

**NEW MEDIS AS A WEB CAMPAIGNING TOOL:
THE CASE OF THE PORTUGUESE LEGISLATIVE ELECTION IN 2011**

Joana Motta

ISLA Campus Lisboa | Laureate International Universities

e Unidade de Investigação BRU-UNIDE do IUL-ISCTE

joana.motta@lx.isla.pt

Maria Barbosa

Instituto Superior de Gestão

e CIGEST – Centro de Investigação em Gestão

mariabarbosa@cigest.ensinus.pt

Sandra Filipe

ISCA - Universidade de Aveiro

e Unidade de Investigação GOVCOPP da UA

sandrafilipe@ua.pt

ABSTRACT

According to Xenos & Moy (2007), the use of new media together with traditional media has become the core of any political campaign in democratic countries, since Barack Obama was elected President of the United States in 2008. Portugal is no exception: during the Presidential campaign in 2011, the 6 political candidates used altogether 35% of all different types of new media available; this amount rose to 52% for the winning candidate Cavaco Silva (Barbosa & Motta, 2011). The use of new media in political communication has been studied by a number of scholars.

The main aim of the present research consists in analyzing the new media's campaign strategy used by the political communications apparatus of the five major political parties that presented candidates for legislative office in Portugal, in the election and campaign period occurring in May-June 2011.

Furthermore, data concerning the frequency and type of new media used, and the level of involvement with the voter in the web site and the social networks Facebook and Twitter was quantified.

Regarding the investigation methodology, an online content analysis was applied, as a qualitative and a quantitative research instrument.

Keywords: Political Marketing, Political Communication, Web Campaigning, New Media, Portugal

RESUMO

De acordo com Xenos & Moy (2007), o uso de *new media*, juntamente com os meios de comunicação tradicionais tornou-se o núcleo de qualquer campanha política nos países democráticos, desde que Barack Obama foi eleito presidente dos Estados Unidos, em 2008. Portugal não é exceção: durante a campanha presidencial em 2011, os seis candidatos políticos usaram em conjunto 35% dos diferentes tipos de novos meios de comunicação disponíveis, o valor subiu para 52% para o candidato vencedor Cavaco Silva (Barbosa & Motta, 2011). O uso de *new media* na comunicação política tem sido estudado por vários investigadores.

O principal objectivo do presente trabalho consiste em identificar a estratégia de comunicação *online* seguida pelos cinco partidos principais que apresentaram candidatos às eleições legislativas em Portugal em Maio/Junho 2011.

Adicionalmente foram analisados dados referentes à frequência e ao tipo de *new media* utilizados, assim como ao nível de envolvimento com o eleitor manifesto no *web site* e nas redes sociais Facebook e Twitter.

No que respeita a metodologia de investigação, foi utilizada a análise de conteúdo *online*, quer na sua vertente qualitativa como quantitativa.

Palavras-chave: Marketing Político, Comunicação Política, Campanha *online*, *New Media*, Portugal

1. INTRODUCTION

The Internet has been playing an increasingly important role in political campaigns since 1966, the year that political mass campaign used the Web for the first time, creating an extra equal footing for voters on political dialogue and giving voice in forums to these receptors that have been traditionally passive (Selnow, 1998).

The growth of online political campaigns can be seen both in terms of the number of parties and candidates who use the internet for campaign purposes, as well as the level of sophistication.

The official online campaign of Barack Obama in the 2008 presidential elections in the United States brought a new communications strategy to the political playing field due to its extensive use of and recourse to new media (Xenos & Moy, 2007; Cornfield, 2008; Bentivegna, 2002). During the electoral period, more than half of the American population and three-quarters of Internet users were online to see, read and comment on news of the campaign, and 59% of the internauts received and shared information and political messages via e-mail; instant messaging; social media and text messages (Smith, 2009; Butler & Harris, 2009; Gomes, Fernandes & Reis, 2009; Baumann, 2011). However, according to Vergeer & Sams (2011) this relationship is a fragile one in that voter loyalty toward any given party is not sustained over long periods, *i.e.* it is not continuous over time.

In fact, when has been given the name of the first "social media president" to U.S. President Barack Obama there is a strong argument to be termed as such: as a candidate, he had one of the Twitter accounts and Facebook pages more popular, and its website contained a section in which his supporters could create profiles and connect with each other; his campaign was also present at YouTube, Flickr, LinkedIn, MySpace and Second Life (Zarella, 2010).

