political content: Videos, pictures, voice recording, everything goes. Actually it is the debates going on on those social media platforms that turn them into suitable political arenas.

More and more this increased engagement is done through entertainment in order to move beyond the simple realm of politics. Embedded videos, the posting of pictures and the update of statuses all render politics more attractive and funnier than it used to be. Vesnic-Alujevic (2012a, p.467) explain that “the political attention changed the focus outside parliamentary system and that new forms of engagement brought different sort of organizational structure and membership, while the boundaries between politics, cultural

values and identity processes have become blurred”. Thus politics is moving away from politics.

“The Internet also stimulates the feeling of belonging to a certain group and it contributes to an easier construction of collective identities (Vedel, 2003 in Vesnic-Alujevic, 2012a, p.467). Identification, recognition, continuity and belonging are as many values that not only the European Parliament but all the Parliaments, politicians and political parties should strive to achieve through their communication strategies. Therefore using the Internet represents an asset for the world of politics. In the case of the EP Vesnic-Alujevic sums it up quite well: “Facebook offers useful space for supranational political organizations like the European Parliament first because it is flexible, which makes it different from other media (Bimber et al., 2008 in Vesnic-Alujevic, 2012b, p.38), because it can reach more audience than classical media (as there is no traditional media published/broadcasted on the EU level)”. Another interesting asset of the Internet is the mixing of genres and nationality it can provide. “Out on the networks, people who are not of the same race, gender, class, nationality or locality are interacting in cyberspace through operational interfaces that reduce their identities to strings of text, synthesized speech or stylized graphics” (de Kerckhove, 1998 in Luke, 2006, p.164). The Revolutionary use at which the Internet is put today transforms it into a new form of participatory politics. It is Manuel Castells who said (2001) “Some argue that the Internet may be the most persuasive and effective form of communication technology in diffusing social ideas and actions in history” (in Carty, 2009, p.64). If we sum up we can say that the Internet enlarges the audience of citizens engaging in politics, that it opens up new ‘spaces’ for discussion, that it has introduced new type of exchanges between individuals by turning them from passive into active content creators, that it has increased engagement and this by using entertainment, that it fosters identification, recognition, continuity and belonging and finally that it can create a mix of genres and nationalities.

This summary brings us to the question of participation. Even though the next sections will try to answer the question “how are its citizens engaging with these efforts?” we can already provide some answers by referring ourselves to the literature on participation. Indeed, participation in politics on the Internet is closely connected to our topic of politics and social media. Before starting on this point it is worth to take notice of the so called ‘digital divide. Taking it into account confronts us with the reality that not everyone is able to access the Internet equally due to inequalities such as income, education, gender, age and race. The consequence of such a characteristic of the Internet is that “instead of balancing the traditional inequality access to politics, the Internet reinforces existing problems” (Albrecht, 2006, p.64).

We will therefore be confronted to a stereotype of those who have more chances to participate in Internet activities: they are young white men of higher education, having a higher income and who are experienced users. Hill and Hughes (1998) have conducted a study that confirms the general tendency of having younger people participating in Internet political activities. According to them, “Internet users and activists (those who use it for political reasons) are considerably younger than the general public, with Internet activists averaging a very young 32.8 years” (p.29 in Rice & Haythornthwaite, 2006, p.96). Baumgartner and Morris (2010) agree with them when they state that “Young adults are often seen as a target group of online political communication as they were less engaged in politics than other citizens” (in Vesnić-Alujević, 2012b p.36). To continue with Hill and Hughes (1998), they contend that “this type of users (activists) are more involved in information gathering and more knowledgeable about current political events than is the general public (Hill and Hughes, 1998, p.35 in Rice & Haythornthwaite, 2006, p.96). Delli Carpini and Williams side with Hill and Hughes when they write that “those who rely on non-traditional sources of information are certainly no less informed than those who rely on traditional news sources and there is evidence that they may, in fact, be better informed” (2009, p.181). Therefore the audience we might find for our political Facebook page is a young audience, more educated than the average and knowledgeable about current political events. Here we can notice a change that is quite mentioned in the literature: the advent of the Internet technologies has opened up the field of politics to the younger generations which were usually not the first and main target of the political world. Indeed, “according to Delli Carpini (2000), in the classical political communication, political institutions and actors have disconnected young adults from public life, by paying no attention to them and to the topics that matter to them, thus not supplying them with the opportunities to participate” (in Vesnić-Alujević, 2012a, p. 467). Today, thanks to the advent of the Web 2.0 this situation has changed. “Young people certainly use the Internet for participation, broadly defined, including information seeking, online newspapers, peer communication, emailing/voting/interacting with websites, content creation and visiting civic or political websites (Pew, 2005 in Vesnić-Alujević, 2012a, p. 467). According to Dahlgren (2004 in Vesnić-Alujević, 2012a, p. 467), a great deal of civic discussion takes place online and especially among young adults. Thus, for them too, the Internet has opened up a new sphere where to bring political discussion. The new types of interaction, that is, instant communication, has become their normal way of communicating and their role of active content creator has become their normal status. Not only are youngsters now included in the world of politics but they actually help to make it; they are no longer passive listener.

Lusoli (2005, p. 155 in Vesnić-Alujević, 2012a, p. 467) “suggests that the Internet contributes to the “liberation” of younger generation as it “unlocks participation from traditional authority structures and information gatekeepers.”” Consequently youngsters have become a target group for online political communication. Now, whether young citizens are interested in these political initiatives is another story.

Now that we have enlighten the position of social media and politics in general, let us now focus on one particular medium, the one we will use for our analysis, namely, Facebook. Facebook is a social media platform, founded in 2004 by Mark Zuckerberg and its headquarters are in California. It enables its users to create a personal profile and to share it online. What is shared on the Web is personal information going from one’s birthdate to one’s current job to one’s place of living. Among all the types of data displayed on one’s profile, it is also possible to find personal political opinions. The amount of data shared on the Internet depends on the individual’s profile security parameters. “Unlike other SNSs, Facebook users are unable to make their full profiles public to all users” (Boyd and Ellison, 2008, p.218).

Boyd and Ellison (2007, p. 211 in KitchenerandKushin, 2009) have defined social network sites as “[W]eb-based services that allow individuals to (1) construct a public or semi-public profile within a bounded system, (2) articulate a list of other users with whom they share a connection, and (3) to view and traverse their list of connections and those made by others within the system” and they have noted that many “have integrated these sites into their daily practices” (Boyd and Ellison, 2008, p.210).

But there is more to Facebook than just the setting up of public profiles. One, be it an individual, a corporate company or an international organization, is also able to set up a page. A Facebook page is defined as “a public profile that enables you to share your business and products with Facebook users” (KickStart Alliance, 2014). “Pages can only be created by an official representative of the business or organization, who remains anonymous. Pages are ideal for companies, brands, artists and celebrities » (KickStart Alliance, 2014). Therefore a page is also the ideal for an international organization such as the EP. Pages have three options: ‘like’, messages and RSS feed. To the contrary of a profile or a group one cannot publish on the wall of a page. It is possible to comment a publication, but not to publish a post. Only the official person in charge of the page manages what is written on it. Consequently the EP manages all the posts and comments that are published on its page. “One of the main differences between member and fan pages is who can post the content. The member page is officer controlled and the person who oversees the Facebook page is listed on the site. A fan page doesn’t display who developed or who controls access to the site.

Therefore, the only way a visitor would know who controls the site is if the individual self-disclosed their affiliation”. (McCorkindale, 2010, p.5). Photos and videos can also be displayed on a page, but once again they are managed by the official instance in charge of the page. The number of Facebook users has already been given in the introduction; therefore I will not repeat them again. Nevertheless it is useful to add that: “Therefore, based on the number of consumers, it can be considered an appropriate medium for political advertising, both for individuals and organizations. Facebook gives opportunities to political actors to be closer to citizens” (Vesnic-Alujevic, 2012b, p.36). This, as we have already mentioned, is one of the reasons why we have chosen this particular medium. Another reason can be found in this quote “more than one in three eligible European voters is on Facebook, and millions of others are reachable online” (Linder, 2014).

2.3 Branding and political organisations

Before starting our journey within the twists and turns of the EU branding, we should first ask ourselves what does branding consist in and what is a brand. Branding as such “derives from the practice of marking cattle with the decorations of their owners” (Van Ham, 2008, p.249), that is, the cattle is marked with a brand. The evolution of the practice has led to the association between a brand and the goods trading world. According to the Oxford online dictionaries the general definition of a brand is the following: “A type of product manufactured by a particular company under a particular name” (Oxford online dictionary, 2014a). If we are to apply this definition to political organisations we should view these organisations as companies which manufacture products, that is, values wearing for instance names such as justice and human rights. The reason we can apply this definition to political organisations and not remain constrained to the world of commercial companies is due to the fact that the meaning of branding has expanded. Nowadays everything can be branded: cities, countries, international organizations and even the individual have become branding material.

Branding can therefore be analysed under various aspects, be it literature on personal branding or city branding. However, the literature that is of interest to us concerns political organisation branding. This type of literature is scarce and even nonexistent, despite thorough research. Nevertheless, there remains one type of literature that we can analyse and that will suit our purpose: the literature on nation branding. This type of literature is of use to us as we are concerned with branding and political organisation and what is a state or nation if not a political organisation? According to the Oxford online dictionary a state is defined as follows: “A nation or territory considered as an organized political community under one government”

(Oxford online dictionary, 2014b). As the definition mentions it we are dealing here with “an organized political community” or put in other words a political organisation. For this analysis of the literature we will use the extensive work of Peter van Ham on *the Rise of the brand state* and some insight coming from Simon Anholt’s work on place branding. Anholt writes: “I have always intended Nation Branding to consider how the nation *as a whole* presents and represents itself to other nations” (2006, p.271). If we apply this quote to any political organization we understand that branding is about how those organizations *as a whole* presents and represents themselves on the world’s political stage. Yet, no matter how a state brand oneself “brands and states often merge in the minds of the global consumer. For example, in many ways, Microsoft and McDonald's are among the most visible U.S. diplomats, just as Nokia is Finland's envoy to the world” (Van Ham, 2001, p.2). Such a merger also applies in the case of political organisations, the difference is just that political organisations are more often merged with values. NATO for instance has as an inevitable brand defence, peace and security since it is what it stands for. The case of the EU is similar; its brand is defined by the value it represents. Yet the EU has also more assets. “The application of "euro" to everything from trains and soccer championships to a unit of currency will make it one of the most frequently used names across the continent and one of the world's most popular brands” (Van Ham, 2001, p.5-6). The logic behind this is that “we talk about a state's personality in the same way we discuss the products we consume” (Van Ham, 2001, p.3). As the product we consume, states’ brands and political organisations’ brands depend on important factors such as trust, customer satisfaction, image and reputation (Van Ham, 2001). Branding a nation or a political organization is different than simple advertising. Van Ham states that “Straightforward advertising has given way to branding—giving products and services an emotional dimension with which people can identify” (2001, p.2) Political organisations do indeed strive for people to emotionally identify with them, be it small local parties or political organizations such as the EU. Once acquired, identification is a major asset, as it will guarantee the faithfulness and pledge of the citizen. Faith in a political organisation thus comes from its branding practices. The practices of nation branding, according to Anholt, “attempts to harmonise policy, people, sport and culture, products, tourism, trade and investment promotion and talent recruitment” (2006, p.271). These attempts are similar for some political organisations which attempt at harmonising a set of different parameters to make them work all together. For instance the EU as a political organisation has to reconcile fisheries laws with young people high rate of unemployment. A successful and strong brand does more than managing different sectors all together, “In

today's world of information overload, strong brands are important in [...] wielding political influence (Van Ham, 2001, p.2)". Consequently a strong brand for a political organisation will enable it to exercise political influence. The stronger the brand, the stronger the political influence that the organisation will have on the International stage. This is why "Knowing that "Europe" will never inspire affection in its citizens similar to that enjoyed by the nation-state, the EU is in the midst of a campaign to brand itself as a beacon of civilization and prosperity in an otherwise disorderly and disoriented world" (Van Ham, 2001, p. 5). Finally we can conclude this section by stating Van Ham once more who wrote that "A brand is best described as a customer's idea about a product" (2001, p.2). Therefore the European citizens' idea about the EU will be what describes the EU the best. If that idea of the EU is flawed or filled with distrust, then this is the sentiment that will describe the EU brand. It is therefore necessary that the EU regain the faith and trust of its citizens in order to have a radiating brand on the world stage.

Now that we know more about political organisations and branding it is now time to go online and review the literature that deals with the branding of political organisations on the Internet. Let us start with Tokarewicz who writes that "contemporary methods of political communication are based in the particular culture of the time" (date, p.96). The advent of the Web 2.0, is what represents, in 2014, the particular culture of our time. Consequently, it is normal that our contemporary methods of political communications be rooted in the Web 2.0. Thus focusing on the Web 2.0 and more particularly on the social media platforms which represent the heights of this very ICT technology, we will concentrate our literature review on one specific aspect of branding which is campaigning. The reasons why we focus on this particular aspect are numerous. First most of the literature available on the online branding of political organisations focuses on the specific aspect of campaigning. Second the example of campaigning is tangible and quite easily understandable thanks to the overarching example of the 2008 Obama campaign. Third what we will analyse later are "campaigns" published by the EP online. In this vein Rachel Gibson has analysed the 2008 Obama campaign in his bid for the US Presidency and its link with social media. According to her it is the "one of the most acclaimed e-campaigns to date" (2009, Gibson, p.290). The question following this quote is "what can this campaign teach us about the online branding of political organisations?"

