Chapter 6

Talk to me and I will talk for you: Relationships between Citizens and Politics on the example of Portuguese Members of Parliament online communication

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Introduction

As digital communication technologies started to develop, a new environment for communication was formed. What was initially considered just a roll-out of innovations soon took the form of the World Wide Web, laying the groundwork for the emergence of Web 2.0. What could be called Digital Evolution took on its own *milieu* and setting (Macnamara, 2010, Breakenridge, 2008).

Characterized by the easy creation and exchange of User Generated Content (Kaplan & Haenlein, 2010: 61), social media creates new circumstances and possibilities for public discussions. With it comes a new stage for the public sphere, which creates blurred borders with the public space. Furthermore, social media also means, due to its communications conditions and routines, that there is a clear separation of time and space and even a change in the linear understanding of the communication sequence and flow. Social media not only complements traditional media but has specific characteristics such as mobility, complexity, plurality of channels and actors, interactivity, network structures, and constant change.

From a social theory perspective, social media and modern online communication can be framed by the dominance of abstract systems and the characteristics of modernity defined by Giddens (1991). Because of the process of "disembedding", social relations are removed from local contexts of interaction, creating new con-

texts. Those interactions become more and more mediated by new technical interfaces, and are often based on trust in the "correctness of abstract principles (technical knowledge)" (Giddens 1991: p. 34). Those changes add an extra challenge to social action and relations.

Politicians all over Europe have quickly taken to this virtual space. Since 2011, an average of 70% of Members of the European Parliament (MEPs) regularly communicate with citizens via social media. Since 2011, the European Parliament has also had a mobile version of the website with an integrated Facebook page that disseminates content from the MEPs' presence on their own online platforms, including Twitter, blogs and the EP's official website (EP, 2011). Parliamentarians' websites offer a range of Web 1.0 and Web 2.0 features and strive to stimulate engaging and interactive experiences (Lilleker, 2011). But, not limited to informal discussion, in 2012, the European Commission performed a public online consultation, in which European citizens could express their opinions about their rights (Andrecs, 2011).[1] According to the 2015 European Parliament Digital Trends Survey (EPDTS), the European Parliament currently has 572 of 751 MEPs (76%) on its list of those with Twitter accounts and 663 MEPs (88%) on its list of Facebook users.[2] Learning about breaking news, engaging with people through dialogue and expressing their views to stakeholders are the main reasons why MEPs become involved in social media (EPDTS, 2015).

Contrary to other European countries, few studies have focused attention on MPs' online communication practices in Portugal.[3] A previous study came to the conclusion that three main obstacles existed to the development of a "digital democracy" in Portugal: the predominance of television in the media system, a political parliamentary system that does not promote direct contact with citizens, and the existence of unmotivated citizens (Cardoso, Cunha & Nascimento, 2003). This study also showed that only 5.1% of MPs frequently used personal websites, 2.6% used newsgroups and 1.3% used chat rooms to do their parliamentary work. Has this reality changed over these last 10 years with the new evolutions of the digital era and the spread of mobile media?

[1] http://europedecides.eu/2014/06/the-new-european-parliament-on-twitter-look-whos-talking/

[2] http://www.epdigitaltrends.eu/assets/ep-digital-trends-survey_full_results.pdf

[3] See, for example, regarding the UK's situation, Jackson and Lilleker, 2004; or Lusoli, Ward, and Gibson, 2006.

Another more recent exploratory study was conducted about the use of Web 2.0 tools on the Portuguese Parliament's website that aim to increase interaction between Members of Parliament and citizens – forums, blogs, petitions – and revealed a small degree of participation by both parties (Serra, 2012). This study agrees with the findings by Leston-Bandeira (2012) about petitions as a participatory tool:

> What may be lacking is the development of more participative citizens, though data on petitions shows that the Portuguese have learned how to make use of this constitutional right (p.399).