According to Phillips & Young (2009), success in politics is now highly influenced by online activities of political institutions. Potential voters are empowered to exchange ideas and opinions on the latest political developments, inviting all citizens to comment. The use that Obama gave the new media tools has been an example for other democratic nations.

In the 2009 legislative elections in Portugal, the websites of the main political parties – the Socialist Party (PS) and the Social Democratic Party (PPD/PSD) – used the majority of the tools which currently exist (Rodrigues, 2010) and in the presidential elections of 2011, all the candidates put their campaigns on the Internet and on social networks (Sebastião, 2010; Barbosa & Motta, 2011). The winning candidate, Aníbal Cavaco Silva, registered the highest level in the category of interactivity: 74% of the different types of interaction and 13 different types of new media (Barbosa & Motta, 2011). Compared with the elections for the Presidency of the Republic, which took place in January 2006, where the tools exist were used much less and were still being used in less pronounced, is denoted one sharp and positive evolution.

Hopefully the present research will contribute with critical information that might help cast light over recent theories and practices of web campaigning and political communication.

2. RESEARCH OBJECTIVES

The present research consists of analyzing the new media's campaign strategy used by the institutionalized political communications apparatus of the five major political parties that presented candidates for legislative office in Portugal, in the election and campaign period occurring in May-June 2011.

The main objective of this research aims at the detailed analysis of the visual and textual communication strategy for each party in evidence on the respective home pages of the websites. Furthermore, focusing the study on the entire website and the social networks, the new media most used by these five political parties were measured, the audio-visual material made available to the voter was quantified, the voter's level of involvement/participation with these new media was identified and the relationship between economic and social status and participation (SES model) was tested.

3. REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

The study of Political Communication according to Rogers (2004) began with Lippmann in 1922 with his study of propaganda and public opinion, becoming a full-fledged field of study in 1973 via the Political Communication Division of the ICA – the International Communication Association.

Political Communication was defined by Hughes & Dann (2006) as a set of actions whose objectives are to create, communicate and bring promises of value to customers in such a way that the relationship with them becomes beneficial to the political organization and interested parties. In the development of strategies for political approximation, Espírito Santo & Figueiras (2010) emphasize the intervention of the media in the relationship between party/candidate and voter.

Political campaigns have been conveyed through the television, radio, newspapers, outdoors, rallies and new media. Barbosa & Motta (2011) defined the concept of new media as the entire range of digital communication channels, including Web 1.0 and 2.0 tools such as websites, blogs, social networks, wikis, chat rooms, e-newsletters, e-surveys and online petitions. The new media are viewed as something complementary which expands the message sent via the traditional means of journalistic communication; moreover, it is considered to be a new channel for disseminating information through which the press, television and radio can obtain content and news (Fallows, 2000; Severin & Tankard, 2001; Bentivegna, 2002; Foot & Schneider (2006); Macnamara, 2010).

Online campaigns have begun replacing the traditional patterns of the off-line or traditional-style campaign; the specific characteristics of the Internet such as interactivity, hypertext and multi-media have brought about fundamental changes in the relationship between politicians and their public audiences (Schweitzer, 2008; Lilleker, Pack & Jackson, 2010; Vergeer, Hermans & Sams, 2011) making for greater competitiveness (Gibson & McAllister, 2005). Communications based on the Web are potentially more direct, more dynamic, broader, more interactive and unedited in processing than those from conventional media (Gibson & Ward, 2000).

The number of people producing and reading political content online has been increasing. The term “Web 2.0” coined by O’Reilly in 2005 has been viewed by several scholars and professionals as an assurance of a higher and richer interaction between political parties and voters, based on the production of content, participation through comments and up- and download of files (Gordon-Murnane, 2009; Greengard, 2009).

According to the statistics from the Pew Research Center for the People and the Press, the proportion of young Americans who claim that the Internet helped them to decide how to vote increased between 1996 (14%) and 2002 (20%). Furthermore, a higher number of voters report reading new media that challenge their opinion (13%) rather than that confirm it (8%).

However, to the voters, television still predominates as a source for gathering political news; in contrast, new media are consulted to deepen the understanding on particular issues (Howard, 2004). Canavilhas (2009) points out that the success of an online campaign stems from the way political communication integrates the campaign into the mix, exploiting the strengths of these new facets, *i.e.*, personalization and interactiveness. Several studies concluded that politics online does not change the intrinsic way campaigns are conducted: their content is accessed primarily by individuals already engaged in political issues (Margolis & Resnick, 2000; Bimber, 2001; Kalnes, 2009; Barbosa & Motta, 2011).

