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**in**  
**Social Representations and Communication**



**Co-ordinated by**  
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**SOCIAL REPRESENTATIONS OF SOCIAL MEDIA AT  
ROMANIAN TEENAGERS.  
EUROPEAN INTEGRATION THROUGH THE INTERNET**

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**“SAPIENZA” UNIVERSITY OF ROME**



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**Abstract:** Social media and European Union are two realities of the present that have undoubtedly brought major changes in society in terms of communication, intergroup relations and identity negotiation. The power relations between social media and European Union have become so great that a change from one side is immediately felt on the other side, and more important is that the two together define the present and build the future. It is a complex process, especially since European integration is resisting nationalist politics, and the Internet is drastically regulated even by the European Union, as it has never been before. Thus, inevitably, new aspects of social life arise, with which people need to get familiarized in order to shape a common sense. Therefore, we investigated the social representation of social media at Romanian teenagers, demonstrating through this research that it has mostly positive elements, but which are under the threat of new Internet regulations. If we also consider the process of European integration, social media can represent a strong link between the European Union and Romania, helping create a good European identity, despite the national sovereignty that has been promoted. The research was based on a structured questionnaire, Associative Network Technique with four stimuli (“Me”, “Social Media”, “European Union”, “Romania”), YouTube video analysis, and text mining on Facebook.

**Keywords:** Social representations, social media, European integration, Romania

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## **Introduction**

The present study aims to investigate topical issues of Romania, that are represented by the unprecedented spread of social media and the challenges faced by the European identity in the context of increasingly nationalist politics. These issues already have major influences on the present, but they will certainly have an even greater impact on the future, so we chose to investigate them from the perspective of a sample of Romanian teenagers, who will be tomorrow's adults. The study is all the more relevant as we are actually dealing with the first Romanian generations that are grown up digital and European (Tapscott, 2008).

Even though social media emerged in the early 2000s, and Romania joined the European Union in 2007, both managed to constantly reinvent themselves and make significant changes to the realities of whole society. And when we talk about realities, we also refer to the virtual one and the physical one. In this complexity of evolution, we normally expect to have unfamiliar aspects, changes in intergroup relations and different negotiations of social identities. So, we consider that an opportune approach to these issues is through social psychology, especially through social representations, which are socio-cognitive constructions that allow us to integrate novelties into our everyday lives (Moscovici, 1984; de Rosa, 1996; Abric, 1994a; Flament, 1992).

When we think about social media, we even think that the founder of Social Representations Theory, Serge Moscovici, has suggested in last years of the past millennium that we need to focus on how the Internet shapes the common sense, the language exchanged, and the groups themselves (Moscovici, 1997a). As a continuation of those thoughts, and realizing the importance of the phenomenon, we chose the general aim of the thesis to be the investigation of the social representation of social media at Romanian teenagers, in relation with the European integration process.

The interconnectivity between social media and European integration is necessary for at least two reasons, which concern different contexts. First, we need to consider the context of the recent European Internet regularization of March 2019, which leads to a secondary aim of the thesis, to investigate the influence that European Union can have to the structure of the social representation of social media.

Second, being a power relationship that has effects in both directions, we investigated how social media influences the European Union in terms of European integration of Romania, hence extracting another secondary objective of the thesis, to investigate the European identity in the online field. Evolution and negotiation of the European identity is even more important to be analyzed, as Romania has joined the context of nationalist politics. Romania's political situation has changed to national sovereignty with the beginning of this thesis in 2016 and seems to have ended in 2019, concomitantly with the completion of this thesis. So, in the course of our research, we often had to improve our methods and adapt to the context. In addition to the changes in politics, we had to adapt to the unprecedented changes in the digital environment, because in March 2019 the European Parliament adopted the toughest law that regulates copyright on the Internet.

For a full understanding of the contexts, we will explain them in turn to see the necessity of creating a link between social media and European integration.

*The political context* in which Romania turned to national sovereignty began with the parliamentary elections in Romania in December 2016. The results allowed the political power in Romania to be held by the alliance of PSD and ALDE. Since then, Romania has turned to a nationalist trend, rather than to European integration. Thus, in January 2017, the Romanian Government approved the Emergency Ordinance no. 13, which is a law amending the Penal Code and the Criminal Procedure Code in favor of the ruling leaders. The law has led to street protests and reactions from the European Commission, which sees in the law a “risk for progress in the fight against corruption”.<sup>1</sup> The political atmosphere in Romania continued in the same lines, and from many such anti-European decisions, we will only remember that in November 2018 other changes to justice were proposed, which were approved in February 2019. The European Commission reacted again with concern to the legislative changes that are “in direct contradiction with the Commission’s recommendations under the Cooperation and Verification Mechanism approved by all Member States.”<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> <https://www.hotnews.ro/stiri-esential-21626774-raport-comisiei-europene-initiativele-precum-oug-13-reprezinta-risc-pentru-progresele-inregistrate-romania-lupta-anticoruptie-ultimii-10-ani.htm> (Accessed on May 23, 2019)

<sup>2</sup> <https://stirileprotv.ro/stiri/actualitate/comisia-europeana-critica-modificarile-aduse-prin-oug-legilor-justitiei-si-va-cere-explicatii.html> (Accessed on May 23, 2019)

In the early months of 2019, the anti-European attitudes became even stronger, so the parties to power in Romania (PSD, ALDE) froze their relations with European affiliates (PES<sup>3</sup>, ALDE<sup>4</sup>).

Throughout this period, paradoxically, Romania held the presidency of the Council of the European Union (1 January - 30 June 2019), organized the informal European Summit in Sibiu (9 May 2019), where EU heads of state or government were brought together, and held elections for the European Parliament (26 May 2019). With these elections for the European Parliament, Romania is beginning to come back on the road to European integration, because PSD came second in the election results, and ALDE did not catch the electoral threshold of 5%. In addition, the next day (27 May 2019), PSD leader Liviu Dragnea, who was considered responsible for the entire anti-European course of Romania, was jailed for corruption.

*The digital context* is marked by the necessity of a new Internet regulation on copyright. The former EU Copyright Directive dates back to 2001 and no longer meets the needs of the online market. Even Mark Zuckerberg, Facebook's CEO, declared in May 2018 in his hearing in the European Parliament that the Internet needs a new regulation: *"I don't think the question here is whether or not there should be regulation. I think the question is what is the right regulation. I think the Internet is becoming increasingly important in people's lives; some sort of regulation is important and inevitable, and the important thing is to get this right"*<sup>5</sup>. The inevitable came in March 2019 when the European Parliament adopted the new Directive on Copyright in the Digital Single Market<sup>6</sup>. It is the most controversial Internet law ever in the European Union, seen by a group of IT specialists, led by Tim Berns-Lee, the World Wide Web inventor, as a threat to the online environment: *"We cannot support Article 13, which would mandate Internet platforms to embed an automated infrastructure for monitoring and censorship deep into their networks. For the sake of the Internet's future, we urge you to vote for the deletion of this proposal"*<sup>7</sup>.

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<sup>3</sup> <https://agenceurope.eu/en/bulletin/article/12235/12> (Accessed on April 14, 2019)

<sup>4</sup> <https://twitter.com/guyverhofstadt/status/1121397943351644160> (Accessed on April 14, 2019)

<sup>5</sup> <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=o0zdBUOrhG8&t=3746s> (Accessed on April 20, 2019)

<sup>6</sup> <https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/?uri=CELEX%3A32019L0790> (Accessed on April 2019)

<sup>7</sup> <https://www.eff.org/files/2018/06/12/article13letter.pdf> (Accessed on March 27, 2019)

Therefore, both the European Union and the Internet have gained tremendous power over societies, and the changes from one side also feel immediately on the other side, so we consider that treating them together is appropriate. We will be able to observe along the thesis how social media can represent a favorable environment for the continuation of the European integration and the consolidation of the European identity, while Romania has adopted a policy of national sovereignty. At the same time, we will see how the structure of the social representation of social media can be affected by the new European Internet regulations. In order to achieve the aims of the research, we conducted three studies.

In the first study we investigated the structure of the social representation of social media. In order to relate to the above-mentioned contexts, we have also investigated the social representations of the self, of the European Union and of Romania. Throughout the study we treated in a comparative manner the four social representations in order to extract the links between them. In this regard, we used the Associative Network Technique (de Rosa, 2002) with four stimuli (“Me”, “Social Media”, “European Union”, “Romania”), and we also used a questionnaire to analyze how Romanian teenagers use and relate to social media, highlighting its impact on European integration process.

The second study involves an analysis of YouTube conversations with themes related to Article 13 (European Internet regulation), European Union, Romania and Internet. So, we could continue to investigate the underlying dimensions of the social representation of social media through the influence that Article 13 may have on the social representation structure. We also focused on the formation of the European identity and verified the link between European citizenship and Romanian citizenship. In addition, we have also referred to Brexit as an influential factor in the European integration process of Romania.

The third study is a text mining on Facebook conversations and is an extension of the second study, with the same objectives and working methods.

I chose Facebook and YouTube, because these two are the most popular social media platforms in Romania and they also offer the possibility to easily search for keywords. The three studies can be found in the second part of the thesis, while in the first part there are theoretical references. Besides the Social Representations Theory of Serge Moscovici (1961), I also approached the Field Theory of Pierre Bourdieu (1993) and the Social Identity Theory of Henri Tajfel (1979).

## **1. Social Media**

### **1.1. Emergence of Web 2.0 / Social Web**

There is no doubt that the beginning of the third millennium is strongly marked by the Web 2.0 revolution. In fact, as a natural continuation of history, the bridge between millennia has made the transition between Web 1.0 and Web 2.0. This transition has coincided with the event that will remain in history as “the bursting of the dot-com bubble” (O’Reilly, 2009), which happened between March 11, 2000 to October 9, 2002. It was a major crash on the NASDAQ Stock Market for investment in the Internet sector, so big companies called “Dotcom companies” (after the .com extension in the URL, from the word “commercial”) failed and shut down (Wollscheid, 2012). Therefore, it was demonstrated that the Web 1.0 market was unpredictable and especially uncertain, so that creating a new, more developed and dynamic market was needed. This is how the Web 2.0 market appears, with lots of promises to revolutionize the internet: „Power to the People” „By the People for the People”, „Content is King” (Meza, 2015, p. 85). As these taglines show us, Web 2.0 is more focused on interaction, communication, mass involvement and user-generated content. In contrast, in Web 1.0, the sites were static and without interactivity. Their look was more like business cards, where people could see certain information, a list of services, and contact details.

Even though Internet experts have a wide variety of definitions of Web 2.0, there is still a widely accepted view that Web 2.0 is seen as Social Web or Participative Web. The term Web 2.0 was invented in 1999 by Darcy DiNucci as a preview of what was going to happen, and in 2004 it was popularized by Tim O’Reilly and Dale Dougherty at the “Web 2.0 Conference” (O’Reilly, 2009). However, not 2004 was the birth year for Web 2.0; in fact, we can not speak of a specific birth year, because the transition has been gradual, so some opinions also mention the Web 1.5.

What is good to know when it comes to Web 2.0 is that we are not talking about a new version of software or web technology, but 2.0 represents the second generation of intelligent development for World Wide Web services. This development facilitates the communication and distribution of information on the Internet, with a more active social involvement in the online environment.

Web 2.0 is an evolution that, due to its high degree of interaction, can give a new face to a web page, resembling more like an application. According to Anderson (2007), Web 2.0 facilitates a more connected web, where each user can be both consumer and producer at the same time. This has resulted in services like social networking, video sharing, blogs, podcasts and many more. Web 2.0 has at its core a power that web 1.0 did not own. This power is structured in six “big ideas” (Anderson, 2007), which have a huge social impact, changing not only the way a simple person accesses the Internet, but also how he lives his daily life, including how is making friends or joining different groups.

The six “big ideas” are structured as follows, making short descriptions for each one in order to pave the way for a better understanding of the social media concept:

*1. Individual production and user-generated content*

In addition to regular web browsing, the need for content creation by each user occurs at the crossroads between the second millennium and the third millennium, even surpassing the expected success. (Berners-Lee & Fischetti, 2000). Thus, through a web-connected gadget, everyone can create and recreate their own media space. The users can upload pictures and movies in which they can tag themselves or their friends, and they can easily write their thoughts to reach as many people as possible. Some are doing it for pleasure, but some do it for money and for fame. Either way, content creators can have significant influence on the masses of people, especially if we are talking about young people. In fact, there are many users who are unofficially proclaimed, or self-proclaimed “influencers”, such as video bloggers.

*2. Harnessing the power of the crowd*

The appearance of Web 2.0 also coincided with the publication of the best-seller “The Wisdom of Crowds” (Surowiecki, 2004), which had significant influences on how the Internet would be perceived. The author argues that any decision made in the group is much better than the individual decision of a member of the group, and hence extrapolation to the communities on the Internet. There is high emphasis on the unity of an expanded group, as it can be quickly and easily created on the Internet, and on its decision-making power, which can bring wiser ideas than a small gathering of elites. However, critics say these ideas are somewhat too daring, because there is a need of a perfect group cohesion and close



collaboration, which can hardly be achieved on the Internet. But, helped by circumstances, the concept of crowd power has gained momentum, and has been implemented in many Web 2.0 theorizations, even by Tim O'Reilly (2009).

### *3. Data on an epic scale*

From the beginning of Web 2.0 until today, a huge amount of data has been generated and stored. Without us being aware or neglecting terms and conditions on various sites, we allowed the Internet to enter slowly but surely into our private lives. In principle, data storage is closely related to major web market players like Google, Amazon and many others. They provide huge servers that are fed daily by terabytes of information. In fact, their business is now dependent on these databases. Moreover, the companies we mentioned earlier are holding the so called “databases of human intentions” (Nielsen, 2014). That means the Internet knows our desires and needs, and so we should not be surprised if Amazon knows very well what products to recommend us or Google what news to filter for us. So, we can say that sometimes we do not have to look for the information anymore, but the information is looking for us. But, besides the benefits that we as users receive, making our lives easier, there is also an ethical issue that raises a big question. Who, in fact, behind the servers owns our data and in what other purposes are used? We probably will never have an answer, but we can think that these databases provide a world-wide power of great importance to the owners. It is as in the first millennium that those who had the power were those with the broadest empires, then in the second millennium the power was owned by those who owned machinery and raw materials, taking advantage of the industrial revolution, and now at the beginning of the third millennium, power is held by those who have the largest human data bases.

### *4. Architecture of participation*

Regarding this concept, Anderson (2007, p. 19) says that it is a subtle concept and we need to give equal attention to both terms. This means that we overcome the idea of collaboration between users with reference to the content created. What it wants to convey is that improving the architecture of a service can improve and facilitate the participation of the masses. But there is also the other side, the more users participate, the better is the architecture of the service. Thus, in theory, there is a win-win relationship between the two components (users - online service), and the most eloquent example is Google search. Architecture of participation mobilizes communities to contribute more and more to production and

sharing of information so that subsequently, communities can take advantage of Web 2.0 algorithms to get information much easier as needed.

#### *5. Network Effect*

The Network Effect (Beck, 2006) refers to the added value that an online service receives with the subscription of multiple users. Firstly, the service grows economically, resulting also in increasing users' revenues, depending on the type of service; secondly, social connections are wider, because existing users can get in touch with new ones. Therefore, the Network Effect can be directly correlated with social media development. For example, the more users upload videos on YouTube, the more useful the platform is to the public, and the revenue of content creators may increase. Likewise, the more people join Facebook, the more virtual friends you can have, so the platform becomes more important to you and to your friends in order to stay connected in an interactive way.

#### *6. Openness*

One of the key points of Web 2.0 success was the open way to work with users. Even though Web development has also meant legal, political and cultural regulations, online users still may feel the "freedom" of the Internet, not having such a strict control. In addition, the speed of information and ease of access have made a huge number of people embrace the benefits of Web 2.0. Creators have also been given the option of contributing to various services by providing open-source services (such as certain Internet browsers). So again, the advantages lie on both sides, both in the architecture of the Internet and user involvement, the growth being made together using the snowball effect.

Of the six "big ideas" we can say that Web 2.0 has put the community first, with services tailored to meet people's needs and pleasures. The active involvement of users and the gradual development of services have led to the use of Web 2.0 as something "normal" in everyday life. We can say that the social structure has become so complementary to online architecture that a dependency has been created between the two. In fact, there is nothing wrong when we think that we use the Internet and the Internet is using us. This is the key to accessibility and efficiency, from any point of view, from the financial part to the technological one, as well as the social part. Truly Web 2.0 has meant opening the internet to anyone. It takes just the will and a few minutes to create an account and to start being at the same time

writer, video producer, influencer or a simple user who wants to add a comment to a news item.

## **1.2. Social Media - Synoptic view and definition**

Having a background of what Web 2.0 means, we can now investigate closely what social media is. Before defining the concept, we will present the common core aspects that are mostly encountered in the specialized literature (Ahlqvist, Bäck, Halonen & Heinonen, 2008; Obar & Wildman, 2015; Kaplan & Haenlein, 2010; Kietzmann, Hermkens, McCarthy & Silvestre, 2011). The common features of social media can be systematized in four points:

### *1. Social media are interactive Web 2.0 Internet-based applications*

Web 2.0 has brought a new ideology that can be defined by the term “prosumer” (Ritzer & Jurgenson, 2010) which means that the user is at the same time both producer and consumer. This is due to the interactivity available to any site, because the use of the Web has been thought of as a mix of applications and platforms, and so new methods of sharing the information are being introduced. With the large spread of information and limited restrictions, we can say that the Web 2.0 has contributed to the democratization of the Internet, creating an environment that is extremely conducive to the emergence of social media. Everyone can create a remote account with a click of a mouse or simply by tapping the screen of different devices. Portability has also played an important role for spreading the Web 2.0 Internet-based applications, with the aid of new technologies and advanced online architecture. Thus, all necessary conditions are prepared for the harmonious rise of social media.

### *2. User-generated content*

User-generated content (UGC) can be seen “as the sum of all ways people use Social Media” (Kaplan & Haenlein, 2010, p. 61). In other words, the term is used to designate any type of content that is created by the user to be made public. Any type of text, including comments, emoticons or the “like” reaction. Also, pictures, videos, music, check-ins, surveys, and any sort of content that can be generated through online interaction. User-generated content has been a fundamental concept since the emergence of Web 2.0, but has been regulated only a few years later by the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development

(OECD, 2007). Thus, user-generated content must meet three requirements: it must be public, must show minimal creative effort and must not be formulated in professional practices or activities. So, posts that are private or discussions on messenger can not be categorized as user-generated content. It is also the case for the simple sharing of another post or copying of text from another source, as well as the content being promoted for commercial purposes. User-generated content is diversifying according to the technological novelties that appear (such as 360° photos) and keeps social media alive.

### *3. User-specific profiles*

Creating a profile provides the way for identifying users and the uniqueness needed to have all the advantages of social media. Typically, a profile is created by entering the name, password, and email address. These are the mandatory elements, but there are a lot of other optional elements, such as profile photo, marital status, physical address, and more. Without creating a profile, direct interaction with other users will not be available, especially creating own social media content. So, we can say that the profile is the entrance door to access the entire social media world. However, there are social media platforms which do not require an account for simple content viewing. Some prefer this option to view content (sometimes only partially) without having an account, just to avoid entering the “human databases” we were talking about in the previous subchapter. Once the profile is created, automatically IP tracking begins, sometimes even location, and depending on the permissions granted, other data can be stored on the servers of the social media platforms.

### *4. Social media supports the online social networks*

Social network sites are among the most widespread social media services and perhaps the most controversial. After a user joins a social network site, is prompted to identify people with whom he would like to have relationships. Depending on the social network site, these people are referred to as “friends”, “followers”, “contacts” or “fans”. Once a user connects to other profiles, he can start a series of interactions, such as adding comments or reactions, private chatting, tracking posts from a specific profile, and many more. Through social network sites, new social ties can be strengthened or created, because online space is seen as one that will continue personal interaction (Mlaiki, Walsh & Kalika, 2017). Online social networking is a real success because it offers access to an extremely diverse

online community, where anyone can still find people with whom can share the same interests, needs or experiences. In addition, the advantages of the online environment can help the need for shared identity and immediate social recognition, so in most of the time checking out the news from social network sites is seen as something that has already come into our habits, and sometimes more than that, it can even be addictive.

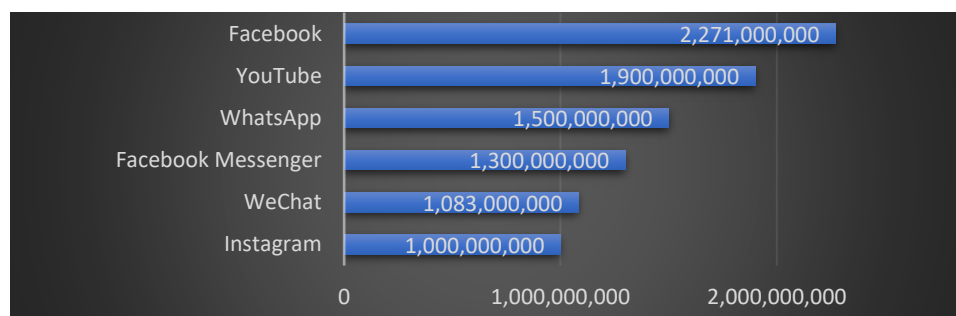
In the specialized literature mentioned in this subchapter there is a variety of definitions of the social media concept; but because this concept is a dynamic one, most of the time we have found the necessity of adding new features. Thus, we even turned to social media to find the best definition, demonstrating one of the theoretical concepts so far, that with every user input, social media is developing, and the stronger it becomes, the more users are receiving more valuable information. So, the most complete definition we have found on Wikipedia, thanks to the continued contribution of users. To this we have added our own concepts, so we can finally say that social media are interactive technologies based on Web 2.0 architecture, allowing the creation and sharing of content between online users, in order to facilitate communication and social interaction. The entire exchange of information, experiences, needs and other forms of expression is realized through virtual communities and networks, where users adhere according to common shared principles, valuing their identity, creativity, freedom, affiliation and social recognition.

Due to the wide variety of interactions offered by Web 2.0 and due to multiple needs, there are a multitude of social media types, Aichner & Jacob (2015, p. 259) identifying thirteen, as can be seen in Table 1. Because technologies are being updated every day, we have completed the list with an extra type: “Podcasts”. Noteworthy that Table 1 is not an exhaustive one, and it can hardly be done in such manner, precisely because it could be improved at very short intervals through the emergence of new services. However, we wanted to capture the main types of social media, in a general look, to see how interpersonal relationships enter a new stage of multidimensional communication. It is hard to explain users’ preference for choosing a certain type of social media, each having its importance. Also, there is still something that can hardly be explained: due to the wide diversity of social media services, new social structures are being created without being ever predicted and for which there are no control or optimization procedures (Bădău, 2011).

Type of social media	Examples	
Blogs	The Huffington Post	Boing Boing
Business networks	LinkedIn	XING
Collaborative projects	Wikipedia	Mozilla
Enterprise social networks	Yammer	Socialcast
Forums	Gaia Online	IGN Boards
Microblogs	Twitter	Tumblr
Photo sharing	Flickr	Photobucket
Podcasts	Soundcloud	Mixcloud
Products/services review	Amazon	E lance
Social bookmarking	Delicious	Pinterest
Social gaming	World of Warcraft	Mafia Wars
Social networks	Facebook	Google+
Video sharing	YouTube	Vimeo
Virtual worlds	Second Life	Twinity

*Table 1: Types of social media with examples*

The use of social media has grown so large that Castells (2010, p. 12) even speaks of concepts such as “web society” or “human network”, so we can say that a main purpose of social media is to create a heavily connected world that becomes more organized, and more coherent. Achieving the goal seems to be heading for the right path, because it has already been demonstrated that social media succeeds in bringing people closer to each other; proof of this is represented by the huge number of active profiles worldwide for the most important social media services, as shown in Figure 1, as of January 2019.<sup>8</sup>

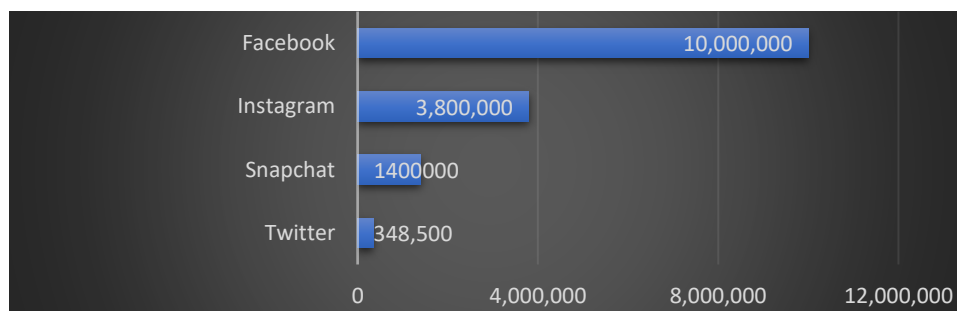


*Figure 1: Active profiles worldwide for the most important social media platforms (January 2019)*

<sup>8</sup> <https://datareportal.com/reports/digital-2019-romania> (Accessed on March 27, 2019)

The social media landscape is dominated by Facebook with 2.27 billion profiles and YouTube with 1.9 billion profiles. If Facebook and YouTube were two countries, they would be the top 2 in the number of inhabitants. The figures are so astonishing that we can talk about a “social media revolution, comparable in terms of development and effects with the Industrial Revolution, but much faster. A simple comparison with traditional media is stronger than any other argument: the radio has reached 50 million listeners in 30 years, television has reached the threshold of 50 million viewers in 13 years, the Internet took 4 years to reach this figure, while Facebook has reached 100 million users in less than nine months (data was obtained from [www.socialnomics.com](http://www.socialnomics.com))” (Bădău, 2010, p. 11).

Also, for Romania, the figures are outstanding, with the number of active profiles on Facebook reaching 10 million, which represents half of the country’s population. The data presented<sup>9</sup> are valid for January 2019 and can be consulted together with the number of active profiles of other types of social media in Fig. 2. This graph is missing data from YouTube, because we did not find any statistical data for the same period. The latest data reporting is from December 2018<sup>10</sup> with 3.1 million active accounts on YouTube. From another source<sup>11</sup>, also for December 2018, there is a total of 10 million YouTube accounts out of which 7 million are active.



*Figure 2: Active profiles in Romania for the most important social media platforms (January 2019)*

<sup>9</sup> <https://datareportal.com/reports/digital-2019-romania> (Accessed on March 27, 2019)

<sup>10</sup> [https://economie.hotnews.ro/stiri-media\\_publicitate-23004462-cati-utilizatori-romani-sunt-fiecare-retea-sociala-care-fost-cele-mai-populare-postari-2018.htm](https://economie.hotnews.ro/stiri-media_publicitate-23004462-cati-utilizatori-romani-sunt-fiecare-retea-sociala-care-fost-cele-mai-populare-postari-2018.htm) (Accessed on March 27, 2019)

<sup>11</sup> <https://www.manafu.ro/2019/02/social-media-in-romania-2019/> (Accessed on March 27, 2019)

### 1.3. User-generated content and online field

Given the huge number of users around the world, with current technologies it is impossible to control all the content from social media. In fact, we are facing an unforeseen problem: “for the first time in history, we get more information than we can consume” (Bădău, 2010, p. 32). Thus, we can say that social media and Web 2.0 make the transition from “the information age” (Castells, 1997) to “the age of attention” (Saelens & Spruijt, 2018). This means that the information overwhelms us because we do not have enough time or the proper resources to consume it. All this happens due to user-generated content (UGC).

UGC is the way of expressing in social media by creating text, pictures, videos, podcasts and other similar forms of shaping ideas. That results in a huge amount of information produced at a very low cost and in a very short time. But, UGC means something even more important: users are “gaining unprecedented power (in a virtual environment) to initiate and influence change on various social, cultural, political and economic issues in the non-virtual world. This power appears to emanate from a ground swell of popular culture rooted in the western democratic value of free speech/expression, together with the decline of trust in traditional organizations (such as established media) and institutions of governance” (George & Scerri, 2007, p. 2). This is how we can talk about culinary bloggers who can influence different tastes, fashion video bloggers who can change trends, overnight musicians who can impose new musical styles, and stars created by the huge number of followers on social network sites, becoming even national or international celebrities, influencing lifestyles.

Users typically contribute to UGC expansion for various reasons, such as socializing, strengthening their belonging to a specific group, creating a reputation, learning, or simply developing the social good (Kraut, Resnick & Kiesler, 2011). Thus, we can say that UGC and social media can create a new social status and special social structures. These changes can be seen from the point of view of a joint social space in which common interests bring users together, but at the same time creates distances from the rest of the users without the same interests. In addition, “any given UGC platform - a system that enables users to contribute, evaluate, and consume content online - generates a variety of ways in which social distinctions can be acquired, the most common being the number of views and downloads, the number of a user’s followers, and positive ratings and comments on the content.”



(Levina & Arriaga, 2014). Besides the number of followers and likes received, on certain social media types, status marking is obvious. Important profiles can receive a “verified” badge, as in the case of Facebook and YouTube. Social media users are aware that they can improve their status, so they often use direct calls, either in videos or in written posts, to gather multiple views, likes, subscribers, and other similar assessments to help them receive the necessary social confirmation. “Unfortunately, traditional social psychology-based theories of social status are not readily applicable to UGC platforms” (Levina & Arriaga, 2014), but we still have some research on seeking social status. In the case of social media, status could refer to the “feeling of being important and being admired” (Lee & Ma, 2012), or to “gaining attention” and “establishing reputation” (Wang, Fang, & Tang, 2019). In the online environment, it seems that real life elements no longer have the same impact on social status, such as age. Khan, Rahman and Qazi (2016, p. 79) noticed that “the social scene online was dominated by youngsters and that this trend was increasing social satisfaction among its users.” Neither gender nor race has the same strong influence on social status as in real life (Levina & Arriaga, 2014); in fact, many such elements may not matter online, because they can remain hidden.

As Aral, Dellarocas & Godes (2013, p. 5) said, “understanding how social media design impacts interaction and social structure is critical because these social processes affect the very fabric of society”. Not only social media services themselves have “power” through the generated content, but users themselves can also have “power” once they have more quality content and frequent posts. By linking the two sources of power, we can say that the user tends to occupy a central place on the social media platform he is accessing, which could mean assuming a leadership status. Of course, a certain status earned in a social media community is not automatically passed to another community. The process is like in real communities. In order to see more connections between real and online communities, and to better investigate the relationship between power and status in social media, Levina and Arriaga (2014) propose the approach to Pierre Bourdieu’s Field Theory of Cultural Production (1993) to finally explain the concept of *online field*.

According to Bourdieu (1993, p. 162-163) “a field is a separate social universe having its own laws of functioning independent of those of politics and the economy. The existence of the writers, as fact and as value, is inseparable from the

existence of the literary field as an autonomous universe endowed with specific principles of evaluation of practices and works.” A fundamental feature of the field is that it is built on relationships between agents that define the structure of the field. (Bourdieu & Wacquant, 1992, p. 99). In other words, Bourdieu explains through field theory how agents (who must be understood as individuals, groups, or institutions) create and transform social structures through the practical actions they perform day in, day out. Thus, they produce certain social spaces, well delimited by common interests and power relations. These social spaces are called field of practice. The purpose of Bourdieu’s field theory is to describe the social stratification and dynamics of real-world societies. Because of the dynamics, the positions that agents occupy in different social fields can be modified, and the determining factor in this respect is the “capital” they hold. Bourdieu defines “capital” as being an accumulated resource that allows obtaining the influence (1986, p. 241). And there are three major types of capital: economic, cultural and social, but also a special form of symbolic capital, which is strong in the field of cultural production where economic capital is very low (Bourdieu, 1993).

Even though field theory has been created for the offline world, its principles can also be overlapped with the online environment. To find the similarities between the two environments to finally reach the definition of the *online field*, we will use the metaphor of the football field that Bourdieu also used to make analogies (Bourdieu & Wacquant, 1992, p. 21). The football field is presented to the player as the immanent place where he will carry out his practical actions. The positions of the players are defined by their previous actions but also by the future actions. But this is not all, the positions are dependent on the different stakes of the game (for example, approaching a goal, or defending an attack), and on the capital of each player, that means his skills. So, the dynamics of the game requires a player to have more roles depending on the situation. The same happens in the fields of cultural production, including social media which creates through UGC even more: “a democratizing form of cultural production for the masses” (Nakamura & Chow-White, 2011, p. 146). So, making the necessary analogy, the football player can fulfill multiple roles, defender or striker, just like the social media user which can be consumer or producer.

Thus, following Pierre Bourdieu’s concepts of field theory, Levina and Arriaga (2014, p. 477) propose the following definition: “*online field (of practice)*

is a social space engaging agents in producing, evaluating, and consuming content online that is held together by a shared interest and a set of power relations among agents sharing this interest.” The definition continues with the specification that “on any platform (just as in any offline social context), one is bound to find multiple nested and overlapping fields”. It is like finding a wide field on YouTube for those who are interested in top-rated videos that overlap with more focused fields, such as those centered on comic videos or music videos. Or we can have the example of a Twitter post distributed on Facebook. Also, we can find fields that both exists in online and offline, such as a technology blog, which can have implications not only in the blogosphere, but also in traditional technological journalism.

Online fields “fundamentally have two key groups of agents - producers and consumers of content - with the key capital specific to each field being the recognition achieved within the field” (Levina & Arriaga, 2014, p. 478). Thus, the major difference between the offline field and the online field in cultural production is that in online, the roles of the consumers are wider and more diversified, having a higher impact on the status of producers. With this change, the following online stratification is proposed (Idem, p. 477 - 478):

- passive consumers/lurkers - they are not “vocal”, they do not upload or post anything, instead sometimes they can follow a profile or subscribe to a channel;
- mass raters - give a lot of ratings and comments, and sometimes produce content;
- expert evaluators - are just like mass raters, but they have accumulated significantly more cultural capital, so they have stronger opinions;
- authorized evaluators - moderators of different platforms;
- platform designers - those who created that platform.

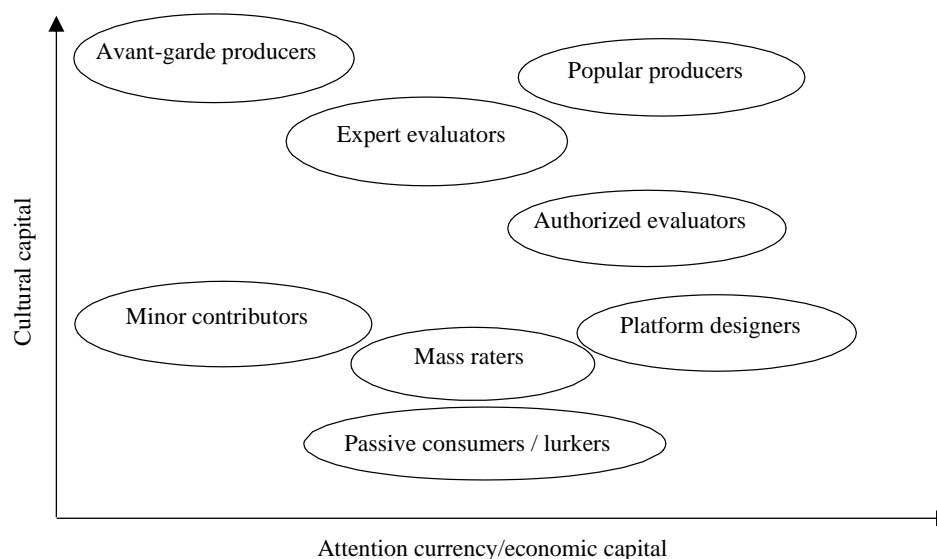
In addition to this classification, we can also include those who have as main activity the production of content, passing secondary the evaluation of others. They can be divided into several categories:

- minor contributors - who have occasional posts but with a meaningful message, without wanting to overcome their status (e.g. the experience of a faculty student who is of real interest to the entire university);
- popular producers - those who regularly post content quality, with an extremely high number of followers or subscribers;

- avant-garde producer - are like popular producers, but they have reached the status of great influencers, so they can easily set trends;

Depending on the purpose of each, it is so interesting to see how the evaluation power differs. If, for example, a teenager who wants to be always in trend will appreciate more the opinion of an avant-garde producer, in turn, for the avant-garde producer it matters that he even won one more passive consumer / lurker, by pushing the “follow” or “subscribe” button. Platform designers’ make rather rare, but very important evaluations, as they are likely to announce platform changes or other Internet innovations; the opinions of expert evaluators are important in services like Wikipedia, and authorized evaluators are appreciated in crowdsourcing, which “consists of making an open online call for a creative idea, or problem solving, or evaluation or any other type of business issues, and to let anyone (in the crowd) submit solutions” (Ribiere & Tuggle, 2010, p. 96).

To give us an overview of the online stratification depending on the user’s ability to be both consumer and producer, Figure 3 shows an example of an online field structure, taking also account of the cultural and economic capital:



*Figure 3: Example structure of online field crossing cultural and economic capital*

As in the social field described by Bourdieu, so also in the online field, “through the practices of contribution and evaluation of content, agents generate a unique set of power relations.” (Levina & Arriaga, 2014, p. 479). The greatest dynamics within the online field is given by the producers’ rush for recognizing their content, which culminates in gaining a high status and a better social influence. All these processes do not happen only with agent’s own capital but is also needed an external capital. Thus, in Figure 4, we can see how power and status processes occur in the online field.

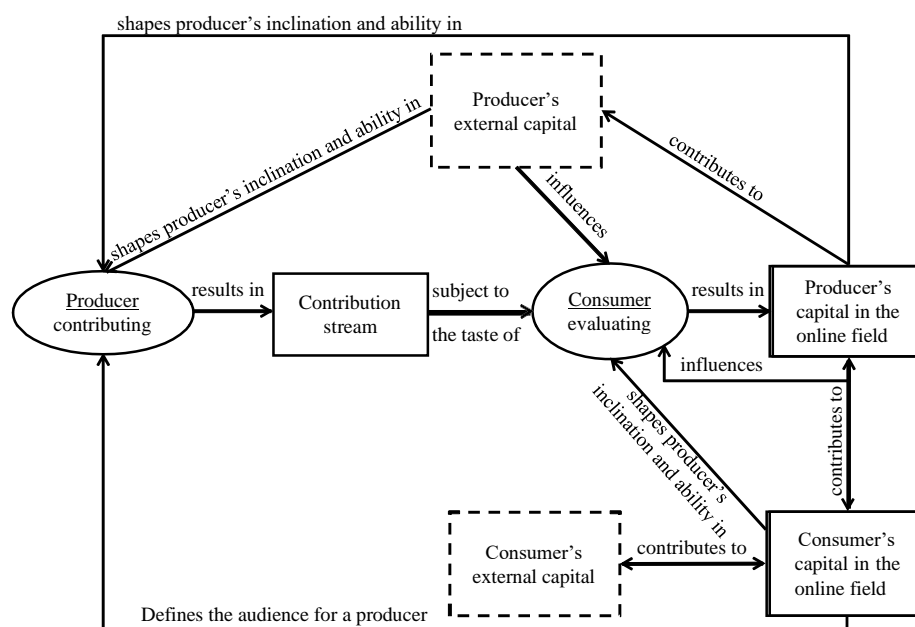


Figure 4: Process model of power and status production in online fields

Therefore, according to Figure 4, the producer’s path towards recognition starts with its content contribution, relevant and valuable to consumers. Content is uploaded to various platforms (contribution stream), which then allow consumers’ evaluation. Thus, the producer generates its own capital in the online field, gaining recognition. With this, producers gain the ability to contribute even more. In this way, previous agents’ positions are reshaped in dispositions which involves action, and producers the more they gain better recognition tend to attract more agents and influence them (the backward “influence” arrow from the producer’s capital in the online field to consumer). Thus, from the dynamics that are created, we are dealing with the first power relations. Power is given by the recognition and influence

gained, but also by the frequency and quality of the subsequent content. If a popular producer stops contributing, another will take his place. A decrease in content creation will mean a decrease in ratings not only for consumers but also for the platform itself. Usually, social media platforms tend to bring forward the content of producers who have already proven their popularity, but they also maintain it.

