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Online politicians: Portuguese digital political communication strategies in a governmental and electoral context

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Abstract

Political campaigning over time has adapted to a new reality while accompanying transformative technologies. Radio and Television played such a role, and now we find the Internet and social networking doing the same via varied digital platforms and tools that allow new forms of contact between candidates and voters. Studies underline new media increases political participation, thus decreasing the distance between the elected and electors (Coleman, 1999; Davis, 1999; Stanley & Weare, 2004). This work's main goal is to explore the importance Portuguese MPs attribute to the Internet and social networks while communicating, interacting, and competing in this new public space. Its specific objectives are: 1) to see if these digital tools fit into their daily political action and, if so, which are most used; 2) to examine the tools considered to be important in fostering closer relations between representatives and represented; and 3) if during the electoral campaign periods they are gaining preponderance in relation to traditional means of communication.

Keywords

Online political communication, internet, social media, MPs

Introduction

In Portugal, political actors have been increasingly marking their presence on the Internet, using a variety of online digital platforms such as websites and social networks (Facebook, Twitter, and others), both in the electoral and governance context. In digital social networks, political parties and politicians with parliamentary representation not only gain greater visibility and protagonism, but also find the opportunity to highlight their proposals, ideas and political initiatives. In addition, with the online tools available, it has become easier and less onerous for political actors to inform, promote, mobilize, and involve citizens in various policy initiatives, as well as publicize their political agenda (ranging from supporting candidates in an electoral campaign context, to other types of events favoring their political party).

Politics today cannot avoid the new technologies and has accompanied the evolution and transformations that they are provoking in the political communication sphere. The Internet and networks have brought citizens more information, and political institutions have made efforts to mobilize and engage citizens via the Internet (Chadwick, 2006), but the question of more substantial interaction and political participation is still disputable, given the way politicians use these methods "seems more a means of reproducing than a means of interaction" (Lobo, 2011, p. 6).

During election campaign periods, the use of the Internet has proven to be one of the most used tools. At first mainly through website and blog use, but more recently via social networks (especially Facebook and Twitter), which have made digital political communication gain a new breath. We have since witnessed the creation of politicians' and political parties' official pages during (and outside of) electoral campaigns (personal and political profiles from all political quadrants have multiplied). In Portugal almost all the politicians have personal profiles or official pages on Facebook and Twitter. MPs with parliamentary representation find in these online digital platforms an unparalleled opportunity to show their work without the need for information to pass through the Journalistic selection criteria, as well as the opportunity to obtain real-time feedback from citizens on their political initiatives/decisions/positions.

On the other hand, citizens who follow politicians and political parties on social networks can receive notifications in their newsfeeds related to the latter's activity and the

opportunity to listen, poll, and evaluate politicians because the mechanisms of transparency and accountability appear to be reinforced by Internet (in addition opening the possibility for citizens to express themselves directly in the politician and/or political candidate pages).

The general objective of this article is to understand the importance that Portuguese MPs attribute to the Internet in general, and to online social networks in particular, in communicating, interacting, and competing in this new public space. The specific objectives are to understand if Portuguese representatives use these digital tools: 1) in daily political action (and, if so, which are most used); (2) if they are considered to be essential to foster closer relations between representatives and represented; and 3) whether the tools are gaining dominance during electoral campaigns against traditional means of communication. In the context of the 2016 Portuguese presidential elections, we will describe what kinds of tools the candidates used in comparison with the 2011 presidential elections via methodological techniques that are essentially quantitative and qualitative (including an online survey administered to the MPs in 2014).

The Internet and social networks in a governmental and electoral context

Since the mid 90s the Internet began to gain preponderance during electoral campaigns, leading some authors to stress that "new technology has great potential to expand the horizons of political communication" (Barnett, 1997, p. 193) and "...became almost mandatory for candidates to have an election campaign website" (Druckman et al. 2007, p. 426), statements that are still valid today. Although in the first decade of the 21st century, other types of online digital platforms, such as social networks (Facebook, Twitter, among others) emerged, the design of websites during election campaigns are still a priority when political campaign strategies are defined.

Much research has been conducted over the last few years on the importance of the Internet and social networks in political campaigns and/or political mobilization. These perspectives address different aspects ranging from the question of reinforcing political participation, to improving relations between politicians and voters, to the question of interactivity with reflections on improving democracy (e.g. Davis and Owen, 1998; Johnson et al. 1999; Puopolo, 2001; Johnson and Kaye, 2003; Farrel et al. 2005; Kes-Erkul and

Erdem-Erkul, 2009; Tumasjan et al. 2010; Lees-Marshment 2011; Maarek 2011; Vergeer, 2012; Karlsen, 2012). Perspectives that relate the strength of the Internet as a tool that enhances democracy and the role that online campaigns should play as instruments that contribute to the strengthening of the principles and procedures of democracy can still be found in studies by Strommer-Galley (2000); Carlson and Göran (2001); Kaid (2002); Johnson and Kaye (2003); Kluver (2004); Trammel (2006) and Schweitzer (2008).

Reflections on political information in online campaigns that do not suffer news filtering, appear in the research (Farnsworth and Owen, 2004; Gibson et al. 2003; Kaid 2002; Klotz 1998; Myers 1993). The use of soundbites in television journalism (Gibson et al. 2003) can be compensated for with online campaigns where debate and deepening of projects and public issues are reinforced, since they do not find space and time in traditional media, due to news filters. Ward and Gibson (2003, p.189) attribute to the Internet and online digital platforms the possibility for parties to be able to provide information directly, in detail, and in greater quantity to citizens, by dispensing with traditional mediation. On the Internet, unlike traditional media, we have seen the absence of editorial control and non-distortion caused by the media. According to Kaid (2002), this possibility contributes to a more qualified and reasonable formation of the electorate's opinion.