Political parties and candidates have been increasing their presence on the Internet considerably (McChesney, 1996; Newman, 2001; Gulati & Williams, 2007), with smaller parties in particular drawn to the Internet given that it affords them greater reach to a wider audience at a lesser cost (Gibson & Römmele, 2007).

In the center of the debate of the consequences of online communication lies the normalization (reinforcement) and equalization (mobilization) hypothesis (Norris, 1999). The normalization hypothesis states that web campaigning sustain the existing political power differences between political parties (Danziger et al., 1982; Dutton, Blumler & Kraemer, 1987; Davis, 1999; Margolis et al., 2003), that is, larger parties dominate also online. Evidence for the reinforcement hypothesis was found in Finland, Germany, Ireland and the United States (Schweitzer, 2005; Strandberg & Carlson, 2007; Sudulich & Wall, 2009).

The equalization hypothesis implies that smaller parties and new political groups can be empowered, due to lower barriers to participation (Rheingold, 1993; Gibson & Ward, 1997; Bimber, 1998; Jackson, 2006, 2007). Empirical studies indicate that in candidate elections, the normalization hypothesis applies whereas in party elections, the equalization one is seen.

The increasing use of Web 2.0 political campaigns suggests that campaign managers believe that online communications can boost the involvement and participation of voters responding to the more compelling way information is presented (Grossman, 1995; Negroponte, 1995). Web campaigning has given birth to a very sophisticated science of campaigning, helping politicians to make inferences about voters' attitudes (Howard, 2004). It has also become more and more tempting to campaign managers, since it provides the best ground for testing and improving the accuracy of forecasting models of electoral or legislative outcomes.

4. METHODOLOGY

The research methodology applied to the present study consists of a Thematic Content Analysis, in both its quantitative and qualitative aspects. The *corpus* to be analyzed is made up of verbal, visual and auditory content of the set of new media used in the institutional communication of each political party/candidate. In this study, only the five main political parties ("Big Five") were analyzed: the *Partido Socialista* [the Socialist Party] (PS), the *Partido Popular Democrático/ Partido Social Democrático* [Social Democratic Party] (PPD/PSD), the *Centro Democrático Social - Partido Popular* [Social Democratic Center - People's Party] (CDS-PP), the *Partido Comunista Português - Partido Ecologista "Os verdes"* [Portuguese Communist Party/Ecologist Party "The Greens"] (PCP-PEV), and the *Bloco de Esquerda* [Leftist Bloc] (B.E.).

The data were collected on the first and the last day of the formal electoral campaign in the 2011 Portuguese legislative elections, that is to say, on May 22nd, 2011 from midnight to 6:00 a.m. and on June 3rd, 2011 from 6:00 p.m. to midnight. In order to quantify the number of times new media were utilized only during the official period of the electoral campaign, excluding the pre-campaign, the frequencies measured on the first day were subtracted from those taken on the closing day of the campaign. The analysis which was carried out features static characteristics due to the moments of measurement chosen for the application of our selected methodology: the opening day of the formal initiation of the campaign and the closing day.

The quantitative and qualitative data analysis focused, firstly, on the website's homepage. The following variables were studied: 1st) the websites' hosting, the graphic design and architecture, the discourse; 2nd) the core strategy - based on the party, candidate, campaign news or opposition in terms of textual and visual prominence; 3rd) the strategic positioning in terms of main themes / issues addressed and; 4th) the type of discourse. Regarding the entire website, the different type of new media used by each party was identified, the use of audio-visuals measured, and the voter's level of involvement/participation on the website, on Facebook and Twitter quantified.

The content analysis was based on an *a priori* and *a posteriori* classification system. The categories were identified conjointly by two authors, comparing the different findings and discussing them. In order to test the outcome, the web sites were shown to the third author who confirmed the categories and the classification criteria. The analysis shows an acceptable level of validity and reliability since an inter-rater Scott's *pi* coefficient of 93% was found for the analysis of the entire web site and of 81% for the homepages.

5. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The presentation of the results has been divided into two distinct parts: the data presented in the first part focuses on the detailed analysis of the home page of each party's website whereas the data in the second part addresses the total number of pages/content from each website.