Firstly Gibson recognizes it "yes: democratic benefits do appear to be associated with the use of Web 2.0 tools" (2009, Gibson, p.290). Indeed, other mediated experiences than news and journalism have a political potential (Wahl-Jorgensen, 2006). "Mediated

experiences of political life and citizenship take place through a variety of forums and types of experiences” (Wahl-Jorgensen, 2006, p.198). These experiences are found in online campaigns and represent assets for the branding of political organizations. “In the civic realm, social networking sites offer organisations the opportunity to mobilise quickly at the national and international level around a single issue and then disperse (Pickerill 2004; Pickerill *et al.* 2008; Rheingold 2003 in Gibson, 2009, p.291). Mobilising citizens is one aspect of online campaigns, but it is also an aspect of online political organisation. Indeed political organisms such as the European Commission or the International court of justice have both their Facebook page and through the use of this social media platform they can in one instant mobilise thousands of citizens who will soon after disperse and go back to their personal everyday life. “Globalisation and new media technologies allow for the deterritorialisation of political action” (Wahl-Jorgensen, 2006, p.202). Gibson, reminds us of one important point though. It is important if not necessary that the tactics organised online translate into offline mobilisation (2009). Undeniably it is important for political organisations that what they create online results in tangible mobilisation offline, since in the end it is what matters: the concrete actions that one does for the organisations. These actions are what make the organisation go forward. Furthermore, “these new user-driven modes of Internet interaction are seen as promoting the voice of the mass over established elites (Surowiecki 2005; Grannick 2006; Leadbeater 2007 in Gibson, 2009, p.291). “Blogging and social networking tools are seen to hold great promise for reviving democratic practice in particular” (Gibson, 2009, p.291). We have already mentioned the features of the Internet that make it fit for reviving democracy online. However we have not said, up to now, that it empowers the masses. Be it for a campaign online or just for supporting an organisation in general, Web 2.0 technologies offer the masses the possibility to have a voice. This is important for political organisations branding as organisations can reach a larger population and layers of the population that they would not have touched otherwise. Besides, it is important for a political organisation to listen to those voices, as a political organisation that listens to its masses will quickly be a popular organisation. “In short, compared with previous forms of media, the Internet is seen to offer a new opportunity to spread ‘power to the people’ and thus present the possibility for a serious challenge, if not an antidote, to current anti-politics woes” (Gibson, 2009, p.291). “The media are “necessary agents of the practice of modern, popular democracy” because “ their circulation of knowledge, presentation of diverse views and critical scrutiny of those in power will act as guarantor of political health” (Corner and Pels, 2006, p.3 in Tokarewicz, date, p.97)

Now we need to mention that there exist also another side to the story; there exists a notion of a media-driven malaise. Before, this malaise was attributed to the medium of television. Liesbet van Zoonen (2005) tells us how television has been categorized as a medium cut out for entertainment alone. For the defenders of this idea, television provides only infotainment and not the real information. According to Gibson those prejudices have now been transferred onto the new media. “The electronic media are regarded as complicit in fostering the general disaffection and cynicism toward all things political. Through its ‘dumbing down’ of news content, fusing of commentary and reporting and concentration on the competitive, scandalous and personality- led aspects of politics rather than the substantive issues at stake, the media are seen to have both trivialised and tarnished the practice of politics in the public mind” (2009, Gibson, p.290). Thus for some, the new technologies embedded by the Web 2.0 era do not convey serious information and are not worthy of attention as they do not deal with ‘serious’ politics. Nevertheless the point we have seen earlier as being characteristic of a political campaign online are asset worth considering when analysing the branding of a political organisation. They have indeed already made their proof in 2008 when Obama campaigned. Therefore the adoption of those strategies “would understandably be of interest to politicians and parties around the world”(Gibson, 2009, p.290).

2.4 The specific case of the EU and EP communication and Branding

As an international organization that has an image to defend on the world stage the European Union does not escape the rule. If we are to apply the definition we used in the previous section to our EU case we should view the Union as a company which manufacture products, that is, values wearing such names as peace and prosperity. Actually, if we look back, the EU possesses a brand since its onset. Indeed, the European Union has been founded on the value of peace. More exactly it has been founded on the concept of “Peace through economic reconstruction” (Aveline, 2006, p.335). This is what the brand of back then advertised to the future European citizens. However, this particular image which used to be regarded as an asset has faded away with the time passing. Nowadays the chances of a European internal conflict are quite small or even inexistent. The old founding myth that defended “a haven of peace and prosperity in an otherwise rough and unpredictable world” (Van Ham, 2008, p.241) does not appeal to European citizens anymore. Peace has been settled, it is a value and state that have been achieved and are not to be threatened any time soon. In consequence, the EU brand is old, unappealing and, worse than anything, it is not trusted anymore. Even if the chances of an internal conflict are inexistent there exist many

other threats out there that might endanger our fragile peace. The crisis of 2008 is one of them. States may not declare war to each other, but the results of the crisis are nonetheless devastating within several countries such as Spain or Greece. As a result citizens have lost faith in the EU project. “Over the past decades, Europe has sold itself short. This has undermined public confidence in the EU as a potential European superpower.” (Van Ham, 2005, p.122). As Van Ham (2005) states it Europe suffers from a lack of confidence.

But there is more to this brand which is not trusted anymore: it is also badly advertised. Peter Van Ham’s work supports this claim when he states that “Europe’s achievements abroad are modest, and the few successes lousily marketed” (Van Ham, 2005, p.122). This bad advertising is mainly due to the fact that the EU is first and foremost a poor communicator. Then it is a mosaic that has to deal with 28 different culture and languages. As a result the EU has been turned into the “scapegoat for its member states” (Van Ham, 2005, p.122). Every time that something is wrong, the Member States blame the EU. This results in a bad image of the EU all over Europe. Eventually, the main problem of the EU is that it is “still abstract for most of its people — a physical abstraction (a faceless Europe), but also normative abstraction (as most European citizens fear the democratic deficit and loss of control over the process of decision-making in Brussels)” (Aveline, 2006, p.335). This faceless and abstract Europe is not well understood by its citizens and this has a big impact on the way the EU brand is perceived. We can conclude this paragraph by Peter Van Ham’s remark that “Europe lacks *der Wille zur Macht*, and is proud of it!” (Van Ham, 2005, p.122).

As a follow up to everything that has already been said, it is clear that the EU needs a new brand, a new *raison d’être*. It needs to be understood and loved again by its citizens. When it comes to creating a brand Peter Van Ham states that it “is not only economically desirable, it has considerable political and strategic implications” (2001, p.4). This is entirely true for the EU. Having a new powerful and all-encompassing brand will not only assert the EU’s position on the world stage, it will also make it understandable for its citizens. Politically this last mentioned step is necessary if the EU does not want to see the link with its citizen disappear and hence its very *raison d’être*. In order to build an image and reputation for itself the European Union has to act as commercial brands, that is, it has to build its image and reputation “on factors like trust and customer satisfaction” (Van Ham, date, p.240). Indeed trust of the citizens is essential for the European project to go further. This very trust will be soon measured in the upcoming elections of the 25th May. If radical anti-EU parties triumph, this means that citizens do not believe in this project anymore and do not want it anymore. Therefore the EU has to regain the trust of its citizens. This can be done by opening up the

door of the EU to the people. Actually this practice has been taken up by the European Parliament and will be analysed in the next sections. As for satisfaction, it is also a state that the EU must strive to achieve if it wants to keep its “customers happy”. Satisfaction with the EU’s work or more exactly with the EP’s work will as well be analysed in the following sections. Still writing about branding, Peter Van Ham states that it is “more than just PR or marketing, it also touches upon the sentiments. It tries to transform products and services as well as places into something more by giving them an emotional dimension with which people can identify.” (Van Ham, 2005, p.122). Giving citizens a sense of belonging, is what the EU should strive to do with its new brand. This sense of belonging to the European project is more important than anything else. If citizens can comprehend the emotional dimension attached to the EU then they will identify with the EU and if they identify this means that their trust has been recovered. “It is therefore time to refresh Europe’s image, to restyle its PR and to start a serious effort to brand the EU as an effective force for good in the world.” (Van Ham, 2005, p.122). “Branding Europe is less about *knowing* the EU than it is about *loving* it. (Van Ham, 2005, p.123)”

However, despite all the EU’s communication faux pas we have mentioned earlier, we have to be fair and mention both sides of the story. The EU is and remains “one of the most competitive place brands in the world”. (Van Ham, 2008, p.241). Almost 60 years of existence, a blue flag that serves as a powerful logo and a currency named after it (Van Ham, 2008), the EU still has assets that maintain its brand in the competition. Van Ham defines the EU brand as “the ultimate affluence-brand, radiating material comfort and family values” (2008, p.241). Therefore we have to conclude that what the EU needs is a shift in its branding strategies. After all it does remain an important player on the International stage. However, the crisis of confidence with its citizens is present and everything needs to be done in order to overcome it.

The next question that comes up to one’s mind is “what is the place of the EP within this framework of branding?” The EU is a complex body and the EP represents one of its many organs. As a component organ it helps to make the whole mechanics works and when the body suffers so do the organs. The EU represents an entire entity whose parts are affected by what happens to it. If the whole is misunderstood, so are its composite parts. Therefore everything that has been said about the EU can, by extension, apply to the EP. The EP is part of the EU brand, of its founding myth of peace and prosperity and of its communication strategy. If the EU project in general suffers from all these ills, then the logical consequence is that the EP is also affected by them. For instance the lack of trust in the EU is also translated

in the EP by a lack of trust in the MEP and the very existence of the European Parliament. If the peaceful project of the EU is put at stake, so is the democratic project of the EP. Eventually, if the EU has a blurry brand, the EP is blurry as well in the mind of the European people. As Van Ham states “the EU’s information and communication strategy is woefully insufficient and underfunded with both financial and political capital”. (2005, p.122) Like the EU the EP is therefore a poor communicator of its image, ideas and assets. Anderson and McLeod have summed up the reasons why the EP’s communication strategies are so weak. “There are a number of factors that make it difficult to interest the press and the public in states like the UK in the EP’s affairs. These include: the complex nature of the Parliament’s own decision-making procedures; the substantial length of time which it generally takes to reach decisions via those procedures; the fact that it lacks any single interest-focusing individual with the power of a head of government within it; and the fact that it still remains without any significant power in key policy areas such as defense” (2004, p.898). According to Anderson’s and McLeod’s explanation the EP is complex, complicate, slow working and lacks power. Due to those characteristics the EP is seen as weak, often inefficient and even sometimes useless. Still for Anderson and McLeod “for the most part the EP needs a truly outstanding media and information operation if it is to succeed adequately in communicating its importance and relevance to voters *throughout* the EU” (2004, p.898). In other words the EP needs to rebrand itself.

The EP is not ignorant; it has well enough understood its current situation. Consequently several steps have been taken to refresh the EP’s communications strategies and its image on the European stage. Probably the most important and efficient of those steps was to go online. From YouTube, joined in 2007, to Flickr joined in March 2009 and to the setup of a Facebook page in April 2009, the European Parliament is to be found on all the current ‘hot’ social media platforms. Going online was the right move for the European Parliament as for Tapscott restraining to do so “is to choose antiquation, anachronism and anti-progressiveness” (1997, in Luke, 2006, p.166). Of all those processes put in place to restore the image of the EP, it is the Facebook page that is of interest to us. “How is the EP rebranding itself through social media campaigns” is our main research question. How this rebranding is done through the use of a Facebook page will be our focus. The social media campaigns we will examine later are campaigns displayed on the EP’s Facebook page. Some literature examines the EP’s use of Facebook but only in time of elections. Our aim is to see how the EP’s Facebook is used for its rebranding and this, no literature has analysed. The next sections will help filling in the gap and answering the questions we are asking ourselves.

The topic we are dealing with is political in nature and not everyone is appealed by politics. This is why, in its attempt to rebrand itself online the EP is trying to be more attractive to its citizens. It makes efforts to engage them more and this by being a slightly bit different, that is, by mixing politics with entertainment. Therefore, one of the most important aspects of the EP communication with its audience is that it attempts to go beyond the political. Through riddles, games and contests, the EP moves away from the politics. The many policies that frighten us and awaken angst are softened and passed through by stimulating our playfulness. For examining this quite unusual relationship we will refer to the rather extensive work of Liesbet van Zoonen and John Street. Their work combining politics with entertainment is the reference in this matter. If we believe the premises of Liesbet van Zoonen's work, the combination politics/entertainment is becoming more and more common. Despite this fact the alliance of politics with entertainment has been criticized in the literature by a great deal of authors from the French philosopher Bourdieu to Jürgen Habermas. Actually van Zoonen explains that the detractors of the alliance politics/entertainment would even go back all the way to Plato. Nevertheless this has not stop van Zoonen to ask herself whether politics can be combined with entertainment, whether political involvement and participation can be fun and whether citizenship can be pleasurable (2005). Trying to render these three aspects of politics and entertainment feasible is what the EP is striving to do on their Facebook page by making the citizen participate in quiz, question-answer and riddles. According to Liesbet van Zoonen "the presence and relevance of entertainment in politics have only intensified" (2005, p.2). In consequence people do politics even during their leisure time. Indeed when one goes on the EP's Facebook page and participates in the post "What do you think will be on the agenda of this month Plenary," one engages in politics while at the same time doing a pleasurable activity of gaming. Practicing this type of politics has thus become a "leisure" in itself. However van Zoonen insists that "leisure is a highly competitive sector" and that "politics is competing with a large offer of diversion – mediated and unmediated - to gain people's attention, interest and involvement." (2005, p.2-3). This is the reason why the EP's posts on their Facebook page try to be as playful as possible in order to engage the citizen and retain their attention. As Chadwick wrote "online campaigns are based on interaction which should reduce citizens' apathy and increase the participation" (2006 in Vesnić-Alujević, 2012a, p.466). Besides the playfulness of the EP's Facebook page, one cannot help noticing its connection with popular culture. Women's Day is celebrated as is Valentine's Day on the 14th of February. On these occasions, as in many others, the EP asks the citizens to participate in one way or another. Be it by posting pictures, wishing a happy

day to the women you know or participating in a talk about women rights with an MEP, the EP tries to connect culture and your personal engagement. Liesbet van Zoonen contends that “Politics has to be connected to the everyday culture of its citizens; otherwise it becomes an alien sphere, occupied by strangers no one cares and bothers about” (2005, p.3) Culture, John Street mentions, takes its strength from its ability to move us (1997). As a result we can mention him again by using his quote stating that “the entertainment has become a part of every political campaign (Street, 2003 in Vesnić-Alujević, 2012b, p.43), as its element helps in creating affective ties with the electorate”.

2.5 Relations between city branding and political institutional branding

With this theoretical background we are now ready to start the analysis that will help us to answer our main research question and our first and second sub-question. However, there remains the third sub-question which is as important as the three others and which has not yet been enlightened by some literature. “How does the EP use the Brussels city brand to reshape itself online?” is the question at stake in this last paragraph of our literature review. Why, one might wonder does this question come up in our research about the EP online rebranding strategies. This is because we assume that the EP’s online strategies to rebrand itself are somehow connected to the Brussels’ city brand. However, before verifying our assumptions we will review literature on city branding, then make the connection with political institution branding and finally we will analyse the connection between the EP and the city of Brussels. General literature on city branding is necessary in order to understand the mechanism that is behind city promotion. We need to understand this mechanism in order to be able to do the relation between the Brussels’ city brand and the EP. Actually, for the purpose of our comparison we need to understand the general process that associates a place with a certain characteristic such as power. Comprehending this association properly is necessary if we wish to find out which place the city of Brussels occupies in the EP’s communication. Furthermore we need to know the features of city branding in order to be able to compare it with political organisation branding.