The Internet, from the political point of view, can be an ally to improve democracy, because it can increase citizens' participation in public life and increase public debate (Lobo and Cunha, 2016, p. 235). From this perspective, online political campaigns can contribute to an improvement of democracy by promoting greater citizen participation through channels of direct dialogue with people, partisan leaders and campaign teams (Davis and Owen, 1998; Johnson et al. 1999; Puopolo, 2001). For Lees-Marshment (2011), involving citizens in a political campaign, whether face-to-face or through online communication, is one of the strategies to increase and improve the relationship between politicians and voters. Other authors share the view that voter interactivity and participation are key elements for increasing democratic participation (Lamy, 2011). On the Internet, electoral disputes are also more equitable and competitive, and can lead to increased political interest on the part of citizens, unlike the political-media context in which exposure time already depends on financial resources (Johnson and Kaye, 2003). On the other hand, as the structure becomes more sophisticated by media convergence, a greater investment is required, and there may be asymmetries between the campaigns,

weakening the parity of the dispute (Gomes et al. 2009). Other studies show that the relationship between citizens and political elites is becoming complex and that social media platforms stimulate citizen participation. However, this participation varied according to the context and the country (e.g. Anduiza, Jensen, and Jorba, 2012; Earl & Kimport, 2011; Cantijoch and Gibson, 2011; Lim, 2012; Tufecki and Wilson, 2012; Vaccari, 2013).

At an early stage, online political campaigns were confined to websites, where the form and diversity of content varied little, depending on whether the campaigns had more or less financial resources. Nowadays political campaigns have been gaining strength in social networks. Regarding the need to avoid media intermediation, which is always a conditioned intervention, and the reliance on traditional means of communication, with the elimination of gatekeepers, political actors find in social media a way of directly controlling messages (Broersma and Graham, 2012). Public opinion today may no longer be so influenced by traditional media (with its ideology, attitudes, and professional standards, editorial policy orientation of the vehicle, etc.), and therefore Mediation of politics in social networks, because of its ability to provide information directly to their potential voters (Lobo, 2013, pp. 3-4).

Web 2.0 and online social networks have brought new mechanisms in the way we communicate - interactivity, direct communication, and the ability to create our own content - but it has also created new forms of behavior and social and political involvement (Kes Erkul and Erdem Erkul, 2009). It has opened the possibility of citizens choosing to participate in online campaigns through tools such as blogs and social networks. It begins a period that lasts until today, in which online political campaigns have been incorporating social networks online with emphasis on mobilization.

Social networking sites, especially Facebook (which has already surpassed a billion users worldwide) or Twitter (that has millions of users), are transforming society and the political game for the constitution of new public spheres in digital environments. This is why Effing and others argue that the use of the Internet by citizens is increasingly social and participatory (Effing et al. 2011) and that participation is one of the key factors in web 2.0 and social media.

The recent election of US President Donald Trump in 2016 was marked by the preferential use of Twitter's social networking candidate, which eventually sparked some controversy

over the way it was used in the proliferation of fake news (leading to international debates on how dissemination of misinformation helped the candidate and harmed the adversary Hillary Clinton). The Democratic candidate even commented that fake news has become a real "epidemic" and a real danger with an impact on people's lives (Costa, 2016).

It is in this perspective of analysing online political campaigns that many authors emphasize the new potentialities of the Internet and social media in producing political messages. The strategies of political persuasion are different from those used in a media context (often marked by negative and critical campaigns) where candidates find in new media more time for the discussion of concrete public policy proposals of interest to citizens, breaking with the unidirectionality of communication imposed by traditional media. Direct participation between candidates and voters is now a reality. The "traditional" model of communication: a "one-to-many" message (vertical and unidirectional communication) differs from the new communication format (web 2.0 - "many to many" translated into horizontal, direct communication, bidirectional and interactive [socialcast] based on a logic of participation).

The Importance of the Internet and Social Networks in Political Mobilization and Participation

In Portugal, 67.3% of individuals use the Internet (2016). According to a study by Marktest "Portuguese and social networks 2015", the number of Portuguese social network users has tripled in seven years, from 17.1% to 54.8% in 2015. Facebook is the social network with the highest penetration rate in Portugal, with 93.6%, followed by YouTube (41.4%), Google + (40.2%), LinkedIn (37.3%), Instagram, 9%) and Twitter (23.6%).

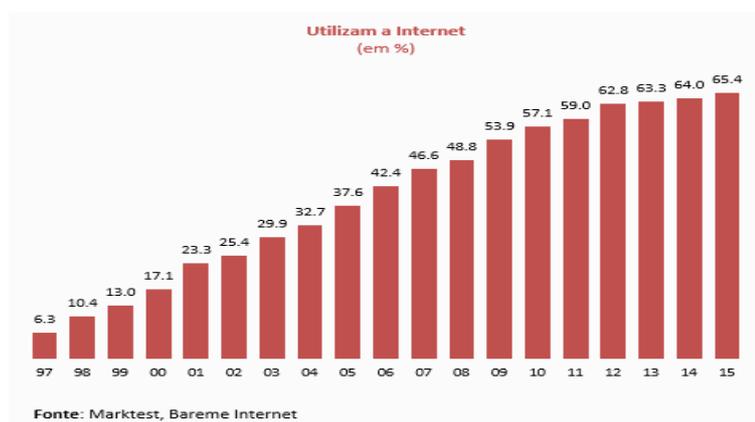


Figure 1. Evolution of the number of Internet users in Portugal from 1997 to 2015.

But the Internet and social networks have also proved important in the field of political protest, such as the successive revolts of countries in North Africa and the Middle East. First Tunisia, then Egypt, then Yemen, Bahrain and Libya had social networks as the aggregator. Paulo Querido, consultant in Information and Knowledge Technologies, revealed that "social networks provide spontaneous movements, where people who share points of view can unite" (Jornal de Negócios, 21/02/2011, p. 26). Mobilizing and holding demonstrations takes much less time to organise. Gustavo Cardoso of the Communication Observatory (Obercom) stressed that "social networks are tools to build the alternatives we want: when many people feel identified with an idea, they go out into the street. It is a task that social networks facilitate and that is later amplified by the media, which causes more people to join the protests" (Jornal de Negócios, 21/02/2011, p. 26). José Neves, historian, reveals the merit of social networks by having "resurrected the very intermediate space of discussion, which is not situated in a political or apolitical dimension". The contest "gains a new glow with social networks," but computerized social networks do not replace "word-of-mouth rumors; in fact, they begin to feed social networks and feed on them" (Jornal de Negócios, 21/02/2011, p. 26).