In line with the "relationship management" theory, which claims that in order for an organization to be successful it needs to put effort into establishing and nurturing relationships with its publics and balance mutual interests (Ledingham, 2006, 2011), the main goal of this chapter is to analyse whether or not online communication tools stimulate citizen-politician relationships. In particular, we aim to find out and reflect on how social media is being used to foster interaction and dialogue between citizens and Members of Parliament, specifically at the Portuguese Parliament – *Assembleia da República*. Our main focus is on this relationship, considering the representative democratic principles that work towards public dialogic needs in a framework of legitimization and transparency, and isolating it from structures and interactions on the platforms made available centrally by the political party or by the Parliament. This approach includes the sociological framework laid down by Giddens in his structuration theory (1984). Furthermore, the dialogical paradigm and maturity in social media communication is considered in the sense of a "transformative discussion", meaning authentic and open communication that produces a means of changing an opinion or perspective. It occurs when stakeholders lose their position of power by engaging in an authentic and open dialogic exchange in the Habermasian sense but applied to online communication (see Oliveira & Winchenbach, 2011).

6.1 Literature review

The literature review is divided into two sections: the first is a reflection on the sociological context of social media communication, and the second focuses on its relationship with online political communication and relationship management studies from a political public relations perspective.

Social Media Communication

Over the last years, the growth in the number of mobile devices and the improvement in connectivity, like LTE systems[4] and others, support the trend that technologically mediated communication has reached diverse sociodemographic groups (van Eimeren & Frees, 2012: 362; PEW Research, 2012: 5-6). While in its initial phase only the young could be included in social media communication, now the "digital natives" are only one group of users.

The emancipation of stakeholders and publics demands and pushes for a shift away from hierarchical structures to produce, demand and perform a form of interaction and communication that is more democratic in its principles (Brown 2009: 2; Coombs 1998: 289; Sweetser 2010). This is a consequence of an authoritative competence developed by structural usability. Publishing is easier and dependent on access rather than personal capacity. In that process, the perception of users changes from passive recipients to investigative multipliers (Zerfaß, 2007: 41). Furthermore, social aspects such as authenticity gain importance and there is a shift from general groups to communities, dissolving authoritative competences. In line with that, the traditional information flow through broadcasting in mass media is replaced or complemented by the selection and sharing of specific information in a new form of gatekeeping. This coincides, in turn, with new open forms of persuasion.

Besides structures and technical possibilities, as well as access to those tools, what O'Reilly (2005) considers a *societal paradigm shift* is becoming stronger and bolder. This shift is considered to be due to the fact that changes in societal exchange and interaction are happening in basic manners and principles. Schmidt (2008: 34-35) makes an analogy of three particularly relevant issues of change

[4] LTE stands for Long-Term Evolution and is also known as 4G. It is a standard for high-speed data for mobile phones, data terminals and wireless communication.

and connects them with levels of society. At micro level, the boundaries between private and public are dissolving as simple publication possibilities facilitate a rise in a variety of "personal publics". At meso level, new technologies demand specific media literacy. Different levels of media literacy are creating "digital gaps". At macro level, established and implemented concepts and practices of communication management are not ready to deal with the quantity and modern forms of collaboration and participation.

Levine *et al.* (2009) describe those characteristics in the context of what they call the Cluetrain Manifesto, in which those changes are described and systematized – especially the imperative for dialogue, which is seen as the willingness and openness to talk to the public. Pleil (2007: 18) (See Table 6.1) breaks down the chronological development of online communication based on what is defined by the "internet galaxy" and the "Google world".

In this case, social media communication characteristics set the tone for users' roles and demands, as well as the main communication aim and role of online PR. Whilst in digital and internet PR communication is monological and users are seen as recipients with options for action, in Cluetrain PR the dialogical and network-oriented characteristics demand an understanding of the users as communication partners and not only recipients. This is true in that the communication aims to argue with and understand publics rather than inform and persuade them.

As we will discuss ahead, political communication according to this understanding poses many challenges that turn out to be more time-consuming and costly than traditional, unidirectional information dissemination. Moreover, the structures and processes are more complex and demand greater professionalization and skills. In a nutshell, the new online platforms cannot just be seen as an additional technological enabler, but instead they produce a *thorough shift* in "the way it's being used" (Pavlik, 2007: 9).

Characteristics	Types of Online PR		
	Digital PR	Internet PR	Cluetrain PR
Environment	Internet Galaxy		Google World
Communication	monological	monological (indirect feedback)	dialogical, network oriented
Users' Role	recipients	recipients with limited action options	communication partners organized in a network
Demands	PR competences, understanding of hypermediality	Content Management, social research	strategic and interpersonal skills; special position of trust;
Expenditure	relatively small,	high technical effort Need for their own site (s) for online PR	very time-consuming; continuous task ("always on")
Role of Online PR	executive	channelling	openness, empowerment of stakeholders
Main Aim	information	persuasion	understanding, argumentation

Table 6.1: Comparison of the three types of online PR (Source: modified from Pleil, 2007: 18)

Online political communication and relationship management

Democratic societies are experiencing a democratic deficit largely visible in the increased abstention in political elections and general disenchantment with politics. This deficit is, to a large extent, a crisis of trust in traditional political parties and government, according to which citizens feel misrepresented and hence alienated from rightful participation in their political destiny.