So, let us start by emphasizing that “Towns and cities have long been identified with major corporate headquarters, factories, or sporting venues and clubs” (Graeme, 2003, p.420). As we mentioned earlier in the case of nation branding and political organization branding Finland has long been associated with its Nokia phones and the US with Microsoft. The process is therefore the same for cities. Google is associated with Silicon Valley while the International court of justice is associated with The Hague. According to Ward (1998 in

Braun et al., 2010) we can find examples promoting cities dating back to 1850. “O’Leary and Iredal (1976) were the first to identify place marketing as a challenging field for the future, describing place marketing as activities “designed to create favourable dispositions and behaviour toward geographic locations”” (p. 156 in Braun et al., 2010, p.2). Here we need to do the distinction between place marketing and place branding. Braun has defined place marketing in general as “the coordinated use of marketing tools supported by a shared customer-oriented philosophy, for creating, communicating, delivering, and exchanging urban offerings that have value for the city’s customers and the city’s community at large” (Braun, 2008, p. 43 in Braun et al., 2010, p.3) while he defines a place brand as “a network of associations in the consumers’ mind based on the visual, verbal, and behavioural expression of a place, which is embodied through the aims, communication, values, and the general culture of the place’s stakeholders and the overall place design (Braun and Zenker, 2010, p. 5 in Braun et al., 2010, p.3). Thus, place marketing uses the marketing tools to promote a place while place branding makes appeal to the emotional association that a customer makes with a place. In short place marketing uses logical tools and makes use of the reason while place branding plays on one’s emotions. In order to play on people’s emotions brands need to mean something to them. Be it the food, the language or the culture at large there is always something in a brand that will make one connects with it for one reason or another. Nevertheless, “for many cities, it’s impossible to sum up the brand in a word — they’re multi-dimensional and also changing” (Salman, 2008). As we will see later the city of Brussels is an example of such a multi-dimensional brand, but for the moment let us take the example of the city of Amsterdam. The brand “I Amsterdam” is a website for tourist, but it is also much more than that. Under this all-encompassing motto, the city embraces life experience, living and business. Those three aspects of the city are totally different and appeal to totally different audiences with different interests. Yet the “I Amsterdam” city needs to talk to all of them and to appeal to their various emotions. As such “I Amsterdam” can be seen as a successful brand as it embraces the various needs of its consumers while at the same time being all-encompassing. “The I amsterdam motto portrays the Amsterdam Metropole as a strong economic and cultural centre in Western Europe, as well as an important centre for engineering and technology. We distinguish ourselves through our core values: creativity, innovation and commercial spirit” (Brand manual I Amsterdam, n.d.). The next step in our research is to wonder what makes such a successful brand. According to Robert Jones, consultant director at international brand consultancy Wolff Olins “Successful branding can turn a city into a place where people want to live, work and visit. A strong identity is vital if you are vying with other places for

attention in tourism and business or relaunching an area after a regeneration initiative” (Salman, 2008). Vying with other places for attention in tourism and business has become common practice as the sector of city branding never ceases to expend. Nowadays every city, every country and even region has a brand. Developing a strong brand has become an asset to remain in the competition as today’s competition is becoming fiercer. “Fierce competition for resources, for business relocation, for foreign investment, for visitors, even residents is evident in today’s world” (Kotler et al 1999 in Kavaratzis, n.d., p.1). “As people, capital and companies have become more footloose, it is vital for places, in all scales, to provide in all these areas an environment capable not only to attract new activity and place-users but also, and perhaps more importantly, to keep existing ones satisfied with their place” (Kavaratzis, n.d., p.1). This is the moment when marketing enters the process, as emotional ties alone are not sufficient. Some logical mechanism is needed in the whole process of place branding. “Places are following ideas and employing practices developed by marketing, transferring knowledge to their own, peculiar environment and translating concepts according to their needs and characteristics” (Rainisto 2003; Barke 1999 in Kavaratzis, n.d., p.1). Therefore we can say that place marketing is a tool used by place branding. According to Mihalis Kavaratzis, places throughout the world “are increasingly importing the concept and techniques of product and corporate branding. [...] This is a trend that has been accelerated in recent years, especially within the new conditions created by the increasing role of image-based strategies and the growing importance of the cultural, leisure and entertainment industries within the contemporary economy, as much for tourists and other visitors, as for the local population. [...] Especially the organization of small or bigger scale art, sport and other types of events and festivals are seen as instrumental in establishing and reinforcing the place’s brand.” (n.d., p.1). Thus, if we follow Mihalis Kavaratzis’s reasoning we can say that Culture and Entertainment play now a major role in city branding. Finally, let us finish this paragraph about city branding by saying that “brands are not purely a source of differentiation, but also of identification, recognition, continuity and collectivity” (Graeme, 2003, p.420). Once again brands make appeal to one’s emotions and thus create identification, recognition, continuity and collectivity.

With this last sentence we finish our definition and our understanding of city branding. This was a necessary step in order to go further and understand how city branding and political organisation branding do connect. Let us now deal with this issue.

Be it political organisation branding, nation branding or city branding, all three are branding. Consequently all three base their methods on the sector of corporate branding, that

is, they borrow their promotion techniques to that of corporate products and the way they emotionally appeal to consumers. We finished our previous paragraph by talking about this emotional appeal. It fosters not only identification with a product, political organisation or city it also produces recognition, continuity and collectivity. In the case of political organisation branding and city branding the created continuity and collectivity are important as they foster a feeling of belonging. A political organization that succeeds at having its members feeling as they belong wins on all aspects and gains the faithfulness of these members. So does the city get the guarantee that people will come back or might even stay. The emotional dimension of branding has been mentioned by all the authors referred to in the sector of branding, be it Peter van Ham in the field of nation/political organization branding, Mihalis Kavartzis and Graeme in the field of city branding and Julie Aveline in the case of the EU branding. Therefore we can conclude that this emotional dimension is, if not the heart of branding, at least its most important aspect. Identification with the brand, be it a city, a political organization or a nation, resides at the core of the branding process. Branding also serves to presents and represents things *as a whole* on the world's stage. Branded products represent a value or a lifestyle and so do branded cities and political organisation. Likewise, harmonising a set of different parameters is an aspect of branded products as it is of branded cities and political organisations. One more asset common to city branding and political organisation branding is that it wields political influence. A strong city brand or a strong political organisation brand are effective assets for a city or an organisation to have a say on the world's political stage.

As we have seen political organisation branding and city branding connect due to their similarities. They use similar processes that have the same origins and elicit somehow the same results. However, there is more to say to this connection. Indeed, city branding can be associated with political power. This means that what the city is branded for is for the political power it represents. Similarly, the political organisation is branded through the city it represents. Therefore city branding and political organisation branding end up being one and the same thing. For instance Washington has been branded as the political capital of the US and The Hague has been branded as the city of peace and justice due to the presence of the International court of Justice. Therefore, sometimes city branding and political organisation branding are intermingled. A physical location can be taken as representing some political power while, likewise, some political power can be taken to represent a physical location. In the case of The Hague, the city is taken to represent peace and justice while peace and justice are generally associated with The Hague. Physical location and political branding are

therefore intermingled. Thus, merging happens with politics. Yet it also happens with culture and entertainment. Let us remind ourselves that Liesbet vanZoonen writes that our society becomes more and more characterised as an “entertainment society” (2005) and that politics does not escape the rule. According to her entertainment and politics have been mingling for a long time. Mihalis Kavaratzis agrees with her when he sees in city branding the pervasiveness of culture and entertainment. Thus, culture and entertainment are elements common to city branding and to political organisations. The next question to ask is whether entertainment is part of political organisations branding as well. This will be better demonstrated through the examples used by John Street in his book *Politics & Popular Culture*. According to him, “British politicians have made every effort to link themselves to the success of the Beatles. Labour’s Harold Wilson awarded them medals; his opponent Edward Heath praised them for their contribution to the British fashion industry ; and John Major gave Paul McCartney a knighthood” (1997, p.47). This example, taken from the music world, shows how entertainment can be used for political ends. It also shows how the icons of a country, who are often associated with the country itself, are used by political institutions – Labour party and opponents alike – to brand themselves and the people who represent them. John Street also gives another striking example. Who else represents the mingling between political organisation branding and entertainment better than Silvio Berlusconi? This “Italian media tycoon” has seen his power rise thanks to a “political career orchestrated by his television station (Street, 1997, p.48). Following those two examples it is clear that political organisation branding, as city branding, does use entertainment as one of its main assets.

Now let us see how Brussels and the EP that both need to refresh their brand, connect.

Representing European values and ideas that are scattered throughout the continent, the EP needs to be politically associated with a place, with a location. Being also increasingly more visible online, the Parliament needs a tangible base with which to be associated. As it is clear by now that ‘Europe’ is everywhere offline as well as online it needs some concrete element with which associating its power. A city would be the best in order to have a politically and economically dynamic centre. A centre comparable to what Washington is for the USA. Therefore, the city of Brussels has been chosen as the location whose meaning would be interwoven with the political meaning of the EP. Brussels as the heart of Europe is the city that represents ‘Europe’. In everything that Brussels means to European citizens there should be the answer: European Parliament. The problem is that Brussels means so many other things that the EP’s mention is often lost in a mixing of several notions. One may wonder how Brussels is to represent Europe as brand. Actually one might at first just wonder

what is the Brussels city brand. “Brussels is a global brand but it lacks coherence because Brussels means, for television, the administrative capital of the EU, for professional visitors, the centre of the EU, easy to reach, for cultural activities a mosaic city, for journalists, a city without a town-planning project, for residents, a pleasant city to live in, for property promoters, an inexpensive city, for tourists, a city to discover, for organisers of trade fairs, a competitive destination and for Belgians, a capital where they earn a living”. (City Marketing. Tourism and Brussels, n.d.) As we can see Brussels is comparable to a mosaic whose offers are intended for a large and varied audience. The city has not succeeded in compiling a one single and all-encompassing brand. “It is against this background that professionals opted for image pillars to bear the differences and characteristics of Brussels: art of living, royalty, comic strips, pralines, green spaces, art nouveau, and events.” (City Marketing. Tourism and Brussels, n.d.) Its “brand positioning is being adapted to specific target groups couples, families, managers businessmen and young people” (City Marketing. Tourism and Brussels, n.d.). Therefore Brussels is not one but many and among those many one will find the entity represented by the European Parliament. Thus we can say that even if Brussels is seen as a global brand by those who have to market it, it fails at being an all-encompassing brand as could be Amsterdam or Berlin. Guy Baeten even says that “A *strategy* to cope with Brussels’ international mission is simply nonexistent (Baeten, 2001, p.128). Therefore Brussels lacks a brand, it lacks a plan to express its international mission and it is always pressured by the European institutions for more space. “This small city is constantly under heavy pressure from the continuous expansion of EU offices and activities; its population is rapidly internationalizing; and its service economy is becoming global.” (Baeten, 2001, p.118). He goes on by saying that “Regeneration practices in the EU district in Brussels clearly reveal how a mismatch has grown between Brussels’ economic and cultural globalization and its political-institutional parochialization” (Baeten, 2001, p.117). Brussels then is in face of a challenge, as is the European Parliament. As the European Parliament is rebranding itself, so is Brussels. The city is also in search of a contact with its citizen, it is also in search of engagement. The new campaign ‘be.brussels’ launched in 2013 has as one of its main aims to make of Brussels THE capital of Europe. The city’s urban planning already expresses this will: “Brussels urbanizes the very notion of a ‘unified Europe’ through its cosmopolitan population, international service economy and governmental institutions. (Baeten, 2001, p.118)”. As “‘Europe’ needs not only more space but a better public image as well”(Lagrou, 2000, p.109), so the does the capital which hosts it.

This was the state of affair of both, the EP and the city of Brussels. Now let us connect it with the literature previously used. In our case the EP represents the political organisation branding and Brussels the city branding. As we already mentioned both apply the core methods used by corporate branding which include the creation of an emotional tie with the public. To the difference of product branding that deals with customers, the two types of branding we are handling deal with citizens. Consequently, the emotional tie created refers more to a person, a value or a place than to a product. Actually, the product is the person, the value or the place. In our case Brussels and the EP are both, in turn, product for each other. Brussels use the EP as a tool to rebrand itself as the heart of Europe and the EP uses the city of Brussels as the physical location with which coupling its power. Here we are in the case we mentioned earlier with Washington and The Hague: Physical location, city branding and political branding are intermingled. This signifies that Brussels means the EP and the EP means Brussels. Both branding strategies are intertwined and the branding of the city becomes intermingled with the branding of the political organisation. Therefore when asked “What does Brussels mean to you?”, the logical answer would be the EP and vice versa. The problem is that both are much more than that and both are mingled with entertainment which ends up becoming more important. We will see how important entertainment can be in our analysis section. We also said about entertainment that it is common to city branding and political organisation. No doubt that the city of Brussels organises several events such as concerts, festivals and exhibition. As for the Parliament it has the LUX prize, a film contest, and works of arts of each country presiding over the EU are exhibited in the EP for six months. So separately, the city and the political organisation are connected with entertainment, but what can we say once both are combined? First we can say that Brussels is the only city which hosts the “Parlamentarium”. It is the biggest visitor centres of a Parliament in Europe (visit.brussels 2014) and hosts a permanent exhibition about the EP but also temporary exhibitions. The “Parlamentarium” can be found on the website of “visitbrussels” the official touristic website of the city. Thus the “Parlamentarium” is an integrative part of the panel of the city’s touristics activities. Yet there is more: as in every other European city the EP organises events that, for a while, associate it with the city. The European Commission in partnership with the EP organises every year weeks for everything and anything. There is the European week for mobility, the European week for waste reduction and 2015 will see appear the European week of sport. Cities apply to participate in those thematic weeks and during the time that the action lasts they organise activities according to the week’s theme. Thus, all over Europe playful or more “serious” entertainment is organised under the direction of the

Commission and the EP. Brussels does not escape the rule and so it associates itself with the EP. Though there is more to the use of the Brussels city brand: there is the core tool of branding; the emotional tie. Using the Brussels' city brand to rebrand the EP comes down to appeal to the range of all the emotional ties that people have with the city of Brussels and to associate them with the EP. The organisation of the above mentioned events plays a part in this association. Thus every time that European citizens are asked what does Brussels mean to them there should be the answer: European Parliament. Through this process people identify with the EP and the city of Brussels. Then they feel part of something bigger than themselves, they feel part of a community. This sense of belonging will elicit faithfulness and trust on the part of the citizens and this is all what the EP needs. Branding the EP by using the Brussels city brand it is also presenting and representing the Parliament as a whole on the international stage but also online. Furthermore, it comes down to harmonising a set of different parameters such as the cohabitation between the city's inhabitants and the expatriates coming to work at the EP. Finally, branding the EP by using the Brussels city brand wields political influence. Indeed the city of Brussels radiates its power on the international stage due to its association with the EP. Thanks to this association Brussels has a strong place on the International stage. One more point deserves our attention: not only has Brussels a place on the International stage, it has also a place on the Web. Whether this place is intermingled with the EP's rebranding will be analysed in the analysis section. There is no literature on how Brussels and the EP connect online, therefore this is all based on our research and the findings they will provide.

3. Method

3.1 Theory on qualitative content analysis

As earlier sections have mentioned it, this thesis will take the approach of analysing the Facebook page of the European Parliament (EP), that is, the Facebook page set up and managed by the EP. This, in order to answer our research question which wonders how does the EP rebrand itself through the use of social media campaigns. When it came to choose a method to conduct the study, qualitative content analysis has been selected as being the most appropriate method to conduct the research. Therefore the entire thesis will only be based on a qualitative method of analysis producing, by this way, qualitative results only. The choice fell upon qualitative content analysis, due to the wish to analyse content thoroughly and to produce a personal - although as objective as possible - theoretical framework.

