

MEDIA PLATFORMS, ONLINE CONTENT AND GLOBALISATION – EUROPEAN PERSPECTIVE IN THE SHIFTING INFORMATION ENVIRONMENT

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Abstract

The digital age has transformed media consumption and production, profoundly shifting the information environment. Media platforms, including social networks and streaming services, play a huge role in this. The article examines the European perspective, highlighting the influence of online content and media platforms. It includes data from the EUMEPLAT project, conducted between 2020-2024 across 10 European universities. Platforms like Facebook, Twitter/X, Instagram, TikTok, YouTube, HBO, and Netflix have revolutionised content creation, distribution, and consumption, transcending national borders and enabling global media access.

Keywords: video platforms, platformization of video, digital consumption, media transformation, platforms hegemony

In 2021, ‘The Economist’ declared that digital media are a good place, promoting the European culture. „Moments when Europeans sit down and watch the same thing at roughly the same time used to be rare,“ it said. „Now they are more common, thanks to the growth of streaming platforms such as Netflix.“¹. Instead of fostering a shared European culture, the opposite effect might be occurring. Since most major web platforms are owned by American companies, a sizeable portion of the content consumed in Europe is imported from the United States or other dominant market countries.

¹ Charlemagne, (2021), How Netflix is creating a common European culture - Streaming subtitled box sets is the new Eurovision, The Economist. (<https://www.economist.com/europe/2021/03/31/how-netflix-is-creating-a-common-european-culture> 10.06.2024)

The digital age has transformed media consumption and production, leading to a profound shift in the information environment. Media platforms, from social networks to streaming services, have become central to this transformation, playing a pivotal role in globalisation. This article explores the European perspective on these changes, focusing on how online content and media platforms influence and are influenced by globalisation. The article includes data and outcomes from EUMEPLAT project, a deep digital platforms research, held in the period 2020-2024 in 10 European universities.

Media platforms such as Facebook, Twitter/X, Instagram and TikTok, as well as the video on demand (VoD) platforms as YouTube, HBO, Netflix have revolutionised how content is created, distributed, and consumed. These platforms have transcended national borders with huge tempo in the last few years, enabling global access to diverse forms of media content online. In Europe, the adoption of these platforms has been rapid, facilitated by widespread of good quality internet access and mobile device usage.

One of the key aspects of globalisation is the cultural exchange facilitated by online content. European media consumers are exposed to a variety of cultural products from around the world, which can lead to a more homogenised global culture. However, this exposure also allows for the appreciation and dissemination of diverse cultural expressions. European media platforms have increasingly curated content to cater to both local tastes and global audiences. At the same time the platforms' algorithms have a key role in the consumption patterns. No strict rules about the translated video content, movies and series, no quotas about local (per country or on EU level) content brings to marginalization of European VoD content. Those are the main outcomes from the EUMEPLAT project research².

The EUMEPLAT research shows that the most used platforms for video content in Europe are YouTube, Instagram and TikTok. For some countries they are also some country specific platforms, placed on fourth place: Vbox7 for Bulgaria, Twitch for Czech Republic and Sweden, Dailymotion for Germany and Greece³.

As for the VoD platforms, most used in Europe are HBO, Apple TV+, Amazon, Disney, Netflix⁴. About 64% of the content, consumed in Europe on Netflix is produced in North America⁵, compared with just 18%, produced in Europe.