It is rumored that one of the risks of social networks are lies. A rumor or myth can start off as a fake profile of a Facebook politician, and spread to the media. This is an obvious difficulty in closed countries such as Libya, where there is no press - in addition to the state press - to confirm the information transmitted via Twitter. "The social networks leave much to be desired from the point of view of information accuracy", admits Paulo Querido. The information that circulates is useful for those who participate in the demonstrations, but it is not easy for the journalist to discover its origin, nor to attest to its truthfulness".

Even because it lacks a central axis of decision, a face, a leader" (Jornal de Negócios, 21/02/2011, p.26). Joaquim Dionísio, head of the CGTP (General Confederation of Portuguese Workers) confirms the potential of Facebook: "It is a powerful instrument: it makes communication and the exchange of ideas easy". However, he considers that the potential of the tool is not being exploited well (Jornal de Negócios, 21/02/2011, p. 26).

José Manuel Pureza, former leader of the parliamentary group of the Left-Bloc party (BE), revealed to the newspaper Jornal de Negócios that "Facebook is a political forum (...) and that he has used to transmit ideas in parliament, the least known initiatives." Like all social networks, he believes that Facebook "is a bubble that produces a representation of reality that can be very distorted of what is really happening ... because it is one shaped by small communities of opinion" (Jornal de Negócios, 21/02/2011, p. 26).

In Portugal, having an Internet website, as well as personal pages and /or profiles in social networks, is not yet assumed as a determining factor in order to win elections. Although there are no studies on this relationship valid for the Portuguese context, the reality seems to show that the use of digital platforms in electoral campaigns can contribute to the (re)configuration of democratic processes by facilitating and encouraging citizen participation in political life. Through online digital platforms, it is believed that citizens today have the possibility to participate more actively in the process of choosing the candidate and denouncing, commenting, and protesting against the attitudes of politicians or pronouncing themselves against political decision-making which they consider to be unfavorable to the interests of citizens. This does not mean, however, that social networks have created the conditions for qualified discussion on political, economic, or cultural issues, or that politicians consider these discussions for public debate.

In an interview with the newspaper Correio da Bahia, Castells stressed that "if there was a desire for political and democratic participation on the part of the elites, network communication offers enormous possibilities to increase citizen participation instead of reducing democracy to a mediated vote every four years (Fontes, 2015). Contrary opinion reveals that social networks "seem to have agglomerated a set of egos that were scattered and divided". Umberto Eco even affirmed that "social networks came to give voice to a legion of imbeciles" (Eco, 2015, nd). However, although the voices are in agreement or discordant about the advantages of using the Internet and social networks for democracy

and political debate, the study has tried to know how Portuguese politicians communicate with citizens in a digital context and during election campaign periods?

Methodology

The governing parties' actions, as well as opposition parties with parliamentary representation, show a growing number of politician profiles and Facebook pages, revealing their party activity and ideological position on certain topics. An online survey was conducted for the project "Elections, Leadership and Accountability: Political Representation in Portugal: a longitudinal and comparative perspective" (PTDC/CPJ-CPO/119307/2010) coordinated by Professor André Freire (ISCTE-IUL and CIES-IUL). The researcher, Mafalda Lobo, coordinated the questions related to the use of the online platforms by the MPs. The general objective of the survey was to understand the importance that Portuguese Members attached to the Internet in general and to the use of online digital platforms, especially in the process of communication, interaction and competition in this new public space. The specific objectives were: to see if the representatives of the portuguese citizens fit these online tools into the daily parliamentary and extra-parliamentary political action, and also in the electoral context.

The survey was administered in July 2014, and was divided into four major areas; i) entry into politics and exercise in political activity; ii) use of online platforms; iii) political representation and new information technologies (ICT); iv) internet, digital social networks and political campaigns; V) profile of the MPs (age, qualifications, electoral circle). The survey had a total of 46 questions. For the analysis and discussion of the results, this article gives priority to points ii, iii and point iv.

Regarding the Portuguese presidential elections of 2011, the objective is to describe how candidates used the Internet, what kind of social media tools they utilised for political campaigning, and if there were major differences in the strategy adopted by the candidates. The methodology is based on qualitative content analysis of the candidates' web pages and social networks.

Analysis of the survey of portuguese MPs

The sample of the data included in the survey on "The Use of Online Platforms by Portuguese Members" consists of 62 MPs (out of 230) from the XII Legislature (2011-2015). Regarding the gender of the respondents, 44 were male and 18 were female.

Figure 2 – Characterization of the sample by gender, 2014 (male and female n=62)