It is no wonder, therefore, that since the mid-1990s the rise and spread of the internet has been observed as the solution to the illnesses of democracy, enabling "the virtual community" (Rheingold, 1993), "virtual democracy" (Scheer, 1994), and radical new ways of

living (Dertouzos, 1997). In fact, ever since the internet became part of the politician's toolkit, and especially with the development of Web 2.0, more attention has been paid to new opportunities for politician-voter interaction, as demonstrated by the much publicized 2008 Obama campaign, known as "the first internet election".

However, and despite it being a debated issue, there is no consensus regarding new media's potential to increase citizens' political engagement and participation. Earlier studies, albeit to different degrees, have suggested a positive or optimistic perspective of the internet's role in enhancing political trust, pluralism and widening citizen participation in governmental processes (e.g., Chadwick 2006; Curtice & Norris, 2004; Norris, 2003; Rheinghold, 1993) and have stressed its importance for "horizontal communication", which is central to civic interaction (Dahlgren, 2005). In general, these studies have underlined how digitally mediated direct representation could provide the basis for more dialogical and deliberative democracy instead of the "dialogue of the deaf which tends to characterize contemporary political representation" (Coleman, 2005: 177).

Nevertheless, more empirically focused research has, contrariwise, shown a more negative, pessimistic, sceptical approach, pointing to what is often referred to as the "normalization thesis": politics on the internet is nothing more than "politics as usual", dominated by the traditional, offline players (Margolis & Resnick, 2000; Larsson, 2013; Schweitzer, 2008, 2011).

Over time, as presented in Table 6.2, these positive/negative approaches have led researchers to adopt one or more dichotomies when interpreting their findings in online political communication (see Larsson and Svensson, 2014, for a comprehensive overview). One cannot help wonder if this dichotomization is a not a dead end. Some researchers, indeed, have already suggested a third, middle-ground alternative when studying the politicians' online activities. Jackson and Lilleker (2009), for example, suggest a hybrid, midway between innovation and stagnation, as a description of what political parties are doing online. In their analysis they found that British political parties have sought to experiment with Web 2.0 applications and appear to be using some aspects of the technology but not others. They found that they have sought to create a "Web 1.5" that offers the advantages of both Web 1.0 (control and content dissemination) and Web 2.0 (interactivity).

(More) positive	(More) negative	Authors (examples)
Equalization/ innovation	Normalization	Gibson *et al.*, 2008; Lilleker *et al.*, 2011; Margolis and Resnick, 2000; Schweitzer, 2008, 2011
Optimistic	Pessimistic	Coleman and Blumler, 2009
Cyber-optimist	Cyber-realist	Shane, 2004; Wright, 2012
Optimist	Sceptic	Christensen and Bengtsson, 2001

Table 6.2: Dichotomized approaches to online politics (Source: adapted from Larsson and Svensson, 2014: 3)

The on-going discussion about the merits of online communication potential can also be easily found in the political public relations (PPR) literature, especially literature grounded in the relationship management paradigm. It was Stromback & Kiousis (2011) who, with the intention of bridging the gap between public relations and political communication theory, brought the relationship management perspective into the definition of PPR:

> Political public relations is the management process by which an organization or individual actor for political purposes, through purposeful communication and action, seeks to influence and to establish, build, and maintain *beneficial relationships* [emphasis added] and reputations with its key publics to help support its mission and achieve its goals. (Stromback & Kiousis, 2011, p.8)

In the light of relationship management theory, *beneficial relationships* would be characterized by mutual positive interdependence. To better understand this interdependence, Ledingham and Bruning (1998), key authors in the development of relationship management theory, identified five dimensions of organization-public relationships that influence publics' perception of their relationship with an organization: trust, openness, involvement, commitment and investment in the relationship. Moreover, the authors found that better perception of these aspects correlates with more favourable dispositions toward an organization. *Trust* describes the feeling that those in the relationship can rely on each other. *Openness*

refers to being engaged in communication in a frank way. Involvement means that both the organization and public are committed to furthering each other's interests and thus maintain a long-term relationship. *Investment* "refers to the time, energy, feelings, efforts and other resources given to building the relationship" (Ledingham & Bruning, 1998, p. 58).