The internally generated capital is in a very close relationship with external sources of capital. For example, it is essential for a video producer to have from exterior a solid cultural capital for harnessing his artistic and technical skills. This will enable him to create appropriate content for influencing the consumers, and thus will increase its recognition. Also, external sources of economic capital are essential, especially for the producer's survival, but also to contribute to his recognition again. Not a few times, producers choose to create content that would please various agents with a large economic capital. It is like a fashion blogger creates content to reach the fashion designers. Naturally, the content is not meant to influence fashion designers, but to attract their sponsorships through money and products. And if the blogger is a popular producer or even an avant-garde producer, he can get the quality of being "endorser" for a respective fashion designer. With this new quality he can improve his recognition, if the fashion designer also has a good recognition. In this case, the blogger will reshape its content, depending on the external capital received from the fashion creator (the arrow from producer's external capital to producer / contributing).

Also, the external sources of cultural capital and economic capital play an important role in the dynamics of the online field if we refer to all consumers, not just selective, as was the case with fashion designers. Every consumer has external resources of economic capital, even if in smaller sizes. Otherwise, there would be no Internet advertising. More, each consumer has cultural capital resources that are used as references in his evaluations. That is why producers must consider all these sources of external capital of consumers, but also their internal capital in the online field, in order to learn their tastes and to always please them. In fact, this is how an audience is best built (the arrow from consumer's capital in the online field to producer / contributing).

As we can deduce from what we have shown so far, the online field is very dynamic, so the audience is also very fluctuating. This is especially so because an agent (a user) can be both consumer and producer at the same time. Because of this,

the power relations that are created within the online field are complex and can change radically in a very short time depending on the role of the agent: producer or consumer. However, the specific capital in the online field remains the recognition obtained within the field, which leads some producers to try to please a very broad audience, as Bourdieu showed about different agents in the social fields of practice (1993). Just that in the online field is easier to reach a greater number of consumers due to technological advantages of the Internet: speed, spread, accessibility, low costs of production. Because these benefits are offered on a non-discriminatory basis to large masses of people, the newcomers struggle side by side for recognition with those who already gained popularity.

#### **1.4. Social media about social media (bright side and dark side)**

We believe that the less-seen face of social media can be revealed especially through the interpretation of social media content. So, this kind of review will be done in this subchapter, in order to highlight the positive and negative aspects, the challenges and especially the social media threats. This analysis does not want to be an empirical one, as will be the practical studies in the second part of the thesis. Rather, we want to provide a basis for comparison for our next studies.

Thus, in our exposure, we will mainly present the direct views of social media experts that we found in the content uploaded especially on YouTube. However, in order to preserve the scientific character, we will also present relevant information from the literature.

Positive social media aspects focus on “creation of community” (Roebuck, Siha, & Bell, 2013, p. 173). These are the *online communities* that can reach huge proportions. Thus, social media transform the “communication paradigm from one to-many to many-to-many” (Borrino, Furini, Roccetti, 2009), and its power derives from the interaction of a large number of people. Without these enormous communities, user-generated content would drop significantly, and the Internet structure might return to Web 1.0. But this is not the case, because social media is still challenging more and more users to join the various online communities. The benefits are obvious, from finding high school colleagues to people with same passions or interests like yours, traveling, cooking, singing etc. We have become so attached to the online communities that sometimes we classify them as a special

family - “family of invisible friends” (Rheingold, 2001). Within communities, as in any family, creating *relationships* is a key concept. Just that online communities bring more, they can create relations that we do not meet in real society, because online everyone can remain anonymous. That is how it can be created an equal relationship between a director and a subordinate who play the same online game, hiding their real identities under some avatars. Also, online communities can make warmer relationships between professors and students, and in principle, other diverse relationships can be created regardless of time or place. This brings us to the concept of *accessibility*, which depends only on a relatively inexpensive gadget and Internet access. Once the two are met, access to social media can be done in seconds. Accessibility can be the advantage that other media did not have, and which brings enormous success to social media. If we think about the social aggregation brought by television over many years and removing the geographical distances that telephony has made, then we can understand the benefits of social media that can connect both television and telephony in a much more accessible way. Unlike television or telephony where paid subscription is needed, access to social media is free. The user only needs a small initial investment to buy a device that can access the Internet. Then, free internet hotspots exist in all major cities. Thus, *low costs* are another benefit that social media offers; and when a user gets what he wants at low or no cost, it means very high *efficiency*. By far, the highest efficiency of social media is related to rapid *information*. Often, you do not even need to type the full word about what you want to look for, because the suggestions are immediately displayed and most of the time they are exactly what you wanted to write. Then in less than a second you have the information you searched for. In addition, through various social media platforms, including Facebook, YouTube, or Twitter, sometimes you even do not have to look for the information because it comes directly to you, depending on the people or pages you are following or the channels you subscribed to. And the range in which you seek information is extremely varied, we could even say unlimited. But there is still a major question in using social media as a source of information, namely how we assess whether the sources have credibility or not, to avoid the fake news phenomenon (Westerman, Spence & Van Der Heide, 2014). It seems to be a difficult question not only for us, but also for Facebook’s founder and CEO Mark Zuckerberg, who acknowledged the issue of



fake news in the European Parliament on May 22, 2018<sup>12</sup>: *“It’s also become clear over the last couple years that we haven’t done enough to prevent these tools from being used for harm as well. That goes for fake news, foreign interference in elections and developers misusing people’s information. We didn’t take a broad enough view of our responsibility. Now is a mistake, and I’m sorry for it.”* In the same session of the European Parliament, Zuckerberg was also asked if he would agree to regulate the Internet in order to protect the consumer more and to avoid similar problems for those who apologized. And Zuckerberg’s response was as clear as possible: *“I don’t think the question here is whether or not there should be regulation. I think the question is what is the right regulation. I think the Internet is becoming increasingly important in people’s lives; some sort of regulation is important and inevitable, and the important thing is to get this right”*. After Zuckerberg agreed with an Internet regulation, less than a year away, on March 26, 2019, the European Parliament adopted a tough online copyright law that require strict Internet regulation. This law can have a major impact on the social representation of social media and also on the European integration of Romania, so we paid special attention to it in the next chapter, but also in all empirical studies from the second part of the thesis.

The growing importance of the Internet that Zuckerberg was talking about is bringing a huge power to social media. In fact, we can say that social media are “the most powerful media ever created” (Borrino et al., 2009). The same opinion is shared by Chris Hughes, co-founder of Facebook, who stated in a video<sup>13</sup> posted on YouTube on May 9, 2019 *“that Facebook has grown too big and too powerful”* and *“even Mark [Zuckerberg] himself has said that he and the Facebook team have too much power”*. In his video, Chris Hughes also believe that *“we need new regulations”* for Internet, being even tougher and saying that *“it’s time to break up Facebook”*, because *“people are powerless in this situation”* and *“there’s nowhere else to go”*. *“Facebook snatches up competitors by buying them before they get too big.”* That is what happened with WhatsApp and Instagram, so Chris Hughes *“often hear people say, «I’m shutting down my Facebook account. Thank God for Instagram» not realizing that Instagram is owned by Facebook.”*

<sup>12</sup> <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=o0zdBUOrhG8&t=3746s> (Accessed on April 20, 2019)

<sup>13</sup> <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=fCj8-MlhvaA> (Accessed on April 20, 2019)

We should notice *“it’s not just that Facebook is a really big social network. It’s everything.”* These words of Chris Hughes are very much like the Bourdieu’s metaphor related to the football field that becomes one with the football player. (Bourdieu, Wacquant, 1992, p. 21).

Chris Hughes adds that we need to pay attention to major social media companies because *“when companies get too big, they get sloppy and careless, and that leads to things like poor privacy practices, enabling foreign actors to meddle in elections the spread of violent rhetoric, fake news and the unbounded drive to capture more of our data and attention.”* In fact, capturing our data and attention represents the “resource” that can transform the ideology of any social media platform into a tyrannical ideology, as was the case with Facebook, that is the biggest player in the social media market: *“The harm goes beyond the economy though, it goes to democracy itself. When companies become empires, people are stripped of power.”* So, we can say that social media play a key role, although not always visible in the public sphere, and can intervene in the “political power” (Shirky, 2011). Still, we are dealing with a paradox. While the Internet should develop democracy in modern public spheres (Lagos, Coopman & Tomhave, 2014) even talking about “electronic democracy” (Bohman, 2004), according to Chris Hughes, Facebook does exactly the opposite, and for that he says that *“Facebook empire needs to be broken up”*. He requires the intervention of the only factor that can stop the extinction, namely the American state: *“America’s regulated corporate empires before, and we can do it again”*, and because the desire of an empire is to grow even more, Chris Hughes adds: *“to be honest, I’m angry that Mark’s obsession with growth led him to sacrifice security for clicks.”* That is why he urges us to be cautious about the fact that *“Facebook’s employees write complex rules, called algorithms, that decide what you see in your news feed. Facebook can decide what messages get delivered and which don’t. And what exactly makes for violent or inappropriate content.”*

Concerns go further and another important voice, Chamath Palihapitiya, former senior executive of Facebook, appears in a video<sup>14</sup> uploaded on YouTube on November 13, 2017 by Stanford Graduate School of Business. He is speaking about how Facebook is ripping apart the society, and how the leaders, like him, have realized that:

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<sup>14</sup> <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=PMotykwOSIk> (Accessed on April 20, 2019)

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*“I feel tremendous guilt. I think we all knew in the back of our minds, even though we fanned this whole line of like there probably aren’t any really bad unintended consequences. I think in the back deep recesses of our minds we kind of knew something bad could happen, but I think the way we defined it was not like this it. Literally is a point now where I think we have created tools that are ripping apart the social fabric of how society works that is truly where we are, and I would encourage all of you, as the future leaders of the world, to really internalize how important this is. If you feed the beast, that beast will destroy you. If you push back on it, we have a chance to control it and rein it in. It is a point in time where people need to hard break from some of these tools; and the things that you rely on, the short-term dopamine, driven feedback loops, that we have created are destroying how society works. No civil discourse, no cooperation, misinformation, miss truth. And it’s not an American problem, this is not about Russian ads, this is a global problem, so we are in a really bad state of affairs right now. In my opinion it is eroding the core foundations of how people behave by and between each other, and I don’t have a good solution. You know my solution is: I just don’t use these tools anymore, I haven’t for years, it’s created huge tension with my friends, huge tensions in my social circles.” (Chamath Palihapitiya, former senior executive of Facebook)*

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It seems like “these threats profoundly alter the psychological, social and cultural dynamics of vulnerable social media users” (Chandramouli, 2011). Thus, we can ask ourselves whether the only way to avoid these threats is to delete our social media accounts. However, if we do this, we lose the benefits, so the middle way remains viable, because through social media we have privileged access to a common virtual space, but we should be very careful about how we move onto it. (Couldry, 2012). However, as all this would not be enough, Chamath Palihapitiya says more than that: *“You don’t realize it, but you are being programmed. It was unintentional, but now you got to decide how much you’re willing to give up”*. This programming is based on the fact that *“consumer internet businesses are about exploiting psychology and that is one where you want to feel fast, because you know people aren’t predictable and so we want to psychologically figure out how to manipulate you as fast as possible, and then give you back that dopamine hit. We did that brilliantly at Facebook. Instagram has done it, WhatsApp has done it, you know, Snapchat has done it”*.

In the same line, Sean Parker, the founding president of Facebook, but retired from the company, says in a video<sup>15</sup> on YouTube, uploaded on November 9, 2017, that Facebook was designed to be addictive, to hook as many users as possible, “*exploiting a vulnerability in human psychology*”. The biggest problem is that this plan was known from the beginning:

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*“The inventors, creators - it’s me, it’s Mark [Zuckerberg], it’s Kevin Systrom on Instagram, it’s all of these people - understood this consciously. And we did it anyway... the thought process was all about how we consume as much of your time and conscious attention as possible, and that means that we need to sort of give you a little dopamine hit every once in a while, because someone liked or commented on a photo or a post or whatever; and that’s going to get you to contribute more content, and that’s going to get you more likes and comments. It’s a social validation feedback loop”.* (Sean Parker, the founding president of Facebook)

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This social validation is closely related to the recognition we have expressed as the main internal capital of the online field, which we presented in the last subchapter. The dynamics created in the online field are so vast and attract so many people, that if someone says he will not be addicted to Facebook, Parker responds very easy: “*you will be*”. Still, Parker remarks the surprise element, namely the unplanned consequences: “*I don’t know if I really understood the consequences of what I was saying because of the unintended consequences of a network. When it grows to a billion or two billion people, it literally changes your relationship with society, with each other*”. This is also proven in a research synthesis made by Matook & Butler (2014): “research on relationship formation suggests that social media systems may increase the homogeneity of relationships with potentially negative consequences.”

Considering all these threats of social media, industry-leading voices have asked the community to delete their social media accounts, like Brian Acton - WhatsApp cofounder, in a public speech at Stanford University in March 2019<sup>16</sup>: “*To be brutally honest, the curated networks - the open networks - struggle to decide*

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<sup>15</sup> <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=D5-X915iKTc> (Accessed on April 20, 2019)

<sup>16</sup> <https://www.buzzfeednews.com/article/ryanmac/whatsapp-brian-acton-delete-facebook-stanford-lecture> (Accessed on April 21, 2019)

*what's hate speech and what's not hate speech. ... Apple struggles to decide what's a good app and what's a bad app. Google struggles with what's a good website and what's a bad website. These companies are not equipped to make these decisions. And we give them the power. ...That's the bad part. We buy their products. We sign up for these websites. Delete Facebook, right?"*. He also had a similar view a year earlier, in March 2018, when he posted on Twitter: "It is time. #deletefacebook".

The #deletefacebook campaign was joined even by Elon Musk, who, besides Tesla and SpaceX, also has important Internet activities through two companies that deal with artificial intelligence: OpenAI and Neuralink. When a Twitter user asked him "*Delete SpaceX page on Facebook if you're the man*", Elon Musk replied on Twitter in March 2018<sup>17</sup>: "*I didn't realize there was one. Will do.*"

The date of creating the #deletefacebook campaign is not accidental in March 2018, because then the situation regarding Facebook and Cambridge Analytica illegalities was published. Concrete, Cambridge Analytica harvested data from 50 million US users who completed a quiz app created in 2013 called "thisisyourdigitallife". Facebook did not give its consent but also did not inform users about what happened. The data was used in Donald Trump's election campaign in 2016, and so the issue of stricter regulation of personal data processing was raised.<sup>18</sup>

Another voice asking for the deletion of Facebook accounts, but also of other social media accounts is Jaron Lanier, Microsoft researcher and the founding father of virtual reality. He even published a book with a very suggestive title "Ten Arguments for Deleting Your Social Media Accounts Right Now" (2018) at two months after the Cambridge Analytica scandal, about which he said is not the worst of Facebook problems. The ten arguments in his book refer briefly to the fact that social media makes us lose our free will, creates insanity in society, transforms our personalities negatively, undermines the truth, makes us feel meaningless, destroys the ability of empathy, makes us unhappy, affects our economic dignity, affects political systems, ending with the fact that social media hates our souls.

In an interview published on YouTube in June 2018, Jaron Lanier sums up the 10 arguments for the deletion of social media accounts in 2 main principles:

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<sup>17</sup> <https://www.cbsnews.com/news/facebook-resistance-includes-elon-musk-and-sonos/> (Accessed on April 21, 2019)

<sup>18</sup> <https://www.newsweek.com/which-companies-have-deleted-facebook-list-cambridge-analytica-863775> (Accessed on April 21, 2019)

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*“One of them is for your own good and the other is for society’s good. For your own good it’s because you’re being subtly manipulated by algorithms that are watching everything you do constantly, and then sending you changes in your media feed, in your diet, that are calculated to adjust you slightly to the liking of some unseen advertiser; and so if you get off, you can have a chance to experience a clear view of yourself in your life. But, then the reason for society might be even more important. Society has been gradually darkened by this scheme in which everyone is under surveillance all the time and everyone is under this mild version of behavior modification all the time. It’s made people jittery and cranky; it’s made teens especially depressed, which can be quite severe, but it’s made our politics kind of unreal and strange, where we’re not sure if elections are real anymore, we’re not sure how much the Russians affected Brexit; we do know that it was a crankier affair that it might have been otherwise.” (Jaron Lanier, Microsoft researcher and founder of virtual reality)*

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The two principles are dominated by the sense of social media surveillance, combined with manipulation based on various algorithms, but also, he introduces a new concept, behaviorism, which is an approach for understanding the behavior of humans. In the continuation of his speech, the explanations are even deeper, with reference to all those listed. Surveillance in social media occurs by the fact that our activity produces a constant feedback loop. It is like you are exploring social media, and social media is exploring you, because it recognizes your interests, needs, location, and so on, through various algorithms. This has not been the case for any type of media yet; for example, when you watch TV, the TV is not watching you. The algorithms we are talking about are done in such a way that they follow the user’s quickest reactions for offering suggestions and advertisements as soon as possible. As the fastest human reactions are negative ones, like getting stunned, scared, irritated or angry, as opposed to positive, as a general well-being or euphoria, so the algorithms respond rather to the negative elements and amplify them by introducing sometimes even more negative aspects or negative people. This explains why during the fire of Notre-Dame Cathedral, an algorithmic “error” at YouTube put information about 9/11 under news videos<sup>19</sup>. So, these algorithms do not “think”, but they are just a repeat series of mathematical responses that offer suggestions based on users’ momentum reactions, without considering ethics, empathy, irony,

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<sup>19</sup> <https://www.niemanlab.org/2019/04/as-notre-dame-burned-an-algorithmic-error-at-youtube-put-information-about-9-11-under-news-videos/> (Accessed on April 21, 2019)

tragedy, or general context. So, do not expect that these algorithms will try to educate users, but rather irritate them. However, this irritation is part of the “game”, and we sometimes have to admit that we are feeding with negative elements, as was the period when the Cambridge Analytica scandal was made public; in those days we all wanted to find out more about the subject, even though it was not one that brought us any direct benefit. It is like gambling addiction, you do not always play for winning, you play for the general feeling of the game, sometimes just wanting to destroy the plans of others. In fact, it has been scientifically demonstrated that social media users behave as gambling addicts, or substance addicts (Meshi, Elizarov, Bender, & Verdejo-Garcia, 2019). Social media addiction is not as dramatic as gambling addiction but has the same principles. Rather in social media we can talk about a “stealthy addiction” (as Lanier calls it in his speech on YouTube<sup>20</sup>), based on a scheme of punishments and rewards. Rewards are when you receive for example “likes” or “retweets”, and the punishments are when other users are marginalizing you or denigrating you in case you do not have the proper content. Both make you come back to social media, either because you are appreciated and want to be still, or you are denigrated but want to change that in appreciation. But we need to be aware that addiction is in fact a model of business. The most important social media platforms attract you, collect your data, and then use it to third parties, and this is where manipulation begins. The social media itself does not manipulate but creates the environment through which other users or advertisers reach you with manipulative views. Manipulation techniques are so subtle, using behaviorism concepts, that the user does not realize it is manipulated. Everything is so sneakily, and things have gone so far, that in fact, today, few users still realize they can live without social media. This is the worst part of social media, manipulation. If we put it aside, we could have a good social media. But the chances of this happening are small, regardless of the data protection laws. In essence, social media has been built to give third-party access to user data for the purpose of advertising, otherwise social media platforms would not survive economically as long as they leave users free access. As long as there is this aspect of the third party, the manipulation will exist, because you can always find an advertiser with hidden intentions.

Even if major social media voices request the deletion of social media accounts, in practice this is hard to happen. In fact, due to the digitalized era in which

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<sup>20</sup> [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=kc\\_Jq42Og7Q](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=kc_Jq42Og7Q) (Accessed on April 22, 2019)

we live, absence on social media is not an option anymore. After all, what is social media about? Is about aspects that humanity has always had, communication and interaction. Blaming social media is like blaming the TV itself as a device, because we are watching a bad show. We can choose from a large variety of content, and we need to be aware of what we consume. The same happens on social media, we need to have a more rigorous self-control of the platforms we access and of the information we receive. We must pay attention to fake news, to fake users and to try to control our addiction. This means we must create a good online behavior. So, we do not believe that getting rid of laptops or smartphones, or deleting social media accounts is the best solution, but we need to have more care of the dark side that is built on manipulation. As we take care of what we eat, so we need to take care of what content we consume online. In fact, deleting a social media account does not mean fighting against its negative side, but rather it means abandonment. Social media has a special power, and now we do not think there is a perfect solution to organize a revolt against it. In fact, the question is if we can revolt against it and if we can break it down? It is not like a powerful person or a powerful institution that can fall overnight, and unplugging all the Internet is impossible. Social media mechanisms are much more complex and obviously interfere many of society's interests. And if it destroys society, it will destroy itself.

But it is certainly not about destruction at this moment. It is about positive aspects and negative aspects, both equally strong, and that is why in our thesis, in the second part, we investigated the social representation of social media at Romanian teenagers to see how they perceive it. Then, because we have demonstrated the need for Internet regulation, we will see how European regulations can affect the structure of this social representation, but also how social media can affect the European integration of Romania. It is a very close interdependence between social media and between European integration, and because both are supported by huge powers in the background, changes from one side can greatly affect the other side. Thus, during the analyzes we will treat them together, especially as both represent the road to the future of Romania.



### 1.5. Teenagers and social media

We chose the teenagers target in our research because they represent the most vulnerable category in social media and they are “grown up digital” (Tapscott, 2008), so whether they want or do not want to take part in social media, they seem to have only one choice, to be in the phenomenon. On the other hand, we can also say that the Romanian teenagers were raised in a European environment, many of them being born around the moment when Romania joined the European Union, January 1, 2007. Moreover, because social media emerged a few years earlier, it is expected that the behavior and thinking of young people are marked by the two aspects. The study is even more interesting, as the current generation of Romanian teenagers (who are currently 13-19 years old) is the first to be born under these conditions: openness to social media and to European Union. So, this study can represent the analysis of a new beginning for Romania, which may mean a future consolidated on European principles with the help of the Internet.

By now dealing with social media, we will undertake in this subchapter a review of the most important studies demonstrating the influence of social media on teenagers. Given that we have already highlighted the threats expressed by former members of the Facebook board, we will begin with the opinion of one of them, Sean Parker, founding president, who said about Facebook, referring to the unintended consequences that “God only knows what it’s doing to our children’s brains”<sup>21</sup>.

Also, even Mark Zuckerberg, Facebook’s founder and CEO, is aware that Facebook can have negative influences on teenagers. Thus, one of the American senators asked him the following question in April 2018<sup>22</sup>: “*As a dad, do you worry about social media addiction as a problem for America’s teens?*”. Zuckerberg’s answer was as follows:

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<sup>21</sup> <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=D5-X915iKTc> (Accessed on April 20, 2019)

<sup>22</sup> <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=3QgM1h-vR08> (Accessed on April 22, 2019)

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*“My hope is that we can be idealistic but have a broad view of our responsibility. To your point about teens, this is certainly something that I think any parent thinks about. Is how much do you want your kids using technology. At Facebook specifically, I view our responsibility as not just building services that people like but building services that are good for people and good for society as well. So, we study a lot of effects of well-being of our tools and broader technology and like any tool, they’re good and bad uses of it. ... If you’re using the Internet and social media primarily to passively consume content and not engaging with other people it doesn’t have those positive effects and it could be negative.” (Mark Zuckerberg, Facebook’s founder and CEO)*

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Zuckerberg’s statement is surprising, especially as it raises concerns about the negative effects of Facebook on teenagers. Coincidentally or not, half a year after this statement, in October 2018, in the United States of America it was published data showing that teens are abandoning Facebook at a staggering pace<sup>23</sup>. So, to the question “Which social platform do you use at least once per month?” teenagers responded as follows: Facebook - 52% (Fall 2016) / 45% (Fall 2017) / 36% (Fall 2018). We notice that the trend was already decreasing, but the difference between 2018 and 2017 is 2% higher than difference between 2017 and 2016.

There are numerous studies that associate the use of social media with the deterioration of mental health and wellbeing of teenagers, the main reason being anxiety caused by the excessive use of social media (O’Reilly, Dogra, Whiteman, Hughes, Eruyar & Reilly, 2018; Keles, McCrae & Grealish, 2019; Calancie, Ewing, Narducci, Horgan & Khalid-Khan, 2017). After that, there are feelings of depression (Barry, Sidoti, Briggs, Reiter, & Lindsey, 2017).

Another serious problem of social media is cyber-bullying. According to Alim (2016), this issue is most related to cyber-bullying incidents in schools and general increased private information disclosure on social media.

Also, cyber-bullying is the most negative factor that is correlated with youth suicide due to social media. Other such factors are sexting and disseminating information about self-harm techniques and pro-suicide content on social media. But there are also positive factors that lead to avoiding suicide on social media. These are: detecting suicide risk by analyzing social media posts, running social

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<sup>23</sup> <https://www.cnn.com/2018/10/22/teens-abandoning-facebook-still-flocking-to-instagram.html> (Accessed on April 22, 2019)

media prevention campaigns and providing online consultation for those who have suicidal thoughts (Intahchomphoo, 2018).

Although social media should theoretically unite people, there are also studies that paradoxically show exactly the opposite, so there are social media connections with social isolation (Primack, Shensa, Sidani, Whaite, yi Lin, Rosen, Colditz, Radovic & Miller, 2017). In addition, FOMO feeling may appear, which comes from Fear of Missing Out, meaning “a pervasive apprehension that others might be having rewarding experiences from which one is absent”. (Przybylski, Murayama, DeHaan, & Gladwell, 2013, p. 1841). This phenomenon is characterized by “a desire to stay continually connected with what others are doing” (Ibidem), so it is no wonder that FOMO is associated with perceived stress related to the use of Facebook (Beyens, Frison, & Eggermont, 2016). Because FOMO is a desire to get back to social media as quickly as possible, so as not to lose the others’ posts, it is one of the most important factors that can explain the use of social media for teenagers. Also, those who have a greater FOMO tend to use a larger variety of social media platforms, and for some platforms, a higher level of FOMO is associated with a higher frequency of social media use, such as Facebook, Snapchat, Instagram and YouTube (Franchina, Abeele, van Rooij, Lo Coco, De Marez, 2018). This could explain to some extent the addiction that can be created. Because it is very difficult to measure the addiction for the entire social media, at least there are studies that correlate the excessive use of social network sites with the feeling of “addiction” (Rajeev, Soans, Aroor, Shastry, Shriyan, 2016; Müller, Dreier, Beutel, Duven, Giralt, & Wölfling, 2016).

Through this brief review of the various studies that have been made so far about the implications of using social media on teenagers, we did not want to review all the literature related to this topic, but just point out the most important issues to use them as the basis for our own research undertaken in this thesis. Also, in chapter three we will have a new brief review that focuses in more detail on the specific theme of social representations of social media.

## 2. European Union, Romania

### 2.1. Founding of the EU, accession of Romania and European integration

The idea of a united Europe was a necessity especially in the twentieth century after the end of World War II. Thus, the ideal for peace led to cooperation between states, initially ten of them, creating in 1949 the Council of Europe, based on the fundamental values of democracy and human rights<sup>24</sup>. It was considered a forum where member countries could collaborate without considering national authority. However, progress has not happened to the expectations, so that in 1951 the European Coal and Steel Community (ECSC) was officially born at the initiative of 6 countries, Belgium, France, Italy, Luxembourg, the Netherlands and West Germany. The plans for the ECSC were presented by Robert Schuman and Jean Monnet. The Schuman Declaration on May 9, 1950 is celebrated today as Europe Day. The six ECSC countries will sign in 1957 the Treaty of Rome that created the European Economic Community (EEC) and established a customs union. Starting with 1973, the first wave of accession took place. In 1992, the Treaty of Maastricht was signed, which formally establishes the European Union, replacing thus the old name European Community.

The Maastricht Treaty brought European citizenship as an over-national one for the citizens of all member states. European citizenship gives additional rights, such as the right to vote in European elections, but also to elect and to be elected in local elections in another country, the right of free movement and the right of consular protection abroad. Regarding free movement rights, the European Union established on January 1, 1993 the European Single Market with the guarantee of the four movements: goods, capital, services, and labor. In 1999 the eurozone was established, and in 2002 the euro replaced the national currencies for part of the member states. Later in 2007, a new treaty was signed, known as the Treaty of Lisbon, with various reforms for the European Union, especially on the legal side.

January 1, 2007 is the date of Romania's accession to the European Union. From this moment, we can say that the European integration process has started *de*

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<sup>24</sup> Information for this subchapter were taken from the official portal of the European Union [ec.europa.eu](http://ec.europa.eu) (Accessed on April 29, 2019)

*facto* for Romanian citizens, who now receive European citizenship. Even if at the institutional level, the European integration process of Romania started earlier, along with the country's intentions to join the European Union, dating from 2004-2005, and even much back in time, the general European integration process for the population started with the moment of accession and continues today, people being faced with accepting a new European reality. Romania is one of the youngest members of the European Union, and in 2019 it is still not part of the Schengen Area nor does it use the euro. On January 1, 2014 was the end of the transition period in terms of accessing the labor market in the European Union, so the Romanian citizens no longer have any restrictions in this respect. Until now, Romania has participated in 3 European Parliamentary elections in 2009, 2014 and 2019, and between 1 January and 30 June 2019, Romania holds the presidency of the Council of the European Union.

Starting with 2010, European Union is going through a difficult period, with a debt crisis in some European countries, especially in Greece, thus feeling the effects of the global economic crisis in 2008. Other issues are managing migration for people entering the European Union from the Middle East and increasing terrorist attacks in major European cities.

Beside these problems, one of the most delicate moment took place on June 23, 2016 when the citizens of United Kingdom voted to leave the European Union in a nationwide referendum. Because 51.9% of the votes were affirmative, the official announcement of Brexit was submitted to the European Council on March 29, 2017, so the United Kingdom had to leave the European Union two years later, on March 29, 2019. However, due to the negative votes in the British Parliament with reference to the agreement, the Brexit period extended until October 31, 2019.

The most recent challenge faced by the European Union is the growing number of member states that promote a national sovereignty policy based on Euroscepticism. This wave of national sovereignty has also been reached in Romanian politics since the national parliamentary elections of December 2016. After this vote, the power in Romania was held by an alliance of two parties, PSD and ALDE. As proof of their nationalist politics, similar European political groups have frozen relations with the Romanian ones. That is why Guy Verhofstadt, leader of the ALDE Group, posted on his Twitter account on April 25, 2019: "Sadly, the situation in Romania keeps regressing. The ALDEGroup decided in early April to

exclude ALDE Romania. We expect the ALDE Party to follow this decision and formally expel them from our movement, as soon as possible”<sup>25</sup>. Also, on April 10, 2019 “the President of the Party of European Socialists, Sergei Stanishev, announced that relations between the PES and its Romanian affiliate, the PSD, had been frozen due to ongoing concerns regarding the rule of law in Romania”<sup>26</sup>. Both announcements came about a month earlier than the European Parliament election of May 26, 2019. And the impact, it seems, has been successful. PSD Romania had a steep fall and obtained the second score on May 26, 2019, being usually the first in the top of the Romanian preferences, and ALDE Romania did not meet the 5% electoral threshold to send its representatives to the European Parliament. Moreover, one day after the elections, on May 27, 2019, the leader of PSD Romania was jailed for corruption<sup>27</sup>, so the anti-European road of Romania seems to end slowly.

But the pro-European favorable result of the election was also decisively influenced by social media. Therefore, it is necessary to note although the Romanian politics tried to block the process of European integration, through social media, the Romanians strongly expressed the desire to continue this process of European integration, as can be found in our research. That is why we see the necessity of connections between the individual, the social media, the European Union and Romania, launching for each one a stimulus that lead us to the appearance of the social representations. Through a comparative analysis we were able to realize the common elements that show us the interdependence between the social media and the European integration of Romania. Moreover, investigating the concrete social media discussions of teenagers with reference to European issues, we had positive and negative surprises. Among the positive ones, we can highlight a large number of people who assume online their European citizenship, and of the negative ones we can note the recent Internet regularization made by European Union, that is categorized as “communist”.

We will talk about this European regulation of the Internet in the following subchapter, and in the second part of the thesis we will see what impact it has on the structure of the social representation of social media.

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<sup>25</sup> <https://twitter.com/guyverhofstadt/status/1121397943351644160> (Accessed on April 14, 2019)

<sup>26</sup> <https://agenceurope.eu/en/bulletin/article/12235/12> (Accessed on April 14, 2019)

<sup>27</sup> <https://www.bloomberg.com/news/articles/2019-05-27/romania-s-most-powerful-man-is-heading-to-prison-for-corruption> (Accessed on April 14, 2019)

## 2.2. Digital Single Market and the Copyright Directive

For a harmonious development of the European Union, we need to consider, besides the political and economic aspects, all the technological innovations. Therefore, the Digital Single Market of Europe was announced on May 6, 2015, based on the fast expansion of the Internet. Through this Digital Single Market, users can conduct their online activities in conditions of loyal competition and effective protection of personal data, regardless of nationality and residence. The approach strategy includes three pillars: <sup>28</sup>

- Access: better access for consumers and businesses to digital goods and services across Europe;
- Environment: creating the right conditions and a level playing field for digital networks and innovative services to flourish;
- Economy & Society: maximizing the growth potential of the digital economy.

The actions undertaken within the Digital Single Market aim to create a European digital society, and that is why the three pillars contain several areas of interest, as can be seen in the following table:

1. Access	2. Environment	3. Economy & Society
e-commerce	telecoms and media	data economy
parcel delivery	online platforms	standards
geo-blocking	security and personal data	skills and e-government
<b>copyright</b>		
VAT		

*Table 2: The three pillars of the European Digital Single Market*

Areas of interest are so numerous and diversified that the elaborated online tools and actions will be helpful to health and social services, public relations and communication between institutions across the European Union, but also for the

<sup>28</sup>Information for this subchapter were taken from [http://europa.eu/rapid/press-release\\_IP-15-4919\\_en.htm](http://europa.eu/rapid/press-release_IP-15-4919_en.htm) and <https://ec.europa.eu/digital-single-market/en> (Accessed on April 15, 2019)

development of smart cities. However, in our thesis we will focus only on copyright directives that have a major impact on social media.

The need for a European directive on copyright in the online environment is a necessity. In fact, until 2019, there was no specific EU regulation on copyright. The former Copyright Directive of 2001 (also known as the *Information Society Directive*) was not a law given by the European institutions but was a harmonization of the domestic copyright laws of the member states. Even so, a 2001 regulation is outdated for current digital innovations. In 2001, there was neither Facebook nor YouTube, nor any other major social media platform, but it was rather the transition from Web 1.0 to Web 2.0.

Thus, in March 2019, the European Parliament adopted the *Directive on Copyright in the Digital Single Market*, and a month later it was ratified by the Council of the European Union. The date of entry into force is June 2019, and member states have two years to implement it. It is a directive that creates many controversies among consumers as well as among social media platforms.

The most controversial is Article 13 (updated in Article 17 in the final law), whose main measure is that “an online content-sharing service provider shall therefore obtain an authorization from the right holders referred to in Article 3(1) and (2) of Directive 2001/29/EC, for instance by concluding a licensing agreement, in order to communicate to the public or make available to the public works or other subject matter.”<sup>29</sup> This could completely change the activity on YouTube or Facebook platforms. Until now, online platforms were not responsible for copyright violations, but they still needed to remove content that infringes copyright only if they were notified directly by the rights holders. But, the 2019 Copyright Directive constrains all online platforms to be responsible for analyzing the entire user-generated content and take down the content that infringes copyright. In other words, responsibility moves from user to platform. The problem is how platforms will be able to analyze enormous amounts of content and block what violates copyright before it is publicly disclosed. One of the most viable solutions would be to introduce automatic filters that recognize the licensed content and whether to block it or not. Already this measure has prompted protests from users because these filters could be seen as a censorship of information. The Copyright Directive,

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<sup>29</sup> <https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/?uri=CELEX%3A32019L0790> (Accessed on April 23, 2019)



however, stipulates that there are exceptions to the application of rules such as parodies, which would mean creating “memes”, but the big concern is that robotic filters can not distinguish between parody and commercial use. Thus, from the research on the second part of the thesis we can see that the Romanian teenagers call this measure a “communist censorship” of social media, the term being tougher as the law is given by the European Union, whose values of democracy are well grounded. This view is also shared by the European Digital Rights Initiative in a press release: “Article 13 of the Copyright Directive contains a change of Internet hosting services’ responsibility that will necessarily lead to the implementation of upload filters on a vast number of internet platforms. With dangerous potential for automatized censorship mechanisms, online content filtering could be the end of the Internet as we know it.”<sup>30</sup>

Taking into consideration all these concerns, a group of digital experts, led by Tim Berns-Lee, World Wide Web inventor and Vint Cerf, Internet pioneer, sent an open letter to the European Parliament outlining the risks of the measure: “By requiring Internet platforms to perform automatic filtering all of the content that their users upload, Article 13 takes an unprecedented step towards the transformation of the Internet from an open platform for sharing and innovation, into a tool for the automated surveillance and control of its users.”<sup>31</sup>

Platforms are also worried and have informed users of the changes that will be made. One of the most affected platforms is YouTube, which has already implemented a content filtering system, but not with the proportions required by the Copyright Directive; in an official communication, YouTube transmits that Article 13 “could still have unintended consequences that may harm Europe’s creative and digital economy.”<sup>32</sup>

Besides Article 13, there are still concerns about Article 11 (updated in Article 15 in the final law), the latter being more applicable to search engines and news aggregator sites like Google News. The directive states that those who use snippets from different articles must pay a fee to publisher, which are generally press publications: “Member States shall provide that authors of works incorporated in a press publication receive an appropriate share of the revenues that press publishers

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<sup>30</sup> <https://edri.org/censorship-machine-takes-over-eu-internet/> (Accessed on April 23, 2019)

<sup>31</sup> <https://www.eff.org/files/2018/06/12/article13letter.pdf> (Accessed on March 27, 2019)

<sup>32</sup> <https://www.youtube.com/intl/en/saveyourinternet/> (Accessed on April 23, 2019)

receive for the use of their press publications by information society service providers”<sup>33</sup>. However, the simple distribution of the hyperlink will not be charged without having the snippet attached.