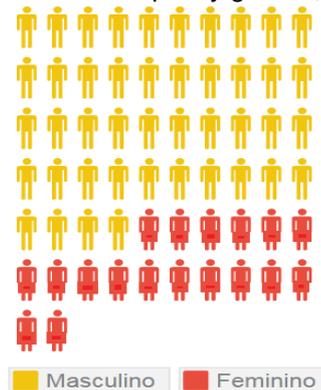
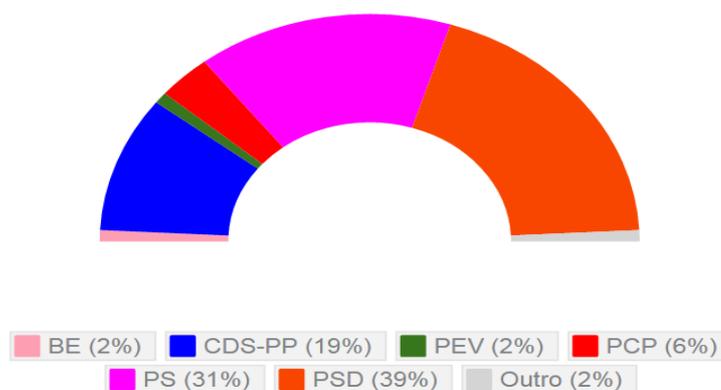
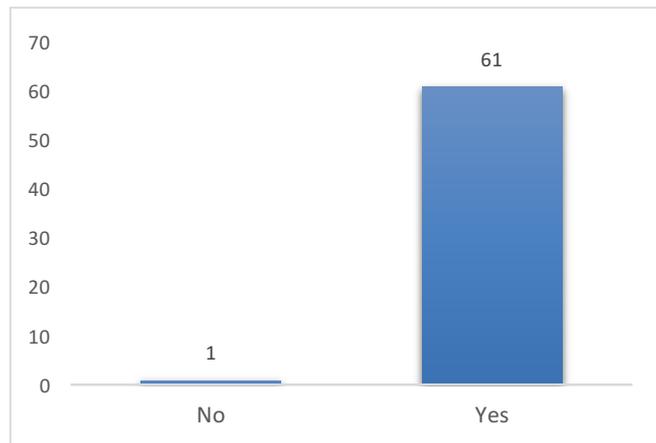


Figure 3 - What party do you belong to?

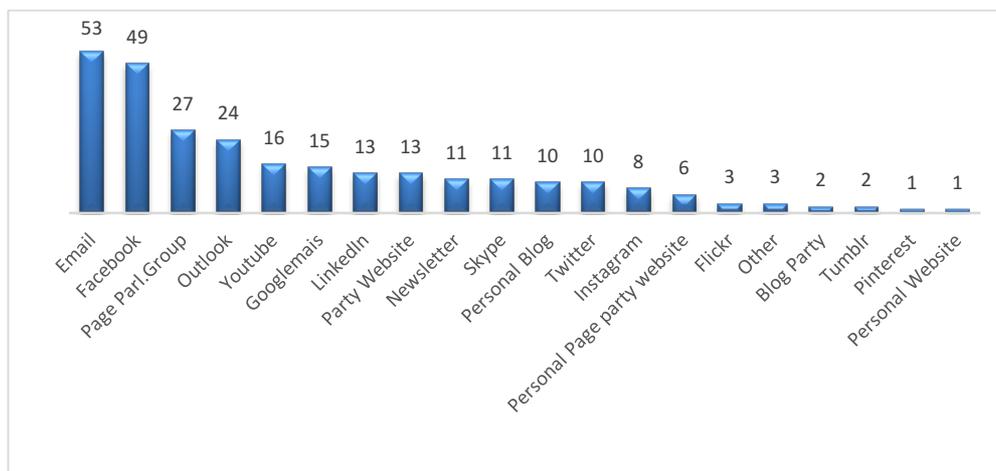


Of the total number of respondents (62 MPs), 24 belonged to the PSD, 19 to the PS, 12 to the CDS-PP, four to the PCP, one to the BE (Left Bloc), one to the PEV and one respondent to another unspecified party. Regarding the question on the use of online platforms, the legislators of the XII Legislature were asked if they had the habit of using online platforms in their activity as MPs.



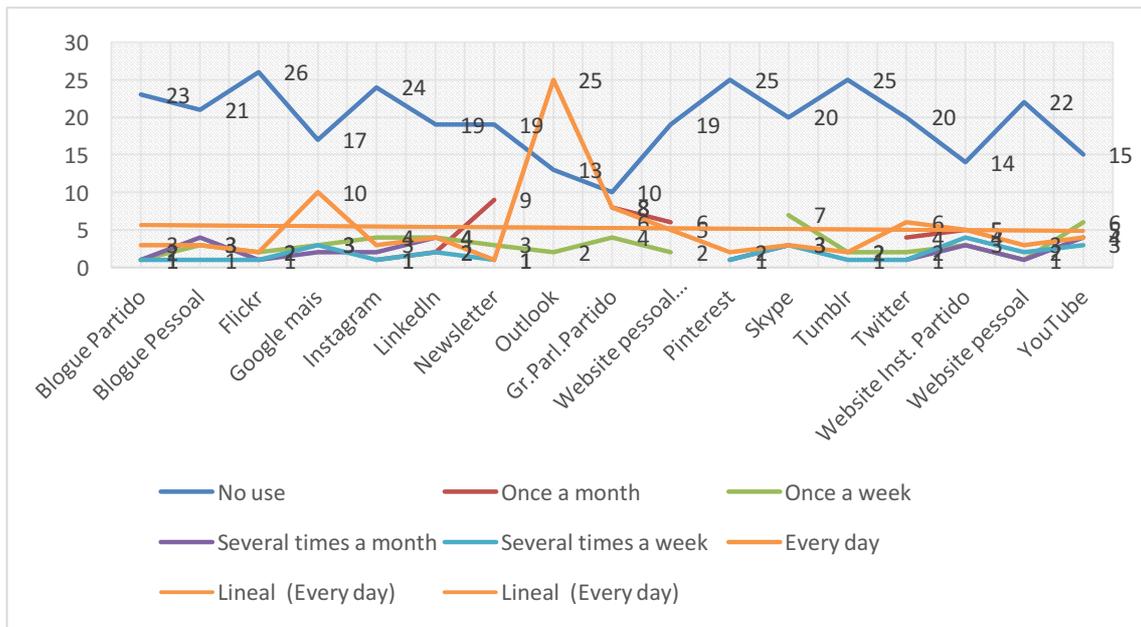
Graph 1. Using online platforms

Virtually all portuguese MPs the Internet in their day-to-day activities in parliament (61). Only one MP said no.