Qualitative research represents one of the three majors « research paradigms », the other two being quantitative research and mixed method research (Johnson, Onwuegbuzie & Turner, 2007). Klaus Krippendorff professor at The Annenberg School for Communication defines content analysis as follow (1980) “Content analysis is a research method for making replicable and valid inferences from data to their context, with the purpose of providing knowledge, new insights, a representation of facts and a practical guide to action” (in Elo & Kyngäs, 2008, p. 108). Representation of facts is exactly what will be sought to achieve in our theoretical framework. Differentiating the playful from the political is one of the main aims of this thesis. Content analysis has this advantage that it “enables researchers to sift through large volumes of data with relative ease in a systematic fashion” (Gao, 1996, in Stemler, 2001). This is another reason why this method has been chosen: it enables us to sift through the large volume of comments and posts available on the EP Facebook page. The categories that will be established, will produce logical patterns that will permit easy moves through the data. Creating logical patterns and trends is the particularity of qualitative content analysis that enables a systematic examination of documents. Stemler recognizes it: “what makes the technique particularly rich and meaningful is its reliance on coding and categorizing of the data.” (2001). Eventually, “Research using qualitative content analysis focuses on the characteristics of language as communication with attention to the content or contextual meaning of the text” (Budd, Thorp, & Donohew, 1967; Lindkvist, 1981; McTavish & Pirro, 1990; Tesch, 1990 in Hsieh & Shannon, 2005, p.1278). Content and contextual meaning of the comments and posts are quite important if we are to understand the strategies used by the EP to reshape itself online. They give us information about the technique used, the tone, the person to whom it is addressed and the current affairs context within which the comment inscribe itself.

However, qualitative content analysis is a generic term. Indeed, there exist three sub-categories to the conduct of qualitative content analysis, that is, three different ways of conducting such an analysis. Qualitative content analysis can be conventional, directed, or summative. Hsieh & Shannon contend that “All three approaches are used to interpret meaning from the content of text data” (2005, p.1277). Among those three approaches, it is the conventional qualitative content analysis that has been chosen. “Conventional content analysis is generally used with a study design whose aim is to describe a phenomenon” (Hsieh & Shannon, 2005, p.1279). In our case the phenomenon to be described is the rebranding of the EP thanks to the use of new media and more particularly thanks to the use of a Facebook page. This type of study design is usually used when, as in our case, existing theory or

research literature on a phenomenon is limited. It has already been mentioned in the Introduction and the Literature review how the literature concerning our case is scarce or even non-existent. The following quote illustrates the path we have decided to follow in order to set up the different categories. “Researchers avoid using preconceived categories, instead allowing the categories and names for categories to flow from the data. Researchers immerse themselves in the data to allow new insights to emerge” (Kondracki & Wellman, 2002 in Hsieh & Shannon, 2005, p.1279)

The next step in our definition of the right qualitative content analysis to use, is to determine whether it will be inductive or deductive. In our case it is the inductive approach that suits us the best. “Inductive content analysis is used in cases where there are no previous studies dealing with the phenomenon or when it is fragmented” (Elo & Kyngäs, 2008, p. 107). “An approach based on inductive data moves from the specific to the general, so that particular instances are observed and then combined into a larger whole or general statement” (Chinn & Kramer 1999 in Elo & Kyngäs, 2008, p. 109). This last quote illustrates the approach we will follow. We will go from the individual posts and comments to the generalities that enable us to group them in logical clusters. Finally, the thesis will make use of emergent coding. This is a type of coding where “categories are established following some preliminary examination of the data”. (Stemler, 2001)

3.2 Data gathering and theoretical framework

Before we start looking at the actual method used to analyse our research question let us remind ourselves those very research questions. Our main research question is “How is the EP rebranding itself through social media campaigns and how are its citizens engaging with these efforts?” Our sub questions are the following:

- 1) What are the different types of engagement created by the EP’s social media campaigns
- 2) How are citizens engaging with the EP’s rebranding efforts?
- 3) How does the EP use the Brussels city brand to reshape itself online?

The first stage of the analysis consisted in gathering all the posts published by the EP over a period of one year. In order to be as recent as possible the year 2013 was chosen as the focus of this study. A total of 134 posts were collected over that one year. The second stage of the analysis consisted in dividing the posts into several categories. Here six categories were established: policies/politics, Act.React.Impact. campaign, Meeting an MEP, Parliament’s prize, Plenary/Behind the scenes and Other (a). I have personally devised those categories

according to a pattern of recurrent themes. The posts categorised as “policies/politics” refer to a political decision or action taken by the European Parliament. A post such as “The economic committee has approved new rules to better protect home owners” (EP, Facebook, 24 April 2013) falls into this category. The “Act.React.Impact campaign” category assembles all the posts connected with that very campaign. The “Act.React.Impact campaign” promotes the 2014 elections of the European Parliament. However, such posts only appear at the beginning of September 2013 as this is the time when the EP decided to launch the campaign. The video teaser of the campaign is an example of such post. “Meeting an MEP” is a post that obviously offers you to enter in contact with a Member of the European Parliament. “Chat with President Martin Schulz” represents a typical “Meeting an MEP” post. Posts referring to “Parliament’s prize” are publications giving information about the rewards awarded by the EP. “Aung San Suu Kyi finally able to pick up the Prize she was awarded in 1990 (Sakharov)” (EP, Facebook, 20 October 2013) is an example of such post. “Plenary/Behind the scenes” category compile together all the publications that aim at opening the doors of the EP to its citizens. The plenary posts are published more or less once a month and inform the citizens of what is happening during the EP plenary sessions in Strasbourg. The “Behind the scenes” posts are posts such as “EU opendoors through our and your eyes!” (EP, Facebook, 4 May 2013). Since the aims of both those type of posts are the same they have been put together. Finally the “other (a)” category is a kind of “all-encompassing category” where all the posts that have not found their place in previous categories end up. It is mainly a category that encompasses all the posts that are not politically related to the EP. An example of such post is the hashtag “onmydesknow” asking every citizen to publish a picture of what is on their desk. Out of those six categories three were selected for a more in-depth analysis. In order to be able answer the main research question “How is the EP rebranding itself through social media campaigns and how are its citizens engaging with these efforts?” we needed to select categories which engage the citizens. Therefore the categories “Plenary/Behind the scenes”, “Act.React.Impact campaign” and “other (a)” were selected because they were supposed to be the one engaging the citizens the most. The category “plenary” is seen as such because its first aim is to connect with the citizens, to inform him of what the parliament is like behind the policies it votes. Act.React.Impact was chosen because it represents the upcoming elections in 2014. It is therefore a hot topic that will engage all the European citizens at some point. It is a topic connected with active citizenship that involves the citizens in the political scenery. The third category, “other (a)” was chosen first and foremost for its

difference to the other categories and then because it is a section that engages the citizen on general topics of culture, language and everyday life.

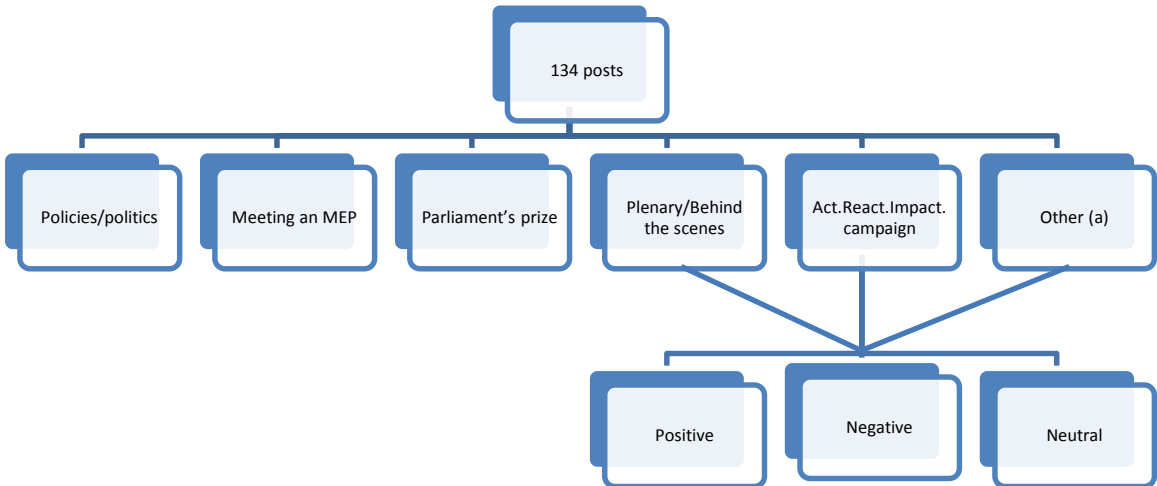
After selecting the three categories a third stage consisted in selecting three posts in each of the three categories for a more in-depth analysis. Those nine posts (3 in each category) were chosen on the basis of their popularity, that is, on the number of times they have been commented. The nine selected posts are presented and analysed individually in the next section.

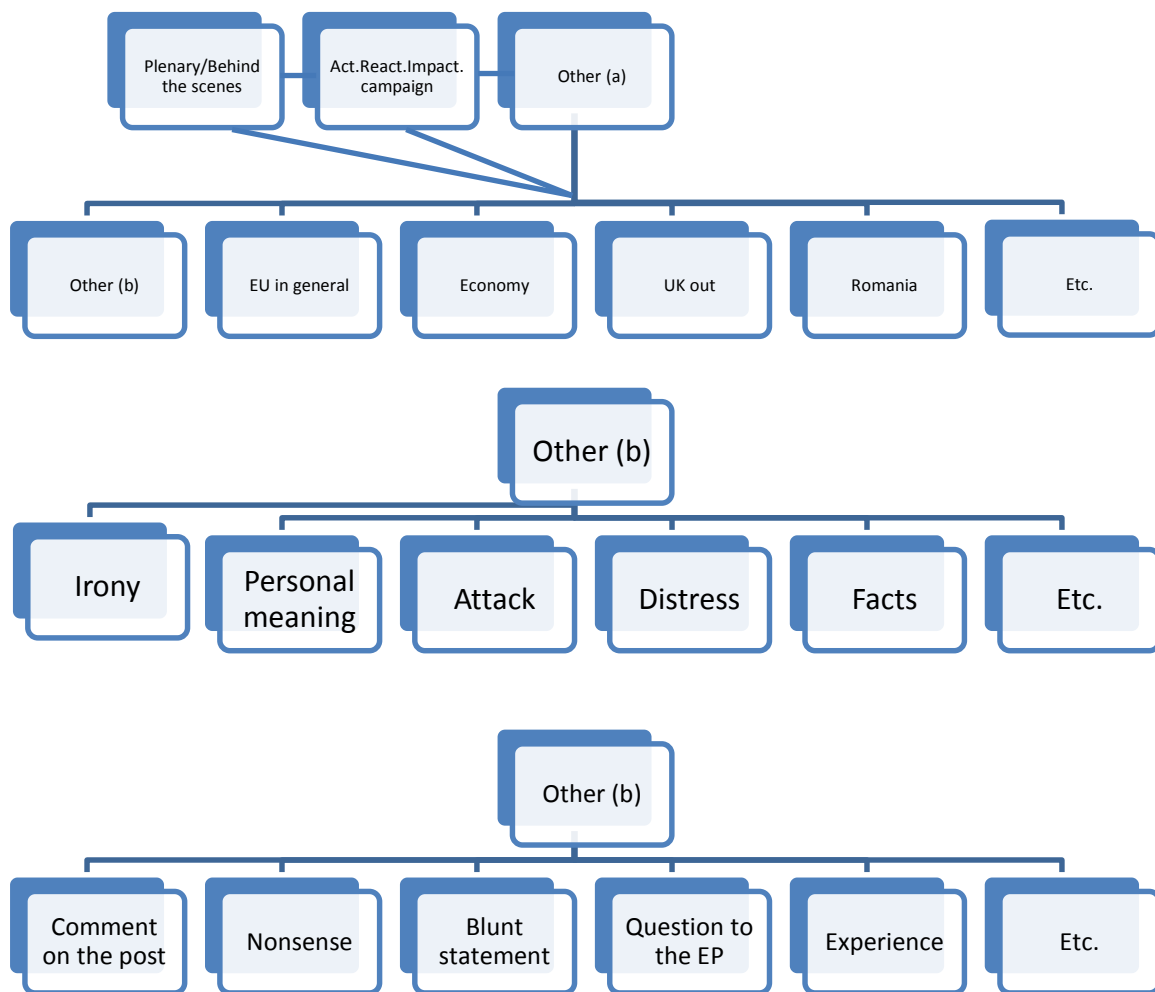
We arrive then at the fourth stage of our analysis where, here, a clear cut distinction needs to be made between posts and comments. As it has been mentioned the posts are short publications on the Facebook page of the EP. The comments are short (or sometimes long) replies to the content of the post. The comments are published in a list following each other according to their time of publication. Some of the nine selected posts had sometimes more than 500 comments. This high amount of comments represents a high rate of participation on the part of citizens. Due to this large amount of available comments only the fifty first comments of each of the selected posts were kept. Therefore with a total of 50 comments for each post and three posts in each category we have an overall number of 150 comments per category.

This brings us to phase five of our content analysis. In a first round those selected comments were categorized according to the feeling and tone they express towards the EP. Sentiments could be positive, negative or neutral. In a second round the comments were divided into several categories according to their content. For instance the categories “internal politics”, “double seat issue” or “human rights” are used to express the content of the separate comments. Of those several categories one category was labelled “other (b)”. This category includes all the comments that did not find their place in the other categories because they are non-political, relating to personal experiences and non-related to the post they comment on. Among those different categories two deserve our attention in this section, namely, the categories EP in general and EU in general. These two categories group all the comments that reflect upon the EP and the EU in general, that tackle several subject regarding the EU and EP simultaneously and that talk about the EU and the EP workings. The problem is that people tend to use the EP and the EU interchangeably and often mention the EU in general although they are writing on the EP’s page. Therefore, those two sections are quite close to each other, sometimes used in combination and sometimes intertwined. The comments on the EU are by extension understood as being also comments on the EP.

Finally we arrive at the sixth and last stage of our qualitative content analysis. For this last step our analysis focused on the category “other (b)”. This section was of utmost interest to us as it is the one which seemed to engage the citizens more personally. Consequently the category “other (b)” was itself divided into several categories. In a first round categories were established that express the feeling or the type of engagement of the comment. A comment using irony, expressing one’s own belief or giving information was put in the according category. In a second round comments were classified according to the type of response they represent for the post. Answer to another comment, comment on the post or appeal to the community are example of the categories used in this round.

The above mentioned methodology will help us, hopefully, to answer our main research question and our first sub question. Nevertheless there remains the question “How does the EP use the Brussels city brand to reshape itself online?” In order to answer this question, the question “What does Brussels mean to you?” was asked to random European citizens. The query was posted in several Facebook groups such as “International students@VUB” or “Brussels Expats”. Then the answers of the respondents were categorized and their nationality was tracked down thanks to their profile. Therefore for this question nationality represented a category but also whether the respondents had mentioned the EU or the EP and whether they have mentioned the entertainment, that is, the non-political side of the city. Furthermore special attention was dedicated to the comments that use the words “Brussels” or “Belgium” in order to know whether the EP uses the Brussels’s city brand for rebranding purposes.