Websites of the individual political parties take on a prominent role in that they permit an increasingly larger number of voters to have contact with them. Information is presented in extensive detail, greater than in any other type of new media, allowing for constant updating of content and an interactive and instantaneous dialogue with the internauts (Bowers-Brown & Gunter, 2002; Sundar, Kalyanaram & Brown, 2003; Ward & Gibson, 2003; Rodrigues, 2010). As a way to encourage reading, the content must be relevant and have value for whoever is reading it, and should be presented in an accessible way (user-friendly) (Coleman & Normann, 2000). The home page, the gateway to the website, serves multiple purposes, namely the presentation of the candidate's leadership skills, the party's platform and the electoral promises contained therein (Culbert, 1983; Davis, Baumgartner, Francia, & Morris, 2009).

Inasmuch as the home page contains the most important information of each website, it was selected as the basis of the present study. The comparison of the content and form of the website home pages of each of the five parties participating in the campaign turned it possible to identify 31 subcategories whose elements were then grouped in eight final categories: 1) design of the website and the elements that comprise it; 2) writing style of the news presented and the existence of testimonials; 3) nationalism as a reference point in the campaign; 4) the party as an identifying element of a collective group; 5) the candidate and testimonials; 6) the electoral campaign and its characterizing features; 7) specific features of the voter, and 8) the identified opposing forces. For the quantifiable subcategories, frequencies of elements were calculated, and for the qualifiable subcategories, characteristics were identified.

The PPD/PSD, PS and CDS-PP were the ones which most invested in the design of the institutional website, demonstrating a high level of professionalism in its conception, with a special mention of the ease of navigation of the PPD/PSD site. The PPD/PSD and the B.E. site used a more objective and factual writing style, whereas the PS relied more on a sensationalist and opinion-based style of writing, seeking out a greater closeness with the reader via the inclusion of four testimonials.

From the group of five parties, it was the PPD/PSD which cast a more nationalistic light on its communications, despite never having used any visualization of the Portuguese flag, as the PS and the PCP-PEV did.

With respect to the fourth category, the party as an identifying element of a collective group, only the PPD/PSD opted for a 'renaming' of the party in its use of the candidate's name in the campaign phrase "Passos Coelho PSD," with this designation making up the very logo itself. It is the B.E. which stood out from the other political parties due to the fact that it chose a strategy of continuous reinforcement of identity, through its mentioning the name of the party, through the design of its logo and through the presence of its flag on the home page of its website, respectively with a frequency of 20 times, 6 times and 3 times. It is curious that the winner of the elections, the PPD/PSD, is the one that makes the least mention to itself on its home page.

Table 1 - Frequency of the categories and subcategories

Categories	Subcategory	PPD/PSD	PS	CDS-PP	PCP-PEV	B.E.
Design/layout	Unique Template	yes	yes	yes	yes	no
	Professional-looking design (level)	high	high	high	medium	low
	Navigability (level)	high	medium	low	medium	low
Writing style	Opinion-oriented		9	4	3	1
	Factual	6	2			5
	Testimonials		4			
Nationalism	References to Portugal	5	1	1	1	
	Flag of Portugal		1		1	
	Map of Portugal		1			
Party	Name of party	Passos Coelho/PSD	PS	CDS-PP	PCP/PEV	Bloco de Esquerda
	Logo	1	1	2	1	6
	Flag of the party		1			3
	References to party	5	9	10	10	20
President	Large-scale photos	1	1	1		
	Photos of President	5	3	1	1	1
	References to President	14	13	6	3	1
	Direct quotes	1	7			
Campaign	Name of the campaign	Passos Coelho PSD	Sócrates 2011			
	Breaking news items	1	1			
	Main news items	1	1	3	1	1
	Secondary news items	5	6	1	2	5
	Lesser news items		4			8
	Campaign locations	1	2	4	6	

Voters	“The Portuguese”	2	5	1	2	1
	“Tax-payers”			1		
	“Generations”					1
Opposition	Party	2 PSD				
		2 Passos				
		Coelho				
		1 CDS-PP				
	President	4 Sócrates				

The respective candidate is represented in a wide shot in the header of the PPD/PSD, PS and the CDS-PP, with the leader of this final party, Paulo Portas, represented in black and white. Both the PPD/PSD and the PS displayed a communication strategy that strengthened the figure of the candidate, focusing on continual references to the candidate (14 and 13 times, respectively) and the inclusion of their photos (5 and 3 times respectively).