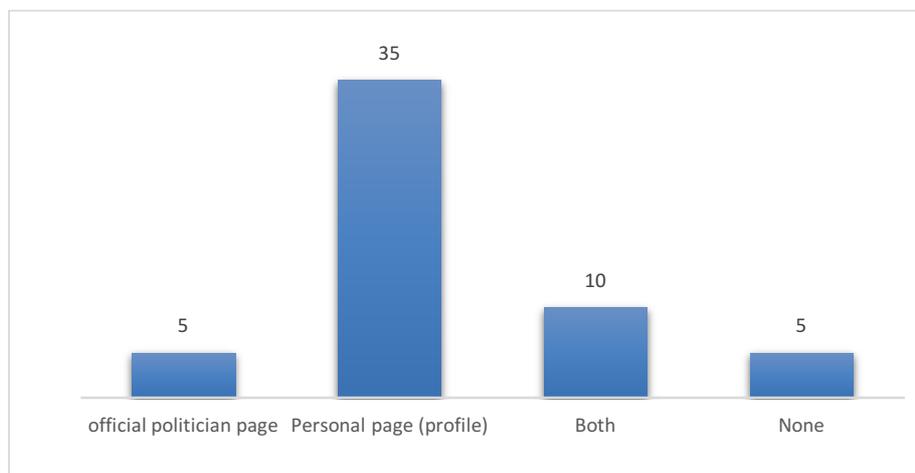
Graph 2. Use platforms daily to communicate initiatives

In analyzing answers to the online platforms used by the MPs daily to communicate their activities and initiatives (Graph 2) it is shown that the digital platform most used by the majority of Members was e-mail (53), followed by Facebook (49). Third was the Parliamentary Group party page to which they belonged (27). The least used platforms are: Instagram (8), followed by the party website (6); Flickr (3); Other unspecified (3); Party blog (2); Tumblr (2); Pinterest (1) and personal website (1).



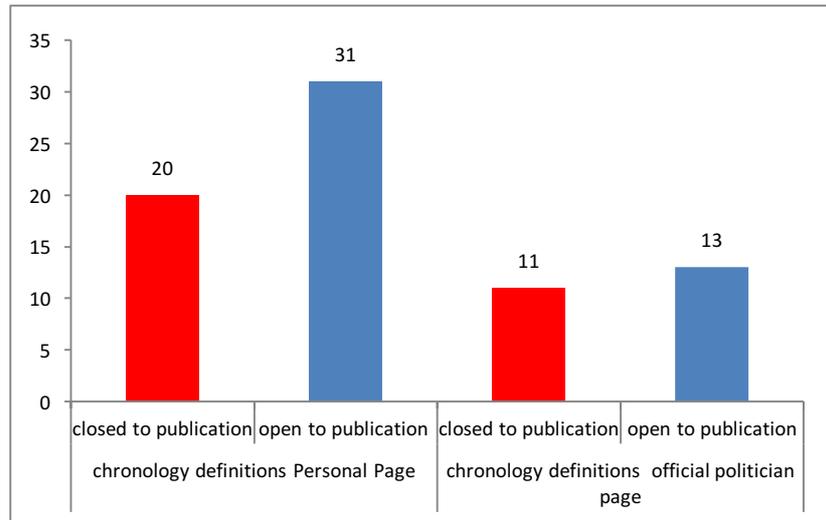
Graph 3. Frequency of online platforms use

When questioned about the frequency of the platforms used (Graph 3), the study finds that the online digital platform that MPs use most frequently (every day) is e-mail (52) followed by social network Facebook (33) and Outlook (25).



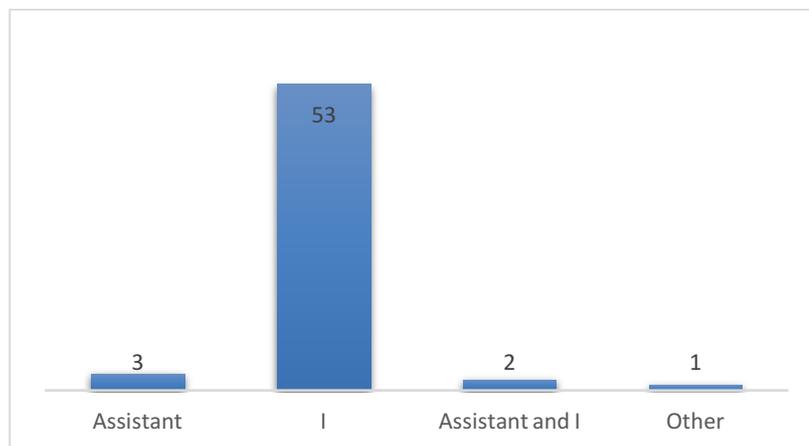
Graph 4. Page type on Facebook

According to Graph 4 it was verified that the majority of MPs (in relation to the type of page in which they chose to appear in Facebook), was the personal page (profile) with 35 responses. Only ten answered that they chose to have both pages (profile page and political page), five opted for the official politician page, and five replied that they did not have any kind of page.



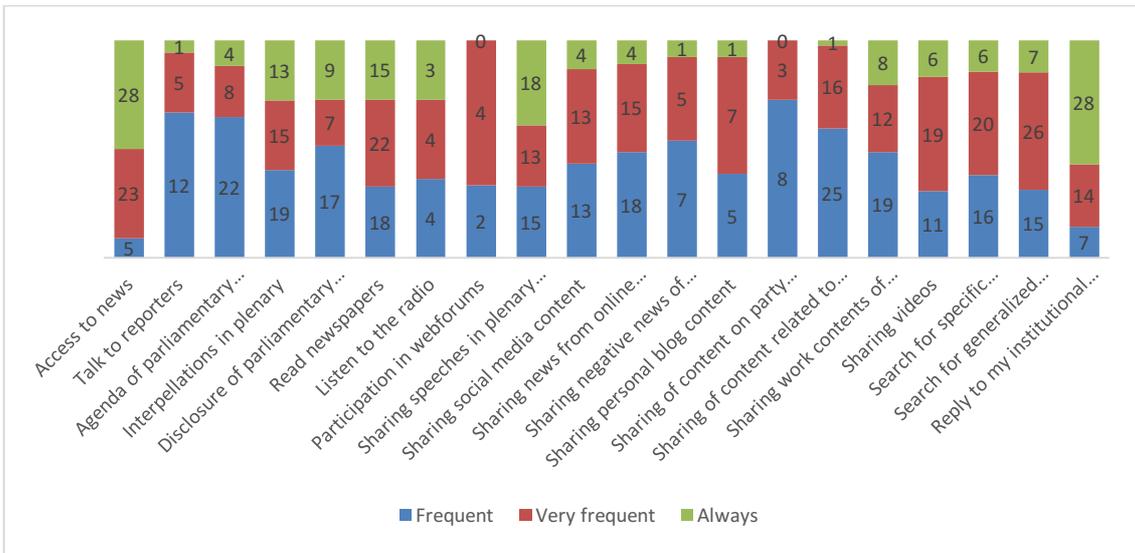
Graph 5. Chronology settings vs. public posts