The Council of the European Union argues that all these measures of the Copyright Directive should theoretically lead to a reduction in the value gap between the incomes received by online platforms and content creators, balancing the situation in favor of the latter. But the opinions of those involved in the digital domain are exactly the opposite: “Disappointingly, the newly adopted Directive does not benefit small independent authors, but instead, it empowers tech giants. More alarmingly, Article 13 of the Directive sets a dangerous precedent for internet filters and automatized censorship mechanisms - in the EU and across the globe”<sup>34</sup> said Diego Naranjo, Senior Policy Advisor at European Digital Rights Initiative.

We do not yet know how the Directive on Copyright in the Digital Single Market will be implemented, but we know that it already has the necessary force to influence the social representation of social media, and even the European integration process of Romania, especially if the association of “communist censorship” resists for this directive, so indirectly for the European Union. These influences and changes are being developed in the last two studies of the thesis in which we analyzed the content of YouTube videos and Facebook posts.

### **2.3. European identity**

Identity is a social psychological process that helps the individual to position itself as a social actor. In this regard, from a perspective of Social Representations Theory, a social identity “is a way of organizing experience which contributes towards the definition of self but does so by locating the self within the collective world” (Duveen, 1993). From the perspective of Social Identity Theory, we can say that a social identity “refers to the ways that people’s self-concepts are based on their membership in social groups” (Leaper, 2011). So, the similarities between Social Representations Theory and Social Identity Theory are extremely high and

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<sup>33</sup> <https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/?uri=CELEX%3A32019L0790> (Accessed on April 23, 2019)

<sup>34</sup> <https://edri.org/censorship-machine-takes-over-eu-internet/> (Accessed on April 23, 2019)

therefore we propose a multi-method approach in our thesis to find out during the empirical research how the European identity is formed.

In fact, there have been various recommendations for the integration of the two theories, one of the oldest and most important being made by Breakwell in 1993.

The common part of the two theories is that both try to explain intergroup relations. Differentiation arises in the fact that Social Identity Theory takes more account of individual needs and individual motivation to create a positive identity, while Social Representation Theory refers to how people based on common beliefs, traditions and values recreate the surrounding reality to give it meaning. The connection between the two can be beneficial on both sides and so we can explain some unclear elements. In Social Representations Theory we still do not accurately know the processes that lead to the final form of a representation or the likelihood that an individual will accept a certain representation. But Social Identity Theory could describe these processes (Breakwell, 1993).

Social Identity Theory explains how through social identity we can evaluate people and place them in-group, that is the group with which we identify, or out-group, in the group we do not identify with. This requires three mental processes: social categorization, social identification and social comparison. (Tajfel & Turner, 1979). A major contribution that the Social Representation Theory has in this perspective is that social representation of the out-group determines the homogeneity of in-group perception.

So, the similarity and even the completion of the two theories is impressive, Markova remarking the contribution of both to social psychology, because together “they have brought into focus the study of interactions and interdependencies between groups, individuals, and institutions shaped not only by contemporary events but also by collective memories and forgetting, as well as future visions.” (Marková, 2007, 2015)

Having the arguments for this multi-method approach, we will analyze in the context of our research the European identity of Romanian teenagers, keeping in mind that “European identity should not necessarily be conceived as being in competition with national identity” and conceptually should be “understood to be a component of more general attitudes towards European integration” (Mendez & Bachtler, p. 5-6). Moreover, in view of the general situation of national sovereignty versus Europeanization, Cinnirela (1997) says that “National and European

identities are likely to be undergoing transformation as a result of European integration and associated political debate”. Thus, given the anti-European current in Romania, we will try to capture the formation of the European identity and how it is negotiated in relation to the Romanian one.

### 3. Social Representations Theory

#### 3.1. From Collective Representations to Social Representations

The Theory of Social Representations is developed by Serge Moscovici, and the first mentions appear in 1961 in his doctoral thesis “La Psychanalyse, son Image and son Public”. Moscovici bases its notion of social representation on the notion of collective representation proposed by Émile Durkheim in 1895, only as Moscovici creates a concept almost completely new, more dynamic, approaching both the sociological and the psychological side.

Collective representations are “socially produced phenomena that circulate, and are shared in society, for example, as religious, mythical, or scientific representations. They arise directly from social structures and they constitute social reality just like physical facts constitute physical reality. Durkheim called them social facts; they are external to individuals, who do not contribute toward their formation” (Marková, 2015). Thus, collective representations create a framework that constrains the individual, being independent of himself, which creates a certain static aspect. From this point of view, Moscovici did not agree with the distinction created between the individual and the social aspects, which could mean a distinction between psychological and sociological aspects. Therefore, as the first difference between collective and social representations, Moscovici integrates in his theory both aspects that are separated in the Durkheimian thinking, for a better understanding of social reality. Thus, social representations gain a *dynamic* character, subjected to movement, transformation and evolution. The second difference is that collective representations are imposed more as a social fact, presented in a rigid way, without being able to undergo great changes, while social representations have an *internal structure*, which explains the changes, but at the same time providing a unitary character. According to Wagner and Hayes (2005)

social representations are more *contextualized*, what might represent the third difference. In other words, social representation is a real, identifiable social phenomenon that can be observed and measured, while collective representation is like a concept, an abstraction, rather only a theoretical construction. The fourth difference and the last one is the aspect of *modernity*. This refers to the fact that actual, modern societies have a space of critical discourse and contradictory experiences that help to produce social representations based on a process of continuous formation and transformation (Wagner, 1995a), while collective representations leave no room for critical discourse, being based more on myths, religion and popular beliefs, thus stabilizing socially driven ideas.

As any novelty, as well as Moscovici's thinking was at first criticized, some arguing that his theory "is too loose; others, that is too cognitive; that it is not clear how the concept of social representation differs from other concepts, say, from attitudes, social cognition, beliefs, stereotypes, and so on" (Moscovici & Marková, 1998), but with time, the Social Representation Theory has begun to have a wide recognition, beyond the limits of social psychology, being used by anthropologists, historians, philosophers, and sociologists.

### **3.2. Definition, characteristics and functions of Social Representations**

Defining Social Representations is not an easy task, because of the complexity of the phenomenon, the variety of theoretical schools, the multitude of approaches from several sciences, and the polysemy of the term. Moscovici himself has avoided an exhaustive definition in order not to limit the improvements that can be made later in the field. However, from the writings of Moscovici, we can say that Social Representations are a "system of values, ideas and practices with a twofold function; first, to establish an order which will enable individuals to orient themselves in their material and social world and to master it; and secondly to enable communication to take place among the members of a community by providing them with a code for social exchange and a code for naming and classifying unambiguously the various aspects of their world and their individual and group history" (Moscovici, 1973, p. xiii). This code can be understood through social communication, which has a key role both in creating social representations and linking their different levels. Thus, communication has not only the function of

transmitting something, but also shaping the representations for making them socially shared. To have a quintessence, we can say that social representations are “collective elaborations of a social object by the community for the purpose of behaving and communicating” (Moscovici, 1963, p. 251). The processes that are created through social representations are done for the social knowledge, to help people making a better idea about their experiences, to give meaning to social events around them, to design future actions, but also to anticipate various individual or collective actions (Purkhardt, 1993). That is why Moscovici remarks that social representations have two major aspects, being conventional and prescriptive. First, it is about conventionalizing objects, people and events we encounter in order to find them a suitable form that would allow them to be placed in a category of a certain type that would be shared by the whole group. The new elements will adhere to this model, and it will merge with it, so we can associate for example the communism with the red color. And these models are resistant, so new people, even if they do not exactly fit, are forced to be part of the model to align with the others, with the risk of not fully understanding or decoding the new model. Second, we talk about the prescriptive aspect, that means the extremely high, even irresistible influence that social representations have on us. They even dictate how we should think, as social representations are also a product of preexisting types of thoughts of several generations connected to systems of beliefs, values and traditions. So social representations build new ways of thinking and knowing, while at the same time they build consensual visions of actions to maintain the social bond and continuity of discourse (Moscovici & Duveen, 2000).

All this mean rebuilding reality and integrating into the individual’s cognitive system, depending on the context in which it is placed, ideological, historical or socio-cultural (Neculau, 1996). We are talking about a totally active process in which the individual looks for social responses and tries to cope with the changes and challenges of various social phenomena. So, he gives meaning to certain facts that he finds in media, politics or science and adapt them in a familiar way, so he can share them with others. The collective part should never be neglected, because social representations can not exist outside the group, they have the role of mediator between the individual and the social, being like a guide for everyday actions and exchanges. (Moscovici, 1961; 2000).

In the same line, Denise Jodelet says that “social representations present themselves in various forms, more or less complex. Images that condense a set of meanings; reference systems that allow us to interpret what happens to us, even to make sense of the unexpected; categories which serve to classify the circumstances, the phenomena, the individuals we are dealing with” (1984, p. 360, our translation). We also need to see social representations as part of the concrete reality of social life, each social representation being a “representation of something and somebody” (Idem, p. 362), where something is related to an object and somebody to a subject. According to Jodelet, a social representation has five fundamental characteristics (Idem, p. 365):

- “it is always representation of an object;
- it has an imaginative character and the property of making the sensible and the idea, the percept and the concept interchangeable;
- it has a symbolic and meaningful character;
- it has a constructive character;
- it has an autonomous and creative character”.

So, to synthesize the above into a definition, Jodelet says that “social representation is a form of knowledge, socially elaborated and shared, with a practical objective, that contributes to the construction of a common reality to a social set” (1989, p. 36). Also, Fischer articulates a concise definition in “Les concepts fondamentaux de la psychologie sociale” (1987), which we need to transpose here: “the social representation is a process, a cognitive status, allowing to apprehend the aspects of the ordinary life by a reframing of our own behaviors inside the social interactions” (p. 118, our translation). It should be noted that Fischer projects the social representation according to the influence level and the status of the individual, these aspects having a major impact on the selection of contents, and thus of transforming a social reality into a mental object. So, social representations can be seen as means of recreating reality, mediating the exchanges between the individuals from groups, social categories or institutions, also considering the familiarization of the group with new social realities and objects, but also with the socio-cultural context and existing norms in the group.

Depending on the content of social representations, they may shape different opinions, information or beliefs, all of which can be taken together as a set of

“cognitive elements” (Rateau, Moliner, Guimelli, Abric, 2012) in relation to a social object. According to the authors, this set has the following characteristics:

- *organization* brings a true structure of the cognitive elements around the central significance, not just a mere enumeration of them. This means that the elements of the social representation interact with each other, creating specific relationships like internal coherence, subordination, opposition or similarity;

- *shared* by members of a particular social group to meet their needs, but consensus and broad dissemination are dependent on the group’s homogeneity and the members’ positions towards the social object; so, the consensual nature of a representation is often partial, not reaching all the levels of the representation;

- *collectively produced* due to exposure to mass communication and informational exchange among individuals; thus, the emerging elements of the social representation are shared, and through the obtained consensus will result also the social validation of the different information, opinions and beliefs.

- *social utility* that is seen as the purpose of social representation, meaning understanding and interpreting the social environment, while providing criteria for evaluation, justification and legitimization of behaviors, thus activating the operations of social representations for differentiating or approaching groups or individuals.

Of all the fundamental features of social representations, we can understand that the “cognitive component” always must be considered through the relationship of interdependence with the “social component”, thus having to do with a double logic: “cognitive logic” and “social logic”. The coexistence of these two logics “allow us to explain and understand, for example, why the representation integrates both the rational and the irrational. Why it also tolerates and integrates apparent contradictions. Why the reasoning it generates can appear «illogical» or incoherent.” (Abric, 1994a, p. 14, our translation). It is like the reflex for survival, which also involves an individual’s conscious effort, but also an unconscious effort, to adapt all his actions according to the environment and context. But the contradictions or illogical elements are only apparent because social representations are more than the survival instincts, are socio-cognitive constructs governed by their own rules, and with specific functions (Abric, 1994a, p. 15-18):

- *knowledge functions* allow the understanding and explanation of reality by acquiring knowledge, which the individual assimilates and integrates through his



cognitive function according to the values to which he adheres, facilitating thus, but also being dependent on social communication.

- *identity functions* define both the personal identity and social identity, but also protect the specificity of the groups, in relation to the same socially or historically determined values. Through this function, there is a process of social comparison, whereby the representation of one's own group is usually overvalued to preserve its positive image. Within the group appears the social control of individuals, which is essential in the socialization process. Moreover, social representations help defining and preserving group identity because there is an inter-connectivity relationship between representations and norms within the group, given that members do not come in direct contact with various social objects but through processes inside group (Abric, 1994b).

- *orientation functions* guide social behaviors and practices, directly impacting the finality of various situations through three important properties of social representations: firstly, it is about determining a priori the type of relationship that is relevant to the individual, but also, the type of cognitive approach to be taken in situations where a task needs to be accomplished. Secondly, it is about the system of anticipations and expectations produced by the social representation, the latter being not dependent on the evolution of an interaction, because it precedes the interaction and determines it. Thirdly, it is about knowing what is forbidden or acceptable in a certain social context by referring to the nature of rules and social ties given by the prescriptive power of social representation.

- *justifying functions* permit justifying, a posteriori, the social actors' behaviors and actions related to their partners in a given situation. In the special situation when dealing with a competitive relationship, we can justify the attitudes and behaviors of one group with reference to another group, including also hostile attitudes. Thus, social representations can strengthen the social position of a certain group and, at the same time, the difference from opposite groups.

As we have seen so far, a lot of variables are considered for the formation of social representations, and therefore they vary according to individuals, groups or social categories, various historical or socio-cultural contexts, and social integration of each. All these elements make the difference between social representations and the separate scientific approaches of other representations. In addition to this, Doise highlights that social representations "are principles which generate positions linked

to specific integrations into a set of social relations, and organize the symbolic processes which intervene in those relations” (1985, p. 245). Thus, Doise articulates that social representations are spaces of symbolic exchanges, and for understanding them, we must observe the links between the social metasystem and the mental universe of individuals, both of them being affected at the same time by the social position of individuals, so by their position in the meta-system. In this way, Doise’s thinking is rather focused on identifying and describing individual expressions in their variety and not necessarily in terms of consensus. Still, consensus could be understood through the organizing principle that characterizes social representations. (Rubira-Garcia, Puebla-Martinez, & Gelado-Marcos, 2018).

The opinions of the various authors we have surprised so far have been presented in order to make the transition from different models of approaching the Social Representations Theory. Thus, we can distinguish three major approaches:

- *The sociogenetic approach* having roots in Paris, in the work of Serge Moscovici, which laid the foundation of the theory and articulated the processes of objectification and anchoring. His work was continued by his disciple Denise Jodelet, who developed one of the most accepted definitions of social representations, which we presented at the beginning of this subchapter. Both Moscovici and Jodelet put a great emphasis on the functions of language, on the social actions of particular groups, but also on context, attributing to media and institutions the most important roles in the creation of the social representations.

- *The structural approach* with researchers from southern France, Aix-en-Provence and Montpellier, who have focused on cognitive procedures. Within this school, following Moscovici’s process of objectification, Jean-Claude Abric and Claude Flament have created the “Central Core Theory” that organizes the social representations based on a central core and a peripheral system.

- *The socio-dynamic approach* known as *Geneva approach*, but also with researchers from Lausanne, has a vision that describes individual expressions from various interactive situations that can be created only in social dynamics. The theoretical model is developed by Willem Doise, based on Moscovici’s anchoring process and it is in contrast with the structural approach, focused on the opinion of the group.

These three major approaches have been and still are the most important foundations of the Social Representation Theory. But, of course, there are many

other researchers who made contributions. In Austria, Wolfgang Wagner demonstrated that in the construction of social representations there is a tight connection between the discursive exchanges and social interactions: “a social representation is the ensemble of thoughts and feelings being expressed in verbal and overt behavior of actors which constitutes an object for a social group.” (Wagner, Duveen, Farr, Jovchelovitch, Lorenzi-Cioldi, Marková & Rose, 1999, p. 96). In United Kingdom, Robert Farr, Miles Hewstone and Gerard Duveen made significant contributions. In Italy the Social Representations Theory has been spread by Augusto Palmonari, Felice Carrugati and Annamaria de Rosa, in Romania the most prominent representatives are Adrian Neculau, Mihai Curelaru and Andrei Holman. Lately, spreading has begun to grow in Latin America, particularly in Argentina with contributions of Susana Seidman, in Venezuela with researches done by María Auxiliadora Banchs, but also in Mexico and Brazil.

### **3.3. Anchoring and Objectification**

The purpose of all social representations is to “make something unfamiliar, or unfamiliarity itself, familiar” (Moscovici 1984, p. 24), and the whole process is based on two socio-cognitive mechanisms: anchoring and objectification.

Anchoring is the mechanism that integrates something new into the existing knowledge through classification and naming processes, so that there are no longer foreign elements, because they are assimilated into a familiar world based on interpretation and comparison. On the other hand, objectification refers to the transformation of something abstract into something concrete and material so that it can be perceived as making part of physical reality (Moscovici, 1984).

Regarding these two mechanisms, Marková sees them complementary, both contributing to the stability and change of representations: “anchoring is orientated towards stability, or towards remaining in the existing state; objectification, on the other hand, is orientated towards change. One can represent these orientations as complementary figure-ground relationships. In the case of anchoring, stability can be conceived as figure and variability as the ground. In the case of objectification, it is the other way round; variability can be conceived as figure and stability as the ground” (Marková, 2000, p. 448-449).

Denise Jodelet (1997) continues Moscovici's idea of turning the unfamiliar into familiar, saying that this process takes place in a close connection between memory, social memory, and formation, consolidation plus transformation of social representations. Thus, shared memories of personal or collective memory and various experiences accumulated through social actions, allow the extraction of the images, language and gestures necessary to transform the unfamiliar into familiar. Individual's memory plays here the role of a shield that prevents sudden and unexpected changes that could create personal and social imbalances.

*Objectification* is a more complex mechanism than anchoring, because objectification must transform the mental content into something real, palpable that can be controlled. This would mean detaching ideas from social sources and transforming the ideas literally into physical reality. Through this process a figurative nucleus captures the essence of ideas; because the figurative nucleus has an image structure, projecting ideas into reality is made by identifying or constructing an iconic aspect, that could mean personification or figuration. (Wagner, Elejabarrieta, Lahnsteiner, 1995). Moreover, due to its complexity, the objectification consists of two component operations: naturalization and classification. Explaining the existence of the two components would be that "in naturalization, social representation is given concrete evidence through conversion into a «common theory» which can categorize autonomous individuals and their behaviors. Classification makes sense of the world around us and introduces a new order that adapts to the existing one mitigating the impact of any new design." (Cuevas-Muñiz, Gavilanes-Ruiz, 2018).

*Anchoring* is the second major mechanism of social representations, which "occurs almost automatically each time we are confronted with new phenomena" (Höijer, 2011, p. 12). It is described as a defensive maneuver that gravitates around the unknown object to choose which new information to assimilate or to reject. So, anchoring can not be neutral, but it seeks certain interests through it (Wagoner, 2017, p. 109). After Moscovici, the whole mechanism is about how "to anchor strange ideas to reduce them to ordinary categories and images, to set them in a familiar context... which draws something foreign and disturbing that intrigues us into our particular system of categories." (1984, p. 29). This involves creating correlations of something new with well-known social events or processes and deconstruction plus reconstruction of the new element in order to be classified in a

particular way through an already familiar form of understanding so that it changes its way which is being regarded. According to Doise, the investigation of anchoring should be done considering both the internal analysis of the semantic content of a representation, but also the meanings that govern the symbolic relations between the social actors, requiring a wider framework of a particular social domain. Therefore, Doise proposes three types of anchorages (Doise, 1992; 1997):

- *psychological anchoring* refers to the influence of beliefs or general values on different social cognitions at individual or interindividual level;
- *psychosociological anchoring* indicates the symbolic way of individuals' positioning in relation to social relations, positional divisions and their own categories in a given social field;
- *sociological anchoring* is the most general and refers to the comparison of opinions and beliefs of different groups based on common experiences and various sets of social reports that lead to similar representations.

The complexity of anchoring and objectification shows that social representations are also complex processes, difficult to integrate in a single pattern. Thus, if objectification succeeds in integrating elements of knowledge into a social reality, anchoring makes visible how these elements are expressed.

### **3.4. Central system and peripheral system**

Given the complexity of social representations, it is worthwhile to continue to analyze the structure of social representations more closely to better understand their content and the processes they carry with themselves. Among the many researches undertaken, a generally accepted conclusion has been reached that the most important part of the internal structure of a social representation is given by the central system, giving it a consensus. The central system is “considered to be composed of a small number of elements which organize the entire representation by determining its meaning, and its essential property seems to be stability” (Guimelli, 1993a, p. 85).

Starting from Moscovici's objectification process, Jean-Claude Abric proposes the “Central Core Theory” (Abric, 1993) which explains the dynamics and organization of social representations but also the understanding of socio-cognitive schemes. The theory refers not only to the central system but also to the peripheral

system, which contains elements that complement the first one. Abandoning the distinction between subject and object, Abric's structural approach creates the so-called "«objective reality» defined by objective components of the situation and the object" (Abric, 2001, p. 43), thus showing that the whole reality is represented, being reconstructed in the cognitive system of individuals and integrated in their value system, depending on the history of each and on the social and ideological context (Ibidem). On the other hand, the Central Core Theory was based on the contradictions related to social representations, given their structure and their way of functioning. Therefore, the first characteristic that was considered was the one in which stability and rigidity came in contradiction with dynamics and flexibility; the second characteristic was related to the consensus of a representation, which is still marked by strong interindividual differences. Thus, Abric proposes to understand a representation through two components, the central nucleus and the peripheral elements, which however function as an entity, each side having a complementary impact on the other (Abric, 1993, p. 75).

The *central core* is the most stable element of a social representation, which resists changes and gives continuity and consistency. It also offers consensual and coherent character, because it is formed based on collective memory and related to historical, sociological and ideological conditions. Therefore, it is determined by the nature of the object represented, by the type of relationships in the group with respect to this object, but also by the social norms and values of the group. The central core is so important that if a transformation occurs at its level, the whole social representation is transforming. We can also distinguish two different representations depending on the differences between the central core elements. There are social representations about the same object, but we state that they are not the same when the elements defining the representations are structured differently around their central core, and thus the centrality of the elements is different. In other words, the centrality is not only strictly quantitative, but also qualitative, depending on the assigned meanings. Thus, the discovery and identification of central core elements is not an easy task, so finding the central elements should consider three characteristics. The first one refers to the *symbolic value*, which has a direct connection with the signification of the representation as a whole, the *associative value*, which means an extremely high degree of connections of the constitutive elements of representation, much larger than the peripheral system, and the

*expressive value* that is given by the many elements of the central nucleus extracted directly from the speeches and from the verbalizations concerning the object of representation. Thus, once the central core is identified, it performs two major functions: it generates the significance of the representation and determines its organization (Abric, 1993; 2001). Moreover, Pascal Moliner, who has carried out a series of studies on the central core, describes even three of his major functions. The first one would be a *denoting function*, based on the symbolic properties of the central elements, that would mean the extraction from long speeches of the verbal labels with which individuals evoke or recognize a particular object of representation. But the essential here would be the ability to indicate these verbal labels than their intrinsic meaning. The second is an *aggregation function* based on the strong semantic potential of the central elements; even if some elements have a vague semantic value, under the same term it is possible to reassemble various disparate experiences of individuals. The third function results from the first two and is a *federation function*, that integrates individual differences into a notional framework of consensus; thus the weak semantic elements are organized by the central core through a common matrix, providing everyone the possibility to evoke the element of representation (Moliner & Martos, 2005).

The *peripheral system* complements all the above and additionally comes with its functional aspect, while the central core is essentially normative. The peripheral system consists of the elements around the central core, and the latter provides it value, weight, but also regulates its functions. Claude Flament, the one who helped Jean-Claude Abric closely in developing the Central Core Theory, says the peripheral system behaves in the form of schemes, that means sequences of specific actions from various situations, thus explaining the behaviors between individuals. The peripheral elements guide actions, without referring to the central core, but referring to the context in which the actions take place (Flament, 2003). Thus, the peripheral elements depend directly on the context and represent an interface between the central core and the concrete situations in which the representation is elaborated. Abric has articulated three functions of the peripheral system. The first one is the *concretization function*, which allows the elaboration of the social representation in concrete terms, making it immediately comprehensible but also transmissible. The second function refers to the *adaptation* offered by the peripheral elements. They are moving and evolving aspects, helping to adapt the

representation to the changing context. So, new information and transformations in the environment can easily be incorporated into the periphery of representation. The third function is the *defense function* of the central system that has to maintain its resistance (Abric, 2001).

Therefore, the peripheral system is more sensitive and flexible, which is not a disadvantage, but it is a perfect addition to the central system. In fact, the two are interdependent and can be seen as a dual system that organizes and allows the functioning of social representations. This may explain the contradictions related to the social representations that we have presented during the subchapter. So, social representations are stable and rigid because the central core is deeply linked to the collective memory and history of the group, but they are also dynamic and flexible because the peripheral elements capture the individual experiences and the context changes (Abric, 1993).

### **3.5. Previous studies related to Social Representations and social media**

Most researches related to social representations and social media have investigated platforms like Facebook or Twitter.

One of the most recent studies was made by Buschini & Cristea (2018) and is about social representations of Facebook through the two methods, which were also presented in one of the previous subchapters: the structural approach and the organizing principles approach (named socio-dynamic approach in our thesis). The methods used were the questionnaire and the associative technique in which the respondents had to write down all the words that came to their minds in connection to the stimulus phrase “My personal opinion about Facebook”. The study was divided into two stages, namely a first application of the two methods, then a second application of the same methods on the same sample at a distance of two weeks. Thus, for the structural approach after applying the stimulus, the result showed that the central core was made up of the following elements: “Internet, find people, a means of communication, having friends, a community and a site”; to these may be added other less powerful elements: “virtual, creating a profile, public, keep in touch and recreate online”. Regarding the organizing principles approach, for the result were retained six dimensions extracted from the questionnaire: the first one is related to the dark side of Facebook, the second one is about individual benefits such



as entertainment, leisure, facilitating friendly contacts and flirting, the third one refers to communicate and inform broadly and simultaneously, sharing, exchanging and keeping, making or renewing contacts despite distance. The fourth one is about creating and promoting groups by spreading their ideas, the fifth one is related to people who are not interested in Facebook, considering it an useless activity and the sixth dimension is about Facebook as a set of tools and services to build a friendly or professional network, which can palliate loneliness, shyness, and encourage dating. Based on these results, a comparison was then made between the different grouping of respondents, also considering other aspects such as age and if they are Facebook users or not. This made it possible to check the homogeneity and size of the groups.

Another research is conducted by de Rosa, Fino and Bocci (2016) and highlights how social networks can be a very good interactive space for social representations and interventions. The study investigates the content of the discussions on psychoanalysis, psychiatry and mental health issues on Facebook, Twitter and Yahoo! Answers. The selected conversations have been subjected to word co-occurrence analysis and hierarchical classification. The conclusion that is related to the theme of our thesis is that the “social networks promote the coexistence of expert knowledge and usual knowledge, and allow to observe the social positioning of individuals with similar or contradictory interests, as well as their visions of the world” (de Rosa et al., 2016, p. 289); so the use of social networks gives social relevance to the object of social representation.

Kaganer and Vaast (2010) go further and propose a research about social representations of social media used in the enterprise environment. For this they have collected and analyzed 25 corporate policy documents concerning this topic. Thus, they could establish a central core created from the following elements: “Editorial Style Recommendations”, “Misrepresentation and Disclosure of Information”, and “Identify Yourself”. The aim of the study was to explore how organizations come to comprehend and respond to end-user driven technologies, like social media. Their main finding was that the process of anchoring dominates the process of objectification, such that “the vast majority of organizations in our sample drew upon established and well-understood corporate communications and human resources practices and concepts in order to craft their social media policies. Their attempts to develop a more nuanced understanding of the social media

environment, or in other words to create new meaning and foster change through objectification were minimal” (Kaganer & Vaast, 2010).

From enterprise environment we move to institutional environment, because Lu, Zhang and Fan (2016) have investigated social representations of social media use in the Chinese Government, with reference to local microblogging platforms. After applying a series of interviews, their results showed that the central core is composed of the following elements: interaction platform, information quality, information content, governing microblogs, information platform, government images, benefiting citizens, information sharing effect, attitude, microblog usage. The study also presents a series of peripheral elements, and according to this structure, complex conclusions were drawn about how the Chinese citizens organize their understandings on the phenomenon of social media use in government.

We will end this subchapter with the social representation of the Internet, even if there is no direct reference to social media, but it is easy to find common elements. Thus, Contarello and Sarrica (2007) used free association technique with four stimuli, internet, computer, mobile, telephone, and the respondents, undergraduate students in Psychology, had to write all the words that came in their minds related to these inductors. In addition, they measured the perceived well-being with Keyes’ Social Well-being scale. The study has shown that since the Internet has entered the lives of the subjects, a general improvement has occurred. Positive results have revealed greater feelings of closeness and contribution to society in general, but also to respondents’ communities, while the feeling of cohesion has also increased. There are also negative outcomes that are related to the decrease in trust in people met online, looking for certainty and comfort in the own communities. Combining all the results, the final findings have shown that the access to a wide range of online information can increase the level of uncertainty and fuzziness, thus affecting the social well-being of Internet users.

### **3.6. Previous studies related to Social Representations and European Union**

Studies about social representations of European Union and European identity are met over an extended period, because European Union is a structure with strong roots in the past and with frequent socio-political changes. In the studies we will present, the most common research method is the questionnaire.

In 1997, Cinnirella investigated through social representations the interactions between European identity and national identity for students from UK and Italy. The study showed that “British respondents often perceive European integration as a threat to British identity. Evidence for a sense of European identity amongst British respondents is minimal: this is reflected in significantly higher levels of national identity than European identity amongst British respondents, and use of discursive strategies emphasizing the perceived threat to national identity posed by European integration. British identity and European identity are negatively correlated. In contrast, for the Italian respondents, overall European identity is significantly stronger than Italian national identity on quantitative measures. Italian Euro-identity is significantly stronger than British Euro-identity on quantitative measures, and is positively correlated with measures of Italian identity” (p. 19).

In another research, Licata (2002) also studied the relationship between national and European identity on a sample of French-speaking Belgian psychology students. The results showed that both European and national identities are seen as positively correlated, or in some cases unrelated, but never antagonistic. In addition, correlations show that the more people identify with Belgium, the more they believe this identification is compatible with European identification. Thus, “participants were generally euro-enthusiastic, but that potential losses of cultural distinctiveness and of national sovereignty were perceived as threatening. Moreover, they confirmed that identification with Europe is facilitated by a representation of Europe and the nation as complementary rather than antagonistic.” (p. 5.1)

Rutland studied in 1998 the social representations of European Union for English teenagers between 10 and 16 years. He used various methods, including two map interpretation tasks, a naming task, a photograph evaluation task and informal interviewing. For question “What things do you think are good and bad about the European Union?” he received the following answers grouped in six categories: keeps the peace (peace); makes trade easier (trade); improves communication

between people (communication); threatens our nation, in particular our identity and sovereignty (threat); improves living standards (living standards) and educates people about other nations (education). The results of the study showed that depending on age there are differences in connection with children's knowledge of Europe, but not in relation to the content of the children's beliefs regarding Europe. Also, "the children's social class group helps mediate the develop of both the knowledge and beliefs components of children's social representations of Europe. However, the other potential forms of social anchoring, namely parental attitude and travel experience, had an insignificant effect on the children's social representations" (p. 61).

Chrysochoou made in 2000 a research based on European integration to understand how people give meaning to the social categories they belong to, in the context of superordinate group formation. The sample was composed of French and Greek people and the outcome was that the status position of the subgroups shapes the feelings towards integration and inclusion. Thus, "the Greeks build their representation of the European integration on the principles of economic success such as discipline, hard-work, organization and equity as the basis of group formation", while French "build their representation of the integration on the elements of culture, civilization and humanism. These are values that acquired universal status following the French Revolution" (p. 418)

A special concern for the social representations of the European Union and for the European identity had Annamaria de Rosa in numerous studies undertaken over a considerable amount of time. Thus, in 1996 she noticed how rapid changes within the European Union (European Community) can be so "searing that scientific research often cannot keep pace, with the risk that the instruments devised either become obsolete even before they can be used, or at the very least require modifications in the course of the research" (p. 381). Through the researches undertaken by de Rosa (2000; 2001), she managed to fix the fourth cardinal points East-West-North-South in the European skies on the basis of the representations of the youth of the ten member, new-member and non-member countries of the European Union. Although there are cases where representations differ considerably, however, it can be concluded that the North-West axis orientates the geo-political compass of a strong Europe, while the socially marginal flank is represented by the East. Regarding the difference between the North and the South,

the results show that besides the geographic and climatic difference, there is also a geo-political difference. De Rosa has even developed a EuroSkyCompass program in which she analyzed together with other researchers how cross-national positioning is expressed via attitudes and the social representations of geopolitical entities (nation, Europe, world, European states), conceived as a system of interrelated representations in relation to North-South-East-West geo-political parameters. On the basis of the results, the “cultural «belonging» seems to be expressed more via identification of citizens with the block of EU member countries than via identification with their own country, with a few exceptions” (de Rosa, d’Ambrosio & Cohen, 2005, p. 56). De Rosa also demonstrated that there is a convergence between social memory, social representations and national or European identity (de Rosa, Mormino, 2002) and has shown interest in the shaping of European Union based on social representations, projections and attitudes of young people aged 15-25 (de Rosa, d’Ambrosio, 2005).

Having the model of studies presented so far, in the second part of the thesis we will continue to investigate the European identity for Romanian teenagers, and how social media can be a link between European Union and Romania.

#### **4. STUDY 1 - Social representations of social media and European integration**

This study is the basis of our research, primarily investigating the social representation of social media. Then we also investigated three other social representations, of the self, of European Union and of Romania, in order to correlate them with the first one and to extract the common elements. Also, in this study we will make the first investigations regarding the European identity, establishing a connection between the European citizenship and the Romanian citizenship, then the results being confirmed by the following studies.

##### **4.1 Objectives and hypotheses**

###### **Objectives:**

- i) to identify the content and the structure of the social representation of social media;
- ii) to investigate the social representation of social media in connection with other three social representations, of self, of European Union and Romania, in order to find common elements;
- iii) to assess how social media can be a link between the individual and between the European integration of Romania;
- iv) to establish a connection between European citizenship and Romanian citizenship in relation to the European integration process.

###### **Hypotheses:**

- a) the content of the social representation of social media have predominantly positive elements;
- b) there are common elements, especially of the central nucleus, between the social representation of social media and at least another social representation of the self, or of the European Union or Romania;
- c) social media positively influences the European integration of Romania, even though the general political current in Romania is one of national sovereignty;
- d) assuming Romanian citizenship and European citizenship on social media positively influences the European integration of Romania.

## 4.2. Participants

The sample is made by 124 pupils from “Vasile Alecsandri” High School from Iași, Romania. The participants were selected from high school classes (IX-XII), but also from gymnasium classes (V-VIII), so that the age is between 13-19 years. Table 3 below is more detailed and contains information about gender of subjects, level of education and areal of origin. Regarding the last characteristic, there are two possibilities: if the pupil lives in the city of Iași or if he lives in the country side and travels daily to Iași for coming to school.

Total	Gender	Education	Areal
124	85 - female	86 - high school	112 - urban
	39 - male	38 - gymnasium	12 - rural

*Table 3: Participants' distribution, considering the following variables: gender, level of education and the areal they come from*

## 4.3. Instruments

To verify the assumptions of this first study I used a **structured questionnaire** with multiple-choice responses and scaling responses (Likert scale) and the **Associative Network Technique** with four stimulus words.

a) **The structured questionnaire** was built following a pilot study in the summer of 2018, from which I extracted the main themes. In addition, questions related to the European integration of Romania were shaped in accordance with Eurobarometer surveys. Therefore, the final questionnaire is composed of 5 parts plus another introductory part. In the introductory part, I tried to find out demographic aspects about the participants, but also their habits about social media, such as what device they use to access their accounts, how often they access them, what are the main purposes, etc. More details can be found in Appendix A and on the next page when we start the analyses of data. Besides demographic questions, the other 11 questions of the introductory part are with multiple-choice responses. The other five parts of the questionnaire contain questions with Likert scale answers,

so the respondents could evaluate the elements on a scale with five points: 1 - strongly disagree, 2 - disagree, 3 - neutral, 4 - agree, 5 - strongly agree. Also, the fifth part contains a question with open answer (see Appendix A). To be easier to identify and interpret, each part received a name:

1<sup>st</sup> part - “General aspects and personal use of social media”;

2<sup>nd</sup> part - “Self-impact on social media”;

3<sup>rd</sup> part - “General aspects of European Union”;

4<sup>th</sup> part - “European Union and Romania”;

5<sup>th</sup> part - “Social media, Internet and European integration”.

b) **Associative Network Technique** (de Rosa, 2002) uses stimulus words to get different associations for detecting the structure, contents, polarity, neutrality and stereotyping indexes of the semantic fields related to the investigated social representations. This is a very efficient technique that requires the participant to write all the words that come to his mind in relation to the stimulus. After that, the participant is asked to rank his words in order of elicitation with Arabic numbers. Moreover, connections between the stimulus and the evoked words can be made by drawing different lines or arrows. The next step requires that each word to be marked with “+”, “-”, “0” according to the positive, negative or neutral meaning of the words for the subject. At the end, the words will be numbered with Roman numbers according to their subjective importance of the participant.

#### **4.4. Procedure**

The structured questionnaire and the Associative Network Technique were applied in Romanian; for the last one, four stimulus words were used in the following order: “Me”, “Social Media”, “European Union”, “Romania”. Each stimulus was written in the center of a separate A4 page (see Appendix B). The data was collected in February-March 2019.

#### **4.5. Analyses of the data**

All collected data was transcribed into databases using SPSS Software version 25. For the questionnaire I have computed frequencies and all the operations



that are required (and described during the study) for Factor Analysis and Multiple Regression Analysis. For the Associative Network Technique (de Rosa, 2002, 185-186) I have computed frequencies, means, “inductive power”, polarity, neutrality and stereotyping indexes. Further, the database was exported to a .xls file and imported to T-Lab Plus 2019 version 4.1.1.4 for the next analyzes: lemmatization, correspondence analysis, cluster analysis, and concept mapping.

“*Inductive power*” measures the width of the semantic body that was generated by applying the stimulus word (inductor). The higher the result is, the more associations are made. The computation is very simple and consists of the number of elicited expressions divided by the number of total participants.

*Polarity index (P)* is a “synthetic measurement of evaluation and attitude implicit in the representational field” and is computed as follows:

$$P = \frac{\text{number of positive words} - \text{number of negative words}}{\text{number of total words associated}}$$

“This index ranges between -1 and +1. If P is between -1 and -.05 (this value may be later recorded as 1 or as -1), most words are connotated negatively. If P is between -.04 and +.04 (this value may be later recorded as 2, or as 0), positive and negative words tend to be equal. If P is between +.04 and +1 (this value may be later recorded as 3, or as +1), most words are connotated positively”.