The electoral campaigns of the PPD/PSD and the PS became the political underlying force which created an independent event within the regular party framework via the personification of the mottos “Passos Coelho PSD” and “Sócrates 2011.” It was the B.E., however, which gave greater news coverage to the campaign (14 items in total, although 8 placed in the minor news), followed by the PS with 8 and the PPD/PSD with 7. Although the CDS-PP numerically had fewer news items on the homepage of its website (4), they nevertheless appeared with greater highlighting – three as main news items, whereas the other major parties only placed one at the same level. In addition, both the PCP-PEV and the CDS-PP emphasized the locations where the campaign was taking place, with six and four references, respectively.

The voters emerge as the public/audience with the most presence on the home page of the PS website, being mentioned five times, whereas the websites of the competing parties, the PPD/PSD and the PCP-PEV had only two mentions and the remaining two parties had only one mention.

Finally, concerning the final category, the opposition is identified only by the PPD/PSD and the PS, with the PPD/PSD referring to the figure of the opposition in the person of José Sócrates mentioned by name 4 times and the PS mentioning Passos Coelho two times, the PPD/PSD two times and the CDS-PP twice as well.

The carrying out of interviews with the communications-based agencies responsible for the conception of the political campaigns and the access to the quantitative analysis of metrics which only the computer/IT staff dealing with the home pages would have knowledge of are areas which would allow for the triangulation of the data found.

The following analysis consisted of the assessment of the degree of importance given to the six final thematic categories previously identified in the layout of the homepage of the website for each political party. Thus, the website was divided into four visual areas: 1) the header (HD) – the topmost area of the website which calls the greatest attention to the eye; 2) the main body (MB) – which takes on a lesser role of calling attention; 3) the top menu (TM) – which contains the horizontally placed entrance spots to the website and which is immediately located below or above the header and 4) the bottom (B) – the last bit of the page with the least eye-catching impact given that it is only visible if someone scrolls down to that point.

Table 2 - Emphasis of the final categories in the home page of the website

	PPD/PSD	PS	CDS-PP	PCP-PEV	B.E.
NATIONALISM					
References	MB	B	MB	MB	
Portuguese Flag		HD		HD	
THE PARTY					
The Logo	HD	HD	HD	HD	HD
PRESIDENT					
Photo	HD	HD	HD		
Name	TM	TM			

Quotation	HD			
Biography	B			
CAMPAIGN				
Slogan	HD	HD	HD	HD
Message	TM		TM, MB, B	
Program	TM	MB	TM,B	TM, MB, B HD
Relevant Matters			MB	MB, B
Candidates	TM, B	TM, MB	TM,B	TM
Multi-Media	TM, MB	TM, MB	TM,B	TM, MB
News	TM, MB,B	TM, MB	MB,B	MB TM, MB
Campaign agenda	TM, MB		MB,B	TM, MB, B
THE PUBLIC				
Tax-payers	MB	MB	B	
Volunteers		MB		
Recruitment members				HD
Others				TM
OPPOSITION				
Party	MB	MB		
President	MB	MB		

Note: In order to indicate the importance of each element in a graphic way, the above abbreviations will vary in size.

As a first observation, it is worth noting that the logo of the party in question emerges as having the utmost importance for all the parties, and for such it is placed in the header. The campaign slogan is equally important for all the parties, with the exception of the B.E., which focuses more on the campaign platform. The PPD/PSD, the PS and the CDS-PP all focus on the photo of their party leader, presenting him on equal footing with quote which stands out. The Portuguese flag, a nationalistic symbol *par excellence*, is highlighted in the PS and PCP-PEV websites, with additional references to the country in the main body of the PPD/PSD, CDS-PP and PCP-PEV websites.

In the main body of the parties' websites, one can specifically find references to the electoral campaign. The PPD/PSD refers to multi-media, news and the campaign agenda; the PS focuses on the electoral platform, the candidates, multi-media and news; the CDS-PP deals with the message, the topics, the news and the campaign agenda; the PCP-PEV speaks of the platform, the topics, the news and the campaign agenda; the B.E. speaks only of the news. Both the PPD/PSD and the PS opt for a strong communicational strategy in terms of visuals, leaving the other three parties in a more verbal field. Of the set of five parties, it is the CDS-PP and the B.E. which address the campaigns on more intellectual terms.

The allusion to different electoral audiences and to the opposition (both as a party and in the person of the party leader) in the main body is only carried out by the PPD/PSD and the PS.

As for the analysis of the content included in the home pages of the respective websites, the final categories of the analytical chart identified in the previous research were altered in order to contain the relevant and exhaustive class groups from the *corpus* of qualitative analysis of the texts inserted into the home pages of the website.