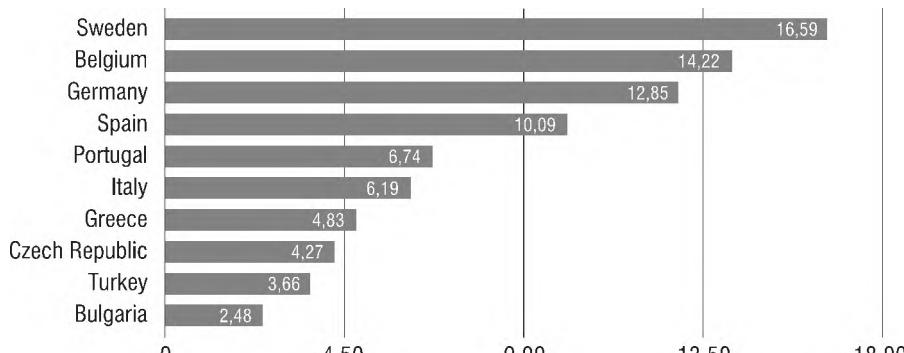
² Bosnakova, D., A. Miconi, J. Toms (2024), Hegemony: Platformization of Video, NBU, Sofia, p. 9

³ Bosnakova, D., A. Miconi, J. Toms (2024), Hegemony: Platformization of Video, NBU, Sofia, p. 31-36

⁴ Digital TV Europe, (https://www.digitaltveurope.com/intelligence_type/reports/#close-modal 15.06.2024)

⁵ Bosnakova, D., A. Miconi, J. Toms (2024), Hegemony: Platformization of Video, NBU, Sofia, p. 41

Table 1. Percentage of population with Netflix subscription per country



Source: EuroNews

What comes with all this increasing online video consumption? Are the traditional media ready for this shift?

In one hand we have regulatory challenges. The expansion of global media platforms poses significant regulatory challenges for European governments and institutions. The European Union (EU) has implemented various regulations to ensure that these platforms adhere to local laws regarding content moderation, data privacy, and intellectual property rights. The General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR) is a notable example, aiming to protect European citizens' personal data in the digital space. On the other hand, comes the economic impact of the process. The globalisation of media platforms has significant economic implications. European content creators and media companies can reach international audiences more easily, creating new revenue streams. However, this also means increased competition from global players, particularly from the United States and China. European media companies must innovate to maintain their competitiveness in this shifting landscape.

Media platforms play a crucial role in shaping public opinion and political discourse. The European information environment has been influenced by the proliferation of online content, which can both inform and misinform the public. Issues such as fake news, misinformation, and the role of social media in election interference have become prominent concerns. The EU has taken steps to address these issues, promoting media literacy and implementing measures to combat disinformation.

Cultural diversity and preservation of languages are also topics, related directly to the hegemonization of the video platforms⁶. More than 50% (227 mentions) of the films on HBO are in English. Next most popular language is Spanish with just 6,73% (30 mentions). The data for the other platforms are very similar. Small countries and language groups almost do not exist on the VoD and other video sharing platforms.

⁶ Gondola, J. (2024), The Impact of AI on Cultural Preservation and Ethics, Medium (<https://medium.com/@jamesgondola/the-impact-of-ai-on-cultural-preservation-and-ethics-48e7ecd42be1>, 12.06.2024)

In response to the dominance of private media platforms, public service media in Europe continue to play a vital role. However, their impact and reach are facing many challenges. Organisations such as the BBC, ARD, and France Télévisions provide content that serves the public interest, offering high-quality news, educational programming, and cultural content – types of content that is not very competitive, but has its public role. These institutions are adapting to the digital age by expanding their online presence and leveraging innovative technologies to engage with audiences. They have to shift their understanding of distribution and dissemination – process that needs fast decisions and implementation.

Next big challenge will be the AI. AI will significantly impact the transformation of media consumption and production, further reshaping the information environment. AI-driven algorithms on media platforms will enhance content creation, distribution, and personalization, offering users more tailored experiences, but also placing them into echo-chambers and limiting their free choice⁷. These algorithms can analyse vast amounts of data to predict user preferences, ensuring relevant content is delivered efficiently.