It is worth mentioning that relationship management research has had a strong boost due to the internet's potential to increase dialogic communication between organizations and their publics (Jo & Kim, 2003; McAllister-Spooner, 2009). Dialogue is "any negotiated exchange of ideas and opinions" (Kent & Taylor, 1998, p. 325) and represents the efforts made by those involved in a relationship to participate in an open and honest exchange. The dialogic theory argues that in order for a good relationship to exist there must be ethical and high-quality dialogue between the organization and the publics (Kent & Taylor, 1998; 2002). Organizations must be open to this conversation because dialogue contributes to developing symmetrical relationships (Kent & Taylor, 1998).

The public relations relational perspective could provide a theoretical basis for understanding the construction of the citizen-political actor relationship. As Taylor and Kent (2004) stated: "The Internet and the WWW can theoretically improve relationships between elected officials and their constituents" (p. 60). However, despite being a well-explored topic in public relations literature, scholarship has focused less on the political organization-citizen relationships (Karlsson *et al.*, 2013; Levenshus, 2010; Seltzer *et al.*, 2013; Seltzer & Zhang, 2011; Sweetser & Tedesco, 2014). Moreover, research in that field mainly focuses on the role of websites and web-based communication during electoral campaigns and influence on voters' party loyalty. Levenshus (2010), for example, used a relational approach to study President Obama's use of social media in his 2008 presidential campaign by analysing the Obama website and its news articles and by interviewing campaign staff. Her findings indicate that social media was primarily used for building and maintaining relationships between the President and his constituents.

This and other studies are based on the assumption that social media communications foster dialogue, and that these can lead to relationship building (see, for example, Sweetser, 2011). Bearing in mind the potential but also the pitfalls of social media in public relations (Duhé, 2012), in this chapter we aim to contribute to the on-

going debate using the example of Portuguese Members of Parliaments' online communication. With the cross analysis and discussion of the results, we hope to offer a reality check on the Portuguese context and add to our knowledge about this communication context.

6.2 Method[5]

Based on the literature review, three research questions were established to guide data collection and analysis:

> RQ1 – What are the Portuguese parliamentary political groups' rules, governance structures and platforms?
> RQ2 – Which channels are used by Portuguese MPs?
> RQ3 – How do Portuguese MPs communicate online?

A multimethod approach was designed to study how social media is being used to foster interaction and dialogue between citizens and Members of Parliament. We analyse the rules and resources as a structure, and we also analyse the interaction. The dynamics are considered according to Anthony Giddens' Structuration Theory (1984) approach. Firstly, we mapped the channels used by Portuguese MPs and, at the same time, we identified rules, governance structures and platforms maintained by the political parties and by the Parliament. Contact was made by phone and email to ask the communication manager questions and posts were simulated to see reactions and handling methods.

In order to implement the analysis, six dimensions were identified that translate the main aspects highlighted in the theoretical framework, as well as central questions in the communication management field: i) Centralization of communication activities; ii) strategic and integrated approach to communication management, iii) presence of dialogic approach, iv) interaction in the form of answers to questions and posts; v) Censorship of content (deleted content); vi) Social media governance, which was operationalized as a list of the following 12 items: participative corporate culture;

[5] We want to thank the 2013-2014 Strategic Communication Master's students from the University of Beira Interior (UBI) for the help in collecting online data.

commitment of top management; human resources; person in charge of social media in each department; monitoring tools; social media workshops; seminars and training; social media guidelines; strategy papers; key performance indicators for measuring success; specific budget; software and hardware; a dedicated social media department (according to Fink *et al.*, 2011); and personified communication, meaning the disclosure of the identity of the person posting the content, either his/her name or function.