*Neutrality index (N)* is a control measurement, “assuming that high positive polarity corresponds to lack of neutrality and vice versa” and is computed like this:

$$N = \frac{[\text{n of neutral words} - (\text{n of positive words})] + \text{n of negative words}}{\text{number of total words associated}}$$

“This index also ranges between -1 and +1. If N is between -1 and -.05 few words are connotated neutrally (=low neutrality). If N is between -.04 and +.04, neutral words tend to be equal to the sum of positive and negative words. If N is between +.04 and +1, most words are connotated neutrally (=high neutrality)”.

*Stereotyping index* represents “the amount of differentiation in the dictionary expressed by each group in relation to the representation objects” and is computed according to the following formula:

$$Y = \frac{\text{number of "different" words (associated by each group of subjects)}}{\text{total number of words associated by each group of subjects}} \times 100$$

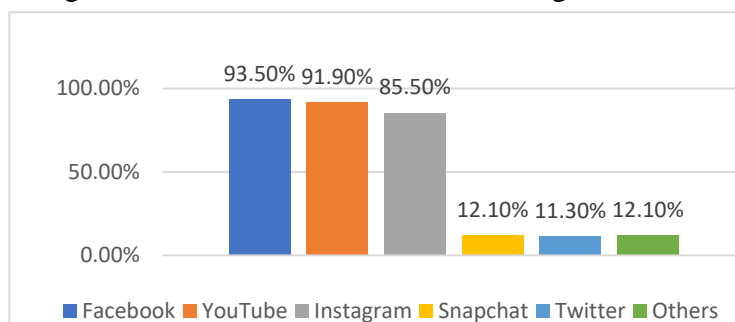
Because a measurement on a scale of 100 could not be compared very well with the results of polarity and neutrality indexes, we will also apply an additional formula to obtain a stereotyping index between -1 and +1, where +1 is the maximum value.

$$X = \frac{[(2Y) - 1] \times (-1)}{100}$$

## 4.6. Results

### a) Results from the structured questionnaire

Before going to the most important results of the study, we need to know the social media consumption behavior for the subjects. Therefore, we present the data we have obtained from the questionnaire's introductory part related to the way of use of social media channels (see Appendix A). The mean age of respondents is 15.9 with a standard deviation of 1.67. The most important social media channels are Facebook and YouTube, with a usage rate of 93.5% and 91.9%, followed at a small distance by Instagram with 85.5%, as can be seen in Figure 5.



*Fig. 5 - Social media usage for Romanian teenagers*

After that, for the other channels the percentage drops significantly. If we refer to the frequency of accessing social media accounts, almost half of the respondents, namely 47.6%, do this between 10-30 times a day. Those who access social media more than 30 times a day are 16.1%, between 2-10 times a day 30.6%, and other

intervals 5.64%. The favorite device for social media is smartphone (98.38%), followed by laptop (30.64%), desktop computer (16.93%) and others (12.09%). The main reasons for use are “to keep in touch with friends and family” (87.09%), “to keep up to date” (78.22%), “to do my homework or other school activities” (51.61%), “to spend my free time” (49.19%), “to plan and participate in events” (36.29%), “to entertain” (29.03%), “to be part of different groups” (26.61%), “to find new friends” (19.35%), “to buy and sell things” (15.32%), others (13.7%).

When it comes to the moments when teenagers are accessing social media, we talk about “free time” (58.06%), or time really doesn’t count, “I access social media everywhere” (54.03%). Also, in the night is a good time, “before going to sleep” (45.16%), or even at school (36.29%), or in the morning “just after I wake up” (30.64%), or “when I go out with friends” (12.9%).

The time spent daily on social media was also measured, the most widespread interval being more than 4 hours (27.41%), after that 3-4 hours (20.96%), 2-3 hours (19.35%), 1-2 hours (16.93%), 30-60 minutes (5.64%), less than 30 minutes (7.25%), don’t know (2.41%).

In the top of the platforms, which young people not only access, but also post, there are Instagram (75.8%), Facebook (52.41%), YouTube (8.87%), others (7.25%), and no posting (5.64%). As regards the content, photos are the most posted (84.67%), then usually only sharing other posts (51.61%), videos (21.77%), text (19.35%), check-ins (16.93%), polls (4.83%), and nothing (5.64%). If we talk about how often teenagers post, the most frequent they do it weekly (29.03%), once every few months (24.19%), monthly (19.35%), daily (14.51%), yearly (4.03%), other (3.22%), never (5.64%).

Surprisingly, although Facebook (93.50%) and YouTube (91.90%) have the highest rate of access, when we talk about the highest posting rate, Instagram leads (75.8%). If we refer to YouTube (8.87%), we understand that it is difficult to post, because it requires editing and uploading videos. But if we refer to Facebook, it seems to have suffered from recent scandals involving fake news and data stealing (i.e. Cambridge Analytica), or maybe it is just teenagers do not consider it “trendy” anymore, so that posting rate reaches only 52.41%.

Another fact that caught our attention, being expected before applying the questionnaire, is the social media usage rate per day, the highest in our study being over 4 hours (27.41%). In order to check for a possible social media addiction, we

asked the question itself, to which we received responses fairly balanced: “yes, but I could live without it” (45.16%), “yes, I would not imagine my daily-life without it, (6.45%)”, “I can not figure it out (4.03%)”, “no, I want it to disappear” (2.41%), “no, but I like it, (41.93%). We also had another question with multiple answers about how would teenagers react if social media disappears tomorrow, and the most common answer was “nothing would happen” (44.35%), followed by “I would be disoriented” (37.09%), “I would meet more often with friends in real life” (33.87%), “I would be in depression”, (3.22%), “my self-esteem would decrease”, (3.22%), other (7.25%).

### **A. Factor Analysis**

The databases made in SPSS were checked in terms of accuracy and missing values. Because the missing values < 5%, they have been replaced with series mean. For the final analysis, were considered only the elements with communalities > .300, consistent to the meaning of others, and with significantly loadings onto minimum two factors. For parts 1 to 4 of the questionnaire we realized a Factor Analysis with Principal Component Analysis (PCA) and with Varimax rotation (orthogonal). Every analysis had the KMO > .500 (Kasier-Meyer-Olkin Measure of Sampling Adequacy) and  $p < .001$  (Sig.) to be statistically significant. The new obtained factors were chosen from those with eigenvalues > 1. Even though most factors have cronbach’s alpha ( $\alpha$ ) > .700, which is the acceptability threshold, we also kept four factors with  $\alpha > .600$ , because they are very important for the study. There are also authors who recommend keeping factors with  $\alpha \approx .600$  if the factor is composed of fewer items, which is our case (Hair, J., Black, W., Babin, B., Anderson, R., & Tatham, R., 2006; Pallant, 2016).

### **I. General aspects and personal use of social media**

After the introductory part of the questionnaire, we remain on the side of the general issues, insisting on the social media topics related to European Union. We also wanted to find out what are the main advantages and disadvantages of social media. Running factor analysis we extracted four factors, with the specificity that

the last factor is composed of a single element. All these factors explain 56.53% of the variance (see Table 4):

- Factor 1 - “Discussions about EU on social media”;
- Factor 2 - “Social media makes life easier”;
- Factor 3 - “Misleading appearance of social media”;
- Factor 4 - “Freedom on social media”.

Factor 1 ( $\alpha=.755$ ) is one of the most important factors of the research, grouping five elements related to the personal activity of discussing or being informed about European Union through social media: “I liked a Facebook page or subscribed to a YouTube channel discussing issues related to the European Union”, “I write / comment on Facebook about topics related to European Union”, “I am part of a Facebook group discussing about European Union”, “I am watching YouTube videos about European Union”, “I am interested in looking for European Union related topics in social media”. The component items touch both Facebook and YouTube, the two most important social media channels in order of usage rate, as shown in the introductory analysis of the questionnaire. This first factor was named “Discussions about EU on social media”.

Item	Factor			
	1	2	3	4
13. I liked a Facebook page or subscribed to a YouTube channel discussing issues related to the European Union	.796			
11. I write / comment on Facebook about topics related to European Union	.766			
12. I am part of a Facebook group discussing about European Union	.745			
10. I am watching YouTube videos about European Union	.637			
9. I am interested in looking for European Union related topics in social media	.568			
7. It is easier to talk about intimate issues on Social Media than in real life		.740		
6. It is easier to make friends on Social Media than in real life		.697		

5. I trust the people I meet on social media		.641		
8. I am more attached to social media groups than real-life groups		.601		
4. Social media is an environment full of hate and envy			.781	
2. Social media is a hostile environment			.715	
3. Social media is an environment where people want to look different than what they are			.633	
1. Social media is an environment where people want to feel free				.699

Extraction Method: Principal Component Analysis.

Rotation Method: Varimax with Kaiser Normalization.

*Table 4: Results of Factor Analysis performed on items of “General aspects and personal use of social media”*

Factor 2 ( $\alpha = .613$ ) consists of four items that balance the everyday reality and the virtual reality, with the emphasis on facilitating some activities through social media: “It is easier to talk about intimate issues on social media than in real life”, “It is easier to make friends on social media than in real life”, “I am more attached to social media groups than real-life groups”, “I trust the people I meet on social media”. Considering all this, the chosen name for factor 2 is “Social media makes life easier”.

Factor 3 ( $\alpha = .607$ ) grouped free items rather with negative connotations. These are sensitive items, about which people prefer not to talk too often: “Social media is an environment full of hate and envy”, “Social media is a hostile environment”, “Social media is an environment where people want to look different than what they are”. This factor received the name “Misleading appearance of social media”.

Factor 4 is made of a single element (“Social media is an environment where people want to feel free”), with great implications throughout the study, especially when we talk about self-representation and social media. We transformed the name of the item into a shorter name for the factor: “Freedom on social media”.

## II. Self-impact on social media

The second part of the questionnaire contains elements that are individually related to each participant, so we can investigate what impact has social media on teenagers, and for this we tried to capture subjective actions and feelings for every teenager questioned. After running the factorial analysis, the results indicated a five factors solution (see Table 5), which explain 65.39% of the variance:

- Factor 1 - “Personal fame on social media”;
- Factor 2 - “Social integration through social media”;
- Factor 3 - “Personal development through social media”;
- Factor 4 - “Freedom of speech in social media”;
- Factor 5 - “Social media threats”.

Factor 1 has an excellent internal consistency ( $\alpha = .915$ ) and the four component items refer to the social media aspect which is related to “celebrity”: “I feel video blogger”, “I feel blogger”, “I feel like a star”, “I feel influencer”. Easier than ever, Internet and social media can give a teenager the chance to be or to feel important in society, and that is why this factor has been called “Personal fame on social media”.

Item	Factor				
	1	2	3	4	5
17. I feel video blogger	.907				
18. I feel blogger	.889				
19. I feel like a star	.887				
20. I feel influencer	.856				
3. I have stronger relationships with my family		.748			

2. I have stronger relationships with my friends	.669			
13. I feel inspired	.633			
4. I have more success at school	.543			
1. I integrate socially better	.482			
5. I have a better self-esteem		.811		
9. I feel like a leader		.702		
8. I feel more confident in myself		.653		
16. I feel sure of my decisions		.615		
14. I feel better informed			.756	
15. I feel open-minded			.704	
12. I feel relaxed			.609	
7. I feel free			.544	
11. I feel in danger				.794
10. I feel discriminated				.779
6. I'm harassed (victim of bullying)				.763

Extraction Method: Principal Component Analysis.

Rotation Method: Varimax with Kaiser Normalization.

*Table 5: Results of Factor Analysis performed on items of “Self-impact on social media”*

Factor 2 ( $\alpha=.736$ ) received the name “Social integration through social media”, because the items basically refer to this. So, the next five items were grouped, all with positive meanings: “I have stronger relationships with my family”, “I have stronger relationships with my friends”, “I feel inspired”, “I have more success at school”, “I integrate socially better”.

Factor 3 ( $\alpha=.781$ ) can easily be called “Personal development through social media”, because it refers to an improvement in self-perception and self-confidence: “I have a better self-esteem”, “I feel like a leader”, “I feel more confident in myself”, “I feel sure of my decisions”. In fact, these four items, along with those in factor two, may be some of the greatest benefits of social media.



Factor 4 ( $\alpha=.680$ ) contains four items that will be very useful in developing social media representation from the perspective of information, and thus also the possibility of informing about subjects such as those related to European integration. We named this factor “Freedom of speech in social media” and it contains the following items: “I feel better informed”, “I feel open-minded”, “I feel relaxed”, “I feel free”.

Factor 5 ( $\alpha=.719$ ) has only three items, but very emotionally connected in a negative way. This has made us call this factor “Social media threats”. Among the items we tried to approach one of the biggest problems of social media, namely bullying online. So, the three items are: “I’m harassed (victim of bullying)”, “I feel in danger”, “I feel discriminated”.

### **III. General aspects of European Union**

After investigating what are the general aspects of social media and what impact they have on teenagers, starting with the third part of the questionnaire, we are investigating what are the general aspects of European Union, and then in the next part, what are the links between Romania and European Union.

This third part has been divided into five factors, which explain 78.17% of the variance (see Table 6). The fourth factor was removed because it had  $\alpha = .368$ , but we will insist a little on his component items: “I believe there are connections between terrorism and immigrants from outside EU”, “EU borders should be closed to any immigrant”, “I know my rights as a European citizen”. As we can observe, the strongest correlation is between immigrants, terrorism and closing borders. And then, this correlation can be interpreted as having an impact on the rights of European citizens. We assume that  $\alpha$  has not reached our minimum threshold of .600, because although these are extremely important subjects, they generally avoid being treated directly, always being viewed with a reserved attitude. Because of this reserved attitude, teenagers may not have written exactly the answers they would have felt, but sometimes they artificially augmented or diminished their responses, so as not to violate certain social standards of discrimination or ethics. This may explain the low internal consistency of factors.

Another issue worth mentioning is that we are dealing again with a factor with only one item; we have kept it as it is because we want to investigate later in the research how can Brexit affect the European integration of Romania.

So, there are only four valid factors left, and they are:

- Factor 1 - “European institutions”;
- Factor 2 - “European personal future”;
- Factor 3 - “Confidence in EU”;
- Factor 4 - “Brexit”

Factor 1 has the highest internal consistency in the entire study  $\alpha = .956$ . It is classified as an excellent value, being very close to the maximum value  $\alpha = 1.000$ . This means that items have strong connections between them, and prefigures the unity of European institutions, which could play the role of engine for entire European Union. Therefore, five items were brought together under this factor, corresponding to the five most important European institutions: “I am familiar with the European Council”, “I am familiar with the European Commission”, “I am familiar with the Court of Justice of the European Union”, “I am familiar with the European Central Bank”, “I am familiar with the European Parliament”. As expected, the name of the factor was chosen as “European institutions”.

Item	Factor				
	1	2	3	4*	5
11. I am familiar with the Council of the European Union	.926				
10. I am familiar with the European Council	.919				
12. I am familiar with the European Commission	.917				
13. I am familiar with the Court of Justice of the European Union	.917				
14. I am familiar with the European Central Bank	.862				
9. I am familiar with the European Parliament	.858				
4. I would like to work in EU		.911			
5. I would like to start a family in EU		.902			
3. I would like to study in EU		.895			
8. European institutions do their job properly			.840		
1. I trust European Union			.821		

7. I believe there are connections between terrorism and immigrants from outside EU				.792
6. EU borders should be closed to any immigrant				.601
2. I know my rights as a European citizen				.535
15. I agree with Brexit				.882

Extraction Method: Principal Component Analysis.

Rotation Method: Varimax with Kaiser Normalization.

\*It was not retained for future analyzes, because  $\alpha < .600$

*Table 6: Results of Factor Analysis performed on items of “General aspects of European Union”*

Factor 2 ( $\alpha = .894$ ) is called “European personal future” because it is related to important decisions in teenagers’ lives, whether we are talking about the near future or the distant future. Three items were grouped: “I would like to work in EU”, “I would like to start a family in EU”, “I would like to study in EU”.

Factor 3 ( $\alpha = .746$ ) consists of only two items, “European institutions do their job properly”, “I trust European Union”, and refers to the smooth running of European Union. We called this factor “Confidence in EU”.

Factor 4 contains only the item related to “Brexit” and consequently received this name. This factor will help us to observe during the thesis whether Brexit can be a model to be followed for Romania and whether it affects in any way the European integration.

#### **IV. European Union and Romania**

The questions in this fourth part of the questionnaire refer to the impact that European Union could have on Romania. Several items were listed, ranging from economic, political, to citizenship.

In the first phase, factor analysis indicated the appearance of six factors, which explain 67.82% of the variance (see Table 7). Of all the factors, two did not have valid values of cronbach’s alpha. Factor 3 had  $\alpha = .574$  and it was excluded because it was just below .600. In contrast, Factor 5 surprisingly had a negative

cronbach's alpha, due to a negative average covariance among items. These items are only two: "I feel European citizen" and "I feel Romanian citizen". Normally, we should have excluded the two items, but we thought that this negative value of cronbach's alpha could bring us an unexpected result of the thesis. Moreover, the two items were crucial to the general understanding of the research, so we decided to keep them, creating for each one a new factor. So, as a result of these changes, we still have six factors, but their order is different:

- Factor 1 - "Biggest advantages of European Union";
- Factor 2 - "Euro currency";
- Factor 3 - "Inequalities between EU members";
- Factor 4 - "National sovereignty of Romania";
- Factor 5 - "European citizenship";
- Factor 6 - "Romanian citizenship".

Factor 1 ( $\alpha = .783$ ) is called "Biggest advantages of European Union" and contains five important items: "I think Romania's EU membership is a good thing", "Economic situation of EU is good", "I am pleased how democracy works in EU", "European funds have been a real help for Romania", "EU is an advantage for Romania".

Item	Factor					
	1	2	3*	4	5	6**
7. I think Romania's EU membership is a good thing	.754					
8. Economic situation of EU is good	.721					
10. I am pleased how democracy works in EU	.695					
4. European funds have been a real help for Romania	.658					
1. EU is an advantage for Romania	.600					
5. Euro currency is a good thing		.900				
6. I would like Romania to adopt euro		.862				
11. I am pleased how democracy works in Romania			.770			
9. Economic situation of Romania is good			.722			
13. I think it is positive that from 1 January until 30 June 2019 Romania holds the Presidency of the Council of the European Union			.682			
3. EU is creating inequalities between member states				.862		

2. EU has marginalized Romania so far					.861	
12. Romania should choose a model of national sovereignty rather than EU integration					-.780	
14. Romania should leave European Union					-.697	
15. I feel European citizen						.781
16. I feel Romanian citizen						-.669

Extraction Method: Principal Component Analysis.

Rotation Method: Varimax with Kaiser Normalization.

\*It was not retained for future analyzes, because  $\alpha < .600$

\*\* It was split in two factors

*Table 7: Results of Factor Analysis performed on items of “European Union and Romania”*

Factor 2 ( $\alpha = .805$ ) refers strictly to “Euro currency”, and so its name will remain; it contains two items: “Euro currency is a good thing”, “I would like Romania to adopt euro”.

Factor 3 ( $\alpha = .703$ ) concerns more the critical part of European Union and the possible differences in the treatment of the member states. Two items have been linked here, “EU is creating inequalities between member states” and “EU has marginalized Romania so far”. We simply name this factor “Inequalities between EU members”.

Factor 4 ( $\alpha = .672$ ) is a sensitive one. Contains items related to preference for “National sovereignty of Romania”, and we found this syntax as appropriate for the name of the factor. The component items are: “Romania should choose a model of national sovereignty rather than EU integration” and “Romania should leave European Union”.

Factor 5 and 6 are each composed of one item: “I feel European citizen”, respectively “I feel Romanian citizen”. As we said previously, the factors were created by dividing a larger factor, which had the two items together, but now we can speak separately of “European citizenship” and “Romanian citizenship”.

## V. Social media, Internet and European integration

The fifth part of the questionnaire is a special one with only three items. Two of them will be used as dependent variables in the further regression analysis: “For me social media has positive connotations” and “Internet and social media helped Romania in terms of European integration”. The answers were also given on the Likert scale with 5 values.

As for the third item, it allowed us to find out what are the most important topics about European Union that teenagers are interested in social media. A free answer was asked regarding this requirement: “Please mention at least three particular European Union-related topics of your interest, in order of priority (from the most interesting for you)”. The answers can be found below in Table 8.

Item	F	Item	F
Brexit	16	European projects	5
Member states	12	Studies in EU	5
Benefits and advantages of EU	7	European Parliament election	4
European funds	7	Rights	4
Laws	7	Economy	4
News about EU	7	Euro currency	4
European Parliament	7	How does EU see the politics in Romania	4
General aspects of Romania in EU	6	Plans	3
Article 13	6	Travels	2
Founding of EU	5	European Citizenship	2
Presidency of the Council of EU	5	Equality	2

*Table 8: The most interesting topics related to European Union in the view of Romanian teenagers (F=Frequency)*

From Table 8, we find surprisingly with the highest frequency the “Brexit” topic. Once again, it is highlighted the importance of Great Britain’s exit, which could affect the entire European Union, so also Romania. A great interest is also

around the member states, and then at a lower frequency are general subjects about European Union and Romania. The most important items will be compared and verified in the following studies, especially from Facebook and YouTube corpuses.

## **B. Multiple Regression Analysis**

Multiple Regression Analysis uses two or more independent variables to explain the variance of one dependent variable. Is a type of predictive analysis, and that is why independent variables are known as predictor variables or explanatory variables, and dependent variables as outcome variables or response variables.

In our case, independent variables are represented by all the factors that emerged from the four main parts of the questionnaire after the factor analysis. These factors will explain in turn the changes of the two dependent variables:

- a. “For me social media has positive connotations”;
- b. “Internet and social media helped Romania in terms of European integration”.

Therefore, for each dependent variable we made four regressions, corresponding to the four main parts of the questionnaire. The method used for Multiple Regression Analysis was Forward. By this method independent variables are introduced into the model one by one (step by step) in order of importance. In the first step is introduced the variable that is the most strongly correlated, positively or negatively, with the dependent variable. In step two (and next), the less closely related variables are entered. At each step, the null hypothesis on the regression coefficient of the introduced variable is tested; so it is tested if the corresponding regression coefficient is zero. It is used the t-test (t), respectively statistic F (which is the square of statistic t). The steps stop when an established significance threshold for F is no longer reached (Jaba, E., Grama, A., 2004). In order to make the results more efficient, we chose to present only the most relevant and statistically significant model from each analysis, considering the significance threshold  $p < 0.050$  also for ANOVA and t-test (t).

**Dependent variable A: “For me social media has positive connotations”**

Part of the questionnaire	Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients	t	Sig.	Model Summary				ANOVA	
	B	Std. Error	Beta			R	R <sup>2</sup>	Adjusted R <sup>2</sup>	Std. Error	F	Sig.
1 (Constant)	3.405	.428		7.957	.000	.477	.228	.208	.69677	11.799	.000
<i>Social media makes life easier</i>	.338	.089	.315	3.819	.000						
<i>Misleading appearance of social media</i>	-.338	.100	-.282	-3.387	.001						
<i>Freedom on social media</i>	.186	.078	.202	2.384	.019						
2 (Constant)	2.128	.350		6.085	.000	.413	.171	.157	.71903	12.463	.000
<i>Freedom of speech in social media</i>	.314	.101	.285	3.094	.002						
<i>Social integration through social media</i>	.203	.094	.199	2.156	.033						
3 Nothing statistically significant											
4 Nothing statistically significant											

*Table 9: Multiple Regression Analysis for dependent variable A: “For me social media has positive connotations”*

From part one of the questionnaire only three factors were retained as independent variables, which explain 20.8 % of the variance in the dependent variable A (adjusted  $R^2 = .208$ ). We will analyze the values of the coefficients B (unstandardized coefficient) or Beta (standardized coefficient), and depending on how they are, positive or negative, so will be the variance in the dependent variable. The results are as expected, so the positive connotations about social media grow when it comes to “freedom on social media” or when we feel that “social media makes life easier”. Also, it is not surprising that positive connotations decrease because the “misleading appearance of social media”.

Regarding part two of the questionnaire, the selected factors explain 15.7 % of the variance in the dependent variable A (adjusted  $R^2 = .157$ ). Also “freedom of speech in social media” and “social integration through social media” increase the positive connotations about social media. Independent variables “freedom of speech in social media” and “freedom on social media” show the importance of the concept of freedom, especially for teenagers, and the need to respect the rights related to freedom. The development of this analysis will be continued in the next part of the research, when we will have the words elicited from the Associative Network



Technique. Getting back to the questionnaire, it is noteworthy that “personal fame” and “personal development through social media” did not have any significant impact, which could mean that social media fails to intervene so much in shaping various personal issues that are long-lasting. Also “social media threats”, did not meet the threshold  $p < 0.050$ , which may indicate that these threats are not that high, or rather that teenagers are not aware of these threats.

Part three and four of the questionnaire have not been taken into consideration ( $p > 0.050$ ) and this is normal, because general aspects of European Union can not really influence positively or negatively the view of social media.

**Dependent variable B: “Internet and social media helped Romania in terms of European integration”**

Part of the questionnaire	Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients	t	Sig.	Model Summary				ANOVA	
	B	Std. Error	Beta			R	R <sup>2</sup>	Adjusted R <sup>2</sup>	Std. Error	F	Sig.
1 (Constant)	2.901	.256		11.335	.000	.282	.079	.072	.93043	10.534	.002
<i>Discussions about EU on social media</i>	.325	.100	.282	3.246	.002						
2 Nothing statistically significant											
3 (Constant)	4.476	.234		19.135	.000	.311	.097	.089	.92174	13.043	.000
<i>Brexit</i>	-.322	.089	-.311	-3.611	.000						
4 (Constant)	4.415	.523		8.448	.000	.478	.228	.209	.85901	11.829	.000
<i>European citizenship</i>	.216	.069	.257	3.152	.002						
<i>National sovereignty of Romania</i>	-.368	.102	-.292	-3.602	.000						
<i>Romanian citizenship</i>	-.224	.075	-.242	-2.971	.004						

*Table 10: Multiple Regression Analysis for dependent variable B: “Internet and social media helped Romania in terms of European integration”*

The beginning of this multiple regression analysis can be intuitive, but the end is unexpected. Thus, from part one of the questionnaire it is easy to draw the conclusion that the more “discussions about EU on social media” are, the better the European integration is. The independent variable explains 7.2 % of the variance in the dependent variable (adjusted  $R^2 = .072$ ).

From part two of the questionnaire nothing statistically significant was found, but starting with part three of the questionnaire, surprises begin to appear. First, of the four independent variables, only one was considered, explaining 8.9 % of the variance in dependent variable (adjusted  $R^2 = .089$ ). The independent variable is “Brexit”. Surprisingly, the other independent variables “European institutions”, “European personal future”, “Confidence in EU” did not meet the significance threshold  $p < 0.050$ . This may mean that although the European Union is helpful to Romania, as we will undoubtedly notice during the thesis, the aid given may be lower than the expectations.

If we talk about Great Britain’s exit from European Union, until now we just supposed that this topic has a statistically significant impact on Romania’s European integration through Internet. But now, we have the confirmation, and we know that the impact is negative (coefficients B and Beta are negative). In other words, this could mean that when teenagers talk online about Brexit, they create a precedent in their minds and think of what might happen if Romania were to leave European Union. This is certainly negative, and this view is also supported by the “national sovereignty of Romania”, which also negatively influences the European integration of Romania. The last independent variable on national sovereignty is included in part four of the questionnaire, as well as “European citizenship” and “Romanian citizenship”, thus explaining 20.9 % of the variance in the dependent variable (adjusted  $R^2 = .209$ )

After having a first supposition in the factor analysis that the assumption of the two citizenships is contradictory regarding the European integration of Romania, we can now confirm this by multiple regression analysis. Looking at Table 10 at the standardized coefficient Beta, we will see the difference between the two. While for “European citizenship” the value of Beta = .257, so is a positive one, for “Romanian citizenship” the value of Beta = -.242, so is a negative one.

Even more interesting is that the contradiction is approximately proportional. This means that the more you assume you are a European citizen, the more presumption of European integration is growing. But with the approximately same value, the more you assume you are a Romanian citizen, the more the presumption of European integration decreases.

In other words, European citizenship helps the European integration of Romania, while Romanian citizenship diminishes it. A first explanation for this

might be that Romania has not yet fully aligned with European standards and that some Romanian mentalities and practices pull down the country from the European path. Another explanation would be given by the prejudices that Romanians face outside the country when they reveal their citizenship, or we might even think that Romanian citizenship has suffered because of the nationalist politics promoted in the country. We will also investigate in the second and third studies the aspect of citizenships and there will be an even clearer picture, because it is about analyzing the assumption of the citizenship on Facebook or YouTube. As we said earlier, teenagers appreciate the freedom of social media and the freedom of speech, so we expect very honest opinions about citizenship. In addition, on the Internet anyone can eventually remain anonymous, so prejudices can be limited.

## **b) Results from the Associative Network Technique**

### **I. Social Representations of Self**

According to the creator of Associative Network Technique (de Rosa, 2002, 184) the “self-representation should be checked in almost every study” because the “reality is at all times being selectively filtered by categorization processes that involve the identity of subjects.” Moreover, the main items studied in this research involve other different types of identities: social media implies in addition to real identity also a virtual identity, and the European Union brings together national identity and transnational identity. That is why I think it is very appropriate for the current study to begin with the stimulus word “Me”.

**A. “Inductive power”** is showing that they are **6.04** words elicited per participant. (A total number of 749 elicited words divided by 124 participants).

**B. Stereotyping index** shows the value **-0.93**, which means a very low level of stereotyping, so a very high level of differentiation in the dictionary.

**C. Polarity index** has the value **0.54**, thus indicating a positive connotation for the semantic field related to self-representation. This is not surprising, because

teenagers generally tend to have a good opinion about them and try to build their future in order to succeed in life.

**D. Neutrality index** is **-0.45**, that means a low neutrality; therefore, we can support the above result from the polarity index, as the self-evaluation of the participants is a positive one.

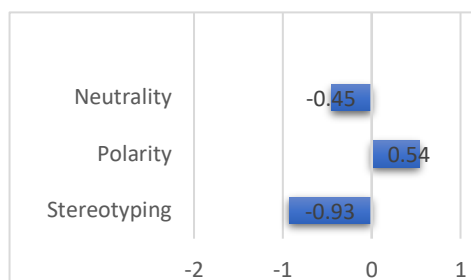


Figure 6: Indexes for stimulus “Me”

### E. Candidates for the central nucleus of the Social Representation of Self

Every social representation must have a central nucleus (Abric, 1993) that stabilizes the representation and gives sense to the information. Because the central nucleus should be concrete and simple, I extracted from all the lexical occurrences only the words with the highest frequencies ( $\geq 10$ ) and with lowest values related to average ranks ( $\leq 3.3$ ); a low average rank suggests that an element has a high importance in participant’s belief.

Lemma	Frequency	Average Rank
Friendly	22	3.27
Sociable	20	2.85
Joyful	17	2.70
Ambitious	10	2.3
Confident	10	3.3

Table 11: Candidates for the central nucleus of the Social Representation of Self

From Table 11 we notice, first of all, the presence of the most powerful elements: “friendly” and “sociable”. They are the strongest candidates for the central nucleus of the social representation of self, but they are also very much related to the notion of social media, which essentially involves these two elements: friends and socialization. These first remarks suggest that there is a strong connection between the self-representation of the participants and the social media field. In fact, throughout the study, we will observe that the lemmas “friends” and “socialization” are also candidates for the central nucleus of the social representation of social media.

Getting deeper into research, connections are far more powerful than that. Common elements are not just between social representations of the self and the social media, but also between the European Union and Romania.

#### **F. Lexical correspondence analysis**

Lexical correspondence analysis is a very suitable method for extracting the data from the Associative Network Technique. Thus, through the words elicited after the application of stimuli, it is possible to point out the structure and the content of the representational field. The results were obtained using the software T-Lab Plus 2019 v. 4.1.1.4.

To begin with, we applied the lemmatization process, which opens the way to the other analyzes. Lemmatization represents the process through a “word” becomes a “lemma”. More precisely, the words obtained through the Associative Network Technique were attributed to lexical units classified according to linguistic criteria. For the stimulus “Me” were elicited 749 occurrences that the software turned into 349 lemmas. Furthermore, T-Lab analyzes the co-occurrences and carries out the mapping of the relationships between lemmas. For these computations, according to the software manual, T-Lab performs the following steps:

- a. building a co-occurrence matrix (word  $\times$  word);
- b. computing the selected association indexes (Cosine);
- c. hierarchical clustering of the dissimilarity matrix;
- d. building a second dissimilarity matrix (cluster  $\times$  cluster);
- e. graphic representation by Multidimensional Scaling and Correspondence Analysis.

Before analyzing the dataset, we formatted the lexical structures by reducing some words to their singular forms, transforming verbs and some nouns into the corresponding adjective, and choosing only one form for the words which are perfect synonyms. To remove items that are less relevant, we chose to only compute the key-terms with a frequency  $\geq 3$ , so the number of lemmas was adjusted to 70.

For a better comparison between the difference and the similarity of lemmas, we ran the correspondence analysis (lemmas  $\times$  variables). The result is shown in Figure 7.

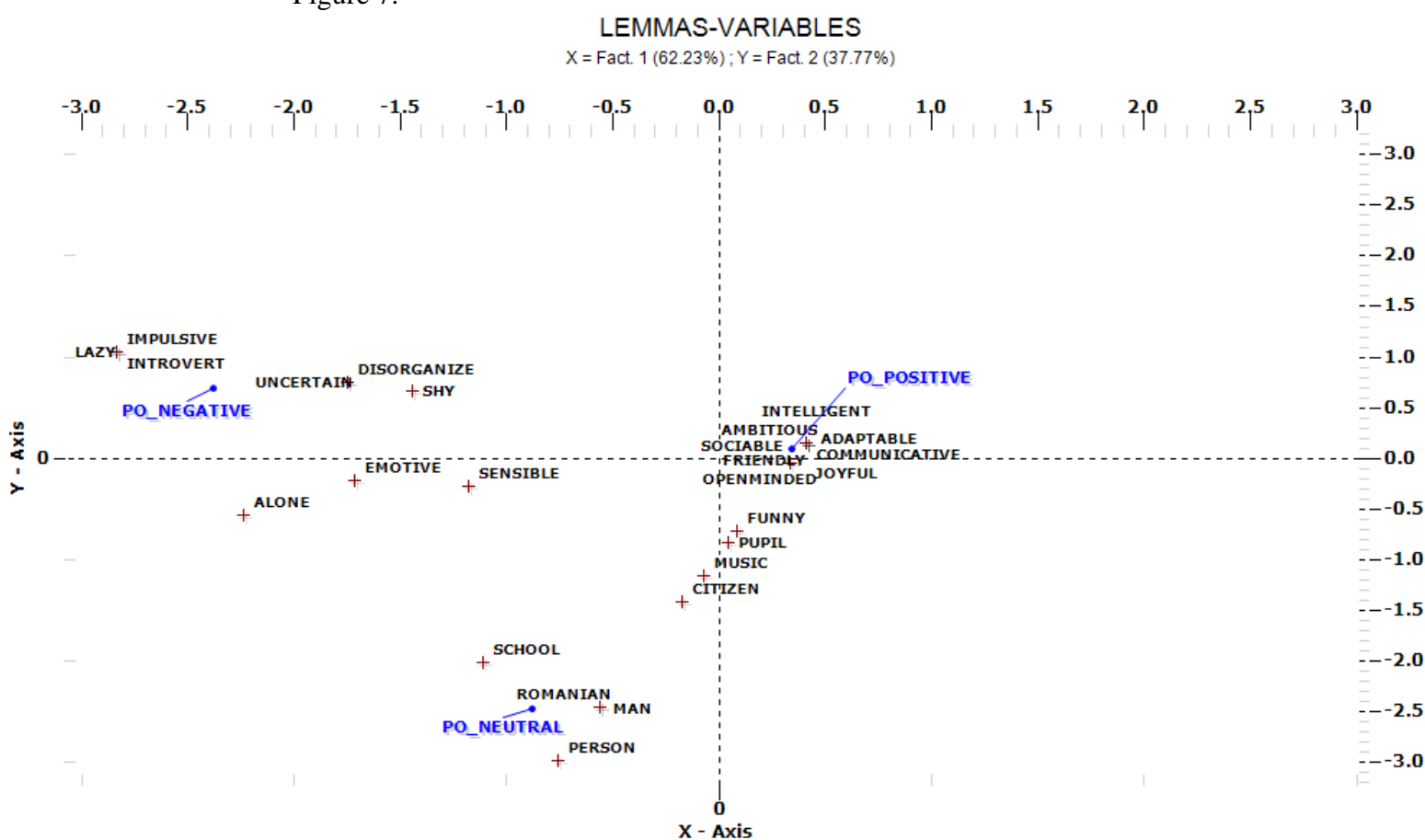


Figure 7: Lexical correspondence analysis for the corpus elicited using stimulus „Me” through the Associative Network Technique

The results are extracted in two factors: Factor 1 (X-Axis) explains 62.23 % of data variance (inertia), and Factor 2 (Y-Axis) explains 37.77 % of data variance. The data has been grouped by frequency, relevance and polarity. Therefore, we can distinguish three major aspects in the structure of the social representation of the self.

The first group of lemmas is represented by the candidates of the central nucleus (“friendly”, “sociable”, “joyful”, “ambitious”) plus the following ones: “intelligent”, “adaptable”, “communicative”, “openminded”. All these lemmas gravitate very closely around the positive polarity. These associations can be interpreted as a very large opening and usage for social media. For teenagers, the social representation of self begins with the two main characteristics “friendly” and “sociable”, and by later comparison with the central nucleus of social media that contains similar elements (“friends”, “socialization”) we can have the confirmation that these two aspects are not valid only in real life, but also in the virtual environment, and the lemma “adaptable” is a strong argument for this. If we refer also to lemma “intelligent”, then we realize that young people are not only open to social media and technology, but they even know how to use them. So, accessing the online environment no longer presents major secrets: everyone can create a social media account, join a virtual group, make friends online, upload photos and information. Considering the latest issues, namely “photos” and “information”, we can see further that they are also part of the central nucleus of the next social representation of social media. So, the relationship between a teenager and social media is very tight. Because information is closely related to communication, the positive connotation of the lemma “communicative”, from the social representation of self, shows us that that a main purpose for social media is to transmit or receive certain news. Because teenagers define themselves as “open minded” that means they are also oriented to current and future issues of their life, so they should be interested in what is happening in Romania as well as in the European Union. These last two subjects of interest are confirmed by the fact that through the stimulus “Me” were elicited the words “Romanian” and “citizen”. “Citizen” is placed on the graph halfway between the positive and the neutral aspect, and “Romanian” is just next to the neutral pole. The fact that the association of “Romanian” is near the pole of neutrality does not show us a lack of interest in the aspect of being Romanian, but rather that being Romanian is a fact that teenagers assume like something normal,

as their way of life. As for the lexical unit “citizen” we will notice in the following studies that there are surprisingly high correlations of teenagers with the lexical structure from social media “I am European citizen and I have rights”.