Concerning the question of chronology definitions (i.e., whether the public could share information on the Members' page), of the 62 Members, 11 did not respond. Of the MPs who replied, 51 revealed that their personal profile on Facebook was open to publication (31), 20 MPs replied that it was closed. Regarding the official politician page, of the total respondents (24), 13 MPs revealed to be open to publication and 11 MPs that it was closed to publication.

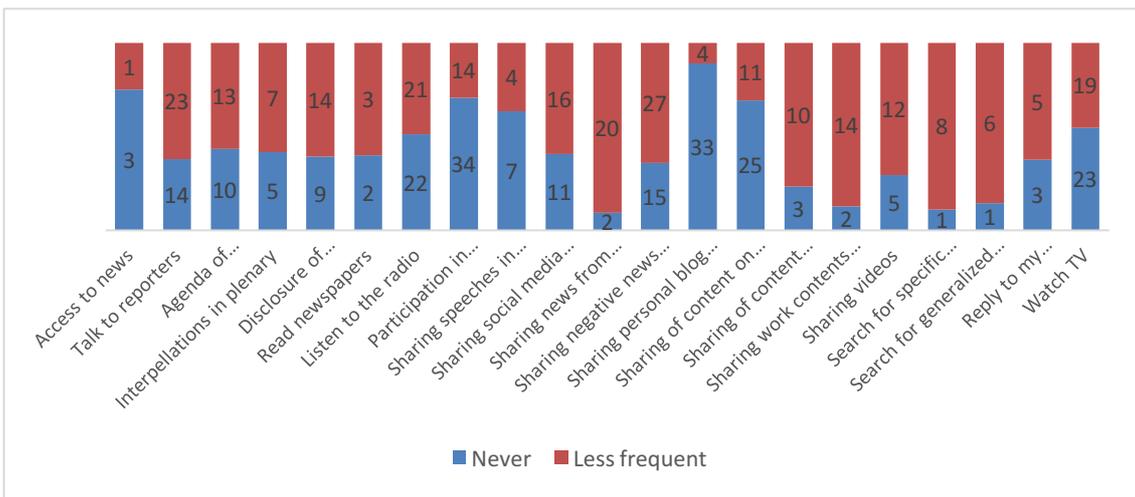


Graph 6. Online content management

Regarding the question of who managed the content of Members online platforms (Graph 6) 59 Members answered this question. Most Members replied that they were themselves managing the content online (53), only three replied that it was their assistant, and two replied that it varied between him and the assistant. Only one answer chose the "other" option.



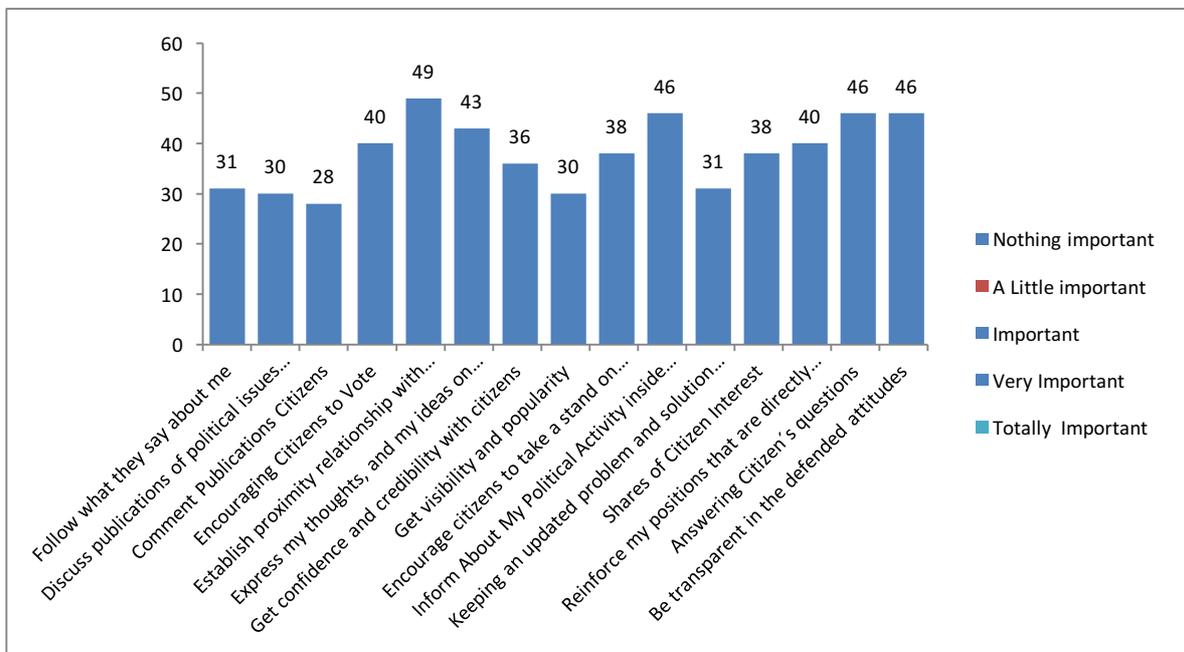
Graph 7 a). Frequency with which he/she performs the following functions/actions daily online in parliament (multiple answer)



Graph 7 b). Frequency with which he/she performs the following functions/actions daily online in parliament (multiple answer)