4. Results

4.1. General facts about the EP's Facebook page

The first thing that came out of our research is that the European Parliament owns only one Facebook page. This page is entirely written in English and most of the intervening parties write in English as well. The European Parliament first joined Facebook on 9th April 2009. Other EP Facebook pages do exist but they are the Facebook pages of the EP's representations in the different EU countries. Those are written in the national language of the concerned country.

Over our chosen year (2013) the EP generated a total of 134 posts which means that the Parliament posted once every third day. This amounts to a posting rate of less than three posts a week and a total of more or less eleven posts a month. The EP also changed its cover 28 times over a year, which means more or less two times a month. Covers do matter as any other post does. As we will see later on one of the posts that had the most feedback was a new

cover. Besides, covers are the ones, through the use of pictures, that promote the city of Strasbourg rather than the city of Brussels. The most used media are pictures (48 posts in total) followed by videos (35 posts in total).

The following sections will analyse in turn the posts and then the comments enabling us, by this way, to give an answer to our main research question and three sub questions. We will start with a part analysing the content of the posts independently from each other. Then our analysis will guide us through the different stages and rounds which analysed the comments and which have been mentioned in the previous section.

4.2 Analysis of the posts

In this section the three posts that were chosen for each of the three selected category are presented. We will start with the category “Plenary/Behind the scenes”, then go on with “Act.React.Impact campaign” and we will finish with “others (a)”. The Act.React.ImpactCampaign, was only launched on the 5th of September. It is the EP’s political campaign that has been set up for the election of 2014. This is why there are no posts concerning this campaign prior to that date. The “other (a)” category which refers to non-political posts is probably the most engaging of the three categories, it can be seen in the massive amount of comments that it has in comparison to the two other categories. The chosen posts have respectively 513, 232 and 190 comments. As mentioned before the posts chosen to illustrate each section have been chosen because of their popularity, that is, because of the number of comments they generated. This section analyses the nine selected posts according to their content and their audience engagement.

When it comes to size, the posts published by the EP are short and “usually consist of one to five (if five, then very short) sentences of introduction to the topic and explanation and then a “read more” syntagm with a link, where the larger information can be found in the form of a text, a video or an application.” (Vesnić-Alujević, L., 2012b, p.43)

The Parliament addresses the citizens on its page as “you”. For instance “Did you miss the Open Doors Day in Brussels this past Saturday?” (EP, Facebook, 8 May 2013) or “As times have changed, so has the European Parliament – today, its decisions are based on what matters most to YOU” (EP, Facebook, 10 September 2013). This use of the second person singular/plural is an attempt to be personal, to directly address the audience. This would have the effect to bring the Parliament and its citizens closer together but also to foster engagement. In its use of the pronouns to go nearer to its citizens the Parliament also employs the first person plural “we” and the personal pronoun “us” as if “we” the citizens and the

parliament where only one entity that will act together. “We will find out what the Irish Presidency has in store for us” (EP, Facebook, 11 January 2013). Furthermore, in another attempt to engage citizens the EP uses the possessive pronoun “your”. “Here's a selection of our and your photos from the event! See more @<http://instagram.com/europeanparliament> and send yours via Instagram using #EUopendoors! — à European Parliament” (EP, Facebook, 4 May 2013). Publishing something that is personal, that is “ours” and that comes straight from our personal resources is another way of making the citizens participate. Sharing a bit of oneself with the EP is engaging oneself with the EP.

Then the Parliament makes a skilful use of the sentence functions, especially of the imperative and the interrogative. “Like in every commercial or political campaign, all posts, especially those written in the imperative and interrogative mode, try in a more or less explicit way to motivate their readers to participate in the elections” (Vesnić-Alujević, L., 2012b, p.44). Here it is not specifically in the elections that the EP tries to have the citizen participating, but in the EP’s online life in general. “Imperative utterances are standardly used with directive force, where a directive act is defined as an attempt to get the hearer to perform the action described by the proposition expressed.” (Sperber, &Wilson, n.d., p.5) Hence, publications such as “Try it, you might "Like" it!” (EP, Facebook, 8 May 2013), “Step inside our new interactive 360 panorama virtual tour of the event” (EP, Facebook, 8 May 2013) or “Watch this video to see how. Feel it. And then share it” (EP, Facebook, 10 September 2013) attempt to have the reader of the post performing the mentioned action. Such imperatives are used to have users performing actions that they might not have performed by themselves. Inciting them to perform those actions enhances the life of the page. Interrogatives or questions are addressed directly to the audience in attempts to be more personal: “Is it a beautiful day for you so far?” (EP, Facebook, 11 January 2013) or “What's the most romantic place in Europe? There's surely more than one - thanks for all your suggestions!” (EP, Facebook, 14 February 2013). “Questions are defined as requests for information” (Sperber, &Wilson, n.d., p.18). By using questions the EP tries to engage the citizens in a more personal way by asking them personal information. Therefore the use of questions has the purpose to personally engage the citizen with the EP’s Facebook page. Both imperative and interrogative are skilfully used because they are used in a playful way, in a way that goes away from politics. The following post announces the first plenary session of the year in Strasbourg and it mentions the rather serious and political topics it will tackle. However the post finishes on a personal note that asks the citizen to participate and to communicate personal information. “This will help set the mood

for next week's plenary, the first one in 2013! We will find out what the Irish Presidency has in store for us, and Members of Parliament will discuss the banking system and the EU-Iraq partnership agreement. @<http://epfacebook.eu/ra>. *Is it a beautiful day for you so far?*" (EP, Facebook, 11 January 2013) We can sum up this point by saying that "The construction of sentences written on the profile is similar to the construction of political slogans: they need to be short, explicative and they need to call for an action" (Vesnić-Alujević, L., 2012b, p.44).

Besides using sentence function in a quite clever way, the EP makes also a quite prolific use of photos and videos. The post we have just used as an example before makes use of the official video clip of the song "Beautiful Day" by the music band U2. In order to promote the 2014 elections and their "difference" the EP also makes use of a video clip. Yet in another post it makes use of a 360 panorama virtual tour and in still another post it makes use of the pictures of a street artist. "Street artist Slinkachu was in Paris recently to create some very creative, job-related art. Which professions can you recognise?" (EP, Facebook, 15 October 2013). As the rest, those videos and pictures are used to make the citizen participate in the life of the page. Asking "Which professions can you recognise?" (EP, Facebook, 15 October 2013) attempts to make citizens participate in a kind of online mini-game. Eventually in order to still make the citizens participate, the EP composes pictures album where anyone can enhance the album by adding its own pictures. The theme of the album varies from the most romantic places in Europe to what is on your desk to the way you go to work. "What's the most romantic place in Europe? There's surely more than one - thanks for all your suggestions! See a selection of your photos and send more on [instagram.com/europeanparliament](https://www.instagram.com/europeanparliament) with #LoveEurope!" (EP, Facebook, 14 February 2013).

To close up this section I want to share the post which is probably the most popular of all the 134 posts that have been collected. "Thanks to our 1 million fans! Thank you for all your comments, likes and shares! Without you, this page wouldn't be as lively and dynamic! On the occasion of reaching one million likes we want to learn more about you. Tell us, where are you from?" (EP, Facebook, 29 October 2013). This post has engendered a total amount of 513 comments. With citizens from all over Europe answering where they are from. By stating "Without you" the EP tells that the citizens are those who make the page lively and dynamic. It gives the page its *raison d'être*. However it is worth noticing that this non-political post thanking the citizens for their participation on the page has quickly been turned into a political forum for expressing one's disappointment towards the EU and the EP.

4.3 Analysis of the comments

Now that the nine selected posts have been analysed content-wise, it is time to analyse the comments that accompany them. Let us remember that only the 50 first comments of each of the nine posts were selected due to the impressive amount of available comments. This makes us a total amount of more or less 450 (actually 438 in total) comments to analyse. The following section will analyse the comments step by step starting with the positive, negative and neutral classification and then go all the way down the process to the last classification of comments type.

4.3.1 Positive-Negative-Neutral

The most dominant sentiment towards the EP, which can be found across the three posts categories (Plenary/Behind the scenes, Act.React.Impact campaign and other (a)), is a neutral sentiment with a total of 278 neutral comments on a total of 438 comments. This means that more than half of the comments do not express a positive or negative sentiment towards the EP. The comments labelled as neutral (77 Plenary, 81 Act.React.Impact, 120 other (a)) deal with other topics than the EP or they do mention the EP but do not express any feeling towards it. Comments such as “Bonne année à tous ! Happy new Year !FrohesNeuesJahr !BuonAnno ! ¡ felizañonuevo !” (anonymous user, Facebook, 11 January 2013) or “Why on earth is this in my feed?” (anonymous user, Facebook, 15 October 2013) have been labelled as neutral. This first result is quite surprising. Indeed considering the current – and long-lasting- love/hate relationship that exists between the EU and its citizens one would expect that the first feelings expressed towards the EP are either ones of love or ones of hate. Therefore, we have to conclude that the page of the EP serves primarily to express feelings and ideas that have no connection with the EP as such. As we will see later many use the EP page to complain about the EU in general and not to argue about the work of the Parliament.

	Other				Act React Impact				Plenary			
	14 february 2013	4 august 2013	29 october 2013	total	5 september 2013	10 september 2013	15 october 2013	total	11 january 2013	8 May 2013	4-20 May 2013	total
neutral	46	45	29	120	28	31	22	81	30	25	22	77

The second most important category is the negative category. The “Plenary” section displays a total of 47 negative comments on a total of 147. As for “Act.React.Impact campaign” and “other (a)” they each respectively display a total 61/147 comments and a total of 15/144 comments. This means that after having no opinion about the EP, the European citizens’ sentiment towards it in 2013 is generally a negative one. Comments such as “You can’t put the words “democratic” & “European Parliament” in the same sentence, its a crime against the English language.” (anonymous user, Facebook, 11 March 2013) or “this EU is a dangerous

monster and needs to be stopped!” (anonymous user, Facebook, 8 May 2013) are example of the types of comments that one can find in the negative category. This is explained by the tense climate provoked by the crisis and the ensuing distrust that citizens express towards the EU in general. The amount of negative comments is higher in the “Plenary” and “Act.React.Impact campaign” section compared to the “other (a)” section. This is explained by the fact that the two former categories are way more political than their counterpart “other (a)”. In fact the two sections give citizens the opportunity to express their dissatisfaction towards the EP, while the section “other (a)” deals with general topics that are mainly non-political. Subjects such as the upcoming election, the EU-Iraq agreement or the budget are dealt with in “Plenary” and “Act.React.Impact campaign” deals with general controversial topics that citizens want to discuss before the elections. For instance “6 YEARS EU MEMBERSHIP = £16,536,000,000 which is £254.40 for every man woman and child in this country. Some how that doesn't seem value for money, for something most have never been allowed to vote on” (anonymous user, Facebook, 8 May 2013) is to be found in the Plenary section and “Let's keep on adding What we need now is adding some lions and it's gonna be a perfect circus clowns are already there! I am ashamed to be European!” (anonymous user, Facebook, 5 September 2013) is to be found in the “Act.React.Impact campaign” category. The conclusion that can be drawn from this analysis is that the current feeling of the European citizens towards the EU is definitely not one of love and trust.

	Other				Act React Impact				Plenary			
	14 february 2013	4 august 2013	29 october 2013	total	5 september 2013	10 september 2013	15 october 2013	total	11 january 2013	8 May 2013	4-20 May 2013	total
negative	0	0	10	15	17	14	30	61	13	20	14	47

The positive section constitutes the last and also the weakest category. In the “Plenary” category only 23 comments out of 147 are positive. This corresponds to more or less the half of the negative comments in the same section. In the “Act.React.Impact campaign” 5 out of 147 comments are positive while 9 out of 144 comments positively view the EP in the “other (a)” section. “A federal UE without states, the europe of nations is the future!!” (5 September 2013) is an example of positive comment. This huge gap between the amount of positive and negative comments is once again explained by several factors: the crisis, the austerity politics or the unemployment, just to name a few. This fewer amount of positive comments strengthen the negative feeling towards the EP and the EU in general.

	Other				Act React Impact				Plenary			
	14 february 2013	4 august 2013	29 october 2013	total	5 september 2013	10 september 2013	15 october 2013	total	11 january 2013	8 May 2013	4-20 May 2013	total
positive	3	0	6	9	4	1	0	5	8	6	9	23

The category “other (a)” is the one with the least amount of positive (only 9) and negative (15) sentiments. It is also the section with the highest amount of neutral commentaries (120). This is due to the fact that the topics it encompasses are mainly non-political, non-related to the post in general and non-related to a sentiment towards the EP. Often the comments in the category “other (a)” do not mention the EP or the EU at all. For instance a comment like “Of course Venezia and its charming streets!” enters in the category “other (a)”.

	Other			
	14 february 2013	4 august 2013	29 october 2013	total
positive	3	0	6	9
neutral	46	45	29	120
negative	0	0	10	15

Then, the highest amount of negative comments (61) is to be found in the “Act.React.Impact campaign” category. Of the three categories it is the one “campaign” that concerns the future of all Europeans without exception: it is the category of the election of 2014. Therefore, European citizens do not miss the opportunity to express their views on something that will affect their next five years. “Plenary” plays the same role as the “Act.React.Impact campaign” category, only it offers the European citizens to debate on the topics that are on the agenda of the plenary session in Strasbourg. The “plenary” posts are recurrent as they are published at least once a month. Consequently the EU citizens have the opportunity to approve or disapprove the monthly progress of the Union and the EP.

4.3.2 The comments classified by theme

It has already been explained in the methodology section that a second round of classification divided the 438 comments of the 9 posts into several categories according to their content or theme. Those several categories are explained in this part of the analysis. To the contrary of the previous round which counted only three categories, this round counts numerous sub sections as each of the categories had to include the subjects that were tackled in the comments. This way of classifying the comments created categories that sometimes include only one element. It also happened that when a comment touched upon several topics it received a double categorisation in order to account for the two categories that were mentioned in the comment. For instance, a comment about the Spanish economic issues within the EU will be labelled “internal politics” as it refers to European internal political problems and “Spain” as it refers specifically to that country.