Returning now to self-representation, in the second group of neutral lemmas, besides “Romanian” we can also find “man” (in the sense of “human”, not of “male”) and “person”, which may be synonymous. Hence the idea that being Romanian is something normal. Another neutral word is “school”, which has already entered the everyday habit of a teenager.

The third group of lemmas is centered around the negative polarity. “Uncertain” may represent the fact that a teenager is not sure of his own strength or is not sure of his future in Romania. In addition to “uncertain” we can find on the graph another negative lemmas like “impulsive”, “introvert” and “lazy”. These are general characteristics of adolescents that are not necessarily new. But the question that arises now is whether social media has amplified these issues? At first glance, the answer can be yes, because of the comfort and “laziness” that social media channels promote, and because of the problems that arise when replacing human physical interaction with the virtual one. Also, we should observe on the graph three other words that are half the distance between negative polarity and neutral aspect: “sensible”, “emotive” and “alone”. The three lemmas can not be interpreted as qualities or defects, but we should question how can feel someone alone in social media, an environment that should do exactly the opposite: to help people make more friends and communicate more easily.

Because the correspondence analysis chart shows only the strongest keywords, the rest of the other elements were grouped into clusters using the K-Means method. We have obtained three clusters and the most numerous is the second cluster, which also contains the candidates for the central nucleus (Figure 8).



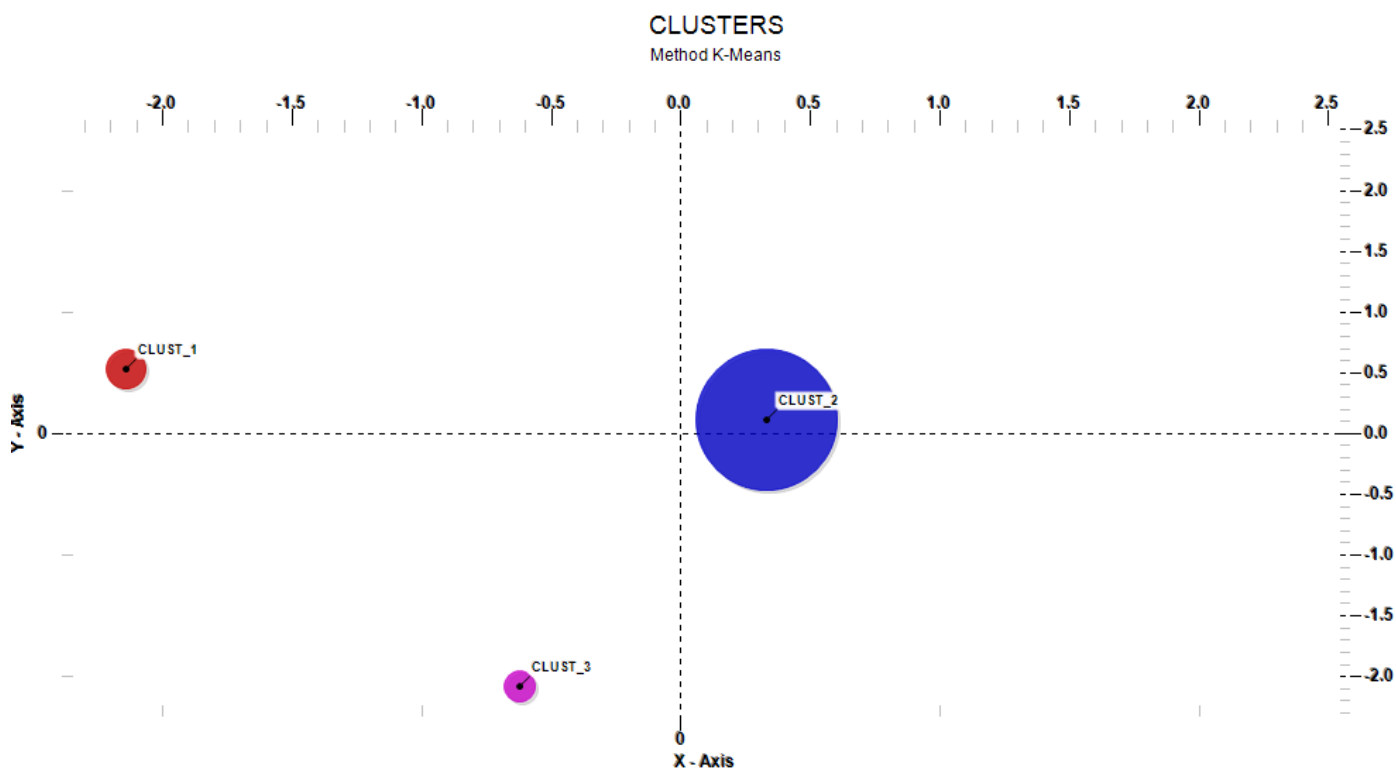


Figure 8: Cluster analysis for the corpus elicited using stimulus „Me” through the Associative Network Technique

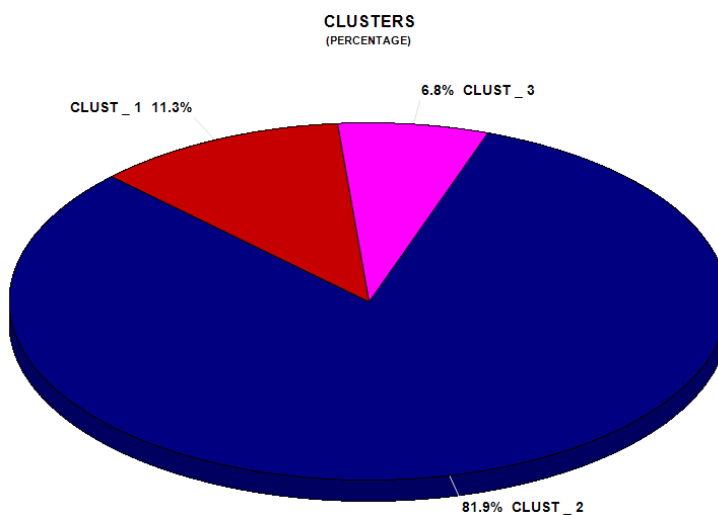


Figure 9: Clusters percentage for the corpus elicited using stimulus „Me” through the Associative Network Technique

Figure 9 shows the percentage of clusters (81.9 % - Cluster 2, 11.3 % - Cluster 1, 6,8 % - Cluster 3) and in Table 12 we can find the lemmas for each cluster.

Depending on the similarities and differences found, we named each cluster: Cluster 1 - “Sensitive aspects”, Cluster 2 - “Main look”, Cluster 3 - “Way of being”.

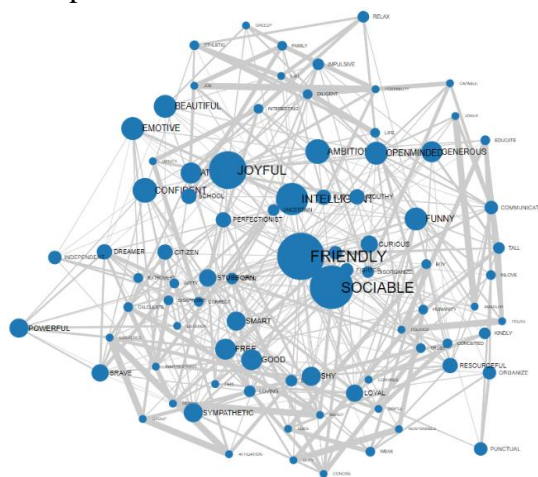
Cluster 1 “Sensitive aspects”		Cluster 2 “Main look”				Cluster 3 “Way of being”	
emotive	9	friendly	22	mouthy	5	citizen	5
lazy	9	sociable	20	future	5	perfectionist	5
shy	7	joyful	17	interesting	5	person	5
sensible	5	intelligent	14	honest	4	school	5
alone	3	hardworking	10	independent	4	Romanian	3
disorganize	3	ambitious	10	organize	4	man	3
impulsive	3	confident	10	calm	4	music	3
introvert	3	free	9	empathic	4		
jealous	3	beautiful	9	fighter	4		
uncertain	3	funny	9	communicative	4		
		good	9	cute	4		
		openminded	9	loving	4		
		generous	8	punctual	4		
		attentive	8	pupil	4		
		powerful	8	young	4		
		sympathetic	7	spontaneous	4		
		optimistic	7	tall	3		
		kindhearted	6	quiet	3		
		loyal	6	relax	3		
		brave	6	comic	3		
		creative	6	adaptable	3		
		curious	6	artist	3		
		stubborn	6	patient	3		
		smart	6	playful	3		
		resourceful	5	positive	3		
		sincere	5	open	3		
		dreamer	5	kindly	3		

Table 12: Cluster list with frequencies for the corpus elicited using stimulus „Me”

So far, we have not referred in our analysis to the lemma “joyful”, which is a candidate for the central nucleus, and the lemma “free” which has also a big relevance. These two lemmas can also be related to social media, to Romania, and to the European Union. Each of these three environments can influence self-representation in a certain way. Social Media can bring joy by getting good news about a friend, or by winning an online game, and at the same time can offer a freedom that no one else offers: “the freedom to be who you want on the Internet”. If we think of Romania, it offers the joy of homeland and family, extremely important elements that will be found in the social representation of Romania, and it offers freedom related to the native place and the mother tongue. As for the European Union, it offers joy through the possibility of knowing other places and peoples, and a kind of freedom that has greatly changed Romanians in recent years, freedom of crossing borders for traveling or settling in the EU member states.

The lexical corpus elicited from the stimulus “Me” is much larger, and during this research we will return to it for making diverse correlations, so that the results combine as many variables as possible.

Below, we can find the whole lexical corpus for stimulus “Me” with directed and weighted correlations. With this look at the data network (Figure 10), we are switching to social representation of social media, remarking the importance of the elements in the center, “friendly” and “sociable”. We will see further that there is a very high correlation between teenagers and social media; then, the research continues in a constructive manner because through social media there are several correlations with the European Union and Romania.



*Figure 10: Network data for corpus elicited using stimulus „Me”*

## II. Social Representations of Social Media

From the analyzes made so far, we go further with having an idea of what we could expect. We will not investigate isolated the social representation of social media, but we will put it in correlation with self-representation and especially with social representations of European Union and Romania. In order to have good terms of comparison, we have kept the same analyzes and computations for the lexical corpus elicited for stimulus “Social Media” and we will do the same for the following stimuli.

**A. “Inductive power”** for the stimulus “Social Media” is represented by **5.14** words elicited per participant (638 elicited words divided by 124 participants). This number is about 1 word/participant less than the “inductive power” for stimulus “Me”. This can be explained by the fact that teenagers know themselves much better than knowing a technology, even if, surprisingly, the age of some participants is sometimes similar to Facebook or YouTube age.

**B. Stereotyping index** has the value **-0.77** which means a low level of stereotyping, so a high level of differentiation in the dictionary.

**C. Polarity index** is **0.38**, which shows a positive connotation for the lexical corpus related to social media. Even though social media is a disputed field, some considering having good influences, others considering having bad influences, however, for teenagers, the general opinion is a positive one.

**D. Neutrality index** is **-0.28**, that means a few words are connotated neutrally; so, we can support the above result from the polarity index.

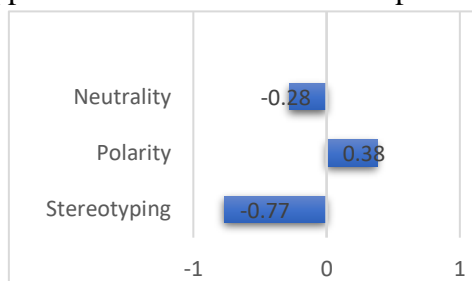


Figure 11: Indexes for stimulus “Social Media”

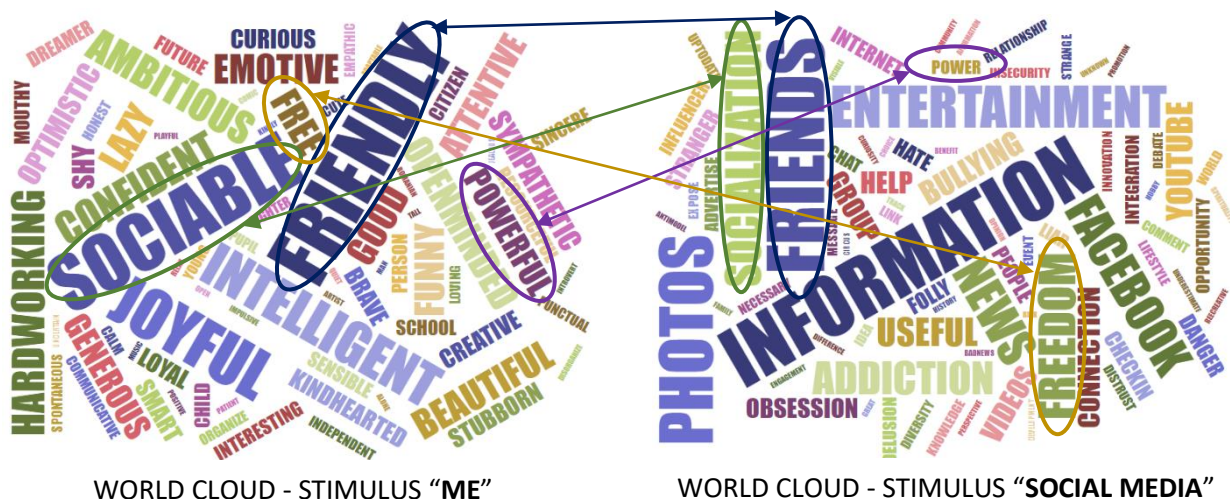
### E. Candidates for central nucleus of the Social Representation of Social Media

To keep the approximate proportions of the thresholds, I extracted the lexical occurrences with a frequency  $\geq 13$  and with average ranks  $\leq 3.3$ ; thus, we can propose the most appropriate candidates for the central nucleus of the social representation of social media in Table 13.

Lemma	Frequency	Average Rank
Information	34	3.20
Friends	31	2.80
Photos	27	3.25
Communication	19	2.47
Entertainment	18	2.94
News	18	3.11
Facebook	15	2.13
Socialization	13	2.30

*Table 13: Candidates for the central nucleus of the Social Representation of Social Media*

As we have shown in the beginning of the study, it is not surprising to find the lexical elements “friends” and “socialization” among the candidates of the central nucleus; basically, about this is social media. It is surprising that we can make a direct and strong correlation between the participants of the study and the use of social media. To have an overview of this correlation, we present the links made in the world clouds for the two stimuli “Me” and “Social Media” (Figure 12).



*Fig. 12: Comparison between word clouds from stimuli “Me” and “Social Media”*

We can clearly see the connections that appear between the two lexical fields, and the most important of these are found at the central nucleus of the two social representations.

Stimulus “Me”			Stimulus “Social Media”		
Lemma	Frequency	Central Nucleus	Lemma	Frequency	Central Nucleus
Friendly	22	✓	Friends	31	✓
Sociable	20	✓	Socialization	13	✓
Free	8		Freedom	14	
Powerful	7		Power	3	

*Table 14: Correlations between elicited corpuses for stimuli “Me” and “Social Media”*

From the above correlations, we can argue that social media is a perfect field in which teenagers can manifest themselves. The participants in the study were self-characterized as being “friendly” and “sociable”, so they can find the correspondence for their attributes in the main features offered by social media: finding “friends” and “socialization”. And the connection goes even further. Because the subjects were self-characterized as being “free”, they can find also “freedom” in social media. Thus, teenagers can find answers to their main needs in social media. And that does not seem to create discomfort, but on the contrary. Furthermore, it is also possible that the “power” with which they characterize social media will also help them to be “powerful”. But the reverse is also possible, the fact that teenagers are “powerful” can give “power” to social media, and such reciprocal relationships can be extended to all the interconnected elements. It is important to note that between teenagers and social media there is a much deeper connection than a superficial one, and this connection makes social media more than just a habit, but a lifestyle, a second nature of a teenager. Accessing social media is a natural daily activity, without something out of ordinary. In fact, the impossibility of daily access of social media has become a problem, not accessing it.

Therefore, we can easily deduce that accessing social media is a very important activity, and if we come back to the central nucleus of social representation of social media, we will see another surprising element. Not “friends” or “socialization” is the most important candidate for the central nucleus, but

“information”. This shows us that social media is also one of the teenagers’ favorite sources to get information; and if we consider that the lexical unit “news” is also part of the central nucleus with a very good frequency, we have no doubt about this statement.

If we think that at the time when we applied the Associative Network Technique the most discussed topics at national level were general news about Romania and about European Union (because during that period Romania held the presidency of the Council of the European Union, there were also preparations for the European Parliament election and preparations for the European Summit from Sibiu, Romania), it is impossible for teenagers not to have been informed through social media about these subjects.

In this context, we must also remember the date of January 4, 2017, when at a distance of 10 years of Romania’s accession to the European Union (January 1, 2007), a new Romanian Government was installed and promoted nationalism rather than European integration. However, in social media, we find surprisingly in studies 2 and 3 of this thesis that Romanian teenagers continued to have a good path towards European integration, as we noticed from Facebook discussions, or YouTube videos. And the frequency of these topics has increased lately, considering also the decision of Great Britain to leave the European Union, a decision that created a real interest in social media. In the next studies (2 and 3) we will be able to see from the perspective of social representations, how Brexit is perceived for Romanian teenagers.

Therefore, the connection between **self - social media - European Union - Romania** is a very strong one and teenagers take full advantage of the online environment to discuss specific themes such as European integration of Romania.

The online environment can bring many benefits, such as the speed of information, but can also stretch traps, like those related to fake news. And social media also feels these advantages and disadvantages. To further investigate the social representation of social media, we conducted a correspondence analysis for the lexical corpus elicited by applying the stimulus “Social Media”.

## F. Lexical correspondence analysis

From the total number of 638 occurrences for stimulus “Social Media”, T-Lab extracted 247 lemmas. Moreover, in order to have the best computations and results, we chose only the key-terms with a frequency  $\geq 3$ . So, we worked with a lexical field made by 52 lemmas.

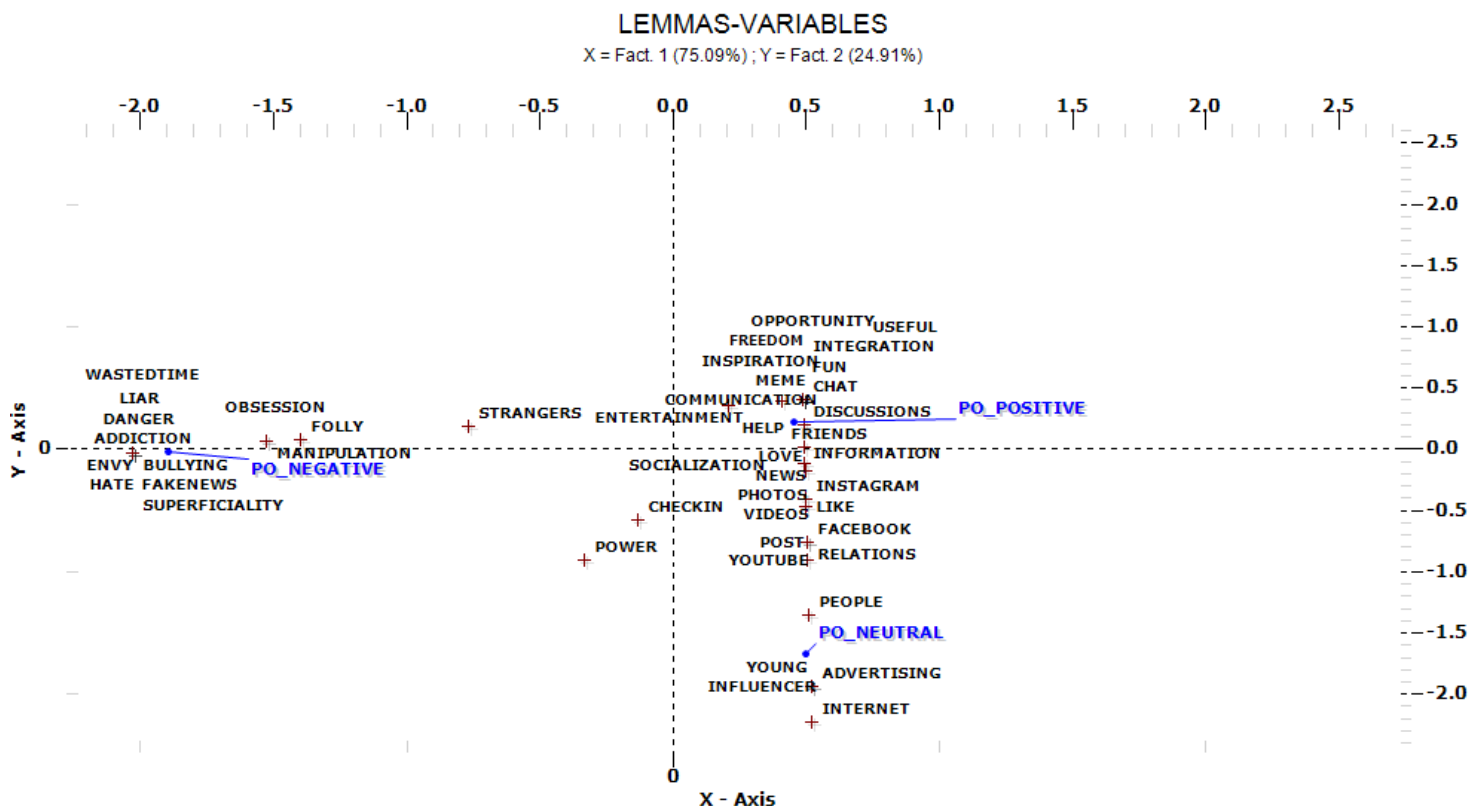


Figure 13: Lexical correspondence analysis for the corpus elicited using stimulus „Social Media” through the Associative Network Technique

The results are extracted in Factor 1 (X-Axis) that explains 75.09 % of data variance (inertia), and Factor 2 (Y-Axis) that explains 24.91 % of data variance. Most keywords are grouped around the positive pointer, as we expect to be, given that the polarity index is equal to 0.38. Because the general opinion of teenagers about social media is a positive one, they also attributed the aspect “useful”, which may be in a close correlation with the connection mentioned above between self - social media - European Union - Romania. Moreover, on the graph we can even find the lemma “opportunity”, which means that the participants in the study are aware



of the most benefits of social media. Besides the essential issues already discussed (“friends”, “socialization”, “information”, “news”) we can observe the keyword “integration”, which can also be interpreted as an integration aid for a particular aspect, in our case, for integration into European Union. It is worth noting that the “freedom” associated for social media, can be extended to the “freedom” of European Union (a more detailed analysis will be in the social representation of European Union) thus giving the teenager the feeling of being “free” as we have seen in the representation of self. Also related to social media and European Union, we can find the lemma “help”. If in the case of the stimulus “social media”, the frequency of “help” is 7, in the case of the stimulus “European Union”, the frequency is 20, being the strongest candidate for the central nucleus. So, we can think in terms of interconnectivity of the help that is offered from the two sides. Another good part is that integration and help can be perceived by the teenager in a fun way, because they associated social media with “fun” and “entertainment”. This can be a new perspective in education and in the mentality of young people, a positive exploitation through the Internet that basically does not impose anything. This last fact can even be considered one of the main reasons for mass usage of social media. Because the spread of social media is so big, the importance of another function is growing more and more nowadays: online chat. The positive link of lemmas “chat” and “communication” is also associated with “meme” which is a “virally-transmitted photograph that is embellished with text that pokes fun at a cultural symbol or social idea”<sup>35</sup>. So, once again the entertaining factor is highlighted in the social representation of social media. Because we talked about “meme” it is important to mention also lemma “photos”, which is the third candidate for the central nucleus structure. This shows that pictures, selfies, and their sharing are part of the mainstream activity of social media, and even from a teenager’s daily dose of fun. In addition to “photos” we can also find “videos”, both being strongly correlated positively. Now, we can move to the elements that are rather neutral. At halfway between positive and neutral, we find the lemma “post”. That might mean that a text post on social media is less successful than a video or a picture. Also, halfway between positive and neutral are the most famous social media platforms in Romania: “Instagram”, “Facebook”, “YouTube”. In this order they follow from positive to neutral, but the distances between them are very small. However, around

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<sup>35</sup> <https://www.lifewire.com/what-is-a-meme-2483702> (Accessed on April 5, 2019)

the names of the three platforms is located the lemma “relations”, that could mean Instagram, Facebook and YouTube are somehow connected and can produce a big variety of social relations. And because social interaction always deserves a response, in the same area we find the lemma “like”.

As for words that are especially neutral as meaning, we find “people”, “advertising”, “young” and “Internet”. This means that their presence, although one of great importance, is no longer felt, because it already has the appearance of something ordinary, which has been successfully assimilated into the structure of social representation of social media. But we still should stop on a keyword with a neutral charge: “influencer”. Perhaps we would have expected this word to be rather positive, or rather negative. But that does not happen, which could mean two things. Whether there are too many so-called Internet influences, and their fame has already gone, either teenagers do not believe in such models at all and look for idols elsewhere. Or could it mean a third thing, that social media alone has no power to impose any influencer.

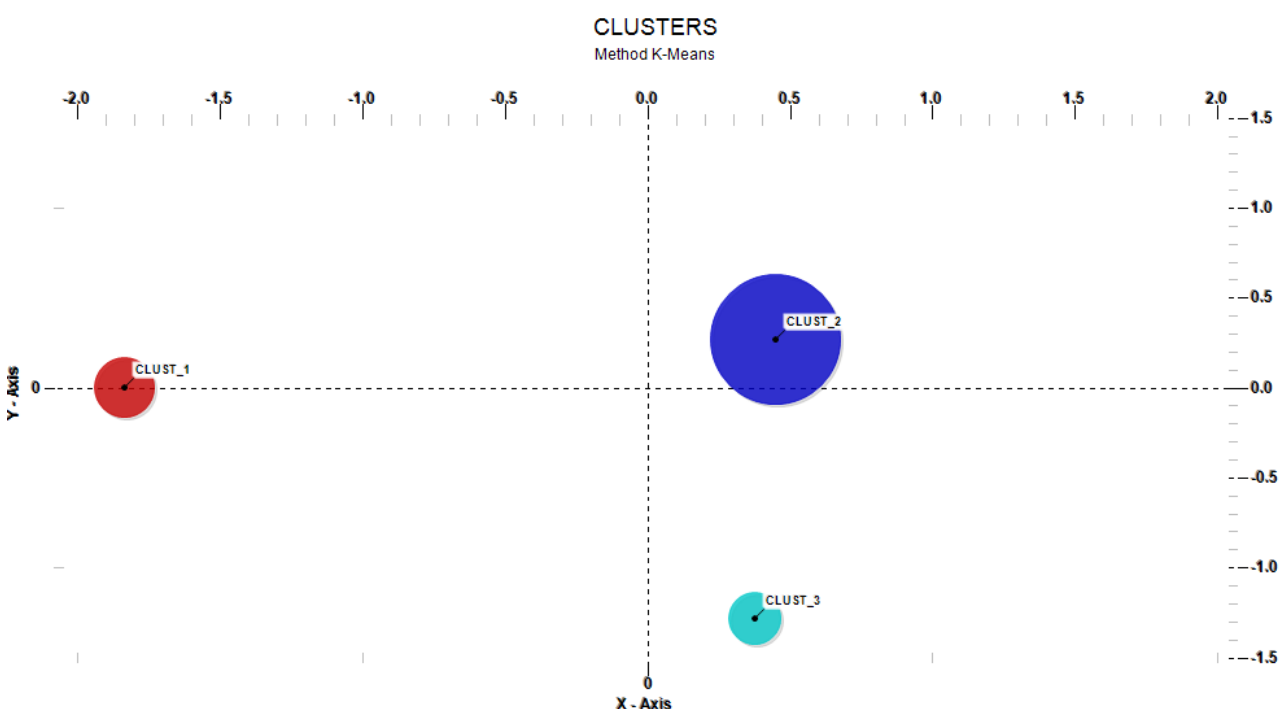
So far, we have discussed the positive and neutral parts of the social representation of social media. But now comes the part a bit more delicate, the one with negative valences. We will start our interpretation with the keywords “addiction” and “danger”. These two keywords should alert us about what social media is and what it does. Even if an addiction has been reached, it is noteworthy that teenagers are aware of this and especially that it can be a dangerous thing. Also, associating “bullying” with social media is a very sensitive thing. Going forward, associations continue with “fake news”, a phenomenon that has grown quite recently, and is closely related to “manipulation”. Considering social media one of the most important tools for information, as we argued, and considering the scandals that occurred during the year 2018 related to the leak of confidential information from the Cambridge Analytica<sup>36</sup> plus other similar cases, we can see that these negative representations are justified. Moreover, social media sometimes succeeds not only in disinforming, but even in creating envy and hatred among those who use it. That is why, with strong negative correlations, we also find the lemmas “envy” and “hate”. And these two are due to certain posts, photos or videos that want to highlight someone’s well-being. A big problem is when we deal with fake posts or edited pictures to present a superior reality. All these are traps of virtual identity,

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<sup>36</sup> <https://www.bbc.com/news/technology-45976300> (Accessed on April 5, 2019)

and for that we find a new keyword with negative connotations, “liar”. Following the above arguments, some find in social media a certain “superficiality”, just because some want to look more than what they are, or because information is sometimes inadequate verified. That is why social media is also characterized by the lemmas “folly” and “wasted time”. We will move now to the element “strangers” which is in the middle of the distance from positive and negative polarity. This positioning can mean through social media everyone can meet trustworthy foreign people, or on the contrary, foreign people who may be suspicious.

To make an even better picture of the lexical field of social representation of social media, we made a cluster analysis; the graph can be seen in Figure 14, the percentage of distribution in Figure 15, and the detailed frequencies of lemmas for each cluster in Table 15.



*Figure 14: Cluster analysis for the corpus elicited using stimulus „Social Media” through the Associative Network Technique*

The percentage pie shows how large is each cluster. Of all three, the most representative cluster is number 2 with 66.8% of lemmas. Here is located a big part of the candidates for the central nucleus and the most lemmas with positive connotations. The other two clusters are significant smaller. Cluster 1 has 19.3 % of lemmas, with mostly negative meanings, and cluster 3 has 13.9 % of lemmas with mostly neutral meanings.

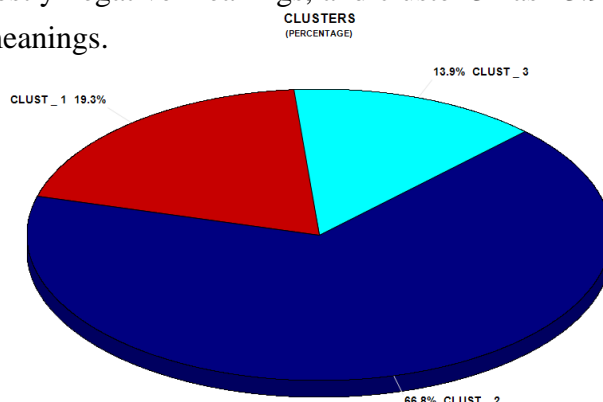


Figure 15: Clusters percentage for the corpus elicited using stimulus „Social Media” through the Associative Network Technique

Cluster 1 “Dark social media”		Cluster 2 “Virtual benefits”				Cluster 3 “Online normality”	
Addiction	12	Information	34	Videos	6	Facebook	15
Falsity	8	Friends	31	Connection	6	YouTube	8
Bullying	7	Photos	27	Discussions	5	Post	6
Wasted time	6	Communication	19	Inspiration	4	Check-in	4
Superficiality	5	Entertainment	18	Like	4	Internet	4
Envy	5	News	18	Love	4	People	4
Manipulation	5	Liberty	14	Meme	3	Advertising	3
Obsession	5	Instagram	13	Animals	3	Influencer	3
Strangers	4	Socialization	13	Chat	3	Power	3
Danger	4	Interesting	11	Fun	3	Relations	3
Folly	4	Useful	10	Games	3	Young	3
Hate	4	Help	7	Integration	3		
Liar	3	Group	6	Opportunity	3		
Delusion	3						
Fake news	3						

Table 15: Cluster list with frequencies for the corpus elicited using stimulus „Social Media” through the Associative Network Technique

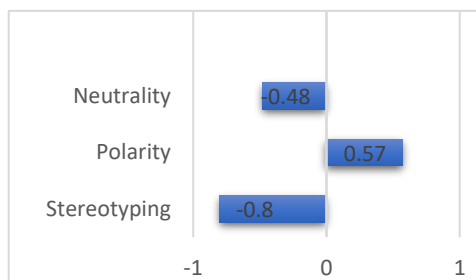


**A. “Inductive power”** for stimulus “European Union” is represented by **5.24** words elicited per participant (650 elicited words divided by 124 participants). This number is with 0.10 word/participant bigger than the “inductive power” for stimulus “Social Media”, which could mean an interest at least equal to the two stimuli, even with a slight advantage for “European Union”.

**B. Stereotyping index** has the value **-0.80** which means a low level of stereotyping, so a high level of differentiation in the dictionary.

**C. Polarity index** is equal to **0.57**, and it is the highest value of all four stimuli, showing that European Union has strong positive connotations for Romanian teenagers.

**D. Neutrality index** is **-0.48**, that means a low neutrality, so the value for polarity index can be supported.



*Figure 17: Indexes for stimulus “European Union”*

### E. Candidates for the central nucleus of the Social Representation of European Union

For the central nucleus we kept only the elements with a frequency  $\geq 11$  and with average ranks  $\leq 3.3$ , as can be seen in Table 16.

Lemma	Frequency	Average Rank
Help	20	2.7
Unity	17	1.88
Freedom	13	2
Funds	13	2.76
Power	13	3.15
Money	12	2.83
Democracy	11	2.54
Economy	11	3.09
Rights	11	3.18

*Table 16: Candidates for the central nucleus of the Social Representation of European Union*

We will continue to compare some relevant elements of the corpuses elicited for the previous two stimuli “Me” and “Social Media” with the corpus elicited for the stimulus “European Union”. In this way, we will observe the correlations created and we will be able to analyze how useful is social media to help a Romanian teenager to integrate into European Union.

Stimulus “Me”			Stimulus “Social Media”			Stimulus “European Union”		
Lemma	Freq.	CN	Lemma	Freq.	CN	Lemma	Freq.	CN
Free	8		Freedom	14		Freedom	13	✓
Powerful	7		Power	3		Power	13	✓
			Help	7		Help	20	✓
			Integration	3		Integration	5	
			Opportunity	3		Opportunity	6	
School	5					Education	5	
						Study	5	

*Table 17: Correlations between elicited corpuses for stimuli “Me”, “Social Media” and “European Union” (CN=Central Nucleus)*





We must also remark the frequency with which the lemmas appear, so that we will be able to analyze more easily the aspect of European integration through the Internet. Thus, we find in the lexical body of stimulus “Me” the lemma “free” with a lower frequency (8) than lemma “freedom” in the other lexical corpuses for “Social Media” and “European Union”. This can mean that *self-identity* in the real world is strengthened by *virtual identity*, which creates a certain kind of online freedom that is highly appreciated by teenagers, as we can deduct from the high frequency (14) of lemma “freedom” from “Social Media” corpus. More than that, the *supra-national identity* (European identity) strengthens even more the aspect of freedom with a high frequency (13) for lemma “freedom” which is a candidate for the central nucleus of the social representation of European Union. Thus, we can see the fine passage and the connection between the three social representations. We can even say that the freedom a teenager does not find in his real life can be found online in social media and physically in European Union. Therefore, social media and European Union may represent a “refuge” of freedom for teenagers. Interestingly, these types of freedom each have their own specifications, but they are complementary. If the freedom from Internet helps you to hide behind a mask in order to turn into another person in whose skin maybe you want to be in real life, the European Union offers the freedom of thought, giving the possibility to choose the diversity and even to start a new life. In addition, Internet always offers you the chance to express yourself freely, which is also one of the main rights of the European Union. More than that, Internet gives you the freedom to speak with everyone without restrictions and to search for information in any country, which is perfectly connected to the fundamentals of the European Single Market: free movement of goods, capitals, services and persons.

The same analysis can be done for lemma “powerful” from the lexical corpus associated with the stimulus “Me”. Here, “powerful” has a frequency of 8 for the social representation of self, and correlations can be made again with the social representations of social media and European Union. “Powerful” can be connected with lemma “power” from the lexical corpus concerning stimulus “Social Media”. Even in this case “power” has a frequency of 3, however, the connection is useful to move forward to the lexical corpus for stimulus “European Union”. In this last case, “power” is a candidate for the central nucleus with a frequency of 13. So, we

can appreciate again that social media and Internet are suitable factors for making connections between oneself and European integration.

For more to support this view, we will move to the following lemmas, which are quite suggestive: “help”, “integration”, “opportunity”. These lemmas can be also found in the lexical corpuses of the social representations of social media, as well as European Union. Noteworthy that lemma “help” has a frequency of 20 and is the strongest candidate for the central nucleus of social representation of European Union. That could mean more than the desire for European integration, but the need for a European integration of Romania. The correlation with lemma “help” from the social representation of social media, indicates that social media can mediate the European integration of Romania. The frequency of lemma “help” of just 7 in the case of social media can show that people still do not know how to take full advantage of the huge potential that social media can have in terms of European integration. The same situation is with next lemmas “integration” and “opportunity”. It is worth mentioning that these keywords were also elicited for both stimuli “social media” and “European Union”, which could mean that teenagers could have a good and interconnected reason to catch the opportunity for European integration of Romania through the Internet. It is ideal to seize this opportunity and make it greater and greater; we will argue the growing need for European integration through the Internet with a major example from a teenager’s life. One of his main interests is represented by school, as we can also deduct from lemma “school” that appears in the lexical corpus related to stimulus “Me”, and which is correlated with the lemmas “education” and “study” from the lexical corpus related to stimulus “European Union”. Therefore, in some cases, teenagers want to take advantage of the European integration of Romania, catching the opportunity to study in the European space. We can really think that this is happening successfully through social media and Internet, because we remember that the most important candidate for the central nucleus of social representation of social media is “information”. So, teenagers can search easier through Internet for more information about European studies and other European issues, such as travel or, why not, work.

To proceed further with more details about social representation of European Union, we conducted a correspondence analysis for the lexical corpus elicited using stimulus “European Union”.

## F. Lexical correspondence analysis

The lexical corpus for stimulus “European Union” is made of a total of 650 occurrences. After the lemmatization process resulted 260 lemmas. To have a more relevant analysis, we chose only the key-terms with a frequency  $\geq 3$ . So, the lexical corpus was reduced to 66 lemmas.