Simultaneously, a content analysis of Facebook and Twitter interactions over a period of two months (March and April 2014) was performed in order to understand how the MPs interact with the public and what kind of dialogue can be found on the social media channel. This was classified into one of eight categories in order to describe the reality of that communication in terms of intensity, intention and approach. The dimensions proposed by Pleil (2007: 18) were also taken into consideration as the main aim of communication acts in each dimension to distinguish between online PR and Google PR (previously discussed in the literature review section, Table 6.1). They include: the mix of channels used by active MPs (1); the number of posts on Twitter and Facebook (2), which were divided into personal and political/public posts (3); the main communication aim(s) of that content (information, persuasion or argumentation) (4); the mean average of likes per post (5); the average number of comments per post (6); the average number of shares per post (6), if there was interaction in the form of discourse (7); and what web architecture was used by the MPs.[6]

The analysis was performed for all six Portuguese parties that have parliamentary representation in the 12th legislature:

- CDS/PP – Democratic Social Centre/Popular Party (Christian democrats, office-seeking)
- PPD/PSD – Social Democratic Party (government, catch-all party)

[6] The architecture of the web is the way that the content and flow are organized in and across several channels and tools (see Oliveira & Winchenbach, 2011: 20).

- PS – Socialist Party (opposition, catch-all party)
- PCP – Portuguese Communist Party (Marxist, ideological party)
- BE – Left Bloc (Marxist, ideological party)
- PEV – Green party

6.3 Results and Discussion

In terms of structures, all the different parliamentary groups are active on the web or at least have a presence with a centralized form of communication for all online communications. There is no room for politicians to participate in the party channels and structures other then through a single dissemination upon request. In terms of online communication, we provide an overview of the parties according to the categories established in Table 6.3. Some of this information was collected during phone and email contact with parties' communication managers.

Group	MPs	Centr.	Strategic/ Integrated	Dialogic	Answer	Censur.	Govern.	Pers.
PPD/PSD	108	YES	NO	NO	NO	YES	NO	NO
PS	74	YES	YES	NO	NO	NO	NO	NO
CDS-PP	24	YES	NO	NO	NO	NO	NO	NO
PCP	14	YES	NO	NO	NO	YES	NO	NO
BE	8	YES	YES	NO	NO	NO	NO	NO
PEV	2	YES	NO	NO	YES	NO	NO	NO

Table 6.3: Analysis overview of the parties' online communication

None of the parties have a dialogical approach, any governance items or personalized communication. It is very surprising that the largest group (PPD-PSD) performs censorship, as well as the communist party. Only the smallest group (PEV) replies online. All of the groups have centralized communication, but we only see signs of a strategic and integrated approach to communication management in two of them.

In the second stage of this research, the parliamentary groups' specific channels and communication activities were examined. After immersion, the main and outstanding elements were collected and can be seen in Table 6.4.

GRUPO PARLAMENTAR PARTIDO SOCIAL DEMOCRATA PSD	• Active since 2009 with dedicated MP group tools • Website; FB, Sapo Vídeos, Flickr and YouTube • Twitter has not been used since 2011 • There are no regular updates of the website • There is no interaction • Comments are often deleted or hidden • Content is not tailored • FB content analysis: low posting frequency (just 21 posts in 2 months)
PS Grupo Parlamentar PARTIDO SOCIALISTA	• Integration of social media tools in the last 5 years • Strategic use of information • Dedicated website Tab; FB, Twitter, G+, Flickr, YouTube, RSS • Intensive and organized publication (e.g. YouTube) • There is no interaction • Comments are not deleted • Content is partly tailored • FB content analysis: mostly informative posts, always with images of MPs

CDS-PP Grupo Parlamentar	• Active since 2011 • Website; Facebook, Twitter, YouTube • Strong political agenda • Flickr was used from 2008-2010 • Standalone video content • Publishing of news content from the media • Controlled by one communication manager • FB – link to the FB page of the political party leader
PCP	• Website with information • YouTube but not used as social media • No interaction desired
PEV osverdes.pt Partido Ecologista "Os Verdes"	• Active since end of 2011 • No dedicated channels for MPs • Website; Facebook, Twitter, YouTube • Strong political and ideological agenda • Answers to posts • No content discussion • Partially adapted content

Bloco de Esquerda	• Website with detailed, organized information • Website, Facebook, YouTube, Flickr, (not updated – MySpace, Twitter, Hi5) • No rules but performed by Com. Dep. • FB is used to spread content (partially automatic)

Table 6.4: Analysis of the parliamentary groups' online communication

Four groups have channels dedicated to the parliamentary group (PSD, PS, CDS-PP and BE). The BE has merged everything into a central website, with a dedicated page for the parliamentary group, while its Facebook page is just used to spread content, mostly videos. Despite the existence of those channels for exchanges and democratic political debate, we notice that little discussion happens on those forums. On a Facebook search, we found alternative spaces – none of which were official – that offered the possibility for discussion and exchanges of different views. These Facebook groups had many more followers than the official ones and interaction was very intense (see Figure 6.1). These results allow us to have an insight to answer RQ1 – *What are the Portuguese parliamentary political groups' rules, governance structures and platforms?*

Mapping parliamentary online communication

At the third stage, we look into the structures, resources and processes organized and promoted by the Parliament, to outline some insights to address RQ2 – *Which channels are used by Portuguese MPs*?