“Switzerland”, “Belgium”, “Bulgaria”, “Portugal”, “Ireland”, “Cyprus” and “Turkey” are categories that count only one element. This is simply due to the fact that these categories were only referred to once in the sample. Those labels are isolated examples and are therefore not representatives of the presence of those countries in the debates among European citizens. Those countries are used by citizens to talk about or make a reference to other countries. For instance “I suppose EU political structure should be based on Switzerland, as it is the only real democracy where people can by direct vote, ratify or not a law proposed by politicians (often out of touch with real life).[...]” (anonymous user, Facebook, 5 September 2013). Not relating to any actuality hot topic, most of them appear in the “Act.React.Impact” category. At a moment when the campaign for the European elections has been announced, it is normal that citizens all over Europe start comparing the different regimes under which they are living. The categories “External politics” (which refers to the EU external relations with countries that are not in the EU zone) and “MEP & Representatives” also count only one element and are both to be found in the “Act.React.Impact” category. Such a low level of elements remains unexplained and abnormal. Indeed posts that mention the upcoming elections should be bombarded with comments about the upcoming candidates. Furthermore the EU external relations, especially with the U.S.A, have been a long subject of disagreement throughout 2013.

	Other				Act React Impact				Plenary			
	14 february 2013	4 august 2013	29 october 2013	total	5 september 2013	10 september 2013	15 october 2013	total	11 january 2013	8 May 2013	4-20 May 2013	total
Switzerland					1			1				
Belgium					1			1				
Bulgaria						1		1				
Portugal						1		1				
Ireland								0	1			1
Cyprus								0	1			1
Turkey							1	1				
external politics							1	1				
MEP & Representatives					1			1				

To the contrary of the above mentioned categories some other sub sections, wearing also the name of a country or a region, count more than one item. “Greece” (5 comments), “Spain” (2 comments), “Russia” (2 comments), “Romania” (9 comments) and “Catalonia” (17 comments) are mentioned several times. Actually, their mention matches with the news that were current at the time when the post was written. Spain and Greece are two countries deeply entrenched in the crisis, Romania is known all over Europe for its stray dogs’ plight and the bad management it makes of it and Catalonia is of course known for its demands of

independency. Thus, all those topics are linked with current affairs. One thing is strange enough though: most comments on Spain and Greece are to be found in the category “other (a)”, the posts category that is mainly non-political. Nevertheless those comments about Spain and Greece are all to be found on the same post, the “Thanks to our 1 million fans!” post (EP, Facebook, 29 October 2013). Even though this post is initially non-political it has been mentioned in the section analysing the posts how this one publication has been turned into a forum for expressing one’s disappointment towards the EU and the EP. “hello from Greece!has anyone even the clue what is going on in my country?how much poverty is around us?they say that we work less than others.well think again....We are proud people who try our best to handle things every single day!(Christina,singlemum,teacher who is so dissapointed of people who rule us).take care...” (anonymous user, Facebook, 29 October 2013). Therefore we can draw the conclusion that the political dimension on the EP’s Facebook page is to be found even at places where it is not supposed to be. As for “Russia”, “Romania” and “Catalonia” they are all to be found in the “Act.React.Impact” section. One can suppose that these authors use the posts published by the EP promoting the elections which, this time, want to be under the sign of difference for asking for help and actions. Therefore we can say that those people do call out to the Parliament. Do they receive an answer? We will talk about it later.

	Other				Act React Impact				Plenary			
	14 february 2013	4 august 2013	29 october 2013	total	5 september 2013	10 september 2013	15 october 2013	total	11 january 2013	8 May 2013	4-20 May 2013	total
greece	0	0	4	4		1		1				0
spain	0	0	3	4				0				0
Russia					2			2				
Romania					7	2		9				
catalonia	0	0	1	1		16		16				0

Some of the other themes that are used to label the categories are timeless and they connect with the news at all times. Those are “Tourism” (17 comments), “History” (6 comments), “Human rights” (6 comments) or “language” (5 comments). These comments are more or less equally spread over the three categories: “Plenary”, “Act.React.Impact” and other.

	Other				Act React Impact				Plenary			
	14 february 2013	4 august 2013	29 october 2013	total	5 september 2013	10 september 2013	15 october 2013	total	11 january 2013	8 May 2013	4-20 May 2013	total
tourism	0	1	4	5				0				0
History					2			2	2	2		4
Human rights						1		1	5			5
language								0			5	5

Then, there are the topics that inevitably connect with the news of 2013. The sub section “Economy” group all the comments linked with the crisis and economical complaints. Economical topics are not to be found in the “other” section. As we have already mentioned the category “other” discusses topics that are mostly not-politically related. Therefore it is quite normal to not find comments about the crisis or the economic situation of the EU in this section. Most of the comments related to economy (16) are to be found in “Plenary”. As it has already been mentioned this section offers a monthly possibility to express oneself over the EU malfunction. It is quite logical that most comments appear in this category since the post of the 11th January discusses the banking system. To the already mentioned sub categories we can also add the label “Internal politics” that assembles every comment concerned with the internal political workings of the EU. Quite often the section “internal politics” was connected with a country; the country which was the target of the comment. Since most of the comments mentioning a country are to be found in “Act.React.Impact”, it is normal that most of the “internal politics” comments – often connecting with a country - are to be found in this same section. Still connecting with the news, the sub category “UK out” represents all the comments expressing the will of the UK to leave the EU. This theme is more or less equally spread between the sections “Plenary” and “Act.react.impact”. It is indeed a topic that matters to both sections. The monthly work of the EU in Strasbourg gives British who want “independence” the occasion to utter their demands, as do the upcoming elections. The highly criticized budget of the EU and the double seat issue are both tags used to label some more categories. Logically the comments concerning the double seat issue are mostly concentrated in “plenary” as it is the very existence of the plenary in Strasbourg that citizens criticize. As for the label “budget”, its main concentration of posts is to be found in the “Act.React.Impact (a)” section. The budget allocation of the EU and the EP is where citizens want to see a change. The categories “EU political party” and “Act.React.Impact.(b)” cover the theme of the upcoming elections. The “Act.React.Impact (b)” comments are logically all to be found in the “Act.React.Impact (a)” posts category. As for the “EU political parties” the comments are to be found mainly in “Plenary”.

	Other				Act React Impact				Plenary			
	14 february 2013	4 august 2013	29 october 2013	total	5 september 2013	10 september 2013	15 october 2013	total	11 january 2013	8 May 2013	4-20 May 2013	total
Economy					2			2	11	4	1	16
Internal politics	0	0	3	7	9	21		30	2		1	3
UK out					3			3	1	2	3	6
budget							12	12		2		2

Double seat issue							0	1		3	4
EU political party							1	1	1	3	4
Act react impact (b)							3	3			

Before we finish there remains two categories. These are general categories. I have named them “EU in general” and “EP in general”. They bring together all the general criticisms that occur against the EP or the EU. The highest amount of comments about “EU in general” (54) is to be found in the “Act.React.Impact” section. The main cluster of comments about the EP is also to be found in the same section (22).

	Other				Act React Impact				Plenary			
	14 february 2013	4 august 2013	29 october 2013	total	5 september 2013	10 september 2013	15 october 2013	total	11 january 2013	8 May 2013	4-20 May 2013	total
EU in general	3	3	8	4	22	9	23	54	4	18	5	27
EP in general	0	0	7	14	1	7	14	22	1	5	5	11

Finally, the last and largest section is the category of comments labelled ‘other (b)’. This section assembles all the comments that have not found their place in the other sections, that are non-political and that tackle themes which are non-related to the EU or the EP. Of the three posts section, the category “other (a)” is the one that counts the most of “other (b)” comments (106). This result is logic and due to the fact that the category of comments “other (b)” mainly does not address political issues. 31 “other (b)” comments are to be found in the “Act.React.Impact” section and 65 in “Plenary”.

	Other				Act React Impact				Plenary			
	14 february 2013	4 august 2013	29 october 2013	total	5 september 2013	10 september 2013	15 october 2013	total	11 january 2013	8 May 2013	4-20 May 2013	total
other (b)	46	46	16	106	7	8	16	31	22	19	24	65

Concluding a logical reasoning from this section is quite difficult. Sometimes there exists a logic between the post and the comments that accompany it. When the comments are connected with posts, when the comments are connected with the news or when the comments are connected with the category within which the comments inscribe themselves, then there is a certain logic behind which comment is to be found where. Yet, there exist many examples where the comment is not in line, topic wise, with the post they accompany. There are even examples when the comments have no connections at all to be found with anything. A post such as “I want the concept of conscripting me again at any military against my consent as a war crime because I wasn't peeling potatoes in military; I was a combatant officer” (anonymous user, Facebook, 8 May 2013) does only have sense for its writer. There are no strict rules on Facebook regarding the comments one posts. From this irregular appearance of logic we can conclude that people comment on what suits them when it suits them. There is no structure to deduce from the post and the comments that accompany it. On Facebook you

are just free to write and the EP’s Facebook page suffers from this characteristic of social media: there are no proper debates that are clearly structured. Everyone just throw one’s opinion on the page expecting, or not, a reply.

4.3.3 The comments classified by genre

Following the two first round sorting out the comments, a third sorting round took place. This third round was implemented in order to sort only the comments labelled as ‘other (b)’. The comments tagged as such were sorted according to their genre, that is, whether they are “a comment on the post”, a “question” etc. This classification was useful in order to understand what type of comments is the most popular and how exactly do citizens engage with the EP.

The categories that were elaborated for this round are “comment on the post”, “answer to a previous comment”, “blunt statement”, “question to the previous comment”, “nonsense”, “comment aiming at another member”, “appeal to the community”, “question to the EP”, “engagement with the EP” and “experience”. Such categories inform us on the type of engagement that citizen maintain with the EP. Categories that mention the EP imply that citizens directly attempt to interact with the EP. A category as “blunt statement” implies that the statement uttered does not leave room for some more conversation while “comment aiming at another member” has the characteristic to try to foster the debate. If the meaning of some of them is clear, others do necessitate an explanation. “Europe will have to accept communism!” (anonymous user, Facebook, 5 September 2013) is an instance of what has been classified as a blunt statement, that is, a statement that evokes straightforwardly what its author thinks. The sub category “nonsense” endorses statements such as “spam spamspamspamspamspamspam spam.....” (anonymous user, Facebook, 15 October 2013). Such a comment does not have a meaning either in relation to the comments that precedes it or to the post it is attached to. Therefore the category “nonsense” does not make sense for the reader. “Appeal to the community” represents comments that make appeal to Europeans, the EP and/or the EU for some help. "SamerIssawi, 33 years old, is a Palestinian detainee in the Israeli unjust jails, he is originally from Jerusalem. He was released in Oct, 2011 after 11 years of being detained. Six months after being released, he was re-arrested for no charge. He is now suffering different kinds of diseases and about to die” (anonymous user, Facebook, 11 January 2013). Finally, the sub category “experience” refers to personal experience as in this comment “Been inside that! Amazing day!!” (anonymous user, Facebook, 11 January 2013). Of all the ten mentioned sub

categories only five are to be found in the “other (a)” posts category. As for “Act.React.Impact (a)” and “plenary” the ten categories are to be represented at least once. The category “comment on the post” in the section “other (a)” counts the highest number of comments (98). The conclusion can be drawn from those numbers that the category “comment on the post” in the section “other (a)” expresses the highest engagement coming from the citizens. When citizens comment on the post they respect the reasoning logic expected by the EP. Commenting on a post about the topic of the post is how the debates and conversations on Facebook are supposed to work. Therefore it can be said that European citizens respond with reason mostly to posts that are mainly non-political and that they comment directly on the subject of the post. The same is true of the “plenary” section where 25 comments in total reply to the theme of the post. This means that citizens react quite well to the questions and riddles posed by the EP. The representation of the other categories is quite balanced. The display between questions, answers and comments is quite equal. However, the category “nonsense” represents an exception to this balance. There, the amount of comments in the section “plenary” goes up to 17 comments.

	Other (a)				Act react impact				Plenary			
	14-févr	4 aout	29-oct	total	5-sept	10-sept	15-oct	total	11-janv	8 may	4-20 may	total
Comment on the post	45	31	22	98					9	6	10	25
Answer on a previous comment	1	6	12	19			8	8	1	1	3	5
Blunt Statement		4		4	1	2		3		2	1	3
Question to the previous comment		1		1	3	1	1	5			2	2
Non sense		1		1			5	5	7	8	2	17
Comment aiming at another member				0		1		1			1	1
appeal to the community					2	1	2	5	3	2	1	6
Question to the EP					1		1	2			1	1
Engagement with the EP						3		3				0
Experience						1		1	1			1

In order to engage the citizens the EP asks questions or riddles as we have seen in the part analysing the posts. A question such as “Tell us, where are you from?” (EP, Facebook, 29 October, 2013) aims at engaging the citizens and expects one straight answer. Hence, this section is quite important in order to understand how citizens do engage with the EP. The different type of engagements – question, answers and comment – have said to be quite balanced with the exception of the category “comment on the post” in the section “other (a)”. The high presence of this section indicates that in the category “other(a)” citizens respond quite well and quite logically to the posts. This is not to be found in the other sections though, which let us suppose that the debates on Facebook are not structured and are spread in several directions.

4.3.4 The comments classified by sentiment

This part analyses the fourth and last round of post sorting. This round focuses as well only on the comments labelled as “other (b)”. Those comments being numerous and varied (202) the

categories used to express them are also varied and numerous. The labels used in this section express a sentiment such as distress or an action such as engagement. What kind of argument is used to justify the comment is also used as a label. Therefore history or real life facts serve as category names. These different labels are put together under the all-encompassing name of sentiment as they have in common to be “a thought, opinion, or idea based on a feeling about a situation, or a way of thinking about something” (Cambridge online dictionary, *sentiment*, 2014)

The category with the highest amount of comments (98) is again to be found in the posts section “other (a)”. This high amount of comments has been tagged “engagement”. These numbers imply that citizens engage quite often with the posts of the category “other (a)” by answering the question or the riddle proposed in the post. We can therefore conclude that the non-political posts section “other (a)” and its high amount of “engagement” comments is the section that provokes the highest rate of engagement coming from the citizens. In this category, at least, citizens do participate and react to what is proposed to them and do not diverge on other topics. Such comments as “Of course Venezia and its charming streets!” (anonymous user, Facebook, 14 February 2013) and “Prague, what else!” (anonymous user, Facebook, 14 February 2013) answer to the post “Which is the most romantic city in Europe?” (EP, Facebook, 14 February 2013). None of these “engagement” comments are to be found in the “Act.React.Impact (a)” posts section and only three are found in the “plenary section”.

	Other (a)				Act react impact				Plenary			
	14-févr	4 aout	29-oct	total	5-sept	10-sept	15-oct	total	11-janv	8 may	4-20 may	total
Engagement	43	33	22	98				0			3	3

“Help offering” represents the second highest amount of comments (6) that can be found in the section “other (a)”. “Help offering” encompasses posts such as “Hello Mr Nicolas we had published a content about a necessity for Greece to rebrand as a nation i will present you a little part of it here” (anonymous user, Facebook, 29 October 2013).

	Other (a)				Act react impact				Plenary			
	14-févr	4 aout	29-oct	total	5-sept	10-sept	15-oct	total	11-janv	8 may	4-20 may	total
Help offering			6	6				0				0

The highest amount of comments (5) to be found in the “Act.React.Impact” section includes the comments expressing a positive engagement. “Nice work!!” (anonymous user, Facebook, 15 October 2013) or “Well done” (anonymous user, Facebook, 15 October 2013) express such a positive engagement. This is also true of the “plenary” section where 18 comments express a positive engagement.