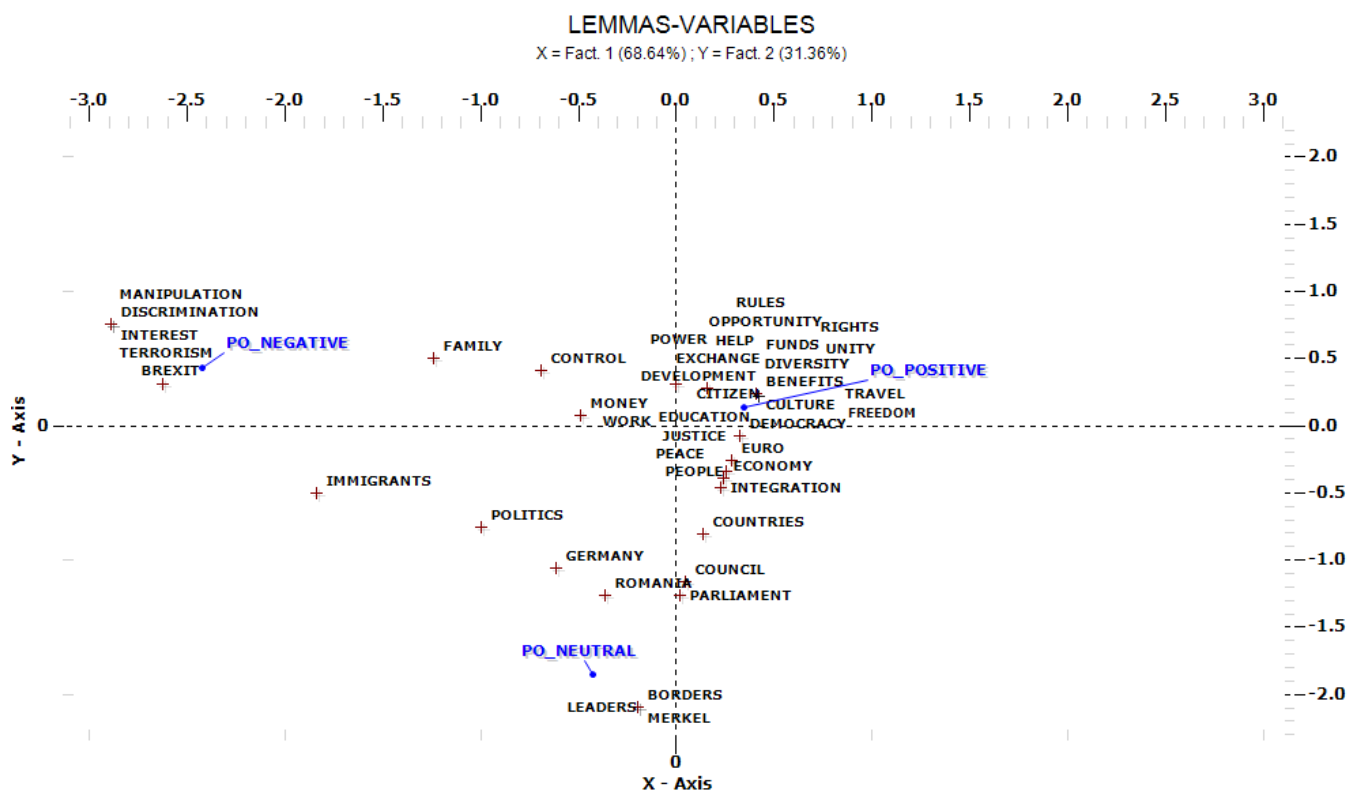


Figure 19: Lexical correspondence analysis for the corpus elicited using stimulus „European Union” through the Associative Network Technique

The results are represented in Figure 19 through two factors: Factor 1 (X-Axis) that explains 68.64 % of data variance (inertia), and Factor 2 (Y-Axis) that explains 31.36 % of data variance.

Among the important elements that we have not discussed so far, we can find the lemmas “funds”, “development”, “money” and “economy”, which, of course, refers to the financial side. All of them gravitate the closest to the positive pointer and can be grouped together with lemma “help” to highlight some of

Romania's benefits from the beginning of European integration: European development funds, high wages that may earn relatives or parents of teenagers abroad, and the overall support of a good European economy which can positively influence the Romanian economy.

If we also look at the central nucleus, we will find the second strongest candidate with a very positive connotation, which is lemma "unity". I think it is not surprising to find this lemma among those with the highest frequency, given that we are talking about the European "Union". It can be that "unity in diversity", because another high frequency lemma is even "diversity". Further analyzing Figure 19, we can see that teenagers have named also with high frequencies some main values of European Union: "freedom", which we discussed about, and "democracy". This makes us confident that the European integration process is an appropriate one.

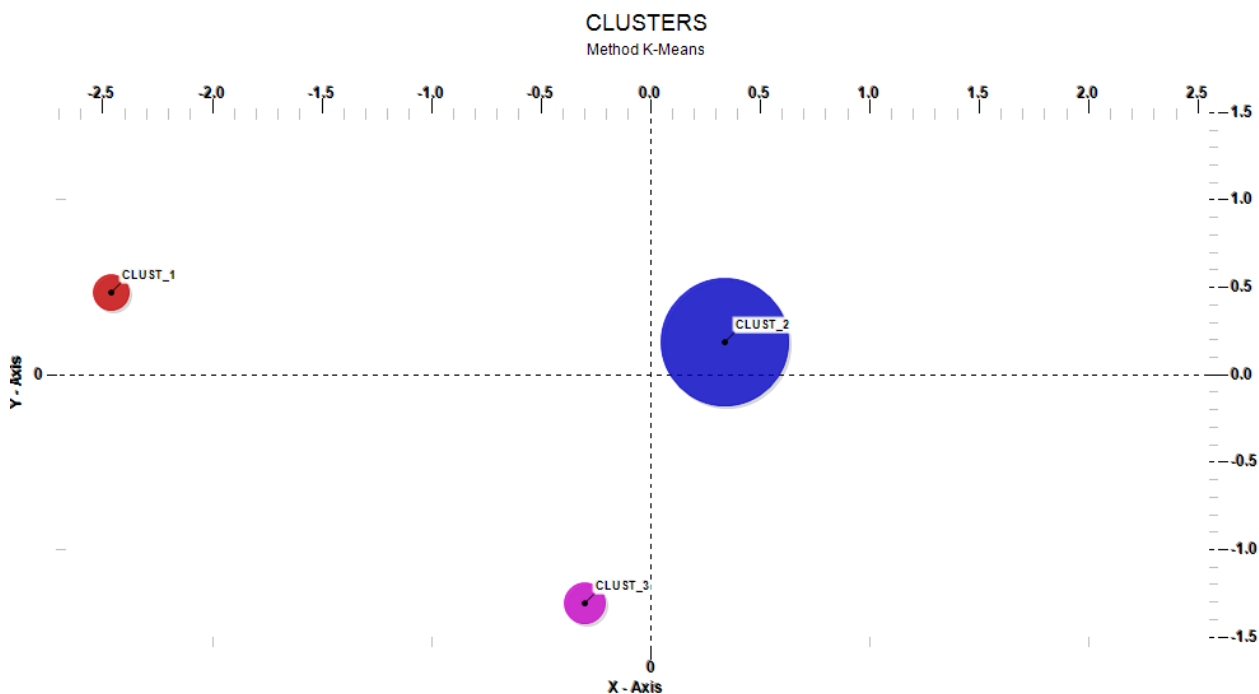
The lemma "benefits" is an additional proof to support lemma "help" as the strongest candidate for the central nucleus. Also noteworthy is that teenagers have elicited the keyword "rules" and gave it a strong positive connotation. This means they agree with a set of European rules and have not suffered because of them, but on the contrary. And the good part is also given by the lemma "rights", which Romanian teenagers seem to be aware of. Correlated with the lemma "citizen", we will see surprisingly in the studies 2 and 3 how often the quality of "European citizen" is used. For now, we just say that being a European citizen is a strong positive aspect that is also valid for lemmas "culture", "travel" and "exchange", which can be correlated with the element "open minded" from self-representation, demonstrating once again that teenagers are open to diversity and ready anytime to take advantage of European Union's benefits. Before moving to neutral elements, we must remain in the strong positive area to mention the lemma "peace", one of great importance, already knowing that European Union provides the longest period of peace in Europe, this being one of the reasons for its foundation.

Going now to neutral connotations, halfway between positive and neutral we find the lemma "countries". "Romania" and "Germany" have a neutral connotation, not because they are unimportant in the structure of European Union, but because their membership has become so natural, suggesting that membership qualities seem to have entered the daily routine. Also, in the neutral zone are lemmas "council", "parliament", "borders", "leaders", "Merkel" and "politics", which may mean that

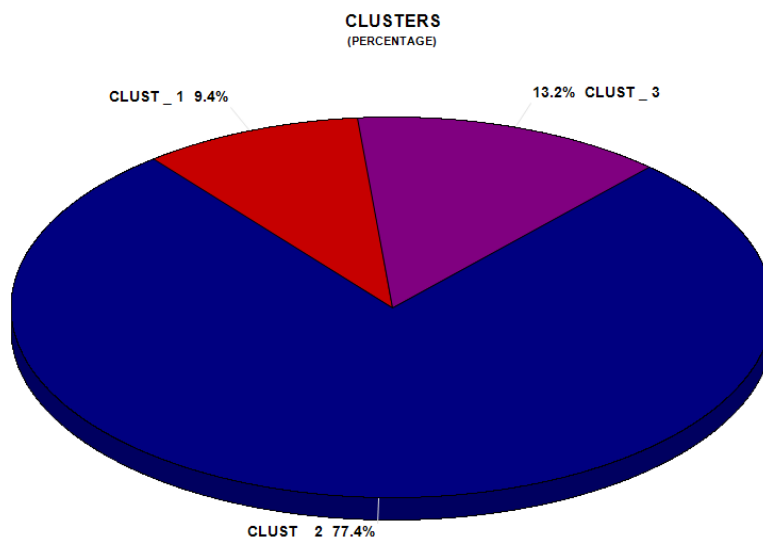
Romanian teenagers have already become familiar with all these aspects and respect them.

Turning now to the lemmas that are polarized negatively we find “Brexit”, which means that it has a bad influence on the European Union as well as Romania, but we will focus on this more broadly in the subsequent studies of this research. Other negative lemmas are “terrorism”, “interest”, “manipulation” and “discrimination”, which are indeed sensitive issues of the European Union. Another element with negative valences for the lexical corpus of the stimulus “European Union” is represented by “immigrants”, only with the mention that it is at a greater distance from the negative pole in the direction of neutral elements.

To see in detail the frequencies and polarities of all 66 lemmas that matter to the lexical corpus elicited for stimulus “European Union” we also ran a cluster analysis.



*Figure 20: Cluster analysis for the corpus elicited using stimulus „European Union” through the Associative Network Technique*



*Figure 21: Clusters percentage for the corpus elicited using stimulus “European Union” through the Associative Network Technique*

Cluster 2 is the largest (with 77.4 % of lemmas) and contains nearly all the candidates for the central nucleus plus the most elements with positive connotations. Cluster 3 is the second largest with 13.2 % of lemmas, most of them with neutral associations; cluster 1 is the smallest with 9.4 % of lemmas, most of them with negative meanings.

Each cluster received a name, depending on the component elements, as follows: Cluster 1 - “Disputed issues of EU”, Cluster 2 - “Advantages of EU”, Cluster 3 - “Familiar EU” (Table 18).

Cluster 1 “Disputed issues of EU”		Cluster 2 “Advantages of EU”				Cluster 3 “Familiar EU”	
Immigrants	10	Help	20	Justice	5	Countries	10
Brexit	9	Unity	17	Cooperation	5	Romania	9
Discrimination	5	Power	13	Education	5	Parliament	7
Terrorism	5	Funds	13	Future	5	Borders	6
Family	4	Development	12	Equality	4	Council	5
Interest	3	Freedom	12	Civilization	4	Germany	5
Manipulation	3	Money	12	Community	4	Rightness	4
		Rights	11	European	4	Leaders	3

Economy	11	Organization	4	Merkel	3
Democracy	11	Understanding	4	Politics	3
Diversity	10	Solidarity	4		
Travel	10	Stability	3		
Benefits	9	Projects	3		
Peace	8	Support	3		
Work	8	Vision	3		
Euro	7	Society	3		
Europe	6	Love	3		
People	6	Law	3		
Opportunity	6	Control	3		
Rules	6	Citizen	3		
Security	6	Culture	3		
Exchange	6	Alliance	3		
Trust	5	Good	3		
Study	5	Group	3		
Integration	5				

*Table 18: Cluster list with frequencies for the corpus elicited using stimulus „European Union” through the Associative Network Technique*

From the analysis we have done so far, we did not include a few elements, with the intention of treating them separately. These are the lemmas “family”, “work” and “euro”. “Family” is an element with a rather negative connotation, and the only explanation we have found is that families of Romanian teenagers may fall apart, because their parents choose to work in other European Union countries, leaving their children in Romania. However, lemma “work” has a rather positive connotation, probably teenagers thinking of the situation in which they will be able to choose to work in the European space. Above all, the economic advantage prevails and that could be shown to us through the lemma “euro”, which has a rather positive connotation, even if at the time of writing this thesis, Romania had not yet adopted euro.

Thinking again of all the connections during this analysis and looking at the correlations in Figure 22, we will see that the element “help” is at the center of the network and from there goes all the links, including those towards development and





**B. Stereotyping index** has the value **-0.89** which means a very low level of stereotyping, so a very high level of differentiation in the dictionary.

**C. Polarity index** is equal to **-0.04**, which means theoretically that positive and negative words tend to be equal. In fact, there are 337 negative words and 308 positive words.

**D. Neutrality index** is **-0.08**, that means theoretically a low neutrality; only 28 neutral words were elicited

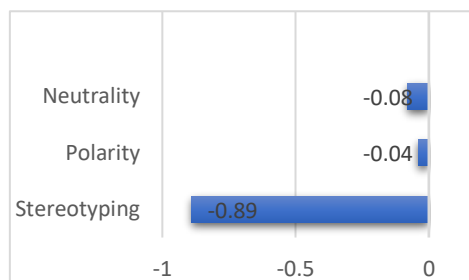


Figure 23: Indexes for stimulus “Romania”

#### E. Candidates for the central nucleus of the Social Representation of Romania

From the entire lexical corpus elicited for the stimulus “Romania”, we chose for the central nucleus only the lemmas that have a frequency  $\geq 10$  and average ranks  $\leq 3.3$ . The list can be found below in Table 19.

Lemma	Frequency	Average Rank
Corruption	34	2.11
Beautiful	28	2.28
Poverty	21	2.61
Home	15	2.13
Landscapes	14	2.71
Politics	13	2.92
Tradition	13	3.30
Theft	11	2.45
Potential	10	2.90

Table 19: Candidates for the central nucleus of the Social Representation of Romania



The lemma “help” is a key one. Even if it does not appear explicitly in the lexical corpus for stimulus “Me”, it can be said that the effects of this “help” are ultimately reflected on the Romanian teenager self. Instead, “help” appears in the lexical corpuses related to the other stimuli. If in the case of stimulus “Romania”, lemma “help” should be seen as a cry of help, in case of stimulus “European Union”, lemma “help” has the meaning of benevolence, of benefits granted. The link between the two can be made through stimulus “Social Media” which led to the appearance of same lemma “help”, here representing the huge advantage of quick information and discussions about European values, rights and obligations. In our times, we think Internet is not just the best way to get this type of information, but maybe it is the only way for teenagers. Considering the teenagers’ appetite for technology, we believe that Internet, which is the base for social media, can influence and mediate in a decisive way the European integration process for Romania. Other correlations can be found in Table 20.

Stimulus “Social Media”			Stimulus “Romania”			Stimulus “European Union”		
Lemma	Freq.	CN	Lemma	Freq.	CN	Lemma	Freq.	CN
Help	6		Help	4		Help	20	✓
			Poverty	21	✓	Money	12	✓
						Funds	14	✓
			Unemployment	5		Work	8	
			Under-developed	3		Development	12	

*Table 20: Correlations between elicited corpuses for stimuli “Social Media”, “European Union”, “Romania” (CN=Central Nucleus)*

We will begin with the complementarity that can be associated with the most important elements, central nucleus candidates. “Poverty” is the third most powerful candidate for the central nucleus of social representation of Romania. It is that kind of material poverty that can be helped with “money”, candidate for the central nucleus of social representation of European Union. We all know that money does not come anyway, but by accessing European “funds”, another candidate for the central nucleus. Here, Internet is very important because it can be the source of

information for various European projects to attract investment. Also, through Internet, people can look for better-paid jobs abroad, thus taking advantage of the “work” from European Union. This may reduce “unemployment” in Romania. Another benefit of European integration can be seen through the connection of lemma “underdeveloped” from the lexical corpus related to stimulus “Romania” to the complementary lemma “development”, relevant for stimulus “European Union”. In this case, Internet can have a determinant role. For example, even for teenagers, Internet can be the basis for start-ups to access European funding, and ultimately, it all leads to the development of Romania. Also, the spread of Internet coverage in the country side can be beneficial to develop rural areas, at least if not through immediate economic development, but by developing a new modern way of thinking and broadening horizons, consulting online European courses, or simply by being connected to the realities of other European countries. Because we mentioned online courses, we are focusing now on lemma “illiteracy” from the corpus associated with the stimulus “Romania”. According to “Ziarul Financiar”<sup>37</sup> (“Financial Newspaper”), the rate of functional illiteracy in Romania for 2018 was 40 %. Functional illiteracy means that a person can write or read in a precarious way a text, but without understanding its meaning. This could be improved by European “education”, lemma from the lexical corpus of stimulus “European Union”. Improving does not mean sending functional illiterates to study in Europe, because it would not be appropriate, but it could mean accessing educational programs and European funds to prepare some online video or audio materials to be a help in learning process.

We believe that at this moment, Internet and European integration bring important advantages to Romania, and especially teenagers should learn to use them for the “hope” they invoked in the lexical corpus associated with the stimulus “Romania”. More connections about this lexical corpus, we will find further, when we applied the correspondence analysis.

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<sup>37</sup> <https://www.zf.ro/eveniment/romania-anului-2018-generatiile-viitoare-40-analfabeti-functional-social-cauza-lipsei-educatie-primara-ceea-insemna-catastrofa-piata-muncii-business-economie-viitor-vom-ajunge-tara-vom-importa-tot-16919263> (Accessed on April 12, 2019)

## F. Lexical correspondence analysis

After applying the stimulus “Romania” through the Associative Network Technique, they were elicited 673 occurrences, which have been transformed into 296 lemmas. Afterwards, for a more efficient analysis, we reduced the number of lemmas to 60, keeping only those with a frequency  $\geq 3$ .

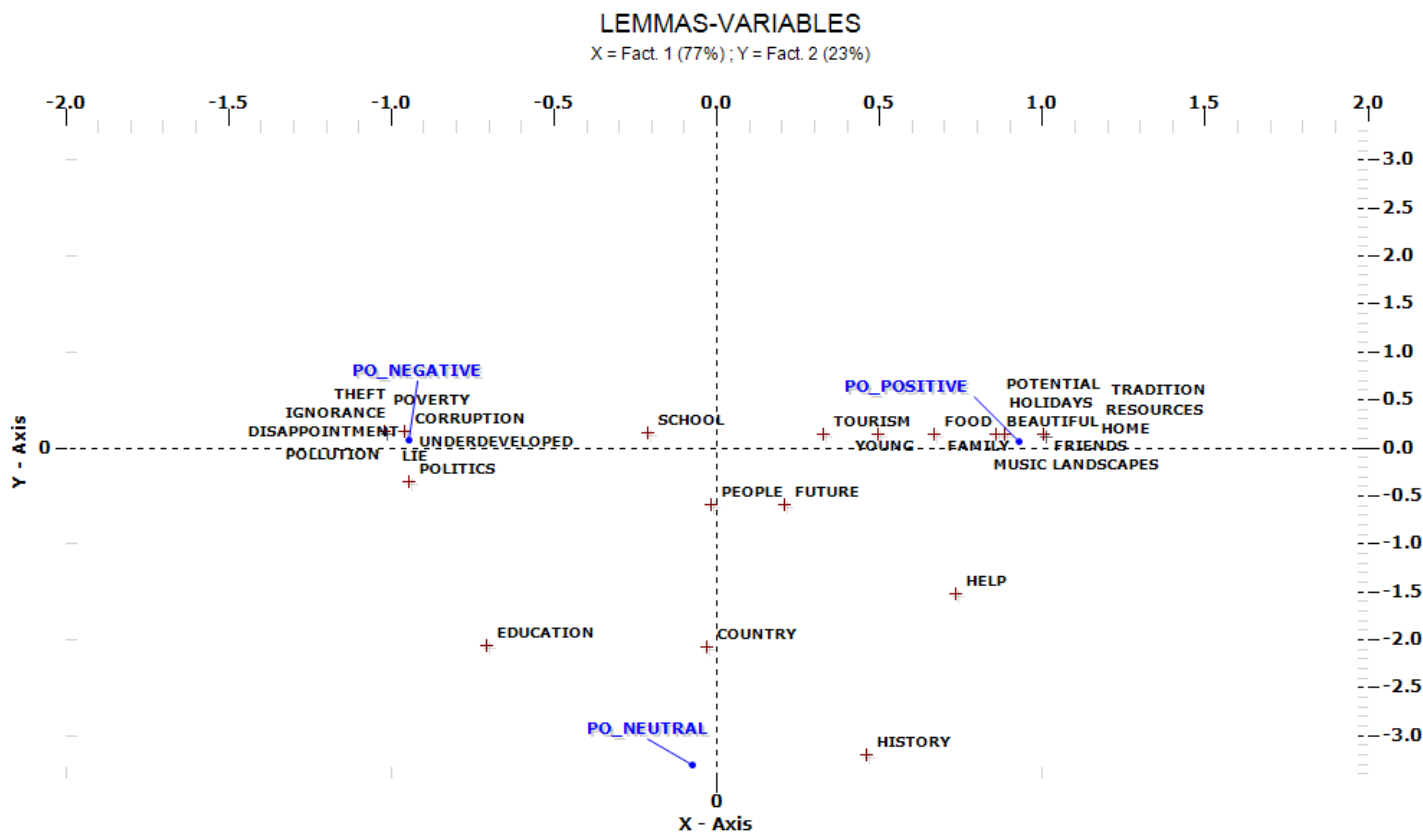


Figure 25: Lexical correspondence analysis for the corpus elicited using stimulus „Romania” through the Associative Network Technique

The results of correspondence analysis for stimulus “Romania” are represented in Figure 25 through the following factors: Factor 1 (X-Axis) that explains 77 % of data variance (inertia), and Factor 2 (Y-Axis) that explains 23 % of data variance.

From this graph we can see that candidates for the central nucleus are divided between the positive pole and the negative pole. The strongest candidate is “corruption” with a very high frequency of 34, and a strong negative connotation.

This demonstrates once again the help that Romania needs from European Union and social media. Even though social representations may persist for many decades, they are not static, and change may be influenced by other forces in society (Hayes, 1995, p. 84). And in this case, Internet is a real force, which together with European integration, can change in time the perception of corruption into something better.

The second most powerful candidate for the central nucleus is “beautiful”, being positive, also like the lemmas “landscapes”, “tradition”, “music”, “food”, “holidays” and “tourism”. All these lemmas point out the beauty of Romania. If we add the lemmas “home”, “friend” and “family” we will be able to see the attachment of teenagers to their homeland. We should note that in the case of Romania, “family” has a positive connotation, which means that family is reunited here, while in the case of European Union, “family” has a negative connotation, which could mean that family is divided because of freedom of movement.

Returning to the central nucleus candidates for Romania, we can see in the negative part of the chart lemma “poverty” about which we discussed when we compared the world clouds, and lemma “theft”, which can be in close correlation with “politics”, “lie”, “ignorance”. All these lemmas tell us that Romanian teenagers realize the realities in the country and are aware even of the negative parts. In addition, we can find “disappointment”, but if we look again in the positive area, we will find a little hope referring to “resources” and “potential”. These two positive elements can certainly be exploited by the power of Internet and can be included in various European programs to enhance their benefits, so we can take advantage again of the integration process.

If we look at the elements with a rather neutral connotation, we will observe few lemmas at important distances from each other: “history”, “country”, “education”. These three can be a confirmation for everything we have interpreted so far, that there is a “compromise” of the positive and negative elements presented above. Only for lemma “education” the direction tends to turn to the negative area in contrast to lemma “education” from the lexical corpus referring to the stimulus “European Union”, which has a strong positive connotation. This means that teenagers are more pleased with the educational system in European Union. Moreover, thanks to European integration of Romania and thanks to Internet, the possibility to attend an educational program abroad is much higher, and one of the

real proofs of these arguments is the thesis you read right now, written by a Romanian who is enrolled at Sapienza University of Rome.

To go further and to see the distribution of all the 60 lemmas from the lexical corpus related to stimulus “Romania”, we did a cluster analysis.

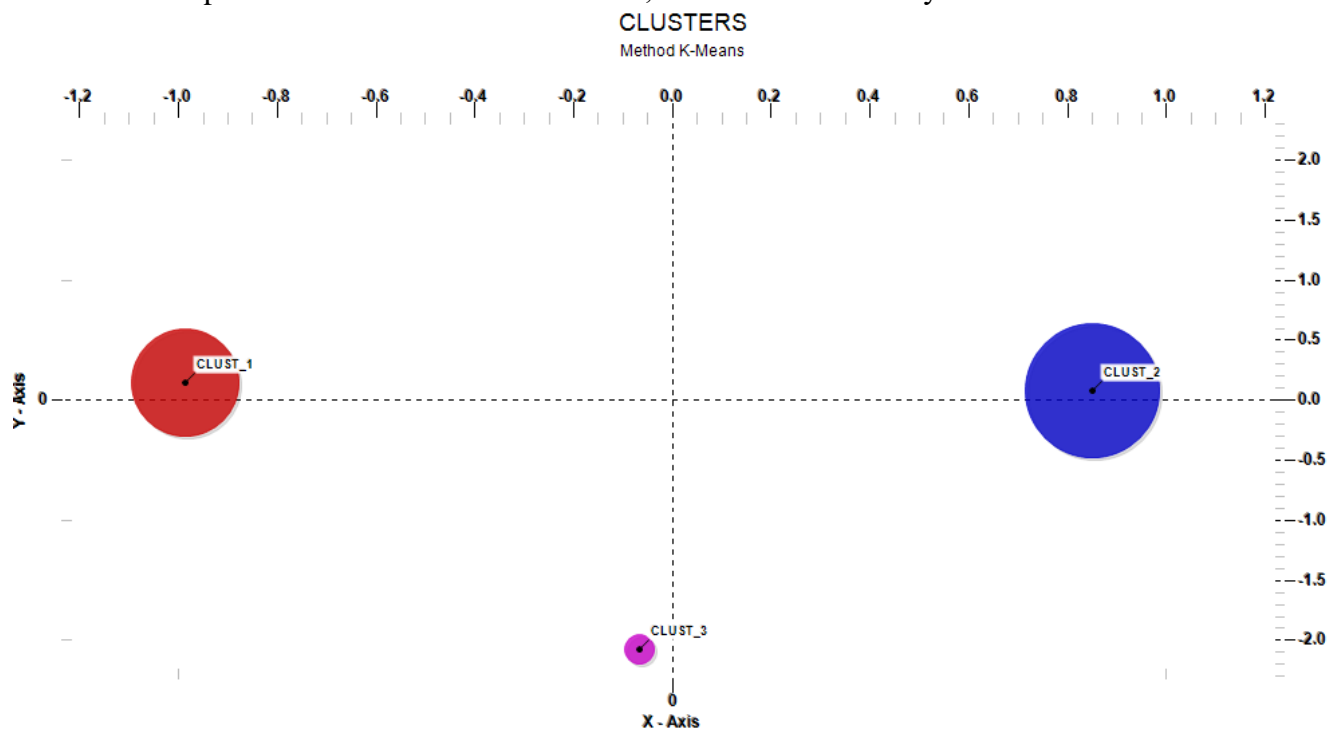


Figure 26: Cluster analysis for the corpus elicited using stimulus „Romania” through the Associative Network Technique

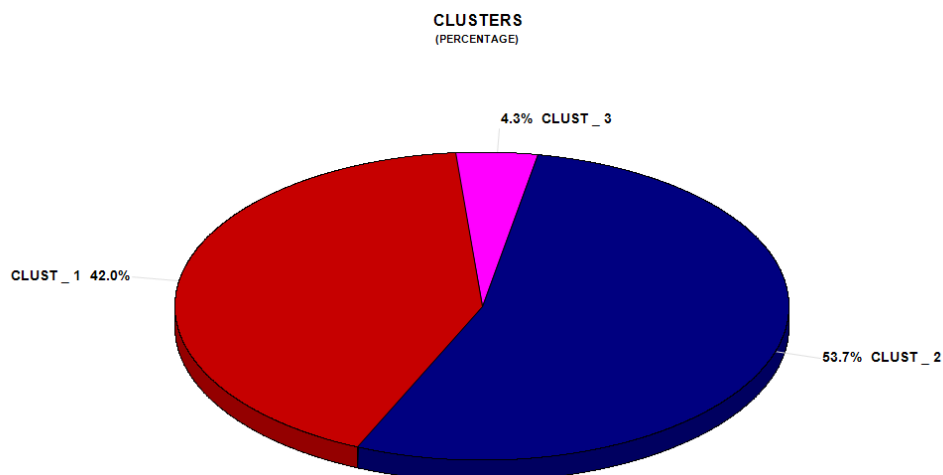


Figure 27: Clusters percentage for the corpus elicited using stimulus „Romania” through the Associative Network Technique

Figures 26 and 27 support the result from Polarity index, as positive and negative words tend to be equal. Compared to previous stimuli, this time the difference between the dominant cluster and the other two clusters is no longer so great. Cluster 2 is the largest with 53.7 % of lemmas and contains the most part of positive connotations. At a small distance is cluster 1 with 42 % of lemmas and the most part of negative connotations; the smallest is the cluster 3 with 4.3 % of lemmas, most of them being neutral. Each cluster received a name: Cluster 1 - Romania's worries, Cluster 2 - Romania's pride, Cluster 3 - Romania can better.

Cluster 1 - Romania's worries				Cluster 2 - Romania's pride			
Corruption	34	Problems	3	Beautiful	28	School	5
Poverty	21	Quiet	3	Family	17	Sarmale (food)	4
Politics	13	Chaos	3	Home	15	Young	4
Theft	11	Underdeveloped	3	Landscapes	14	Holidays	4
Illiteracy	8	Pollution	3	Tradition	13	Love	4
Ignorance	7	Manele (music)	3	Potential	10	Patriotism	4
Unemployment	5	Injustice	3	Homeland	9	Opportunity	3
Disappointment	5	Garbage	3	Future	9	Music	3
Dragnea	4	Highways	3	People	9	Green	3
Economy	4	Hospital	3	Nature	8	Mother	3
Infrastructure	4	Lie	3	Hope	7	Tourism	3
Mici (food)	4	Disorganization	3	House	6		
Sadness	4	Crisis	3	Food	6		
Stagnation	3			Resources	5		
Cluster 3 - Romania can better							
Help	4	Education	3	Misery	3		
History	4	Country	3				

*Table 21: Cluster list with frequencies for the corpus elicited using stimulus „Romania” through the Associative Network Technique*

Until now, we have not focused on the word “politics”, which has a strong negative connotation and is closely related to the lemma “Dragnea”. Liviu Dragnea is a Romanian politician, the head of the party that has been in power in Romania since December 2016, after winning national parliamentary elections. From that





#### 4.7. Discussions and conclusions

It is important to investigate the social representation of social media at Romanian teenagers, especially considering the polemical views from the first chapter, where we highlighted the positive and negative effects of social media. Although former Facebook or WhatsApp leaders are demanding the rapid removal of social media accounts – even the current Facebook CEO, Mark Zuckerberg, being aware of the negative effects of Facebook on young people – our study shows that Romanian teenagers have a strong positive social representation of social media, so that the hypothesis a) is validated. Also, we noticed that social media is viewed both as a means of information and as a means of socializing, being a good environment to make friends and to communicate, to share photos, to be entertained, and to find news. In previous studies, social media is seen either as a means of information or as a means of socializing. If in the study of Buschini and Cristea (2018) the central nucleus was made up of predominantly socializing elements (“Internet, find people, a means of communication, having friends, a community and a site”) in the study of Lu, Zhang and Fan (2016) the elements of the central nucleus are related to information (“interaction platform, information quality, information content”). In comparison, in the central nucleus of our research there are both types of elements: “information, news, friends, socialization”.

Analyzing all four central nuclei of the social representations of self, social media, European Union and Romania, we can validate hypothesis b). So, there are common elements between at least two of the central nuclei, the most powerful ones being between self-representation (“friendly” and “sociable”) and social media (“friends” and “socialization”). This means that teenagers can easily find their greatest needs in social media; moreover, it can mean that social media has become a natural part of daily activity. In fact, “nowadays, social media does not necessarily refer to what we do, but who we are” (Griffiths & Kuss, 2017, p. 49). Other connections can be made between the two central nuclei of European Union and Romania, with elements not synonymous but complementary: while the first nucleus contains the elements “money” and “funds”, the second contains “poverty”. Also, outside the central nuclei we have such complementary elements, “unemployment”, “underdeveloped” for Romania, and “work”, “development” for European Union. This could mean that the European Union can be a real help for

Romania, and social media can mediate the aid. Proof is the link of the element “help”; it is the strongest candidate for the central nucleus related to the social representation of European Union, and at the same time it can be part of the peripheral systems of the social representations of social media and Romania. Our results are consistent with those found by Chiciudean & Corbu (2015), who analyzed Eurobarometers for 7 years and concluded that “the citizens of Romania believe that the European Union is the answer to their hopes of personal prosperity and growth, consolidating a myth of the savior, which projects an aura of trust and stability onto the European Union”.

Another very important connection can be seen between the social representations of self (with elements “free”, “powerful”), of social media (“freedom”, “power”) and of European Union (“freedom”, “power”). The elements mentioned in the parenthesis are only part of the central nucleus of the social representation of European Union, and this could mean that the freedom and the power of European Union are transferred through social media to the individual, which thus becomes more powerful and enjoys greater freedom.

If we look more closely to other elements related to social representations of European Union and social media, for both we can find the elements “opportunity” and “integration”, which could even literally mean an opportunity for the European integration of Romania. All the connections between European Union and Romania through social media are obviously positive. In fact, there was no similarity between the negative elements, which makes us validate the hypothesis c) that the social media positively influences the European integration of Romania, even though the general political current in Romania is one of national sovereignty.

Regarding the hypothesis d) we were able to investigate it only through the applied questionnaire, where we had a surprising result. Assuming Romanian citizenship and European citizenship has led to antagonistic feelings. Thus, European citizenship positively influences the European integration of Romania, as we expected, but Romanian citizenship does exactly the opposite. To further test this hypothesis, we will transfer it to the next studies. Also, through the questionnaire, we came to a result that we would not have expected at the beginning of the research. In the declarative way, Brexit is the EU-related topic that attracts the most interest from teenagers in social media. Moreover, from the regression analysis related to the questionnaire, we have concluded that Brexit could negatively

influence the European integration of Romania. This is also confirmed by the key-term “Brexit” that appears in the lexical corpus elicited by stimulus “European Union” with a strong negative polarity. We will continue to test this conclusion in the second and third studies.

So far, the results could validate almost all the working hypotheses, with only one exception related to the assumption of Romanian citizenship. More than that, we have demonstrated that there is a constructive link between the elements of all four social representations analyzed, so we can also speak of a positive interconnectivity between self - social media - European Union - Romania.

## **5. STUDY 2 - YouTube content analysis**

The second study is a continuation of the first, so we will investigate the underlying dimensions of the social representation of social media, bringing into discussion a new aspect, namely the recent Internet regulations adopted by the European Union. We will see how much these regulations have the force to change the structure of the social representation and the positive polarity of elements.

We will also analyze the opposite direction, that means the influence that social media has on the European integration process of Romania, considering the most important elements that we have encountered so far, especially the help that European Union can offer to Romania, the assumptions of European and Romanian citizenships, and the impact of Brexit talks.

Therefore, we conducted a content analysis on YouTube videos, selecting only the topics that included comparative views about European Union and Romania, and opinions on how European Union influences social media and the Internet.

### **5.1. Objectives and hypotheses**

#### **Objectives**

- i) to analyze the underlying dimensions of the social representation of social media, considering the Internet regulations brought by European Union through Article 13;
- ii) to assess how YouTube as part of social media can be a link between the individual and between the European integration of Romania;
- iii) to investigate the negotiation of national identity and supra-national identity in the process of European integration.

#### **Hypotheses**

- a) the social representation structure of social media can be negatively influenced by Article 13 (European Internet regulation);
- b) as part of social media, YouTube has contributed positively to the European integration of Romania, even though the general political current in Romania is one of national sovereignty;

- c) assuming European citizenship on YouTube positively influences European integration of Romania;
- d) assuming Romanian citizenship on YouTube negatively influences European integration of Romania;
- e) discussions about Brexit on YouTube have a negative impact on the European integration of Romania.

## **5.2. Method**

### **a) Data collection**

To select the relevant videos for the study, I used the search function on YouTube with a variety of keywords that are related to Article 13, European Union, Romania, and Internet. All results were manually sorted and most of these are video blogs, speeches in the European Youth Parliament, European activities and projects in schools, debates on different European themes, and interviews on European issues. The analyzed content was represented by teenagers' words extracted from the videos. Written comments or video annotations have not been analyzed, because in most situations they were missing or irrelevant. The age of the analyzed subjects is between 13-19 years old, and it has been verified with the information obtained from the context of the videos, or from additional YouTube channel information, or from other social media pages associated.

Thus, 148 videos were analyzed, totaling over 1,000 minutes. The content of the videos was mostly in Romanian, with only two exceptions in English. Of the analyzed videos, only 115 subjects were selected (male = 51, female = 64), meeting the eligibility criteria for age and theme of speech. Their relevant opinions for the topic of the study summed 1,545 words. The period from which the videos were chosen is 2016-2019.

### **b) Data analysis**

The analysis was performed with T-Lab Plus 2019 version 4.1.1.4. The preliminary phase consisted in the identification of elementary contexts and then applying the lemmatization process. Therefore, the total number of 1,545 words

have been converted to 1,312 lemmas. Then to increase relevancy, the number of lemmas was reduced to 69, keeping only those key-terms with a frequency  $\geq 4$ .

The 69 lemmas were subjected to Thematic Analysis of Elementary Contexts, which involves Hierarchical Cluster Analysis based on bisecting K-means method. The computations were made through a cross-matrix of the elementary contexts with the key-terms (clusters  $\times$  lexical units).

In addition, we also created an independent variable to be considered as related to elementary contexts: the general opinion of each of the 115 subjects was treated as an elementary context and classified manually as positive, negative or neutral, depending on the meaning of the message, the non-verbal and paraverbal language, and the description or title of the video.

Running the analysis generates a set of clusters in which key-terms are grouped in a meaningful way. In our case, we chose not to get more than 10 thematic clusters, and the number of co-occurrences within the context units was set to a minimum threshold of 5. The key-terms were ranked following a chi-square test, depending on the occurrences of the word in the cluster it belongs to, the total number of occurrences of the word throughout the text corpus, and all occurrences of the word, both in the whole text corpus and in the cluster.