We noticed that a great deal of effort was put into online communication at an early stage but they were mostly technical efforts to enable and stimulate MPs' online presence. The Parliament has a website and official tools; it offers political groups and MPs the

Figure 6.1: Screeenshot with the unofficial Facebook group of the largest parliamentary group in Portugal.

opportunity to activate their own page, blog and link to social media. Nevertheless, as we can see in Table 6.5, only a few members of the Portuguese parliamentary groups have created a personal page there, and only 4 use the blogroll device.

The scenario gets even worse when taking into account that the blogs were last updated in 2012. Looking more closely at MPs' personal pages, there are only 4 but they are not updated, and only one of this group of MPs is still an MP today; the others no longer have that role. This clearly shows a decrease in MPs' interest in using personal pages compared with the 2003 study (Cardoso *et al*, 2003), which found that 5,1% of MPs – 15 – frequently used personal websites.

Group	MPs	Personal page Parlamento.pt	FB	Other
PPD/PSD	108	4	2 A; 1 NA	Twitter: 1A YouTube: 1A
PS	74	8	6 A; 1 NA	Twitter: 1A; 1 NA YouTube: 2 A Instagram: 1 A Blogs: 2 A; 2 NA
BE	8	4	2 A	0
CDS-PP	24	0	-	-
PCP	14	0	-	-
PEV	2	0	-	-

Table 6.5: Overview of the tools provided by the Parliament and other social media tools used by MPs as individuals

Content analysis

In order to have a close look and more in-depth understanding of the relationship between citizens and MPs and answer RQ3 – *How do Portuguese MPs communicate online?* – a two-month analysis (March-April 2014) of MPs' activities on social media was performed to obtain a picture of how social media is being used by Portuguese politicians in an effort to take a broad, empirical approach to the topics of research.

In total, 730 posts from 17 accounts, operated by 10 MPs, were collected and analysed. We can see that less than 10 per cent of MPs engage in online communication with citizens. They represent only three of the six parliamentary groups (PSD – 2; PS – 6 and BE 2). Furthermore, more than the half of the active MPs are from one parliamentary group and they were in the opposition party.

The two main platforms that were used for online communication were Facebook (57%) and Twitter (26%). Blogs, YouTube and Instagram were also used but much more rarely. (see Figure 6.2).

In regard to the communication aim of the post (see Figure 6.3), almost eight in every ten posts (78%) were informative, one in every 5 (21%) was argumentative and only one per cent showed persuasive objectives. We recall here that informative and persuasive communication is not seen as dialogic, but rather as a monologic approach as defined in the literature review.