Table 2. Languages of HBO films, IMDB, January 2023⁸

N	Language	N of mentions	%
1	English	227	50,91
2	Spanish	30	6,73
3	French	27	6,05
4	Russian	20	4,48
5	Latin	18	4,04
6	Japanese	13	2,91
7	Italian	12	2,69
8	German	11	2,47
9	Mandarin	10	2,24
10-11	Chinese, Ukrainian	2 x 7	2 x 1,58
12	American Sign language	6	1,35
13-14	Hindi, Norwegian	2 x 5	2 x 1,12
15-18	Arabic, Portuguese, Turkish, Vietnamese	4 x 4	4 x 0,90
19-21	Estonian, Old English, Urdu	3 x 3	3 x 0,68
22-24	Czech, Hebrew, Korean	3 x 2	3 x 0,45
25-41	Afrikaans, British Sign Language, Cantonese, Dutch, Filipino, Greek, Indonesian, Latvian, Malay, Neapolitan, Quenya, Sanskrit, Serbian, Shanghainese, Sindarin, Swedish, Tagalog	17 x 1	17 x 0,22
Total		446	100

⁷ Dhulipala, S. (2023), The echo chamber effect: How algorithms shape our worldview, Campaign. (<https://www.campaignasia.com/article/the-echo-chamber-effect-how-algorithms-shape-our-worldview/491762> 10.06.2024)

⁸ Bosnakova, D., A. Miconi, J. Toms (2024), Hegemony: Platformization of Video, NBU, Sofia, p. 70

Other aspect goes to local languages - AI will also influence globalization by enabling real-time language translation, breaking down language barriers and facilitating cross-cultural communication⁹. This will allow media platforms to reach broader, more diverse audiences.

The shifting information environment, driven by the rise of media platforms and online content, presents both opportunities and challenges from a European perspective. Globalisation has facilitated cultural exchange and economic growth, but it has also introduced regulatory, political, and social complexities. As Europe navigates these changes, a balanced approach that embraces innovation while protecting local interests and values will be crucial.

However, instead of fostering a shared European culture, the dominance of not-European web platforms has resulted in much of the content being imported from the United States or other major market countries. This trend may undermine the development of a unique European cultural identity, also lost of diversity and local heritage. AI will further influence these dynamics by enhancing content creation, distribution, and personalization, offering users more tailored experiences while also enabling real-time language translation to facilitate cross-cultural communication.

AI's capabilities in detecting and managing misinformation will improve content quality and reliability, addressing the spread of fake news. Enhanced data analytics will provide deeper insights into user behaviour, helping media companies optimize their strategies and adapt to consumer demands. In Europe, AI's integration with existing high-quality internet infrastructure and widespread mobile device usage will accelerate the adoption and impact of media platforms, driving further innovation and connectivity across the continent.

The evolving information environment, influenced by media platforms and online content, presents a complex landscape for Europe and the world. While globalisation fosters cultural exchange and economic growth, it also brings regulatory, political, and social challenges, which have to be faced and solutions to be found collaboratively and rapidly.

AI will play a critical role in this transformation, enhancing content creation, distribution, and personalization, and facilitating cross-cultural communication through real-time translation. AI's ability to manage misinformation and provide deep insights into user behaviour will further shape media consumption and production. Europe's high-quality internet infrastructure and widespread mobile device usage will support rapid adoption of these innovations, driving further connectivity and innovation across the continent. A balanced approach that embraces technological advancements while safeguarding local interests and values will be essential for Europe, European media and people to navigate these changes successfully.

⁹ Bhalerao, Ch., (2023), How Filter Bubbles Are Biassing Your Opinions on Social Media, Medium. (<https://medium.com/data-and-beyond/how-filter-bubbles-are-biassing-your-opinions-on-social-media-9469b940154>, 10.06.2024)

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THE AGENDA OF THE NEW EU INSTITUTIONAL CYCLE

Sofia University „St. Kliment Ohridski“,
Hanns Seidel Foundation,
Wilfried Martens Centre for European Studies

Sofia, 2024

ISBN: 978-954-8702-64-5





9789548702645