From the analysis of Graph 7a, it is verified that the frequency with which the MPs exercised certain actions/functions in online platforms, the option "Frequent" was particularly significant in the share of contents related to the party and/or parliamentary group (25); followed by the dissemination of the agenda of parliamentary groups (22); disclosure of pleadings in plenary (19); share of committee work in which I participated (19). Still with some weight, it is important to read newspapers (18); sharing news from various online media outlets where my party is involved (18). The "very frequent" option stands out in the following actions/functions: search for generalized information (26);

access to news (23); reading newspapers (22) and researching specific information about subjects or people (20). Regarding the last multiple-choice option for "Always", members replied that the content they always accessed when using online platforms was: access to the news (28) and reply to my institutional email from parliament (28). Third, there was the sharing of speeches in plenary and/or parliamentary debates (18). In analyzing Graph 7b), we found that the frequency with which MPs performed certain actions/functions in online platforms, the "never" option was significant for participation in web forums (34), sharing of personal blog content (33), followed by sharing content on party blogs (25), watching television (23), and talking to reporters (14).

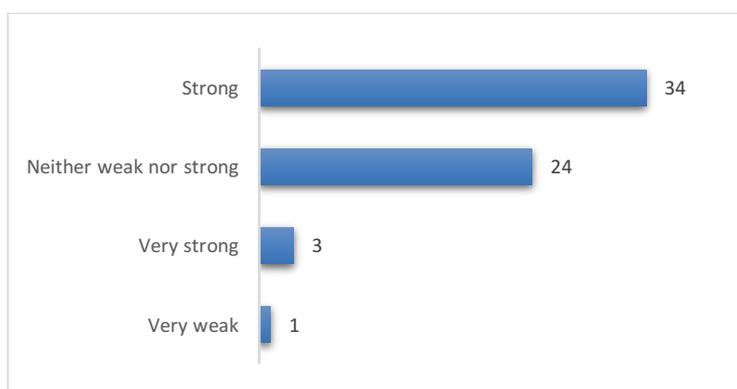


Graph 8. Assessment of online platforms regarding the relationship established with citizens

Regarding the objectives and the importance that was attached to online platforms in the relationship established with citizens, MPs considered "important" and "very important" certain actions. Online platforms are very important for establishing close relations with citizens (49); to report on political activity inside and outside Parliament (46); be transparent in the defended attitudes (46); respond to questions posed by citizens (46); express their thoughts and ideas on political issues (43); strengthen their positions which are directly related to the interests of citizens (40); and encourage citizens to vote (40).

Other significant values point to: encouraging the citizen to take a stand on a subject that interests them (38); share links of subjects of interest/clarification to the citizen (38); and gain trust and credibility among citizens (36); maintain an updated policy agenda of problems and solutions (31); gain visibility and popularity (30). In the "important" response option, it appears to follow what they say about me (31); commenting on political affairs related to other political forces (30); and comment on citizens' publications (28). In the "nothing important" and "not important" options, the answers were not very significant, which showed that MPs valued online platforms according to certain objectives in the relationship they establish with citizens, with a greater degree of importance.

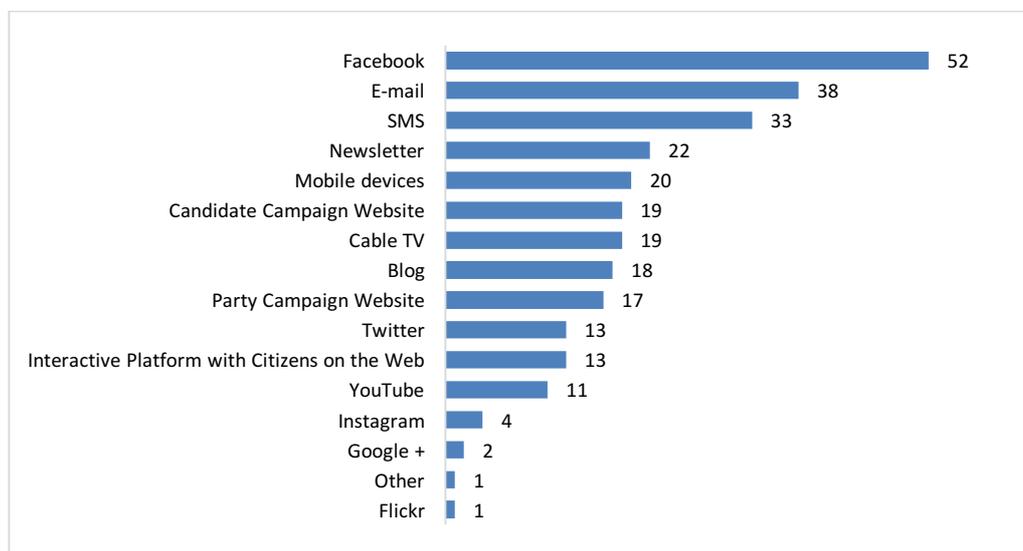
In the context of the election campaigns, we asked members whether they considered the use of the Internet and social networks to be important, to which the majority replied yes (61 Members) and only one replied that they did not. Regarding the question of whether in electoral periods television was losing some preponderance in the face of the development of online media, the answers were divided: 31 MPs thought they did, while 31 MPs did not think so.