In terms of campaign strategy, the PPD/PSD campaign with the slogan "Passos Coelho pointing us toward the future" is presented in a coherent way given that it is centered on the promise of growth for the country, mentioned three times, and on the overall improvement of daily life (two references). The leader of the main opposition force, José Sócrates, is seen as the "origin of the crisis" in which Portugal now finds itself, with the PPD/PSD positioning itself as "an alternative" and providing "hope". With respect to the person of Passos Coelho, the communicational strategy is defensive, striving to confirm that despite the candidate's lack of experience (an accusation launched by the rival PS), he nevertheless possesses the necessary qualities to become Prime Minister, noted as having "the capacity for leadership" and the "knowledge for leadership."

The PS put the phrase "Defending Portugal, Building the Future" on the home page of its website. It is worth noting, however, that the communicational strategy of this party has its origin in its confrontation with or denigration of the opposition, and not its projection of Portugal toward the future nor in the presentation of promises which might add energy to the slogan. The opposition, in the person of Passos Coelho, is denigrated for "not having experience in government," for

“being confused,” and for being “a stranger to this place.” To the contrary, José Sócrates is considered to be a quasi-hero, “courageous” and offering “proof positive” and being “one of our own.” Focusing great energies on this image of antithesis, the PPD/PSD is exposed pejoratively as having “sectarian” and “intolerant” ideas, whereas the PS is the “party of the people,” and “a calming force” which engenders “trust.” The rest of the campaign is rather empty of content and promises save the phrase “being against inequality.”

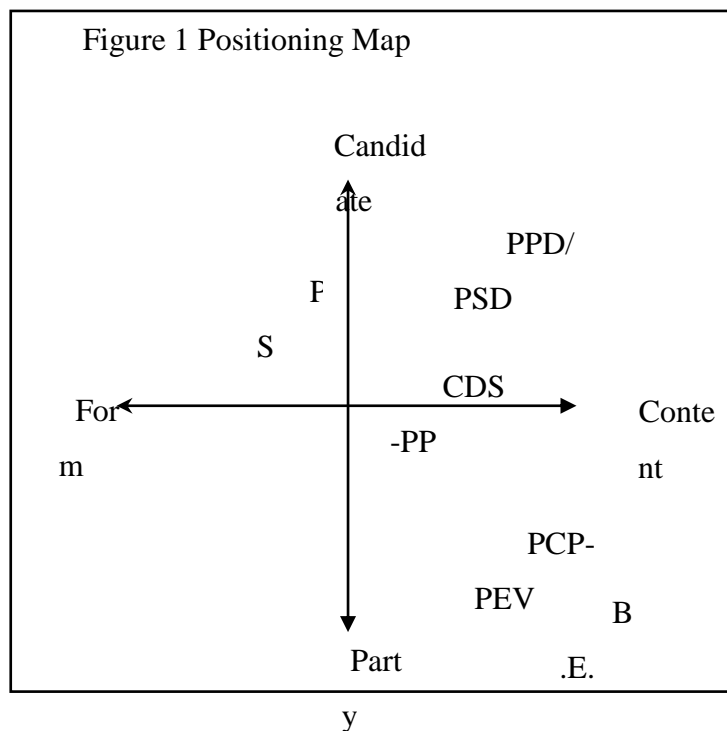
The CDS-PP campaign with the slogan “This is the moment for you. For everyone. For Portugal.” takes a stance outside that of the “game of insults” previously mentioned, focusing instead on the unsustainable situation in which the country finds itself. This message takes on a more high-profile role in the discourse of Paulo Portas, with a statement made by him in the header.

The PCP-PEV opted for a communicational approach that was laden with ideology. The slogan of the campaign was not presented in an explicit way, instead being understood via the statement of “a program which is a commitment, a moment of breaking from the past and the building of a new political structure at the same time.” The emphasis of the campaign is placed not on the candidate nor on the qualities of the party itself but rather on the electoral promises which are derived from the situation in which Portugal finds itself (“serious crisis,” “deterioration of the conditions we enjoy at work and in our daily lives,” and “austerity.”) Taking up this theme, the PCP-PEV assures us on the home page of its website of its commitment, the “rupture” (referred to twice), the “building of a new political framework,” the reduction of job insecurity and unemployment (two references), the reestablishment of rights and justice (twice mentioned), the independence of Portugal with respect to the International Monetary Fund, adequate public services, and the increase in production on a national level. There is no mention of the opposition.