	Other (a)				Act react impact				Plenary			
	14-févr	4 aout	29-oct	total	5-sept	10-sept	15-oct	total	11-janv	8 may	4-20 may	total
positive engagement		1		1			5	5	5	5	8	18

Furthermore, 20 other comments engage the citizen personally. “My uncle a former and ex-Jesuit also gifted me a Swiss mountain dog puppy.I NAME IT "MOQUITA."” (anonymous user, Facebook, 20 May 2013). Other than that all the other categories in “Act.React.Impact” and “plenary” are quite balanced. In general the rest of the categories are: “Irony”, “personal meaning”, “positive”, “thankful”, “negative engagement”, “neutral”, “one’s own belief”, “startled”, “attack”, “distress”, “Anger”, “history”, “facts”, “new political programme”, “personal quote”, “surprise”, “information”, “racism”, “amazement”, “experience”, “remark”, “curiosity”, “anxiety”.

	Other (a)				Act react impact				Plenary			
	14-févr	4 aout	29-oct	total	5-sept	10-sept	15-oct	total	11-janv	8 may	4-20 may	total
Irony	1			1	1		2	3				0
Personal meaning	1	2		3				0		1		1
positive	1			1				0				0
Thankful		2		2				0		1		1
Negative engagement		1		1			2	2				0
Neutral			1	1		1		1				0
One's own belief		4		4	2	1		3	4	2	1	7
Startled		1		1				0				0
Attack		2	2	4		1		1		1	1	2
Distress			2	2		1	1	2	3	2	1	6
Anger			2	2			1	1				0
History					1			1				0
Facts					2			2				0
New political programme					1			1				0
Personal quote						3		3				0
Surprise							2	2				0
Information						2	2	2	1			1
Racism							1	1				0
Amazement							1	1				0
Personal									8	7	5	20
Experience											3	3
remark											3	3
curiosity											1	1
anxiety											1	1

4.3.5 The EP’s replies

After all these classification one will – no surprise – wonder where is the place of the EP in all that. It is true that up to now the Parliament has remained quite silent. It is time to let it speak up. Comments published on a post by the EP to start a conversation or to answer a citizen have not been coded. However they have been singled out. On all the 438 comments only 13 have been posted by the EP. If we count that the comments are spread over 9 posts, this amounts to a response rate from the EP of more or less one (1,4) reply per post. When we now that some publication counted an amount of more or less 500 comments, this reduces the EP’s participation in the Facebook conversation to almost zero. Therefore we can say that the EP barely participates in the conversation it puts online and that it does not dialogue with its citizens. A “direct feedback” is what differentiates the Web 2.0 from other media (Vesnic-Alujevic, 2012a) and it is the reason why, while trying to rebrand itself, the EP had to join social media. Hence the EP does not seize its chance of receiving a “direct feedback” from its citizens and does not take advantage of it although this would be all benefit for it. The

Parliament is polite. It does thank the people who have sent pictures as in this comment “thanks for the pic to Narvaleos<http://epfacebook.eu/aF7>”. It does inform the citizen as in this comment “this one is in English, but you will find FB pages in all EU official languages here @<http://epfacebook.eu/qX>” (EP, Facebook, 4 August 2013). And sometimes it does interact with the citizen, as in the following exchanges:

Citizen 1: ... you don't want to know to create a new EU datagate...

EP's reply: no! it's just to get to know each other, we will not store it or use it anyway and by the way - see how the EP is dealing with data protection scandal here: <http://epfacebook.eu/ba3> (EP & anonymous user, Facebook, 29 October 2013).

In this example the EP uses the citizen's intervention to promote its work in the field of data protection, but it does not really engage further with the citizen.

Citizen 2: Spain, Alicante. (unemployed young),

EP's reply: dear Adrián G-Rod we of course 'like' the first part of your comment, and we hope that measures proposed by the EP to fight youth unemployment will improve the situation in Europe <http://epfacebook.eu/baz> (EP & anonymous user, Facebook, 29 October 2013).

In this example as well, the EP cuts the discussion by offering the citizen to visit its page regarding unemployment in Europe.

Citizen 3: good, you still have another 506 million people of EU to like you!

EP's reply: step by step (EP & anonymous user, Facebook, 29 October 2013).

Here the EP enters the discussion by directly replying to the criticism of a citizen. This kind of example is rare. One thing is worth noticing though: we have given examples of negative comments and we have mentioned that they are the second biggest category in the sentiments towards the EP. Therefore the EP does not suppress those comments. It could actually, as it is the one manager of the page, get rid of all the displeasing comments. However it does not do it. Indeed, if the EP wants to rebrand itself it has, as we have said, to build its brand on “trust and satisfaction”(Van Ham, 2008, p.240). And what a bad idea to lose the trust of its citizens by deleting all their comments and by not being representative of their true sentiment. Thanks to this page the EP has a hint on how the citizens perceive it, therefore it is up to it to use this tool properly in order to reverse the tendency.

4.4 What does Brussels mean to you?

In order to better understand “How does the EP use the Brussels city brand to reshape itself online?” the following question was asked to random European citizens: What does Brussels

mean to you? The answers came from all over the world: from the Netherlands to Venezuela to Italy and Brazil. As it has been mentioned in the methodology section the nationality of the respondents has been tracked down thanks to their Facebook profile. However, some of them live and/or study in Belgium but are of different nationality. A lot of them are mentioned as living in the Netherlands although they are not Dutch. Therefore the nationalities have been assumed and may not correspond.

Out of the people who were asked our one question some 54 replied. Out of those respondents not even half (22) mentioned that Brussels means the EU or the capital of Europe to them. Only one mentioned Brussels as meaning the European Parliament to him. For the other respondents Belgium is much more associated with its entertainment offers and famous cliché such as beer chocolate or the Atomium. In total 18 people mentioned those attractions. Only eight overtly criticized the city. The two Greek respondents associated Brussels with grey colour and inefficiency. The two Spanish respondents underlined its characteristics of supra-national capital where you need to live in a bubble of any kind (European, Spanish, Moroccan) in order to feel at home. One of them also emphasized the ugliness and bad urbanism of the city. What is most surprising is that supposed Belgian themselves criticized their capital like this one respondent who said “traffic jams, poor public transport offer, pollution alerts: a city that should give more resources to fulfill its status of European capital...” (anonymous user, Facebook, 19 April 2013). For other respondents the city is underrated. Therefore, if one thing comes out from at least five respondents, is that the city does not fulfil its status of European capital. Thus, in the minds of European citizens Brussels is not that much associated with the EP as the media could let us presume. Furthermore, every time that the EP changes its cover on its Facebook page and let us see a city, it is Strasbourg. Eventually “Brussels” has not been mentioned once in the comments and “Belgium” was only mentioned once. From this research it came out that much more emphasis is put on Strasbourg and the plenary that happens there than on the city supposed to be the EP’s power centre: Brussels.

Initially, this research question was designed in order to know whether the EP uses the Brussels city brand as a tool in its new communication strategies. However, it has come out of our research that this is not the case. The EP’s communication is more focused on the city of Strasbourg. Every month at least one post relates what happens during the plenaries in Strasbourg and most of the work done in Brussels seems inexistent. Furthermore every time that the EP posts the picture of a city as a cover picture it is always a view of Strasbourg and very rarely of Brussels. This result is strange as the work done in Strasbourg only occupies

one week of the month while the rest of the monthly work is done in Brussels. This result is also strange when we take into account what most media display. Indeed, it is not rare to hear in the different media “Brussels has decided that...” So for the media the EP and the city of Brussels are closely connected, their meaning is even interwoven. Yet, it seems that for the Parliament this connection is not that obvious. Or maybe it does not want to do this connection. One thing is sure, if today the Parliament has to be connected with a city after analysis of its Facebook page it will definitely be associated with Strasbourg rather than Brussels.

5. Discussion/Conclusion

5.1 Limitations

If one thing has to be added to our analysis, it is the limitations that we have come up against while performing our research. First and foremost there is the problem of the already mentioned “digital divide”. Not everyone has equally access to the Internet and hence, not everyone can equally participate in the Facebook political arena. Earlier in this thesis we have shown with academic literature that some groups are indeed left out. Therefore the population of Europeans we have dealt with in our research is not fully representative of the overall European population since some groups are marginalized.

Then “research has found that individuals favour news and information that aligns with their own views” (Best, *et al.*, 2005; Bimber and Davis, 2003; Mutz and Martin, 2001 in Kitchener, &Kushin, 2009). This would mean that citizens participating on the Facebook page of the EP would do so because this aligns with their own views. “Persons engaging in online political newsgroup discussion tended to “gravitate to groups agreeing with their own views”(Davis, 1999, p. 162 in Kitchener, &Kushin, 2009). This can be more or less verified in the case of the EP thanks to the high amount of negative comments we found. Indeed, the participants often hold the same political viewpoint, that is, a negative view of the EU and the EP. In the case of the category “UK out” for instance, all the comments demanded that the UK would leave the EU, but no single comments asked for the contrary. Therefore people with a negative opinion of the EU tend to gather on the EP’s Facebook page and this again might not be representatives of the Union’s population.

As for the categories, the dividing of the posts and comments has been done inductively according to my own perception of the schemes and patterns present on the EP’s Facebook page. The classification is therefore subjective, although I have tried to remain as

objective as possible. Furthermore sarcasm and irony had to be interpreted in order to classify the comments. This again is subjective as one can see irony where another does not.

Another limitation of the analysis is its confinement to the English language. Indeed, only the page in English was submitted to analysis. Comments in the other EU languages were discarded. Again the picture we have in the end might not be representative of the European reality. A Danish EP page or a Spanish EP page might have totally different content and convey totally different opinions about the EP. Also the number of comments analysed might have an influence on our results. The 50 first comments of each post have been chosen, due to the large amount of comments available. However, we can only assume that those 50 comments are representatives of the rest of the comments.

Finally, a difficulty to perform the analysis was the continuous assimilation that people do between the EU and EP. If they criticize one, do they also criticize the other? Do they have separate views concerning both, or do they consider them as together the same? These questions came up quite often during my analysis as I had to try distinguishing what people meant.

5.2 Recap of the results

Now that our analysis has been reviewed in details it is time to sum up our findings and the conclusion we could draw from our study. Furthermore a link will be made with the literature we have reviewed in order to connect our findings to existing research in the field. We will first go through a quick reminder of our findings and then make the connection with the literature. This part summarizing our finding also answers our first sub-question “What are the different types of engagement created by the EP’s social media campaigns”.

Our first category divided the comments into neutral, negative and positive sentiments towards the European Parliament. With an overwhelming majority of neutral comments, the consequence was to conclude that the page of the EP serves primarily to express feelings and ideas that have no connection with the EP as such. The second big category is the negative category. Its position before the positive category is explained by the tense climate reigning in the EU at the time. The crisis, austerity measures and high unemployment have provoked an ensuing distrust that citizens express towards the EU in general. In conclusion the current feelings of the European citizens towards the EU are definitely not love and trust but rather anger and disappointment. Our third and weakest category was the positive one. There exists a huge gap between the amount of positive and negative comments. This once again is

explained by the tense climate prevailing in the Union. Besides, the fewer amount of positive comments strengthen the negative feeling towards the EP and the EU in general.

In the categories “plenary” and “Act.React.Impact campaign” citizens express themselves on several political theme, while the category “other (a)” is reserved mainly to non-political themes. Comments classified by theme revealed several categories. There are the comments with a theme linked with the news of 2013 and categories whose theme is characterised as “timeless”. There are also the comments that just bash on the EU and the EP and the few that express the pride of some citizens of being Europeans. Sometimes there is a logic in the connection between the post and the comment, sometimes this logic does not exist and the comment is just some demand on the part of its authors. But we can say that for the most part, connected or not with the post, the comments are mostly connected with some news event. The next type of classification was useful in order to understand what type of comments is the most popular, that is, a question, a comment on a previous comment or an engagement with the EP. This classification also enabled us to see how exactly do citizens engage with the EP. In this round of categories, it was the category “comment on the post” in the section “other (a)” that was the most present. We concluded that this section expresses the highest engagement coming from the citizens because in this section citizens respond quite well and quite logically to the posts. This is not to be found in the other sections though, which let us supposed that the debates on Facebook are not structured and are following several directions. The high rate of engagement we found in the “type” section is also to be found in the “sentiment” section. The high numbers we found imply as well that citizens engage quite often with the posts of the category “other (a)” and this by answering the question or the riddle proposed in the post. We can therefore conclude that the non-political posts section “other (a)” represents the highest engagement rate coming from the citizens.

Finally, we have seen that the city of Brussels, is not often enough associated with the EU and EP in general. It came out of our research that the interrogated Europeans most often connect it with its entertainment and hence non-political features. Therefore it has been concluded that the city does not fulfil its status of European capital.

5.3 First research question: How is the EP rebranding itself through social media campaigns?

Throughout our thesis our attempt has been to answer our research question. This section attempts to discuss the first part of this very research question, that is, “How is the EP

rebranding itself through social media campaigns?”. In order to answer this question we have first concentrate our research on the social media Facebook. Then we have focused on three social media “campaigns”. Those campaigns were three categories that we selected from the several categories we inductively found. “Plenary”, “Act.React.Impact campaign” and “other (a)” were considered as campaign because of the cause they each supported. How therefore does the European Parliament rebrand itself using these categories? “Plenary” has the purpose to bring the citizens behind the scenes and as such to make them discover the EP’s life behind the policies. “Act.React.Impact campaign” aims at promoting the 2014 elections to the European citizens by making them understand that “this time, it’s different” and “other (a)” aims at entertaining the citizen through personal questions and riddles. These categories can be seen as efforts on the side of the Parliament to open up to its citizens. Therefore, Van Ham’s quote that “Europe lacks *der WillezurMacht*, and is proud of it!” (2005, p.122) is at first doubtful. At least, when one sees all the efforts that the Parliament does to engage its citizens online. However, this quote becomes true as soon as one reads our analysis on the EP’s engagement with its citizens: only more or less 1 comment per post. This means that although it has the tools, the EP does not use them properly. Our claim that the EU is first and foremost a poor communicator thus seems to be true. Furthermore, Julie Aveline’s quote (2006, p.335) said that citizens do not comprehend well the EU as it is a faceless organisation. Once again, thanks to the Internet technology the EP has the possibility to give the EU a face. Yet it does not do it. There is nevertheless, the category “Meet an MEP” where you can have a chat about EU policies with an MEP, but this does not give a face to the EU. We do not even know who is behind the messages ‘European Parliament’. Is it an intern, an assistant or even an MEP?