Graph 9. Evaluation of Internet and social networks influence in the construction of the candidate's image

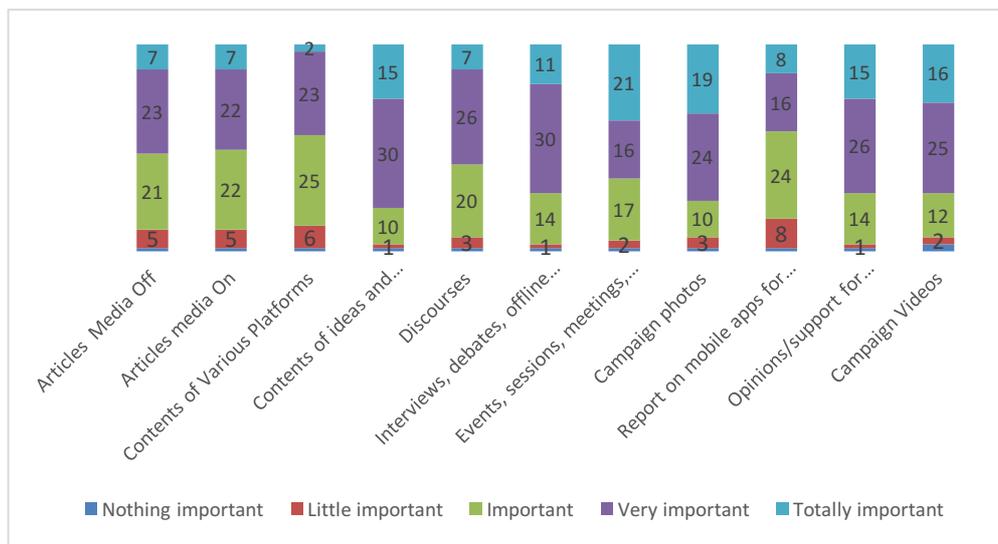
On the way they evaluated the influence of the use of the Internet and online social networks in building a candidate's image in an electoral campaign (Graph 9) we obtained the following results: 34 MPs considered that the Internet and social networks were "very strong" in the construction of the image of a candidate; 24 thought that "it is neither weak nor strong"; 3 thought it was "very strong" and only 1 thought it was "very weak". Also in

the context of an election campaign, 34 MPs felt that the Internet and social networks were not decisive for a candidate to win elections, while 24 MPs thought they were.



Graph 10. Media considered more effective during an election campaign

Regarding the question of what media they consider to be more effective during an election campaign (Graph 10), the study shows that the Portuguese Members who answered this question consider that Facebook is the most effective platform in a political campaign, followed by the E-mail (38); SMS (33); Newsletter (22); Mobile devices (20); Campaign website (19); Cable TV (19); Blog (18); Party campaign website (17); Twitter (13); Interactive platform with citizens on the web (13); YouTube (11); Instagram (4); Google+ (2); Flickr (1).



Graph 11. Most relevant content shared on Facebook

With Facebook being the most effective online platform in a political campaign, we asked Members what kind of content they felt was most relevant to share in an election campaign. We can see (Graph 11) that in the "important" and "most important" options are the majority of the respondents, which means that members attached importance to the use of the Internet and social networks, especially Facebook in the context of election campaigns. In the "important" option the paper shows the answer to the 'media on articles' (22); 'Media off articles' (21); 'Contents of the various platforms' (25); 'Contents of ideas and proposals written in the first person' (10); 'Discourses' (20); 'Interviews/debates/interventions of the offline media' (14); 'Events/sessions/meetings/lunches with militants and supporters in various regions of the country' (17); 'Campaign photos' (10); 'Report on mobile applications for campaign monitoring' (24); 'Opinions/support of candidacies' (14) and 'campaign videos' (12). In the "very important" option, the 'contents of ideas and proposals written in the first person' (30) stood out; and 'interviews/debates/interventions of the offline media' (30) followed by 'speeches' (26); 'Opinions/support for candidacy' (26); Campaign videos '(25),' campaign photos '(24)'; 'Contents of the various platforms' (23); 'Media off' articles (23); 'Media on' articles (22) and 'events/sessions/meetings/ lunches with militants and supporters in various regions of the country' and to report on mobile applications for campaign monitoring (16). In the "totally important" option the highlight goes to 'events/sessions/meetings/lunches with militants and supporters in various regions of the country' (21) followed by 'campaign photos' (19); 'Content of ideas and written proposals in the first person' and 'opinions/support for the candidature' (15) and sharing of 'campaign videos' (16).

Conclusions

Today we live in a changing global world. The Internet has become an increasingly used instrument in this globalized world, and politics today cannot keep away from the new technologies and has accompanied the evolution and the transformations that they are provoking in the sphere of political communication. In the portuguese parliament, almost all Members use the Internet in their day-to-day activities. The most used platform is e-mail. Facebook appears second as the social network most used by MPs to communicate with citizens. Party website pages, for example, are little used for the purpose of communicating their daily practices as representatives of the people. Email is a platform they use every day, as well as Facebook and Outlook. On Facebook most MPs have a personal page (profile) that is open to publication and not a politicians page. The majority of the MPs in the social network manage the contents themselves.

As for the frequency with which they perform certain actions on the Internet and on social networks, for Members, the search for generalized information is very frequent; access to news and reading newspapers. The type of content that MPs access whenever they connect to the Internet from parliament is news and responding to e-mail.

The sharing of speeches in plenary and parliamentary debates is also very common when using the Internet, especially social networks. On the importance that MPs attach to online platforms in proximity and in relationship with citizens, most consider that they are very important to create proximity, but also to inform about what goes on inside and outside parliament that the media do not always cover. Transparency in defended attitudes, responding to questions posed by citizens, expressing thoughts and ideas on political issues, and reinforcing their positions when they are concerned with the direct interest of citizens are some of the actions they value most when using online platforms. In the context of election campaigns, most MPs consider the Internet and social networks to be very important, although in relation to the media context, opinions are divided; one side thinks that television is still the most important medium, and the other half finds that it is not so important anymore.

In building the candidate's image, most consider the Internet and social networks are very strong in building a good image of the candidate. However, they do not think it is decisive for a candidate to win elections. Online media is considered most effective during an election campaign, and there is no doubt that most respondents consider Facebook the most effective digital platform in an online political campaign.

This is the platform they find most effective in sharing content that they think is very important to distribute (ideas and proposals written in the first person and the interviews/debates/interventions of offline media). As a very important sharing, most of the MPs highlight the events/sessions/meetings/lunches with militants and supporters in various regions of the country, because they are moments of great gathering of militants and supporters which shows the great mobilization of citizens for the campaign, and this gives a great visibility to the candidates and the parties that support them.

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