Lastly, there is the campaign led by the B.E., without an *ad hoc* website and opting for no slogan *per se*, functioning as a blog. Again, the discourse is one based on ideology and the promise of changing the future. The following topics are introduced: jobs, tax-payer and fiscal justice, emigration, justice in economics and reforms in taxation on property.

In a final note, it bears adding that in none of the campaigns mounted by the five major political forces in Portugal is the voter or constituent characterized or sorted in any way, thus pushing any classification into the background.

Based on the analysis of the websites two different paradigms were identified in terms of the strategic approach of the political communication of the parties: one axis of analysis is the notion of form and content, and the other axis is the focus on the candidate and the party, which leads us to plot out the parties in the following positions on the graph:



In the first quadrant we find the PS with a communicational political strategy which invests in the candidate and in the form; in the second quadrant the PPD/PSD and the CDS-PP are more centered on the candidate and the content. In the third quadrant, the PCP-PEV and the B.E. are focused on the party and the content.

The following second part of the study investigates the new media used during the electoral campaign, dealing with the total number of pages/content from each party's website.

In the legislative elections which took place in May/June 2011, 14 different types of new media were used. Only two political parties, the PCP-PEV and the B.E. kept up with the use of the traditional media, also relying on external or outdoor publicity displays, namely in the form of political posters and billboards, with the B.E. opting for this method as it served various objectives and not only those of the campaign.

The PPD/PSD, PS and the CDS-PP developed an independent website for the electoral campaign under analysis whereas the PCP-PEV and the B.E. used their party's regular websites during this period. B.E.'s website was used as a blog.

The PPD/PSD and the B.E. were the parties which registered the greatest diversity in the use of the different types of new media, with 10 of the 14 present during the campaign (website, Facebook, Twitter, YouTube, Vimeo, Flickr, Hi5, MySpace, the Sapo channel, online campaign news, newsletters, online radio, RSS/feeds and a search engine). In the second spot, with a frequency of six is the PS, and in fourth place are the CDS-PP and the PCP-PEV with five. In percentage terms, amongst the five parties the PPD/PSD and the B.E. led the ranking with 28% each, followed by the PS with 16% and the CDS-PP and the PCP-PEV with 14% each.

All the candidates selected as their primary venue the use of the website, the Facebook social network, and RSS/feeds; in second place came Twitter (four of the five parties) and in third YouTube and the Campaign News (three of the five parties). Recourse to the Portuguese video channel Sapo was made by only two parties, the PS and the PPD/PSD. It is worth noting that no party prepared their websites to allow for any of the latest operating systems or applications, such as the iPhone or Android, in contrast to what took place in the presidential campaign, also in 2011 (Barbosa & Motta, 2011).

The political parties opted for different communication strategies with respect to their use of audio-visual material. Amongst the five parties, the PS was the one which put up the greatest number of videos (58%) for voter viewing, especially on Facebook, in comparison with the PPD/PSD (17%) and the CDS-PP with 13%. The emphasis on this visual communication strategy was reinforced

even more by the presence of photos in the new media (51%), with the PS taking the No. 1 spot in the ranking of the parties as compared to the B.E.'s 27% and the PPD/PSD's 20%, with the grand total of 2257 photos being placed on the website. It is noteworthy that the B.E. placed all its photographic collection on Flickr. The remaining parties, the CDS-PP and the PCP-PEV put up practically no photography of any kind. To sum up, it was the PS which took the path of an intense visual campaign with 52% of the material presented by the set of five parties, more than the total of videos and photos placed by the B.E. (24%) and the PPD/PSD (20%).

Although the present research is centred on the official period of the electoral campaign for the legislative elections, it was noted that on the opening day, the political parties already had a considerable number of followers on their own websites and in the social networks.

Regarding the five political parties selected, we note that the Facebook pages of the PPD/PSD, CDS-PP and the PS followed the official image, namely the slogan and the design which were conceived for the political campaign being analyzed. The PS as well as the PPD/PSD used the official party page on Facebook, opting not to create a new one *ad hoc*.

The B.E. opted for a different strategy for this social network; thus, there was not just one unique page representing the party but rather various Facebook accounts in accordance to the varying districts of Portugal. Given this situation and the diversity of the pages available to study, the present research has opted for only those pages of Francisco Louçã, the president of the party, for the sake of comparability in questions of methodology. With respect to the CDS-PP's presence on Facebook, due to the lack of any official page for the party, the page named "pauloportasCDS" belonging to the president of the party Paulo Portas was also analyzed.