In the literature review it has also been said that peace and security were part of the EU old founding myth and that those values had been replaced by other ones because they were considered settled and achieved. They were said to not appeal to European citizens anymore. However, the myth that the EU is “a haven of peace and prosperity in an otherwise rough and unpredictable world” (Van Ham, 2008, p.241) is not true anymore. Peace and prosperity are threatened again under the form of the crisis, the high rate of unemployment, the austerity measures and the transatlantic agreements. Therefore, citizens aspire to regain this peace once acquired. “Over the past decades, Europe has sold itself short. This has undermined public confidence in the EU as a potential European superpower.” (Van Ham, 2005, p.122). This is all confirmed by the high amount of neutral and negative comments we

have gathered during our research. Consequently peace and security have to reintegrate the EU brand, they have to be part again of its particular image and be regarded as an asset again. Among the several quotes we have used regarding branding there is also this one from Peter Van Ham that says that branding is “more than just PR or marketing, it also touches upon the sentiments. It tries to transform products and services as well as places into something more by giving them an emotional dimension with which people can identify.” (Van Ham, 2005, p.122). Giving citizens a sense of belonging is, as we have seen, one of the things the EP’s Facebook page strives to do. Using cleverly the sentence function and personal pronouns the EP attempts to convey this sense of belonging and uses the citizens’ sentiments. The category other (a) exemplifies the EP’s attempt at creating this. Identification with the EU is one of the things that the EP’s page attempts to do.

Eventually Anderson’s and McLeod’s have explained that the EP is complex, complicate, slow working and lacks power. Due to those characteristics the EP is seen as weak, often inefficient and even sometimes useless. Going online is part of its attempts to be less complex. The section “plenary” is part of this attempt. By unveiling its workings to its citizens the EP hopes to be seen as less complex and complicate. Also, showing what it does and in which areas aims at displaying the range of its powers. Hence, the category “plenary” is there to show that the Parliament is not as weak as one might think.

Therefore, we can conclude that since a couple of years now the EP is *attempting* at rebranding itself online. However, right now, it does so unsuccessfully and its attempts seem vain. We have seen “how”, that is, the way the EP uses several strategies to rebrand itself and, up to now, it seems that it uses the features of social media improperly. We have seen that citizens do engage on the EP Facebook page. Nevertheless, their main view is still quite negative. Consequently the EP has still a lot of work to do in order to restore its image.

5.4 Second research question: How are its citizens engaging with these efforts?

The first part of our research question has been discussed. It is now the turn of the second part of this same research question to be analysed. The first thing we need to emphasize is the “digital divide”. It has already been mentioned in our review of the literature and also in our limitations. It is indeed an important factor that accounts for who is able or not to engage on the Internet. As it has been said, white men of higher education and higher income who are skilled users have more chances to engage online. It has also been said that now, thanks to the Internet the world of politics has opened up wider, encompassing more young people.

That was it for who can participate, but what is of interest to us is “how” they participate. Numerous of the techniques employed have been summed up in our summary section. However some have not, and some deserve to be repeated again.

Sometimes we have found a logic in the citizens participation. The comments they write fit with the post published by the EP. In these cases the citizens engage logically with the publication. Nevertheless, there are sometimes – and those are quite numerous – when post and comments have nothing in common. In these circumstances the citizen engage in an illogical way with the post published by the EP and Facebook serves just to publish one’s own thoughts. In the neutral, negative and positive category most comments have been classified as neutral. This was because those comments did not express a sentiment of any kind towards the EP. Most of the time this comments did not even mentioned the EP but rather bash on the EU in general or on some news issue. Therefore citizens do not engage with the EP page in a reasoned way. They use it as a forum where to express their disappointment or pride of being European. Another thing has to do with the structure of the debates. Most of the time, we have found that those are not structured and go in all possible directions.

After repeating these three characteristic types of engagement coming from the citizen, time has come to evaluate a fourth one that we have not discussed yet: the playful engagement. The literature review made an extensive use of the work of Liesbet van Zoonen who studied the connection between entertainment and politics. Whether politics can be combined with entertainment, whether political involvement and participation can be fun and whether citizenship can be pleasurable (2005) are the main focuses of her work. We have found throughout the EP Facebook page that politics can be connected with entertainment, that political involvement and participation can have their part of fun and of personal involvement and that this makes citizenship pleasurable. Mainly this was found in the category “other (a)” which was the mainly non-political category. The conclusion we could take from this category is that through their comments citizens do “play” with the EP. Some answered to the question asked by the EP, some posted pictures and some answered the EP’s riddle. This corroborates van Zoonen’s statement that people do politics even during their leisure time. Indeed when one goes on the EP’s Facebook page and participates in the posts, one engages in politics while at the same time doing a pleasurable activity of gaming. Most of the time the information displayed throughout those “games” is of a personal nature.

5.5 Third research question: How does the EP use the Brussels city brand to reshape itself online?

This section is the last, before our final conclusion. It aims to answer to our last sub-research question, that is, “How does the EP use the Brussels city brand to reshape itself online?” Throughout the literature review it has been said that the meaning of the city and the political meaning of the EP are interwoven. It has also been claimed that Brussels is the city that represents ‘Europe’. However, our research have shown somehow different. Remember on all our 50 respondents not even half associated the city of Brussels with the EU and only one associated it with the EP. Furthermore Brussels is not mentioned in the posts or comments of the EP, except in the posts regarding the double seat issue. As for “Belgium” the label has been used only once in our coding. The posts always reference Strasbourg because it is there that the Plenary takes place. Consequently if the EP is to use the Brussels brand to reshape itself online it should start to make use of the city’s name, it should use pictures of it and explains the role it plays in the establishment of its power.

Nevertheless some other problems are in the way of the EP. Indeed, in order for them to use the Brussels city brand, the city of Brussels should first have a brand. Now, we have seen in our literature review that “Brussels is a global brand but it lacks coherence”(City Marketing. Tourism and Brussels, n.d.) because Brussels means so many different things according to who you are (a journalist, a citizen, a businessman, etc.). It has been said that Brussels’ offer is like a mosaic and that “image pillars” have been used “to bear the differences and characteristics of Brussels”. Therefore if EP and the city have to work together, the EP and the more the generally the EU have to be assimilated to one of those pillars. But the main issue, Guy Baeten told us is that “A *strategy* to cope with Brussels’ international mission is simply nonexistent (2001, p.128). In consequence the EP will have a really hard time identifying itself with the cosmopolitan city of Brussels. Nevertheless, not all is lost. Since 2013 Brussels is rebranding itself, by using the new all-encompassing brand “be.brussels”. At the heart of this new brand: Europe, and Brussels as the city that represents its. Therefore it is now that the EP needs to seize its chance. As the Parliament tries to ameliorate its image and to reshape itself online, so does the city of Brussels.

The answer to this third sub-question is thus a negative one. The EP does not use, at least not voluntarily, the Brussels city brand in order to rebrand itself. The only one who do the association Brussels/EP are the media. The EP itself does not do this association or maybe does not want to do it. Therefore it seems that the rebranding of Brussels and the rebranding of the EP are two separate and independent endeavours.

5.6 Final word

Throughout this thesis I have attempted to answer three questions. Often the answer found for these questions is that the European Parliament has started the process of rebranding but has not yet implemented it properly. When asked how they used social media campaigns for rebranding, the answer is that they do use social media platform, but not to its most effective point. The main change brought about by the Web 2.0 is the possibility of direct feedback, which the EP does not use properly. When asked how do citizens engage with the EP the answer is quite messy. Sometimes there is a logic, sometimes there is not. Conversations are most of the time not structured and go away in several directions. Therefore the way citizens engage with the EP's Facebook page is unstructured. Eventually when asked how the EP uses the Brussels city brand to reshape itself online the answer cannot be given completely as Brussels is only trying to develop its all-encompassing brand since early 2013. Therefore if the EP is to rebrand itself in accordance with the city of Brussels it is now that it has to seize its chance. All in all the EP still has some work to do to rebrand itself and to regain its place in the heart of its citizens.

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Appendix A

Comments sorted by positive, negative and neutral and by theme

	Other				Act React Impact				Plenary			
	14 february 2013	4 august 2013	29 october 2013	total	5 september 2013	10 september 2013	15 october 2013	total	11 january 2013	8 May 2013	4-20 May 2013	total
positive	3	0	6	9	4	1	0	5	8	6	9	23
neutral	46	45	29	120	28	31	22	81	30	25	22	77
negative	0	0	10	15	17	14	30	61	13	20	14	47
other	46	46	16	106	7	8	16	31	22	19	24	65
greece	0	0	4	4		1		1				0
spain	0	0	3	4				0				0
EU in general	3	3	8	4	22	9	23	54	4	18	5	27
EP in general	0	0	7	14	1	7	14	22	1	5	5	11
Internal politics	0	0	3	7	9	21		30	2		1	3
catalonia	0	0	1	1		16		16				0
tourism	0	1	4	5				0				0
Economy					2			2	11	4	1	16
History					2			2	2	2		4
Cyprus								0	1			1
Human rights						1		1	5			5
Double seat issue								0	1		3	4
Ireland								0	1			1
UK out					3			3	1	2	3	6
EU political party							1	1	1	3		4
budget							12	12		2		2
language								0			5	5
Russia					2			2				
Romania					7	2		9				
Switzerland					1			1				
Belgium					1			1				
MEP & Representatives					1			1				
Act react impact						3		3				
Bulgaria						1		1				
Portugal						1		1				
external politics							1	1				
Turkey							1	1				

Comments sorted by type and by sentiment

	Other				Act react impact				Plenary			
	14-févr	4 aout	29-oct	total	5-sept	10-sept	15-oct	total	11-janv	8 may	4-20 may	total
Engagement	43	33	22	98				0			3	3
Irony	1			1	1			2				3
Personal meaning	1	2		3				0		1		1
positive	1			1				0				0
Thankful		2		2				0		1		1
Negative engagement		1		1			2	2				0
positive engagement		1		1			5	5	5	5	8	18
Neutral		1		1		1		1				0
One's own belief		4		4	2	1		3	4	2	1	7
Startled		1		1				0				0
Attack		2	2	4		1		1		1	1	2
Help offering			6	6				0				0
Distress		2	2	2		1	1	2	3	2	1	6
Anger		2		2			1	1				0
History					1			1				0
Facts					2			2				0
New political programme					1			1				0
Personal quote						3		3				0
Surprise							2	2				0
Information							2	2	1			1
Racism							1	1				0
Amazement							1	1				0
Personal Experience									8	7	5	20
remark											3	3
curiosity											3	3
anxiety											1	1
Comment on the post	45	31	22	98				0			1	1
Answer on a previous comment	1	6	12	19			8	8	9	6	10	25
Blunt Statement		4		4	1	2		3	1	2	1	3
Question to the previous comment		1		1	3	1	1	5			2	2
Non sense		1		1			5	5	7	8	2	17
Comment aiming at another member				0		1		1			1	1
appeal to the community					2	1	2	5	3	2	1	6
Question to the EP					1		1	2			1	1
Engagement with the EP						3		3				0
Experience						1		1	1			0

Appendix B

What does Brussels mean to you?

- US - An underrated semi european melting pot
 - US- oh here's another thing to add to my previous comment. Brussels:never a dull moment hehe! and it's true!
 - Belgium - My house.
 - Greece - grey color...
 - Belgium - Superdiversity (or maybe it's my wish)
 - Germany - the European Union
 - Belgium - My home, a multicultural mix And a perfect place to meet lots of interesting people
 - Latvia - European capital, decision- making city
 - Belgium - Home town
 - Venezuela - European financial center
 - Belgium- tourists
 - India - Eu headquarters
 - Hungary - beer, Atomium, EU
 - Portugal - MannekenPis, Chocolate, Waffles, Snails... & more Chocolate! ;D
 - Spain - Europe, supra-national capital, ugliness, bad urbanism
 - France - center of europe, nice people, good beer
 - Belgium - traffic jams, poor public transport offer, pollution alerts: a city that should give more resources to fulfill its status of European capital...
 - Belgium - Atomium(rojda) and i have in mind my family:-)
 - Portugal - Center of Europe, Fun, dynamic!!!
 - France - beer& EU
 - Germany - Julie
 - Belgium - Dynamic city that never sleeps, beer, MannekenPis. If you meet 10 different people on the street, I'm pretty sure each one is gonna be from a different country, culture and have a different language.
 - Spain - Brussels is for me a place where you absolutely need to live in any bubble (no matter which: EU, Flemish, Turkish, Morocco, Italo-Spanish, etc.) in order to breath, cause "there is no life out there" (X-files series). The small capital of the old (and also new) Europe, where one community do not look face to face to any other one.
 - Belgium - Brussels is a little shady and disorganized, but nevertheless I consider it my home.
 - Belgium - J'entends aussi souvent "Bruxelles caca" de la part de ma cousine qui y habite. Je pense qu'elle aime pas l'aspect mobilité de la ville l'aspect écologique aussi sûrement et quand je dis mobilité et écologie je veux dire problèmes de mobilité et pas vraiment d'aspect écologique
 - Belgium - Pour répondre à ta question: ma ville d'adoption (en tant que Belge du fin fond des Ardennes); capitale de Belgique; peuplée d'habitants relativement ouverts; lieu de création, d'innovation et de changements, et ce en toute modestie!; petite ville, beaucoup d'activités et grande diversité; capitale européenne, les institutions, les lobbys et les stagiaires (le monde parallèle!)
-
- Brazil - Fancy stuff and chocolat
 - Finland/Italy - Once visited Brussels and i have to say that the city is underrated. Full of culture and arts varying from street art to higher class. Food and drinks seem also to be important...and yes, the chocolate!
 - Finland/Italy It's like in France without all the assholes
 - Turkey/Netherlands - i agree it is underrated
 - Ethiopia - cute
 - Ethiopia - my sister says: "its on the way to paris "
 - Russia - I think Brussels kind of became a victim of its proximity to such cities as Paris and Amsterdam, and people see it only as a transit point from croissants to weed and back. Its potential is bigger.
 - Netherlands Capital of Europe
 - Norway - I was watching a documentary about Brussels today and how they can't grow the cacao plant yet they manage to have the best chocolate. So after today i see Brussels as a very hard working culture.

- Netherlands - Not sure what you exactly mean? Like in what context? But i guess i would say something as the capital of the european union? Or do you need a sentiment like whether i like it??
- Bulgaria/Germany - european institutions and waffels
- Netherlands - yesi think eurpean institutions
- South Africa - European Parliament and Beer
- Singapore - Waffles and tomorrowland
- Netherlands - EU and capital of Europe
- Netherlands - The first thing that crosses my mind is the link to the EU. Good luck!
- Netherlands - I also think about the EU and how you never really actually notice when they're around
- Netherlands - Manneken Pis!
- Netherlands the atomium!
- Netherlands - I think about the EU but also think of it as my home. good luck!!
- Netherlands - Chips and waffels
- Netherlands - I have friends from my exchange there, so I immediately think of them, and how much fun we had when I visited last year and we were drinking all the different flavored beers.
- Netherlands - Waffels
- Switzerland - Cosmopolitanism
- Greece - Inefficiency.
- Russia - Integration
- US - Freedom
- Poland –Chocolate

Total: 54

Mention the EU or the capital of Europe: 22 => not even half

Only one mentions the EP as such

Criticism of the city as such: 8

Entertainment, touristy clichés: 18