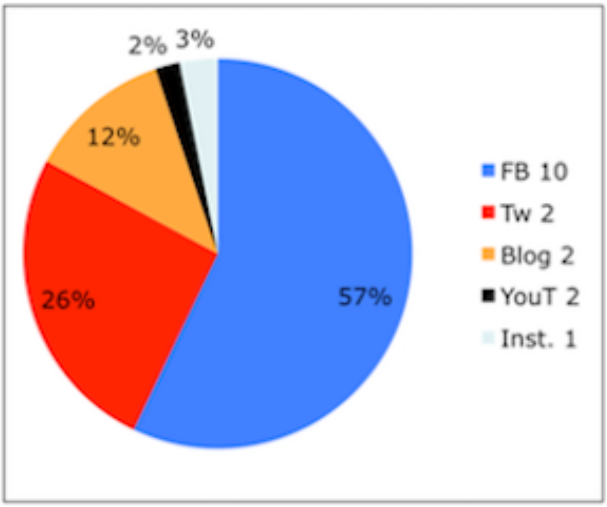
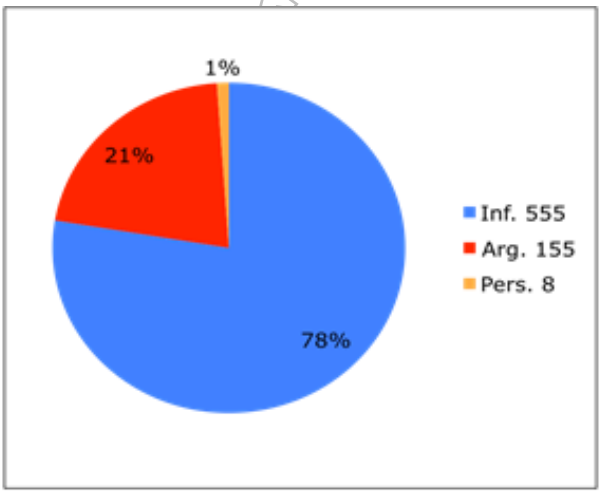
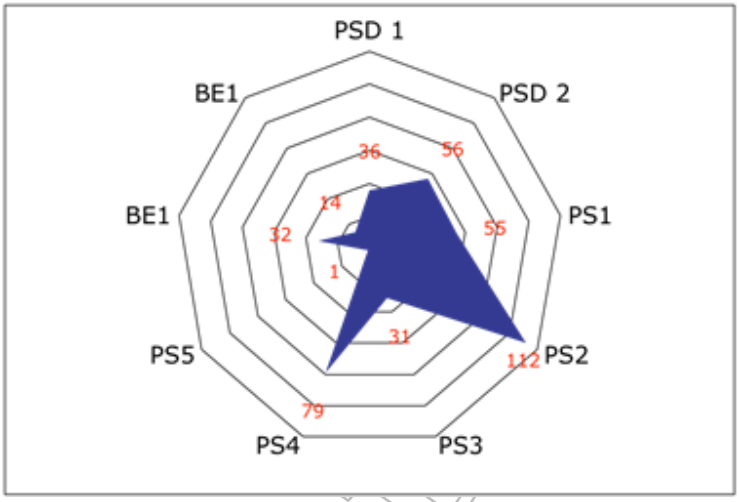


Figure 6.2: Online communication posts



n=730 posts on social networks by Portuguese MPs in March and April 2014. Divided into Informative, Argumentative and Persuasive

Figure 6.3: Communication main aim in online communication content



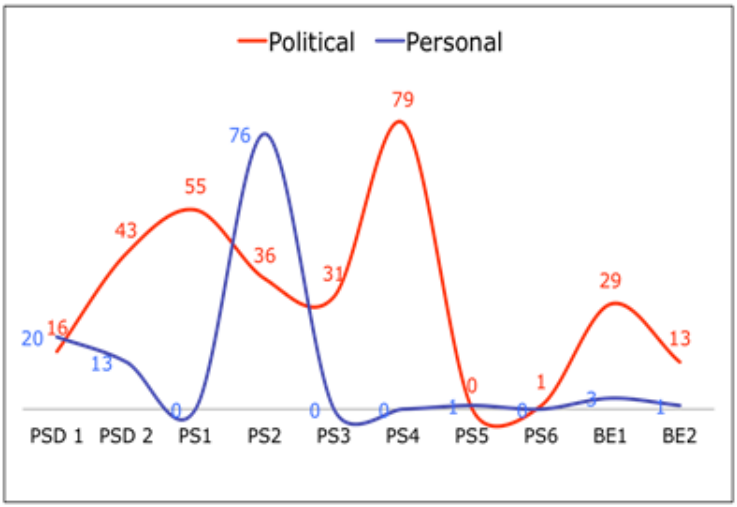
n=417 posts on FB by Portuguese MPs in March and April 2014. MPs n=10

Figure 6.4: Posts on Facebook per MP

When we look closer at interactions on Facebook, we notice that in total 417 posts were made by 10 MPs (see Figure 6.4). There are two MPs from the PS group who produced 191 posts, equivalent to over 45 per cent of them. If we exclude the two MPs who only published one post each, we have an average posting of one post every two days from the others. That means that six of them are quite active in terms of publication numbers, while two are extremely active (more than one publication per day) and two are almost inactive, with one post per day.

When we look at the character of the posts (see Table 6.1 and Figure 6.5), it can be seen that MPs use social media to post more about political rather than personal issues. However, we can see an inversion of this trend by one member of the opposition party: the PS.