For a more detailed investigation, the data from the contingency tables obtained were introduced in a correspondence analysis along with the independent variable (clusters  $\times$  variable). Thus, by creating a two-dimensional representation we can establish relations between clusters and polarity.

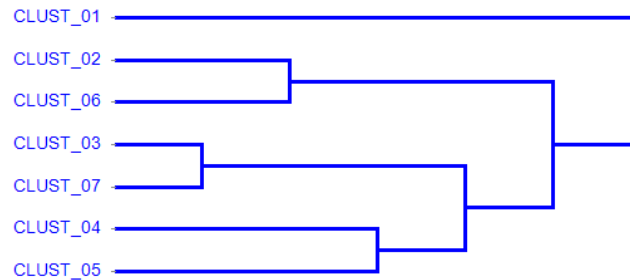
### 5.3. Results

a. The algorithm used (bisecting K-means) produces a *Hierarchical Cluster Analysis* that indicated 3-7 clusters as available partitions (Table 22):

PARTITION	INDEX	GAP	SELECTED	PARENT	CHILD
2 clusters	0.09	0.00		1	2
3 clusters	0.17	0.08		2	3
4 clusters	0.26	0.09	<<	3	4
5 clusters	0.34	0.09		4	5
6 clusters	0.39	0.04		2	6
7 clusters	0.44	0.05		3	7

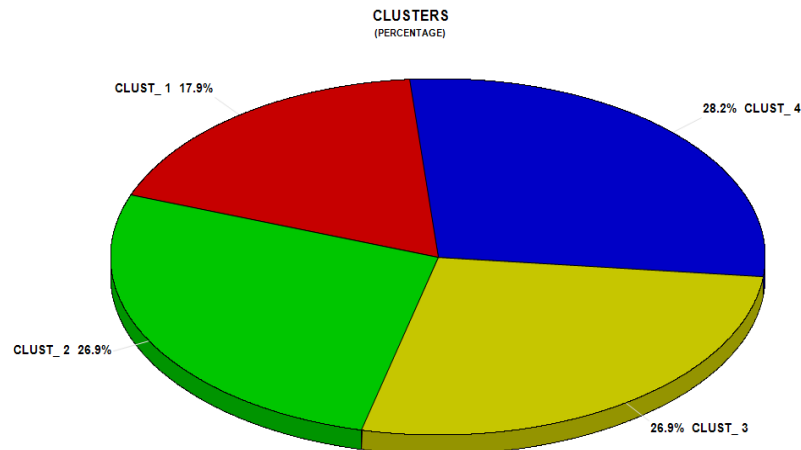
Table 22: Available partitions for hierarchical cluster analysis, YouTube corpus

Partition index values are increasing, being obtained by dividing the between cluster variance by the total variance. The biggest gap we find in partitions with 4 and 5 clusters, a “gap” being the difference between one partition’s index value and the index value of the previous partition. Through the various bisections made, a cluster can be a “parent” or a “child”, as shown in the Figure 29.



*Figure 29: Dendrogram of available partitions for the YouTube corpus*

Of all the computations, T-Lab software has chosen the partition with four clusters as the most relevant for our text corpus extracted from YouTube. Thus, in Figure 30 we can see the percentage distribution of the elementary contexts for each cluster.



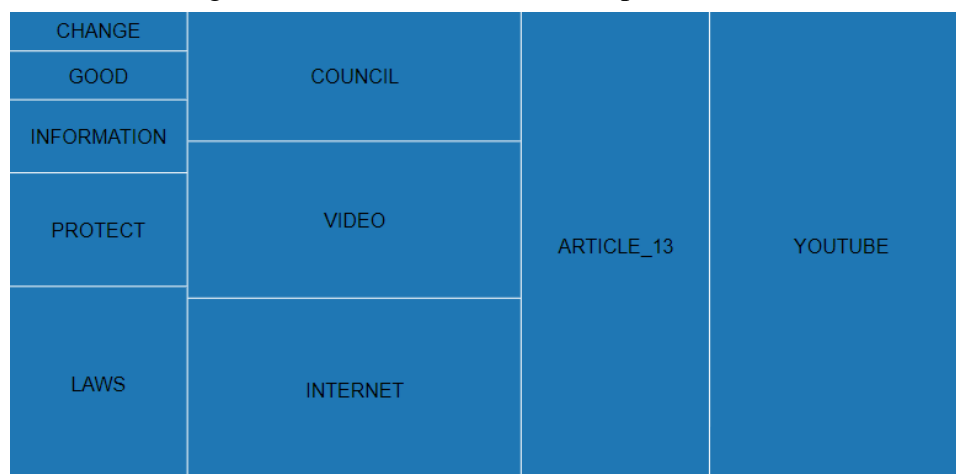
*Figure 30: Pie chart of elementary contexts for every cluster, YouTube corpus*



Cluster proportions are very close, even two of them being equal (cluster 2 and cluster 3), which means that Romanian teenagers have touched in their discussions on YouTube a wide range of themes that can interconnect well with Article 13, European Union, Romania and Internet.

b. *Content* of clusters

**Cluster 1** contains the novelty of the European framework that governs the Internet and social media. Figure 31 shows a thematic map with the most relevant keywords of cluster 1, based on transformed chi-square values. The higher the chi-square index, the higher the box on the thematic map.



*Figure 31: Thematic map of cluster 1 based on transformed chi-square values, YouTube corpus*

All words in cluster 1 refer to the changes made by European Union through the adoption of “Article 13” ( $\text{Chi}^2 = 60.72$ ) in March 2019, which especially affects “YouTube” (85.38), but generally the “Internet” (42.73), by imposing content filters to “protect” (13.55) copyright. Thus, all online activity as well as “video” (36.28) uploading will be subject to new “laws” (23.54) that will be able to alter free “information” (8.59) by a method that is seen as a censorship. So, this major “change” (5.47) seems to be not a “good” (5.67) thing, and the European “Council” (30.20) has already been notified in this regard.

This is a cluster through which Romanian teenagers express their dissatisfaction as well as concerns about the future of Internet and social media,

following the new European regulations. Thus, the cluster name will be “European framework of Internet and social media (YouTube corpus)”.

**Cluster 2** represents the most important elements of the social framework through which European identity can be developed (Figure 32):

PARLIAMENT	PEOPLE	INITIATIVE	REFUGEE
FUTURE			
CULTURE			
IMPORTANT	SOCIETY	YOUNG	
VALUES			

*Figure 32: Thematic map of cluster 2 based on transformed chi-square values, YouTube corpus*

Because the subjects of the research are 13-19 years old, it is natural to talk about being “young” ( $\text{Chi}^2 = 26.85$ ) in a “society” (21.22). And when we refer to European society, it is normal to meet a huge diversity of “people” (14.60), including “refugees” (21.22). Also, Romanian teenagers seem to be aware that it is very “important” (9.52) to know the European “values” (11.86), but also the European “culture” (6.51). Thus, with “initiative” (17.67), they can build a good European “future” (5.31), bearing in mind that their interests can be represented in the European “Parliament” (5.31) or in the European Youth Parliament. Through this cluster, we can analyze how European integration evolves, referring to different aspects of society, so for further analysis we will assign the name “Social framework of European integration”.

**Cluster 3** is a perfect sequel to the previous cluster. The constituent elements (see Figure 33) also refer to European identity, only this time it is voluntarily assumed by being a European citizen. And the main qualities that Romanian teenagers seem to enjoy after acquiring their new citizenship are the European “rights” ( $\text{Chi}^2 = 93.08$ ), mentioning some of the most important: the right to express the “opinion” freely (5.12), the right to “travel” (17.01) and to “visit” (11.32) different places without restrictions, as well as the right of “movement” (5.12) in one of the countries that are “members” (15.13) of the European Union.

MOVE- MENT	MEMBERS	CITIZEN	RIGHTS
OPINION			
VISIT	TRAVEL	EUROPEAN_CITIZEN	

*Figure 33: Thematic map of cluster 3 based on transformed chi-square values, YouTube corpus*

At the level of the lexical corpus, we made the difference between the clear collocation “European citizen” (27.76) and the simple word “citizen” (20.05) used mostly in the general sense and only sometimes making reference to Romanian citizenship. But because the references to Romanian citizenship were under 5 in the whole lexical corpus, we could not fully associate the keyword “citizen” with “Romanian citizen”. However, in the second part of this study we will analyze qualitatively the replies referring to Romanian citizenship and European citizenship. Still, we have chosen the name of the third cluster “European citizenship and its rights (YouTube corpus)”, since this is its main theme, and the collocation “European citizen” has a significant frequency of 23.

**Cluster 4** highlights Romania’s benefits of the European integration process; we can say that these benefits are numerous and important, especially as this is the largest cluster (Figure 34).

TAXES	EURO	ROMANIA	ADVANTAGES	UNITY
DEVELOPMENT		FAMILY		
STUDIES				
STUDENT			FUNDS	
TOLERANCE		MONEY		

Figure 34: Thematic map of cluster 4 based on transformed chi-square values, YouTube corpus

From this cluster we can see that the “advantages” ( $\text{Chi}^2 = 17.47$ ) offered by European Union to “Romania” (11.59) are primarily related to the economic side: European “funds” (20.36) in particular, and “money” (15.82) in general. Other benefits are related to the “family” (13.52), but also to the aspect of being part of European “unity” (18.17).

Also, Romanian teenagers seem to appreciate the “tolerance” (10.12) promoted by European Union, and already think about European “studies” (7.12), for their future status as a “student” (7.84). All the benefits of this cluster would certainly lead to “development” (5.94), even if this involves “taxes” (3.90) and the use of “euro” (3.90), which is not yet adopted in Romania. However, tax compliance and euro can also be seen as advantages, so the name “Advantages of European Union for Romania” can be a suitable name for this cluster.

c. Correspondence analysis of clusters

Once we have the clusters, we can now establish their connection with the polarity, according to the independent variable. The two-dimensional representation of the correspondence analysis can be seen in Figure 35.

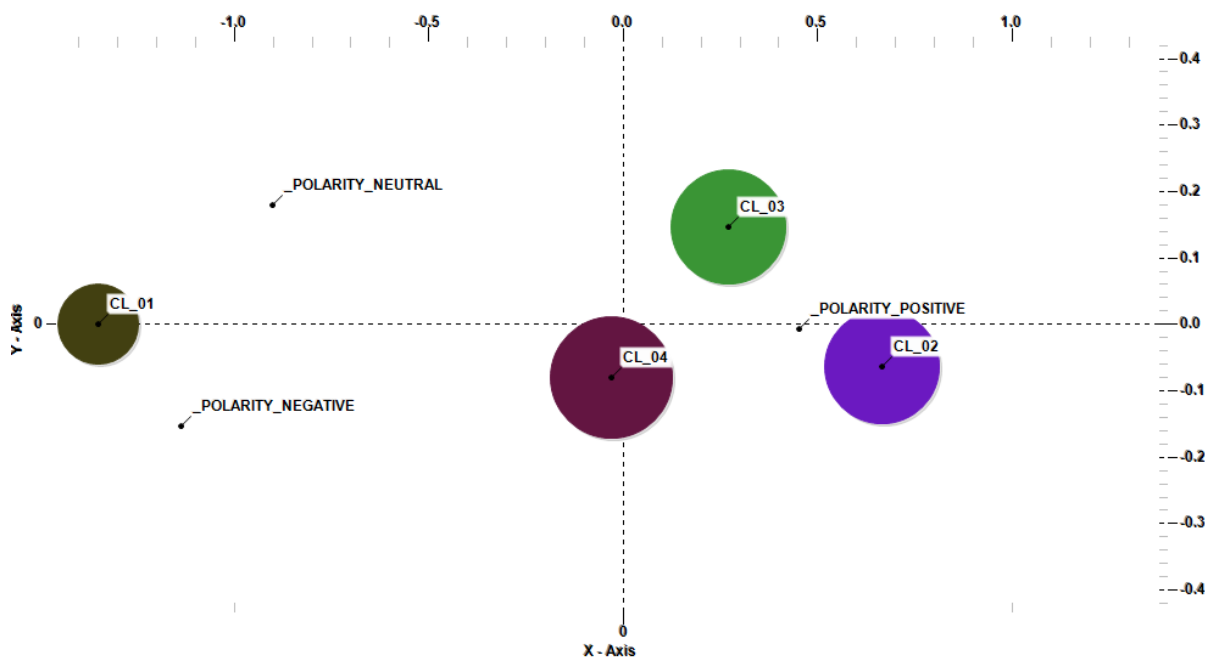


Figure 35: Correspondence analysis for YouTube corpus (clusters x variable)

The results of the correspondence analysis reveal a clear delimitation between cluster 1 and the rest of the other three. Thus, cluster 1 is mostly composed of negative and neutral elements, showing rather that the “European framework of Internet and social media (YouTube corpus)” is no longer appropriate after the adoption of Article 13 (March 2019), but is rather dominated by uncertainty and reticence.

In contrast, the other three clusters are complementary to each other and all three are mostly composed of positive elements: cluster 2 - “Social framework of European integration”, cluster 3 - “European citizenship and its rights (YouTube corpus)”, cluster 4 - “Advantages of European Union for Romania”. Considering the distance between cluster 1 and the other three, we conduct further a qualitative analysis of elementary contexts to identify more precisely what are the negative, positive and neutral elements and what influences they have.

d. *Qualitative analysis of elementary contexts*

Each cluster will be investigated to see the emerging themes, but also the links that can be made between them. In this analysis we will use the most significant elementary contexts that were relevant to T-Lab software, but we will also explore those that were not included in T-Lab computations to see what the reasons are, and if their investigation can in any way change the final result. An eloquent example is Brexit, which was announced as an important factor in study 1, but so far in study 2, we had no mention of it. Of course, as part of the analysis, we will compare the two studies very often, and we will make projections for study 3, to explore the interconnectivity between them.

**Cluster 1 - European framework of Internet and social media (YouTube corpus)**

The theme of this cluster is new for everyone on the Internet, not just for Romanian teenagers. Until March 2019, European Internet regulations were not significantly different from other democratic states in the world. But the adoption of Article 13 in the European Parliament has changed this, and theoretically the Internet will be affected by applying content filters that will lead to better respect the copyright. The new directive provides that social media platforms (and all the other platforms on the Internet) are responsible for verifying the copyright of materials uploaded by users, otherwise platforms may be penalized. So, starting in 2021 when the effects of the directive will apply, Facebook, Instagram, but especially YouTube, will have to filter all the content and decide whether to validate it or not for upload. If any item that violates copyright (soundtrack, pictures, other images from movies, logos, etc.) appears in the user-created material, the upload may be canceled, and the material can no longer be made public. So, there could be a kind of censorship that could alter the informative role of social media.

The effects of this Article 13 could lead in the coming years to some changes in the structure of social representation of social media. Changes may occur especially in the peripheral system to protect the central nucleus, but the impact may be so big that even central nucleus changes may occur faster than we would expect. The first signs of changes already exist, because video bloggers and other teenagers

on YouTube are worried about what can happen: *“If the party in power pulled us down, I’m afraid it’s going to get us a long way down with Article 13”*.

Most of the opinions from the videos analyzed on YouTube are strongly negative, talking about “communist censorship” of information on YouTube in particular, and on Internet in general: *“YouTube will no longer be a free platform, we will not be able to talk about what we want, when we want, there will be no such thing, that it will be basically a communism on the Internet again.”*

If we think that the results from study 1 have surprisingly shown that lemma “information” is the strongest candidate for the central nucleus, then there is a high probability of a big change in the structure of social representation of social media. Also, the European integration of Romania could suffer from the lack of accurate information caused by censorship, that can determine a loss of confidence of a whole generation of Romanian teenagers in the European institutions, especially in the European Parliament and Council of the European Union, which adopted and ratified the Article 13. By approving the article, teenagers could accuse the European Union of not representing the interests of its citizens, as we have seen in our examples: *“Among those who voted for adoption, there are 9 or 10 Romanian MEPs; certainly they do not know what they voted, they will realize within two years until they have to implement the laws for Romania.”*

Some opinions are so harsh that they talk about stopping the free access for Internet or YouTube: *“The end of the free Internet in European Union. Most content on YouTube will be deleted, as European Union wishes to. It was not enough that our country has its troubles, corrupt politicians, poverty and much more, but is this coming now? It will also regulate how we behave between us. In other words, they have stuck to power in the highest decision-making forums and decide our lives... All this while European Union declares itself: we guarantee individual and collective liberty, a lie! I wonder what’s going on in the European Union?”*. This reaction is also very important to consider from the point of view of freedom. In study 1 we showed the importance of the lemma “freedom” or “free” for the social representation of social media, as well as of self and European Union. We then argued that there is a direct link between the various types of freedom, the individual one, the virtual one and the European one, and that a teenager feels much stronger when all three are fulfilled. But now, with blocking or reducing the freedom from the Internet under Article 13, because of the connectivity created between the three,

we can say that the other two types of freedom will suffer, which is also the European one, and this could mean a decrease in the degree of European integration through the Internet.

If we continue to look at the central nucleus of the social representation of social media in study 1, we will notice that also the element “entertainment” can suffer: *“Article 13 has unfortunately been approved in the European Union and this will affect us a lot, because there will be no meme channels. They will clean all the Internet and it will not be the same entertainment.”* Even if Article 13 has express exceptions to satire and quotes, the teenagers from YouTube say that this will be very difficult to put into practice, because the robots that filter the content can not have the sense of humor and satire. So, from here we can understand that social representation of social media may suffer in the future from the point of view of polarity, gathering more and more negative connotations, because some of the main functions, including entertainment, information and socialization, can no longer be met properly. If we have talked about the entertainment and information functions so far, about socialization we can say that it will also have some important changes. There are teenagers who will prefer to give up online socialization, because the Internet will be regulated so hard: *„If Article 13 is applied, then much will change over the Internet. We will no longer be allowed to post on the Internet things that are not ours if we do not have copyright; the memes will be banned, so basically everything will change. We’ll have to make original content and it’s very hard to do that. Many of us will leave YouTube if this article is applied”*. Opinions like this can indicate that not only online socialization could be affected, but also the attribute of being “sociable”, which is a strong candidate for the central nucleus of social representation of self. Also, another candidate of this central nucleus is likely to suffer, namely “joyful”, because teenagers are very connected with social media and the online joy. Since joy also comes from YouTube’s monthly earnings, we can realize that the diminishing or disappearance of these earnings would lead to a decrease in the joy feeling: *“a sort of communist treaty protecting copyright is now accepted by the European Union. Article 13 is the biggest stupidity. There are many of us who have careers on YouTube, and live from YouTube videos, and now we are likely to lose our income.”*

In the previous study we have been able to argue that teenagers take full advantage of the online environment to discuss specific themes such as European



integration of Romania, but now we hit a major problem. Many opinions on YouTube associate the new European laws that regulate the Internet as being communist: *“Article 13 has been approved... A lot of people think that there will be communism on YouTube”*. Or association with communism would be a totally wrong direction for European integration through the Internet, especially as these associations are made very easy in Romania, due to the communist regime existing before 1990. An ironic point of view of Article 13, which is also related to communism, is presented by one of the analyzed youtubers: *“A censorship system on the Internet, what a beautiful life.”* Given the great openness of young people to social media, this censorship could be a big problem because it could increase the sense of online manipulation. Already the lemma “manipulation” is found with low frequencies in the corpus elicited by stimuli “European Union” and “Social Media”, and with the new Internet regulations, it seems that, unintentionally, European Union can create a favorable framework for strengthening this idea of manipulation.

In fact, the new regulations of Article 13 may be a kind of self-sabotage for the European integration through the Internet. A reply from YouTube pointed out that the consequences could be far more serious than we would have imagined. It may decrease not only the result of European integration, but even the initiative of small organizations to help the integration, because it would be much easier to close different social media platforms, rather than paying huge amounts for robots to filter content: *“What would be the best for these big sites? To struggle with bots (to filter content) or simply to make the websites no longer valid in the European Union countries?”*. However, the general opinion is that large sites like YouTube will not close: *“YouTube will be deleted? No, it will not be deleted”, “YouTube will not disappear, but it will be harder for you to make content and upload it to YouTube.”*

After a first view of Figure 35 (the correspondence analysis chart), we could not make a clear delimitation of the strong negative elementary contexts for Article 13, such as *“Article 13 is a nightmare, it is the end of YouTube, it is a danger, the apocalypse is coming”* from the neutral elementary contexts, such as *“this directive will completely change the Internet, but not be so pessimistic, maybe something good will happen, we do not know yet. But as far as we know, this directive will change major platforms like YouTube, Instagram, Facebook, Snapchat.”*

But now, after a more thorough analysis, we can conclude that the most important elements are negatively correlated, and they can represent a real threat to the social representation structure of social media, so hypothesis a) is validated.

## **Cluster 2 - Social framework of European integration**

Following hierarchical factor analysis, we noticed that the most important key-term of this cluster is “young”, which makes us believe that Romanian teenagers are very open to European integration, and so to assume the European identity. It is important to say that young people are socially influencing each other, so the process of European integration is not done only individually, but on a broad scale of society: *“together with other young people, we represent a part of the present and the future of Europe”*. More, the care for the European future is not singular, and teenagers present various joint initiatives on YouTube to ensure a good future: *“The time has come for us to be actively involved in defining our common future. Our ideas, of the young people, can materialize. The idea behind the initiatives is that young people develop their creativity by trying new proposals in different areas of life such as art and culture, social inclusion, environmental protection, participation in community life, European awareness, rural development, youth policies, health and many others. Youth initiatives can be a way to turn a personal everyday experience into a starting point for a future project.”* Such opinions that we found on YouTube, certainly give us strong reasons to believe that social media has an extremely effective role in transmitting the essential impulses and information to enhance the European integration of Romania. The same it is in the following examples: *“If you are wondering why such initiatives, the answer is: because you can form yourself as an active and solid European young man and act locally and at European level”*; *“I want to share the taste for young people to find out new information about their country, about European Union, about the society they live in.”* In addition to teenagers’ desire to build a good European future, we can see from these examples that European identity must also be actively formed, and teenagers are ready to do so. Moreover, they are so involved in these issues that they want to encourage other people to do the same; and they are justified in doing so, because the freedom they enjoy allows them.

This cluster shows that young people appreciate very much any kind of freedom, as we also have shown in study 1, including the freedom of society, which seems to provide the perfect social framework for European integration, for assuming the European identity and for developing the personal future: *“For me freedom is one of the most important European values, maybe the most important one, because without it, it would automatically turn off all the other. A free society means a society with more perspectives for the future and wider horizons to which it is heading. Of course, these horizons can only be expanded with our help”*.

European values are highly appreciated by Romanian teenagers and there are many positive references to them: *“we now need an education built on European values, because it represents us and this is the future of our country”*, *“European values are also among the values of the pupils’ school council”*, *“from my point of view, education is one of the most important values of a well-developed society without which the European edifice would not have sustainability”*. It is not surprising that education is seen as one of the most important European values, because education is the main concern of teenagers. Of the above examples we have to observe that European values are not only mentioned in general terms but also assigned to some purposes like the future of the country, activities of pupils’ school council or a well-developed society, which could mean that teenagers are more than aware of European values because they know also how to assimilate them very well.

Another important aspect of the social framework for European integration is represented by refugees. Most opinions are positive and accept refugees as part of European Union development: *“refugees say they have not chosen Europe, but Europe chose them... let’s learn to live together, to remain humans until the end”*, *“although these refugees were born in another territory, they have the same rights as Europeans. As humans, we owe to respect their social work, jobs, and health care to be able to raise their children in peace”*, *“I think Europe should accept refugees”*, *“why should not refugees come to us, why not get them? Think of European values, human rights.”* Following these examples, we can say that European identity is not built only by reporting to other Europeans, but also to refugees. Developing a harmonious European identity means respecting all other cultures of different people, and everything is possible by respecting the European values and rights, that are once again mentioned

The key-term “people” is also part of cluster 2, and investigating the elementary contexts, we have discovered some of its connections with the word “Brexit”, which we remind, according to T-Lab software computations, is not part of any cluster. The reason why “Brexit” has not been considered in the clustering process is that it only appears in only 5 elementary contexts. So, the frequency is too low. This is surprising, especially as in study 1 we had enough reasons to believe that it is an important element that can affect the European integration. “Brexit” appears in the lexical corpus elicited by stimulus “European Union” with a strong negative polarity, and also in the questionnaire, being treated as a separate factor in the multiple regression analysis, resulting again in a negative impact on the European integration. Moreover, Brexit received the most answers to the open request from the questionnaire “Please mention at least three particular European Union-related topics of your interest, in order of priority”.

The fact that discussions about Brexit do not appear very often in YouTube videos could mean that this is a more complex topic that young people probably do not know to treat properly; and because making a video requires an effort, the decision not to do it anymore is convenient to save energy and time when someone can not tell a lot about a subject. However, because we have found few opinions about Brexit in the analyzed videos, we will show them all: *“I think Brexit will affect Europe, but that does not mean that everything will change. People will still be able to travel, visit a multitude of countries, but not all. We must not let Brexit to build the future, but we must build it together”*. This point of view is supported by the next one: *“I do not think Brexit will bring a big change in the European Union, just that it will disadvantage those who wish to migrate or have already migrated as freedom of movement; to settle down and find a job will become more and more strict”*. We also found some explanations for voting for Brexit: *“I think the referendum in Britain on Brexit was born from an impulse - if it’s not too much to say, reckless - fueled by pride in being British. A referendum regretted by British, which they can no longer cancel.”* Another opinion is in the same line, bringing a little more hope: *“The European family still exists. If a new referendum is held tomorrow, these people would regret the decision they made, and would choose England to be part of the European Union”*. In the fifth and last elementary context there is only a general mention of Brexit: *“we can talk about Brexit, we can talk about education in schools”*. From what we have seen so far, opinions about Brexit

are rather negative, but there is no direct link between Brexit and European integration of Romania. Of course, indirect correlations can be made, but we can not support the hypothesis e) that the discussions about Brexit on YouTube have a negative impact on the European integration of Romania.

Taking a synoptic look at cluster 2, besides Brexit, we can say that it presents the future intentions of Romanian teenagers to have a better integration process in the European Union and to develop more their European identity; all these can be achieved in a social framework dominated especially by freedom, but also by other European values.

### **Cluster 3 - European citizenship and its rights (YouTube corpus)**

The most surprising result of this study is the widespread assumption of European citizenship in the online environment. We should note that the quality of being European citizen is mostly correlated with European rights and always correlated with positive meanings. Thus, we can say that through all these aspects we can achieve a good European identity.

From the analyzed videos we realized that Romanian teenagers know to ideally negotiate their European identity as a supra-national one, which is meant to complement the national one and not to replace it: *“On January 1, 2007, Romania has joined the European Union, so Romanian citizens have acquired the European citizenship that does not replace the national citizenship, but extends it, bringing a number of advantages and rights.”*

Moreover, from the different contexts of the analyzed videos, as well as from the non-verbal and paraverbal language, we understood that Romanian teenagers assume their European citizenship in a proud manner, seeing it as a key element for the development of their European future: *“I feel like a European citizen, I enjoy many rights, I like to travel and I think European Union is a great step for my pleasure.”*

The assumption of European citizenship is very important to Romanian teenagers and seems to be already part of their way of being: *“We first started as humans, then as citizens of some nations, and in a beautiful evolution we became Europeans”*. Practically, the teenagers in our study grew as European citizens. Considering that the maximum age of the participants in the study is 19 years and

in 2019 there are 12 years since the accession of Romania to the European Union, it means that every teenager is a European citizen for more than half of his life. That is why they know their rights very well and take advantage of them to further negotiate their European identity: *“If I know my rights as a European citizen? Of course I know them. They give me the right to be myself anywhere in European Union. I am happy with them, and I am interested in these rights for me and for the future of European Union, which is my future.”*

When it comes to the negotiation between European citizenship and Romanian citizenship, we launched in study 1 the hypotheses that they have an antagonistic impact on the European integration process, the European one being positively correlated, and the Romanian one having a negative correlation. Unfortunately, YouTube discussions about Romanian citizenship are too few, so we can not support the hypothesis d). In our case, only three elementary contexts contain references to Romanian citizenship. One of the three elementary contexts was presented at the beginning of cluster 3 analysis, and the other two are quite similar: *“On January 1, 2007, Romania became a member of the European Union, its citizens becoming European citizens. Starting this date, Romanian citizens who are leaving the national territory enjoy all the rights – established in the basic treaties of the European Union – on the territory of the member states”, “What special rights have we got as Romanian citizens with the accession to the European Union? First, the right to travel freely in all member states, the right to vote in the European Parliament, and the right to see diversity in Europe.”*

The fact that there are much more references about European citizenship in comparison with Romanian citizenship can be explained by the greater rapprochement of Romanians with the democracy promoted by European Union, rather than the national sovereignty promoted in Romania during 2016-2019: *„a well-informed citizen understands that he plays an active role in European Union and will want to get involved in his democratic life at all levels”*. In fact, the high frequency of assuming European citizenship in the online environment during this period 2016-2019 may mean a good continuation of the European integration process through social media, while in Romanian politics the same process seems to have suffered a decline.

Thus, European identity survives on social media, regardless of the nationalism promoted in real life. Taking advantage of the Internet, associations

with European citizenship do not stop: *“yes, of course I feel like a European citizen because I live in Romania, a member of the European Union.”* Moreover, the Internet also leaves room for metaphors, so a YouTube video shows a first-aid kit that can help Romania in unpleasant situations: *“now we are a happy Romania thanks to European Union. We will introduce you to the European citizen’s «aid kit»: the glasses - to see the best opportunities we can get, a mouse - to keep a click away... a patch - to cover mistakes and be ready for a new European start... and not least, chocolate - to enjoy the pleasures of life as a European citizen.”*

From the examples we have presented so far, European identity is clearly assumed by Romanian teenagers. Because identity is not given by birth or predefined by other aspects, but is built through social relationships, we can say that in our case, social media, especially YouTube, are of great help in building a positive European identity: *“you can learn from different people and together you will have the feeling that you are European citizen”*. To this end, the European rights have played a decisive role and many opinions show that the right of free movement is one of the most important: *“As European citizens, we each have our rights; a right which seems to me very useful is the right of free movement within the European Union and even of residence. Before we joined the European Union, we needed visas, which is no longer necessary, and I consider this a strongly positive thing.”*

Of course, there are many positive aspects and rights which are related to European citizenship, and we will continue to present them in the analysis of the next cluster. However, even the investigations made so far are enough to believe that assuming the European citizenship has a strong positive influence for the European integration of Romania, so we validate the hypothesis c).

#### **Cluster 4 - Advantages of European Union for Romania**

The components of cluster 4 largely support the structure of the social representation of European Union from study 1. Thus, four of the central nucleus elements are reinforced by the occurrences of YouTube discussions: “funds”, “money”, “development” and “unity”, highlighting the help we also talked about in study 1 that European Union gave to Romania.

We will start to refer to European funds, which is a topic of high interest for teenagers in social media, as we have seen from the applied questionnaire (open-ended question). The topic “European funds” is ranked 4th according to importance, as well as the topic “Benefits and advantages of the European Union”, the last one fitting perfectly into the theme of this cluster.

From the analyzed videos on YouTube, we noticed that, in fact, European funds are much more useful to Romania, not just to combat poverty and to develop the country, but also to forget the past political regime of Romania, thus trying to align Romania’s politics with European standards: *“Continuing to access the European funds we can grow harmoniously and we can go much easier and faster through this post-communist transition phase”*. So, financial benefits could be even vital for strengthening European integration and democracy. However, although there are cases when European funds are not always absorbed in an optimal percentage, the general opinion of teenagers on YouTube is very optimistic: *“It is not the fault of the European Union that our country does not know how to manage its money in the most efficient way, but the advantages are clear and are far above the disadvantages.”*

As we have shown in study 1, Romania’s development has greatly benefited from the membership of European Union, and the confirmation of this fact is also found on YouTube, pointing out that the process of European integration of Romania can not ignore the Internet: *“We are the future of Europe, a generation of future leaders who should never forget that although we are not alike, our individual unicity is the key for long-term development and prosperity, which can only be achieved through constant collaboration. United in diversity, nothing is impossible.”* It is amazing how European Union succeeds in uniting teenagers to have a common goal based on European values: *“We are here to promote the European unity, variety and connection.”*

In fact, perhaps the best-represented common goal of Romanian teenagers is to study abroad, for a better quality of education. As a strengthening, we noticed in the correspondence analysis of the social representation of Romania, that lemma “education” tends to have negative connotations. So, one of the opinions on YouTube is edifying: *“From an educational point of view, exchanges of experience between countries can be a great advantage for students going abroad, because they can study what they like in another environment, they can be exposed to different*



*cultures and also have the employment opportunity*". At their age, teenagers are aware of the need for good education, and so there are many opinions and initiatives on YouTube that show the importance of European education: *"education is the base of a society, and we now need an education built on European values, because it represents us and this is the future of our country."* Also, the rapprochement to the European educational system can be explained by the following opinion, which has a much more general vision: *"Tolerance is an essential European value. I think tolerance is promoted in family, continuing in school and ending up in the character of each. Of course, tolerance goes hand in hand with patience, which is a rather rare quality in the Romanian educational system and, also, in the character of people"*. In this explanation we also meet the notion of family, which in a thorough investigation of the elementary contexts, we have observed that it also refers to the family from home, as in the example above, but also to the "European family": *"European Union is like a great family in which each of us keeps our identity."* So, the European integration must be seen not only from a political, economic, educational or social perspective, but much closer to everyone's privacy. As evidence, the following opinion is highly emotionally charged: *"European Union does not mean you or me, it means us. When I think of Europe, I think of myself like the future student, like the future tourist, like the future manager. As far as Europe is concerned in 2020 I see it well, I see it in a positive way"*.

To sum up the analysis of this cluster, we will also use an opinion from YouTube: *"If, for Romania, the European Union had not existed, it should have been invented"*. So great are the advantages of European Union, that teenagers believe Romania would have been far behind without having chosen the way of European integration: *"How would a non-European Romania look today? Well, not much different from the Republic of Moldova or current Serbia. It would have been a country fallen prey to its own demons through acts of corruption and underdevelopment, most likely placed in the zone of economic and political influence of Russia and Turkey"*.

If we refer to all the clusters so far, extracted from the discussions on YouTube, we can say that we are dealing also with a paradox. If in the opinion of Romanian teenagers, Article 13 brings communist censorship on the Internet, however, the European Union taken as a whole can get rid of communist mentalities: *"Romania, a former communist state, which would be also today under the tutelage*

*of Moscow, if the concept of European family did not exist; the evolution is different when you have an opening to the West, and Romania has always wanted this thing. Even the narrow mentality of the people who are just out of communism is changing, and the path to this fact is on the edge of the European Union". This view is supported by another, by which we can understand that European Union can also provide a specific power to its member states: "European Union is a very important thing for Romania, because it sits with some of the greatest powers in the world and we believe that this thing will bring a better situation."*

To conclude, we have noticed alongside this cluster, but also with reference to other clusters, how YouTube as a part of social media can positively influence the European integration of Romania through the numerous positive speeches extracted from the videos, including the various initiatives presented by teenagers for a better European education and for a better European future. Also, we must not forget the surprising result of the large-scale assumption of European citizenship. All of this makes us validate the hypothesis b).

#### **5.4. Discussions and conclusions**

The content analysis of YouTube videos has brought us a new aspect that has the power to negatively influence the peripheral system, but even the central nucleus of the social representation of social media. From the European Internet regulations adopted in 2019 (Directive on Copyright in the Digital Single Market), Article 13 is the most debated and is described as a "communist censorship". As we extracted from the discussions of Romanian teenagers, this article could have in the future a significant negative impact on the elements of the central nucleus like "information", "entertainment" or "socialization", but also on other elements such as "manipulation" or "freedom".

In fact, the views of Romanian teenagers are in line with the opinions of digital experts, on both sides being the same concern about censorship and endangering the functionality of the Internet. We recall in this regard the letter sent to the European Parliament by a group of digital experts, including Tim Berns-Lee, World Wide Web inventor: "We cannot support Article 13, which would mandate Internet platforms to embed an automated infrastructure for monitoring and

ensorship deep into their networks. For the sake of the Internet’s future, we urge you to vote for the deletion of this proposal”<sup>40</sup>.

Article 13 may also have a negative effect on the European integration of Romania, because the feeling of “communist censorship” can revive the mentalities of the Romanian communist regime before 1990. Moreover, especially Romanian teenagers can lose their trust in the European institutions, considering that this article does not represent their interests.

However, if we look at all the other general European issues apart from Article 13, we can note that the discussions on YouTube are essentially positive, and they can influence the European integration in a good way. In fact, YouTube as part of social media can be seen as a “refuge” of European integration, given Romania’s politics based on national sovereignty from 2016-2019.

The most surprising thing that we found on YouTube is the assumption of European citizenship in a proud manner and on a very large scale, mostly correlated with European rights. On the other side, the assumption of Romanian citizenship is almost non-existent. This means a greater identification with the European identity of Romanians, in contrast to the study of Cinnirella (1997), which had very little evidence for a sense of European identity amongst British. In another research, Licata (2002) found correlations that showed that the more people identify with Belgium, the more they believe this identification is compatible with European identification. We can not say the same thing about Romania. At least from the discussions on YouTube, we could not draw a definite conclusion about the assumption of Romanian citizenship, but in the first study of the thesis we showed that Romanian citizenship is negatively correlated with the European identification.

Another issue less debated on YouTube, among teenagers, is Brexit. So, we could not show in any way that it influences or not the European integration of Romania. Instead, we found many evidence to show that European Union has a lot of benefits for Romania, and teenagers take advantage of them through the Internet, creating on YouTube various initiatives to build a European future and to study in the member states of European Union. In addition, teenagers highlight the importance of European funds, which can contribute to Romania’s democracy and to the alignment with European standards. All these are a confirmation, but also a complement to the results of the first study that showed how social media can make

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<sup>40</sup> <https://www.eff.org/files/2018/06/12/article13letter.pdf> (Accessed on March 27, 2019)



a strongly positive link between the individual and the European integration. Moreover, in the relation self - social media - European Union - Romania, YouTube is even more meritorious in that it helps to create a strong European identity through the frequent references to European citizenship that Romanian teenagers assume, this meaning a greater rapprochement with European democracy and the attempt to deny the populist Romanian politics.

## **6. STUDY 3 - Facebook text mining**

The third study is about text mining on Facebook and complements the first two studies in order to further investigate the underlying dimensions of the social representation of social media, highlighting the impact that European Internet regulations adopted in 2019 (Directive on Copyright in the Digital Single Market) could have on the structure of the social representation.

As a working method, this third study is an extension of the second study, so we will keep from the latter the same objectives and hypotheses.

### **6.1. Objectives and hypotheses**

#### **Objectives**

i) to analyze the underlying dimensions of the social representation of social media, considering the Internet regulations brought by European Union through Article 13;

ii) to assess how Facebook as part of social media can be a link between the individual and between the European integration of Romania;

iii) to investigate the negotiation of national identity and supra-national identity in the process of European integration.