In total, seven out of ten public posts had political content and three had personal content. On the other side, we see that two MPs posted more than one third of the content. Those MPs have no public personal posts (see Table 6.6).



n=417 posts on FB by Portuguese MPs in March and April 2014. MPs n=10

Figure 6.5: Posts on Facebook per MP divided into two categories

On average, most of the MPs have a quite low average number of comments: no more than 8. Only one has 103 comments per post on average. In regard to visitors' activities on MPs' Facebook profiles, they clearly choose to "Like" specific content but few "Comment" on the posts. This tendency provides information regarding the interaction and relationship and the use of those platforms and channels to really engage in discussion or not. We see that not only is the quantity is very small, but the quality and depth are limited as well.

6.4 Conclusion

With this research, we aimed to understand how online communication tools stimulate citizen-politics relationship management. In particular, we reflect on how social media is being used to foster interaction and dialogue between citizens and the members of the Portuguese parliament. Research was divided into two main areas of inquiry. The channels used by Portuguese MPs were mapped

	Political	**Personal**
PSD 1	16	20
PSD 2	43	13
PS1	55	0
PS2	36	76
PS3	31	0
PS4	79	0
PS5	0	1
PS6	1	0
BE1	29	3
BE2	13	1
	303	114
	73%	27%

Table 6.6: Overview of the posts by MP, classified into Political and Personal focus.n = 417 posts on FB by Portuguese MPs in March and April 2014. MPs n= 10

	Likes	**Comments**	**Share**
PSD1	45.33	3.58	0.88
PSD2	56.23	4.2	1.2
PS1	670	103,03	81.76
PS2	35	7.64	1.36
PS3	15	0.58	0.74
PS4	11	8	0
PS5	29	1.18	1.13
PS6	6	0	0
BE1	65	3.68	23.12
BE2	31	2.28	7.93

Table 6.7: Overview of FB interactions by MP.

and, at the same time, the rules, governance structures and platforms maintained by the parliamentary groups and by the Parliament were identified. The MP-citizen interaction routines were depicted, particularly as regards social media.

All the different parliamentary groups have a presence on the web through dedicated channels, blogs, their own pages or links to social media. The analysis has revealed that there is minimal, ad-hoc use of social media, which means that the professionalization of MPs' online communication is low. That is, we can observe inverse institutionalization dynamics and low professionalization. This means that at an earlier stage, many channels and systems were created but they are decreasingly used by the MPs. This confirms what was found by other studies that looked into professionalization in other Portuguese organizations (See Linke & Oliveira 2015). Also, parties' governance of social media is barely put into practice at all. The visible results of "structuration", in Giddens' sense, do not take into account this particular angle of communication management. We can see that on one side there is a centralized, non-strategic use of online communication, while on the other, the handling by those involved, especially the MPs, was not enough to be addressed centrally.

The main findings indicate a very weak use of the web's potential for relationship-building between politicians and citizens. This has been also found in other research contexts in the Portuguese political realm (see Serra & Gonçalves, 2015). Providing information is a predominant function over promoting interaction in the use of internet communication. As the data has shown, for example, only 10% of the MPs are active on Facebook, with informative (monologic) posts, and there is a very low average of comments per post (8%). Visitors opt for using the "Like" feature and rarely "Comment" on the content of the posts.

These findings suggest that the internet's dialogical promise has not yet materialized in the Portuguese parliamentary realm. Of 230 MPs, only 10 are very active on Facebook, and the new medium is being used merely to disseminate information, not to promote interaction and much less dialogue. Furthermore, we may even conclude that by allowing users to comment on posts on Facebook, MPs appear to be interested in communicating with citizens in an online public space. However, a citizen-politician relationship cannot flourish where there is censorship of political debate. That is, when content that is less favourable to the political party's objectives are simply deleted, as highlighted in the discussion section on findings.

When we compare the fact that 5 per cent of MPs are active in this field, compared with the average of 70 per cent of the Members of the European Parliament (MEPs) who communicate regularly with citizens via social media, we see that Portugal trails far behind Europe regarding this issue.

Nevertheless, and interestingly enough, the data also shows that political discussion takes place in spontaneous online spaces: on closed Facebook groups. Despite the obvious limitations of our study, in particular due to the restricted frame of analysis of two months and the complex and multimethod approach that provides exploratory rather than conclusive insights, we hope to have opened new avenues of inquiry into contemporary political communication from both citizens' and politicians' perspectives.

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