#### **Hypotheses**

a) the social representation structure of social media can be negatively influenced by Article 13 (European Internet regulation);

b) as part of social media, Facebook has contributed positively to the European integration of Romania, even though the general political current in Romania is one of national sovereignty;

c) assuming European citizenship on Facebook positively influences European integration of Romania;

d) assuming Romanian citizenship on Facebook negatively influences European integration of Romania;

e) discussions about Brexit on Facebook have a negative impact on the European integration of Romania.

## **6.2. Method**

### **a) Data collection**

In order to gather the necessary data for the analysis, we considered five relevant Romanian Facebook groups, dedicated for general discussion of teenagers, according to group descriptions and regulations. All these groups are closed groups in which I needed the approval of an administrator to enter and see the discussions. As for the number of members of each group, it ranged from 50,000 to 250,000. To fit within the age limits of the study, I only selected subjects between 13-19 years, looking at the age that is written on each user's personal page; when the age was not written, I investigated the posts or other details of the profile to see in what grade are the teenagers at school. When none of these were possible, the subjects were excluded for the analysis. Thus, the total number of subjects was 274 (male = 185, female = 89), with a total of 289 replies.

Data collection was done using the "Search this group" feature on Facebook, and the keywords were related to Article 13, European Union, Romania, and Internet. Each post was selected and analyzed manually to meet the thematic criteria of the study, and the entire text corpus summed up 1,176 words. All the Facebook posts were written in Romanian and were selected from the period 2016-2019.

### **b) Data analysis**

In order to maintain the continuity and to have meaningful terms of comparison, we retained the same types of analysis as in the second study. Therefore, the initial analysis was conducted to identify the elementary contexts and the number of lemmas. Thus, using T-Lab Plus 2019 version 4.1.1.4, out of a total of 1,176 words, we obtained 1,023 lemmas. For more relevant computations, we set the frequency threshold  $\geq 3$ , so only 41 lemmas have been selected for future analyzes. The most important was the Thematic Analysis of Elementary Contexts with Hierarchical Cluster Analysis based on bisecting K-mean method. The same cross-matrix of elementary contexts with key-terms was used (clusters  $\times$  lexical units).

Each reply (post) from Facebook has been associated with an elementary context. We have again created the independent variable of polarity, so that each elementary context has been classified manually as positive, negative or neutral, according to the opinions and feelings transmitted. Through Thematic Analysis of Elementary Contexts, the cluster composition was automatically made by the software based on the chi-square values of the key-terms. Further, we ran a correspondence analysis of the contingency table, resulting in a two-dimensional graph with the relationships between the clusters and the independent variable (clusters  $\times$  variable). Thus, we have better investigated the relationships between clusters and polarity.

### 6.3. Results

a. Running the *hierarchical cluster analysis* with bisecting K-means algorithm, we obtained a solution with 3-9 clusters as available partitions (Table 23)

PARTITION	INDEX	GAP	SELECTED	PARENT	CHILD
2 clusters	0.10	0.00		1	2
3 clusters	0.38	0.27	<<	2	3
4 clusters	0.29	-0.08		2	4
5 clusters	0.46	0.17		3	5
6 clusters	0.56	0.10		4	6
7 clusters	0.60	0.04		5	7
8 clusters	0.70	0.10		7	8
9 clusters	0.71	0.01		4	9

Table 23: Available partitions for hierarchical cluster analysis, Facebook corpus

With only one exception (4 clusters) partition index values are increasing, being obtained by dividing the between cluster variance by the total variance. Because in the partition with 4 clusters, the index is not increasing, the gap of this partition is negative. The “gap” is being calculated as the difference between one partition’s index value and the index value of the previous partition. After all the computations and bisections made automatically by the T-Lab software, the relationships between the clusters as “parent” or “child” were established, as can be seen from the dendrogram in Figure 36.

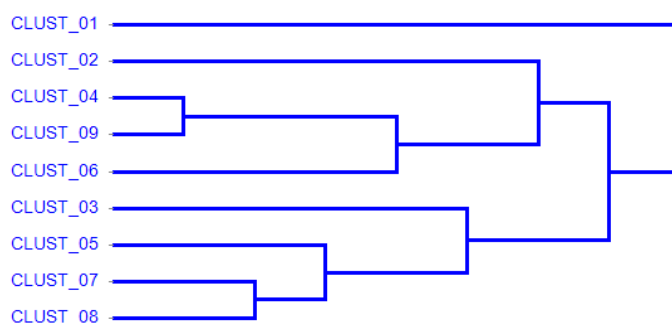


Figure 36: Dendrogram of available partitions for the Facebook corpus

The most significant partition for the text corpus extracted from Facebook is the partition with three clusters, according to Table 23. Thus, with this partition we will work for the following investigations; the percentage distribution of its elementary contexts for each cluster can be seen in Figure 37.

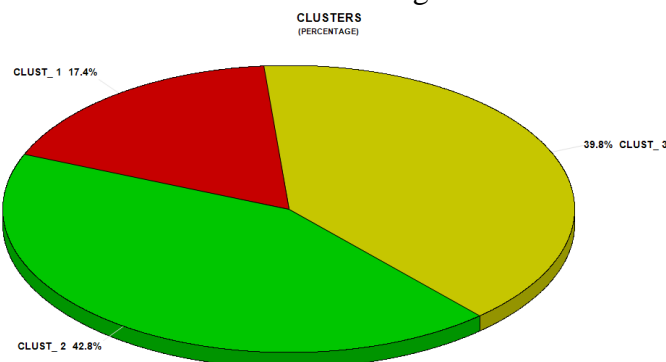


Figure 37: Pie chart of elementary contexts for each cluster, Facebook corpus

The lexical corpus is dominated by clusters 2 and 3, approximately equal in size (42.8% and 39.8%), while cluster 1 is the smallest one (17.4%). As compared to the cluster analysis for YouTube corpus from the previous study, the Facebook corpus that we are investigating now, has instead of four clusters just three, and the members of each cluster are fewer, as we will see from the next analysis. This can be explained by the higher degree of spontaneity that is on Facebook, meaning less preparation for an elaborate post and a higher speed of texting due to successive replies. Thus, the replies have fewer words, but still very significant, representing very well the quintessence of the messages.



b. *Content* of clusters

**Cluster 1** related to Facebook corpus has many common words with the cluster 1 of YouTube corpus. This means a confirmation of the dissatisfaction and concerns of Romanian teenagers regarding the future of the Internet and the social media by adopting in the European Parliament of “Article 13” ( $\text{Chi}^2 = 127.93$ ) in March 2019.

The following keywords highlight again that European Union wants to change the “Internet” (62.20) through a “copyright” (38.48) law that will especially affect “YouTube” (34.57) by filtering and possibly blocking “video” (22.93) content or “music” (15.23). Thus, the Internet “access” (7.12) is about to suffer a major “change” (6.63), which will not have the users’ “support” (15.23). All these keywords can be seen arranged by transformed chi-square values in the thematic map of cluster 1 (Figure 38). The higher the chi-square index, the higher the box on the thematic map. This cluster 1 related to Facebook corpus will be named after the model of cluster 1 related to YouTube corpus. So, the name will be: “European framework of Internet and social media (Facebook corpus)”.

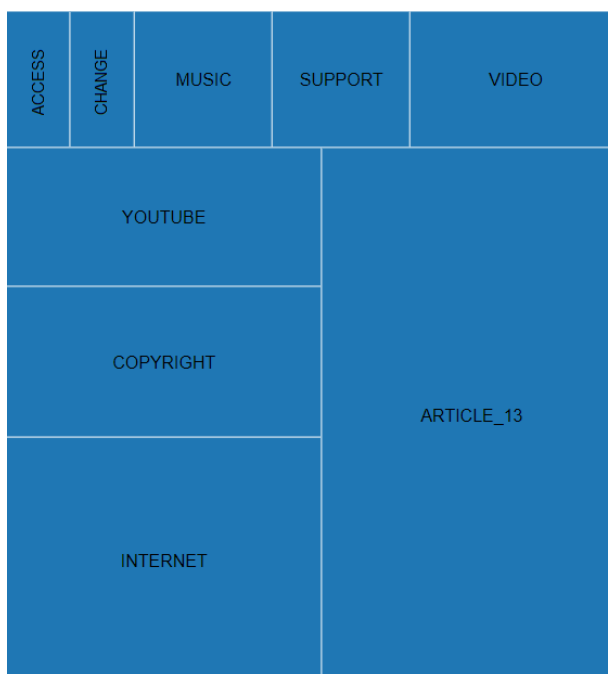


Figure 38: *Thematic map of cluster 1 based on transformed chi-square values, Facebook corpus*

**Cluster 2** brings something almost entirely missing from the previous study: how the European integration of Romania can be influenced by Brexit, that means the exit of “England” ( $\text{Chi}^2 = 42.50$ ) from the European Union; between the cluster components we can also find “countries” (38.97) and “European Union” (17.03).

BUCAREST	ROMANIAN	EUROPEAN_UNION	ENGLAND
LEAVE			
MEMBERS	CITY	COUNTRIES	
EUROPE			
ENGLISH	PEOPLE		
TRAVEL			
POPULATION			

*Figure 39: Thematic map of cluster 2 based on transformed chi-square values, Facebook corpus*

From Figure 39 we can observe the continuation of the references from the second study to the social framework in which is created the European identity. This time, besides the keyword “people” (8.81), we also have the keyword “Romanian” (5.43) that can help us better understand the negotiation of multiple identities.

Also, this cluster is referring to the status of the “city” (8.09) of “Bucharest” (4.34) in “Europe” (4.40) and to the “English” (4.60) “population” (4.60) that will “leave” (4.34) the European Union. Thus, it will be more difficult for the “members” (4.34) of the European Union to “travel” (4.60) to United Kingdom. Because this cluster refers largely to Brexit, its name will be “Brexit vs. European integration”.

**Cluster 3** is a strengthening of the European identity that the individual can assume through the Internet. It is similar to cluster 3 from YouTube corpus, having again the most important keywords “European citizen” ( $\text{Chi}^2 = 91.66$ ) and the associated “rights” (94.78). Linked to these keywords, from the thematic map (Figure 40) we discover also “Romania” (14.36) and “funds” (21.73), highlighting the benefits of European integration. We also should note the keyword “free” (4.97) that we have so far encountered in all studies and which is an important right for Romanian teenagers, also acquired through the Internet, but also through the

European Union. As in the past study, this cluster will be named “European citizenship and its rights (Facebook corpus)”.

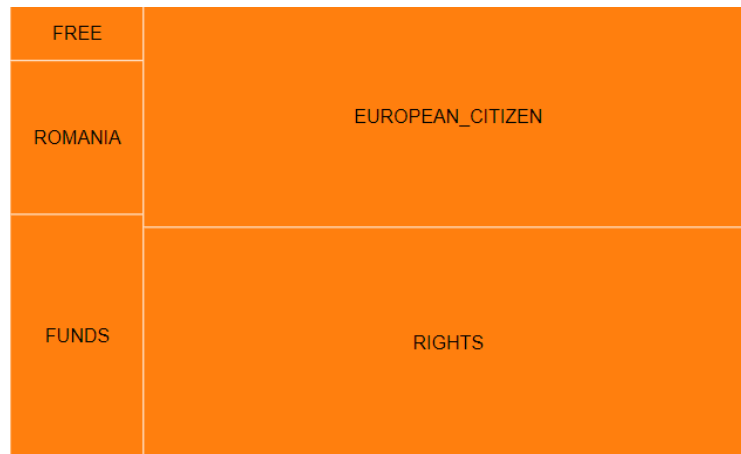


Figure 40: Thematic map of cluster 3 based on transformed chi-square values, Facebook corpus

*c. Correspondence analysis of clusters*

The three clusters related to Facebook corpus were introduced into a correspondence analysis along with the independent variable of polarity. Thus, the associations clusters  $x$  variable can be seen in Figure 41.



Figure 41: Correspondence analysis for Facebook corpus (clusters  $x$  variable)

Each of the three clusters corresponds largely to a polarity: cluster 1 is closer to the negative polarity, showing as in the previous study that Article 13 has inappropriately influenced the “European framework of Internet and social media (Facebook corpus)”. Cluster 2 contains rather neutral elements but with a significant proportion of negative elements, showing what might be the influence of “Brexit vs. European integration”. Cluster 3 is the closest to positive polarity and demonstrates as before that “European citizenship and its rights (Facebook corpus)” can bring an important series of benefits for a good European integration of Romania.

Still, we will conduct a qualitative analysis of clusters to thoroughly investigate the meaning of keywords and elementary contexts, especially since clusters 1 and 2 contain important negative elements and neutral elements. In order to delimit them we proceeded to the next stage of the study.

#### d. *Qualitative analysis of elementary contexts*

Qualitative analysis is necessary to better observe what are the most important correlations between the elementary contexts and the key-terms. At the same time, we will create the final connections of the three studies. So, we will try to analyze the data in comparative terms as before, while surprising the continuity of studies, but also the specificity of each.

#### **Cluster 1 - European framework of Internet and social media (Facebook corpus)**

As we have already announced from the first study, Article 13 is a real interest for Romanian teenagers. In the second study, we explained why this is happening, and now we have the confirmation of all that has been said so far, that European Union succeeds in influencing the Internet access in a negative way, so we found on Facebook even dramatic views related to this subject: “*Rest in peace Internet, Article 13 was approved*”, “*European Union wants to cut off all the Internet*”, “*Save YouTube! Article 13 destroys everything!*”.

Even though, objectively speaking, the basis of this article are as democratic as possible, having the aim of protecting creativity and finding effective ways to respect the rights of content creators (as we can also see from this reply: *“Article 13 is a new law in the European Union that wants to reduce theft and put more emphasis on copyright”*), in fact, it seems that the decision to adopt the article had the exact opposite effect, most people considering it a communist measure: *“If Article 13 is true, there will be communism on the Internet.”* Thus, we can support the idea that we launched in the second study that European Union, without realizing it, is self-sabotaging in the online environment, jeopardizing its democratic principles in the eyes of users, and even replacing them with a communist vision. The idea of communism on the Internet is so much self-inoculated among Romanian teenagers that we found again replies which replace the notion of “content filter” with the notion of “content censorship”: *“Article 13 says it will censor our videos.”* The approach to communism is a sensitive one and can also affect the European integration process. In fact, Romania is now following a way of forgetting the communist period before 1990, and one of the major advantages of the Internet was indeed to make people to forget the communist memories by opening new horizons, such as European ones. But, based on Article 13, restoring now the aspects of communism can create a state of confusion and perhaps a question of whether the path of European integration is a good one. Certainly, all these thoughts related to communism and all the changes brought by Article 13 have the power to change in the future the structure of the social representation of social media.

We should notice that on Facebook, users not only take note of this article, but also urge to sign various petitions to stop the effects: *“Sign here for rejecting Article 13!”*, *“Let’s save the Internet! Europe wants to introduce Article 13 that would mean that music or images from other sources will no longer be legal.”* Whatever the changes, one of the opinions on Facebook presents a reality that can be painful: *“European Union has adopted Article 13 which most likely will drastically change the Internet we currently know. What do you think? Is this the end of the Internet?”*. It is certainly not the end of the Internet, but it could be a major change in how we surf the Internet and how we interact within social media, so we can validate the hypothesis a) that the social representation structure of social media can be negatively influenced by Article 13.

## Cluster 2 - Brexit vs. European integration

In Facebook discussions, Brexit seems to be very important among Romanian teenagers, and this explains why “England” has the highest chi-square value in this cluster. Investigating the elementary contexts, we have noticed that all the usage of the word “England” refers to the Brexit problem. It is worth mentioning that in Romanian, in common language, “England” is used to refer to the whole Great Britain.

This third study confirms what we assumed about Brexit in the first two studies, but let’s take them one by one. As we have said in our second study, Brexit is indeed a more complex topic to debate, and that is why it was very rarely mentioned in the discussions on YouTube, precisely because it requires a thorough documentation and a strong opinion; in their absence, it is understandable why is not worth the effort to make a video about Brexit and then to be uploaded on YouTube. Instead, on Facebook, it is much easier to write anything about Brexit, even if the subject is not very well known. For example, we found a Facebook post with a very strange explanation for Brexit: *„An aggressive step towards Europe of Russian imperialism after 26 years. It was a prophecy of Nostradamus that Russia would attack Europe.”* Also, another complicated opinion sounds like this: *“After England leaves the European Union, some things will change. As far as I can figure out, the official language in Europe will no longer be English. Germany will come to power with German as official language. I will never learn German!”*. We also met a bizarre reply linking Brexit with Romanians: *“There were very many Romanian people without citizenship in England. These people have salaries in pounds, and the pound will drop sharply because no cars will be sold from England to European Union.”*

In addition to the opinions above, we also found more realistic replies, which have a strongly negative connotation: *“I am going to cry, I do not want England out of the European Union”*, *“If England exits, everyone will start exiting and this will be the end of the European Union.”* From the last reply, we can note that Great Britain’s exit from the European Union may be a dangerous precedent for other countries, including Romania, as mentioned in the first study. Moreover, from Facebook discussions we can also find the direct impact of Brexit on the European integration of Romania through Internet: *“I see more and more people on Facebook*

saying that Romania should also exit the European Union. What do you say? I am in the middle, there are advantages and disadvantages if we exit”, “Are you for the exit of Romania from the European Union?”, “You say you’re going hard in the European Union and you’re gonna be better if you exit? That’s what England thought. Now they figured out what stupidity they did, England being a much better developed country than Romania”. So, Brexit can be an important factor in triggering discussions that can affect the European integration process of Romania, and the replies like those that talk about “Roexit” are a clear evidence, so we can validate the hypothesis e).

Brexit is certainly not seen as a good thing from many perspectives, both for Great Britain and for other countries: “Now England as a lonely country is nothing, before it was important because it was at the top of Europe”, “England will most likely exit the European Union. Most likely, we’ll need a visa to travel there”. From these examples we can also see the good understanding of the concept of unity for all the countries in the European Union. So, Romanian teenagers seem to be aware that together, all the member countries can have common benefits, being even stronger. But alone, thus adopting the politics of national sovereignty, benefits diminish, and power weakens.

Thus, we can think again of the advantages that European Union offers to Romania, as we have shown largely in the first two studies. We reaffirm that these advantages are extremely important for Romanians, especially as they are aware of Romania’s delicate situation, as shown in some Facebook replies: “Romania is a country with a low status in the European Union and especially worldwide”, “Why are we the most corrupt in the European Union?”. These opinions reinforce the lexical corpus in study 1 related to stimulus “Romania”, and highlights again the problem of “corruption”, which is the strongest candidate of the central nucleus of the social representation of Romania. In theory, European Union could help tackle the problem of corruption, but one of the voices on Facebook gives us a surprising contrary explanation, linked to the former communist regime of Romania: “Long live Ceausescu and the Romanian Communist Party! We will be free and up-to-date with European standards when the poplar will make pears”. This is indeed an unexpected reply, because it comes from a teenager, born after 1990, when communism was already abolished in Romania. But, however, we can now understand why it is so easy to link Article 13 approved by European Union to the

communist censorship. In fact, in cluster 4 of the previous study, we noticed the importance of the European funds that can help the post-communist transition, and can also help to reduce the poverty in Romania, and more particularly, the poverty in Bucharest, as we can read from some comments on Facebook: *“At this moment, for me, Bucharest is the poorest city in the European Union”, “Bucharest is horrible compared to other European cities”*.

Analyzing this cluster, we can observe that social media has the power to easily influence the thinking of Romanian teenagers, so indirectly it can influence the structure of various social representations. The process of European integration of Romania as presented through the Internet is necessary not only from the point of view of European funds, development and freedom, but now we can say that it is also necessary for changing the Romanian general mentality, by replacing the memories from communism with democratic values of the European Union.

### **Cluster 3 - European citizenship and its rights (Facebook corpus)**

The main elements of this cluster are “European citizen” and its “rights” just as in cluster 3 of the previous study. Therefore, we can say that there is a perfect continuation between the two clusters and a strengthening of the European identity that Romanian teenagers assume through the Internet. Investigating the elementary contexts of this cluster 3 related to Facebook corpus, we can say that the connection shown in the previous study between being a European citizen and the rights deriving from it, is now even stronger: of the 47 mentions concerning the European citizen, 40 of them have the approximate form “European citizen with rights”.

We can once again say that the European citizenship is part of teenagers’ way of being, because they assume it in extremely varied situations: from opinions about the city they live in, to the problems encountered in school and to the general issues of Romania: *“I’m kidding, do what you want, you are a European citizen and you have rights”, “Because it is my right of being European citizen and I can express my opinion wherever and whenever I want”, “I am a European citizen and I have the right to do what I want”*. Sometimes this phrase is used on Facebook to put an end to contradictory discussions: *“I have nothing to do, you are a European citizen in the end. You have rights”*.



We also encountered cases where the phrase *“I am European citizen and I have rights”* was included in a standalone Facebook post without any link to any subject. And the other users also agreed in the comments on the same thing, both in relation to their person and the person who posted. Assuming the European identity has come to be so obvious, even having feelings of pride, as we have shown in the previous study. Sometimes, Romanian teenagers in their self-presentations are assuming their European identity by directly stating that they are European citizens, without being constrained by someone: *“If you have asked for it, I must present myself. I’m the new moderator and I’m old in the group. I am 15 years and 15 months, I am from Calarasi, I am 1.72 m tall, I have green eyes, I am brunette, funny, sympathetic (I boast myself, lol), and I am European citizen and I have rights! I’m waiting for questions, that’s the short part of my presentation”*. Even though adolescents do not directly say they are European citizens, they still say they were born in Europe: *“Let me introduce myself, though no one cares. Hello, I’m Andreea, I’m 14 years old, I’m from Galati, Romania, Europe. I am 1.70 m tall”*.

From what we have seen so far, Romanian teenagers are very pleased to be European citizens. Thus, they can feel that they live in *“a free world with European rights”*. The feeling of freedom is again brought into discussion, demonstrating once again that this is a very important advantage that European Union has given to Romania. Therefore, we can again validate the hypothesis c) that assuming the European citizenship on Facebook positively influences the European integration of Romania. On the other hand, the hypothesis d) that assuming the Romanian citizenship on Facebook negatively influences the European integration of Romania, can not be verified again, because in the text corpus from Facebook there is not even a single reference to the Romanian citizenship.

If we look again at the elementary contexts of this cluster, we can also validate the hypothesis b) that Facebook has contributed positively to the European integration of Romania, even though the general political current in Romania is one of national sovereignty. It is all the more important to note that although Romanian politics is not favorable, on Facebook there are still a large number of assumptions of European citizenship, which is a strong evidence of embracing the European identity, wishing at the same time the development of Romania at EU standards.

#### 6.4. Discussions and conclusions

Overall, the 3<sup>rd</sup> study confirms all the results of the 2<sup>nd</sup> study, which shows a continuity of views from different social media platforms. Thus, it has been proved once again that Article 13 of the European Internet regulations adopted in 2019 (Directive on Copyright in the Digital Single Market) may have a negative influence on the social representation of social media. Article 13 is seen again as a “communist censorship”, which can also affect the whole relationship between self - social media - European Union - Romania. It could mean reducing the freedom of teenagers through the sense of “censorship”, and it could even mean a slowdown in Romania’s process of European integration, because of the references to communism.

In addition to the previous study, this one clarifies that Brexit can negatively influence the same process of European integration of Romania. From the analyzes of Facebook discussions, we can conclude that the Great Britain’s desire to leave the European Union can be seen as a dangerous precedent, because we even met questions and inquiries about a Romania’s exit from the European Union. It is very simple to formulate such a question on Facebook, expecting also a high risk of manipulation. Any information can be easily assimilated, because, as we have seen, teenagers know very little about Brexit, especially since its understanding is not easy, but involves several aspects, at least in terms of social psychology, such as “political values, political authority, and the authority of affect” (Andreouli, Kaposi & Stenner, 2019).

In this third study we received the best confirmation of creating a strong European identity among Romanian teenagers, especially by assuming the European citizenship on Facebook, regardless of the situation, from school aspects to general issues of Romania. Moreover, the European citizenship is almost always mentioned with a set of rights, which makes us believe that Romanian teenagers trust the European Union and feel the European identity as a way of being. In contrast, no reference to Romanian citizenship was found.

Even though the lexical corpus on Facebook is smaller than the one on YouTube, it covers issues that have not been discussed so far. The opinions complement each other and are not antagonistic at all, so we can conclude that both Facebook and YouTube are important online environments in which European identity is strengthening and European integration continues, despite the nationalist politics in Romania.

## 7. Concluding remarks

The need for this study has emerged from the concerns about the effects of social media use and the political tensions in Romania, that can affect the process of European integration, respectively the formation of European identity. We have treated together all these aspects, arguing the link between social media and the European Union. Both have such great power that they can easily influence each other. And influences can be both positive and negative. Because these changes have a greater impact at young ages, our sample was created from Romanian teenagers.

The research was conducted during 2016-2019 when important changes took place in our areas of interest. First, we must remember in 2016 the beginning of the Romanian politics based on national sovereignty, and second, in 2019, we must think about the regulation of the Internet adopted by European Union (Directive on Copyright in the Digital Single Market), which is unprecedented and contains very tough measures. IT specialists even state that these measures are more like a threat to the Internet than a help. The laws adopted by the European Parliament and ratified by the Council of the European Union affect mainly social media.

From our first study we found out that the social representation of social media is positive. Social media is seen both as a means of information, but also as a means of socializing, being a good environment to make friends and to communicate, to share photos, to be entertained, but also to find news. In the first study we also analyzed the social representations of self, of European Union and of Romania, so that we can refer to the general framework of European integration through the Internet. Analyzing all these social representations, we have discovered various links that first start from the “symbiosis” between user and social media. If in the central nucleus of the self-representation we found “friendly” and “sociable”, in the central nucleus related to the social representation of social media we found “friends” and “socialization”, so we can say that social media is a perfect environment in which teenagers can manifest themselves and where they can find answers to some of their most important social needs. The links go even further, as there are common elements between self, social media and European Union, so that the good continuation of the European integration can find a justification, despite the nationalist politics promoted in Romania. These link elements are related to “freedom” (“free”) and “powerful” (“power”), which may mean that the Romanian

teenagers can feed their power and freedom by the virtual environment, but also by the European Union. But it could mean also that social media is a bond of power and freedom between the individual and the European Union. However, the connotations are strongly positive and certainly show the great openness of teenagers to social media, as well as to European Union. We should note that such connections do not exist between self, social media and Romania. Moreover, we have not found a strong enough connection between self and Romania, which could mean that Romanian teenagers do not agree at all with Romania's nationalist politics nor with the general situation of the country, unlike the freedom and power of European Union that they embrace. This can be observed through the only connection created between social media, Romania and the European Union. This connection is "help". We can say that Romania necessarily needs the help of the European Union, and social media can again be the link. The arguments for this help derive from the following connections between Romania and the European Union which are in a complementary form, and not synonymous. If for Romania we found the elements "poverty", "unemployment" and "underdevelopment", for European Union we found "money", "work" and "development". Moreover, there are other connections between social media and European Union which are composed of the key-terms "opportunity" and "integration", that could mean literally and concretely that social media can be an opportunity for the integration of Romania into the European Union.

Moving on to the results of the second and third studies, we continued to investigate the underlying dimensions of the social representation of social media in the light of the new Internet regulations adopted by the European Union (Article 13 of Directive on Copyright in the Digital Single Market). In these two studies we investigated the conversations of Romanian teenagers on YouTube and Facebook, and the first results show great concerns and fears about what might happen to social media. Most teenagers from Facebook and YouTube call the new Internet regulation as "communist censorship". It is a very tough view that could affect the elements of the social representation structure of social media. Most of the elements that can be negatively impacted by the "communist censorship" are in the central nucleus, "information", "entertainment", "socialization", but there are also other elements such as "manipulation" or "freedom". The phrase "communist censorship" is very sensitive in Romania, especially because, prior to 1990, the Romanian regime was

a communist one. It is even more surprising to hear the phrase from some teenagers who were born around the year 2000. From this point of view, the regulation of the Internet made by the European Union could do more harm than good, because we could say that in the eyes of Romanians, European Union is self-sabotaging its own democratic values, and teenagers could even say that through the new regulation of the Internet, European Union does not represent their interests, and everything could turn into a general negative impact on social media, but also on European integration. It is true that at the moment the new Internet regulation named Directive on Copyright in the Digital Single Market, has only been adopted and ratified, and will be implemented in all EU Member States over the next two years. But the results of this study could help different state institutions or IT companies to make the implementation more convenient for the user, considering the negative influences described.

In addition to the Internet regulation, we also found in the first and the third studies that Brexit could also have a negative impact on the European integration of Romania and on the European identity of teenagers. From the investigations of the elementary contexts extracted from the Facebook discussions, we realized that the Romanian teenagers are poorly informed about Brexit, despite the fact that in the declarative way, as the applied questionnaire shows, the topic that most Romanian teenagers are interested in social media with reference to the European Union is Brexit. Being poorly informed, any wrong reply (intentionally or not) on social media discussions can have significant influences. In addition, teenagers have already created a precedent in their minds and have already begun asking questions in social media about a possible exit of Romania from the European Union. However, the responses to this topic were mostly negative.

With reference to European identity, we can really support that “national and European identities are likely to be undergoing transformation as a result of European integration and associated political debate” (Cinnirela, 1997). In our research, the best references to identity negotiation are made by assuming the European or the Romanian citizenship. The outcome of the first study, following the questionnaire, showed that European citizenship and Romanian citizenship are antagonistic. We investigated the influences they have in the process of European integration, and naturally, European citizenship is positively correlated, while Romanian citizenship is negatively correlated. We also verified this result in the

second and third studies, receiving confirmation that European citizenship is strongly positively correlated with the European integration. There were a lot of mentions of the European citizenship, many of them being made with pride and connected with European rights, which makes us believe that Romanian teenagers are very well identified with European identity. On the other hand, regarding Romanian citizenship, in the second study we found too few references to draw a conclusion, and in the third study we did not find any reference. Comparing with the European citizenship, this may mean, however, that Romanian teenagers do not identify very well with their national identity. The reasons could be the tensions in Romanian politics, but also the general situation in the country. Therefore, we can say that despite the Romanian politics based on national sovereignty, social media is still an environment in which European identity is strengthened and the process of European integration continues in good conditions. Overall, we can conclude that social media positively influence the process of European integration of Romania.

We consider that all these results are relevant for today's digital and European framework of Romania, but they can also be a starting point for further studies, especially as social media is expanding, and the European integration of Romania continues. In addition, the sample used is made up of Romanian teenagers from the first generations who have been raised with free access to social media and having European citizenship, so the more the current study can be a reference. Also, all data can be used for practical purposes, especially by state institutions or digital companies.

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## Appendix A - Structured questionnaire

### INTRODUCTORY Part - Demographic aspects, and habits about social media consumption

Please fill in the following:

- Age:
- Gender:
- School grade:
- Area where you live: urban / rural

1. What Social Media platforms do you use? (multiple answers)

- a. Facebook
- b. YouTube
- c. Instagram
- d. Twitter
- e. Snapchat
- f. other: \_\_\_\_\_

2. How often do you access your Social Media accounts? (one answer)

- a. less frequently than once a day
- b. once a day
- c. 2-10 times a day
- d. 10-30 times a day
- e. 30+ times a day
- f. other: \_\_\_\_\_

3. From what device do you access your Social Media accounts? (multiple answers)

- a. smartphone
- b. desktop computer
- c. laptop
- d. tablet
- e. smartwatch
- f. other: \_\_\_\_\_



4. For what reason do you use Social Media? (multiple answers)
- a. to keep in touch with friends and family
  - b. to plan and participate in events
  - c. to buy and sell things
  - d. to keep up to date
  - e. to flirt
  - f. to find new friends
  - g. to be part of different groups
  - h. to spend my free time
  - i. entertainment
  - j. doing my homework or other school activities
  - k. other: \_\_\_\_\_
5. When do you access Social Media? (multiple answers)
- a. in my free time
  - b. at school
  - c. when I go out with friends
  - d. in the night, before going to sleep
  - e. in the morning, just after I wake up
  - f. don't count, I access Social Media everywhere
  - g. other: \_\_\_\_\_
6. How much time do you spend daily on Social Media? (one answer)
- a. no time or too little
  - b. less than 30 minutes
  - c. 30-60 minutes
  - d. 1-2 hours
  - e. 2-3 hours
  - f. 3-4 hours
  - g. 4+ hours
  - h. other: \_\_\_\_\_
7. Which social media platform do you post most often? (multiple answers)
- a. Facebook
  - b. YouTube
  - c. Instagram
  - d. Twitter
  - e. Snapchat
  - f. other: \_\_\_\_\_

8. What content do you post on Social Media? (multiple answers)
- a. text
  - b. photos
  - c. videos
  - d. check-ins
  - e. I usually share things from others
  - f. polls
  - g. other: \_\_\_\_\_
9. How often do you post to Social Media? (one answer)
- a. never
  - b. once every few months
  - c. once every few weeks
  - d. monthly
  - e. weekly
  - f. daily
  - g. several times a day
  - h. yearly
  - i. other: \_\_\_\_\_
10. Do you now consider yourself addicted to social media? (one answer)
- a. yes, I would not imagine my daily-life without it
  - b. yes, but I could live without it
  - c. I can not figure it out
  - d. no, but I like it
  - e. no, I want it to disappear
11. How would you react if Social Media disappears tomorrow? (multiple answers)
- a. I would be in depression
  - b. my self-esteem would decrease
  - c. nothing would happen
  - d. I would meet more in real life with my friends
  - e. I would be disorientated
  - f. other: \_\_\_\_\_

Part ONE - General aspects and personal use of social media

**Please read the following sentences and indicate your agreement or disagreement writing the appropriate number in the blank spaces:**

**1 - strongly disagree, 2 - disagree, 3 - neutral, 4 - agree, 5 - strongly agree**

1. \_\_\_ Social media is an environment where people want to feel free
2. \_\_\_ Social media is a hostile environment
3. \_\_\_ Social media is an environment where people want to look different than what they are
4. \_\_\_ Social media is an environment full of hate and envy
5. \_\_\_ I trust the people I meet on social media
6. \_\_\_ It is easier to make friends on Social Media than in real life
7. \_\_\_ It is easier to talk about intimate issues on Social Media than in real life
8. \_\_\_ I am more attached to social media groups than real-life groups
9. \_\_\_ I am interested in looking for European Union related topics in social media
10. \_\_\_ I am watching YouTube videos about European Union
11. \_\_\_ I write / comment on Facebook about topics related to European Union
12. \_\_\_ I am part of a Facebook group discussing about European Union
13. \_\_\_ I liked a Facebook page or subscribed to a YouTube channel discussing issues related to the European Union

Part TWO - Self-impact on social media

**Please read the following sentences and indicate your agreement or disagreement writing the appropriate number in the blank spaces:**

**1 - strongly disagree, 2 - disagree, 3 - neutral, 4 - agree, 5 - strongly agree**

1. \_\_\_ I integrate socially better
2. \_\_\_ I have stronger relationships with my friends
3. \_\_\_ I have stronger relationships with my family
4. \_\_\_ I have more success at school
5. \_\_\_ I have a better self-esteem
6. \_\_\_ I'm harassed (victim of bullying)
7. \_\_\_ I feel free
8. \_\_\_ I feel more confident in myself
9. \_\_\_ I feel like a leader
10. \_\_\_ I feel discriminated
11. \_\_\_ I feel in danger
12. \_\_\_ I feel relaxed
13. \_\_\_ I feel inspired
14. \_\_\_ I feel better informed
15. \_\_\_ I feel open-minded
16. \_\_\_ I feel sure of my decisions
17. \_\_\_ I feel video blogger
18. \_\_\_ I feel blogger
19. \_\_\_ I feel like a star
20. \_\_\_ I feel influencer

Part THREE - General aspects of European Union

**Please read the following sentences and indicate your agreement or disagreement writing the appropriate number in the blank spaces:**

**1 - strongly disagree, 2 - disagree, 3 - neutral, 4 - agree, 5 - strongly agree**

1. \_\_\_ I trust European Union
2. \_\_\_ I know my rights as a European citizen?
3. \_\_\_ I would like to study in EU
4. \_\_\_ I would like to work in EU
5. \_\_\_ I would like to start a family in EU
6. \_\_\_ EU borders should be closed to any immigrant
7. \_\_\_ I believe there are connections between terrorism and immigrants from outside EU
8. \_\_\_ European institutions do their job properly
9. \_\_\_ I am familiar with the European Parliament
10. \_\_\_ I am familiar with the European Council
11. \_\_\_ I am familiar with the Council of the European Union
12. \_\_\_ I am familiar with the European Commission
13. \_\_\_ I am familiar with the Court of Justice of the European Union
14. \_\_\_ I am familiar with the European Central Bank
15. \_\_\_ I agree with Brexit

Part FOUR - European Union and Romania

**Please read the following sentences and indicate your agreement or disagreement writing the appropriate number in the blank spaces:**

**1 - strongly disagree, 2 - disagree, 3 - neutral, 4 - agree, 5 - strongly agree**

1. \_\_\_ EU is an advantage for Romania
2. \_\_\_ EU has marginalized Romania so far
3. \_\_\_ EU is creating inequalities between member states
4. \_\_\_ European funds have been a real help for Romania
5. \_\_\_ Euro currency is a good thing
6. \_\_\_ I would like Romania to adopt euro
7. \_\_\_ I think Romania's EU membership is a good thing
8. \_\_\_ Economic situation of EU is good
9. \_\_\_ Economic situation of Romania is good
10. \_\_\_ I am pleased how democracy works in EU
11. \_\_\_ I am pleased how democracy works in Romania
12. \_\_\_ Romania should choose a model of national sovereignty rather than EU integration
13. \_\_\_ I think it is positive that from 1 January until 30 June 2019 Romania holds the Presidency of the Council of the European Union
14. \_\_\_ Romania should leave European Union
15. \_\_\_ I feel European citizen
16. \_\_\_ I feel Romanian citizen



Part FIVE - Social media, Internet and European integration

**Please read the following sentences and indicate your agreement or disagreement writing the appropriate number in the blank spaces:**

**1 - strongly disagree, 2 - disagree, 3 - neutral, 4 - agree, 5 - strongly agree**

1. \_\_\_ For me social media has positive connotations
2. \_\_\_ Internet and social media helped Romania in terms of European integration

3. Please mention at least three particular European Union-related topics of your interest, in order of priority (from the most interesting for you):

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## Appendix B - Associative Network Technique

1. Please write all the words (adjectives, nouns) that come to your mind about the given terms. Let your mind free and place your words around the central one. After writing a word put a number beside it to show the order in which you thought of it.
2. Take a look at the entire network you have created, and if you want, you can draw some arrows (lines) to make different correlations.
3. Mark every word you have written with + (positive), 0 (neutral), - (negative) according to the meaning that you want to give them.
4. Take a new look of the network that you have created and mark the importance of the words with roman numbers with a colored pen.





Me



Social  
Media



**European/International Joint Ph.D. in  
Social Representations and Communication**

European  
Union



Romania