During the political campaign under analysis, parties did in fact use new media as a strategic communication tool: the rate of recourse to Web 2.0 applications was 51% out of a maximum possible recourse to new media by the set of five political candidates being 70.

According to the National Election Committee (2011), and regarding the size of the parties under study, the PPD/PSD, the winning party, leads the ranking with 39% of effective votes (2,159,181 votes), followed by the PS with 28% (1,566,347), CDS-PP with 12% (653,888), PCP-PEV with 8% (441,147) and B.E. with 5% of votes (288,923).

Even though the equalization hypothesis was conceived in the context of the empowerment of smaller parties (Rheingold, 1993; Gibson & Ward, 1997; Bimber, 1998; Jackson, 2006, 2007), in the set of the "Big Five", the use of or recourse to different types of new media by each party does not sustain the normalization hypothesis but rather the equalization hypothesis.

In fact, the biggest and the smallest sized "Big Five" parties used 28% of different types of new media each, whilst the other three parties only between 14 and 16%. This can be explained by the B.E.'s voter profile: 70% live in urban areas (as opposed to 36% of PPD/PSD voters), 32% work in the public sector (as opposed to 15%) and 15% have higher education (5% for the PPD/PSD) (ISCTE – Participation and Deliberation Project, 2006).

Regarding reader participation/involvement in the parties' websites and on Facebook, the use of or recourse to Twitter did not enjoy much activity, neither in terms of followers nor in tweets. Voters clearly opted for expressing their support for the parties mainly by voicing their consent with "likes" instead of via the more verbal or active level of participation which Facebook and Twitter affords.

Table 3 - Reader Participation/Involvement

	PPD/PSD	PS	CDS-PP	PCP-PEV	B.E.
Website					
Likes	43,698	0	N/A	389	N/A
Facebook social network					
No. of fans	1,055	777	2,906	39	1,365
No. of posts per 100 fans	0.3	5.8	3.1	0	2.1
No. of comments per post	0.7	1	0.5	0	14.0
No. of comments to posts per 100 fans	0.2	5.8	1.6	0	28.6

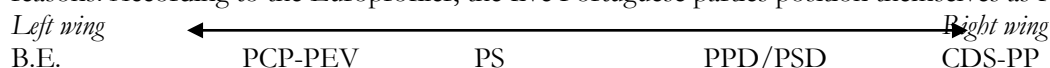
Twitter social network					
No. of tweets	62	111	130	0	50
No. of followers	60	48	86	0	74
No. of tweets per follower	1.0	2.3	1.5	0	0.7

Note: N/A – tool not available; No. – Number

Verba, Schlozman & Brady (1995) suggest that voters do not participate actively to technology-based political communication due to a lack of motivation, lack of capacity to do so and lack of opportunities. The already information-rich voter is best situated to increase his capacity to participate (Bimber, 2001). Putnam (2000) also suggests that nowadays we can witness a decrease in political engagement. From the 9,624,133 number of eligible voters for the campaign under study, only 5,588,594 voted in the end, accounting to 58.7% of the electorate (National Election Committee, 2011).

Taking into account the party size, the number of likes per capita was calculated by dividing the number of likes registered in the website of each party by the number of effective votes in that party. PPD/PSD had 2% of number of likes per capita, PCP-PEV 0.09% and the other parties had no expression. The same procedure was done to calculate the number of fans per capita, taking Facebook as the basis. As a result, the number of fans per capita was highest for the B.E. (0.5%) and the CDS-PP (0.4%) and almost non-existent for the PCP-PEV. Both PPD/PSD and PS showed the same number of fans per capita, namely 0.05%.

The higher rate of online participation by these two parties' voters can be explained by ideological reasons. According to the Europrofiler, the five Portuguese parties position themselves as follows:



Right wing parties are more likely to ensure interactivity (Lilleker & Darren, 2010). On the contrary, Sudulich (2009) found, while studying Ireland, Italy, Spain and the United Kingdom, that it was left wing parties which were more likely to dialogue with voters through the use of new media. Our study shows that the more radical parties, whether right wing or left wing, incentivized a higher rate of participation on Facebook.

In general, the extremely low level of participation of voters in the Portuguese legislative elections seems to indicate certain uneasiness with new media. It has not yet become a habit to consult political websites and social media networks or to share opinions online; perhaps it never will. Portuguese culture is based on oral tradition and not the written word. Data from the National Election Committee reveal that the country has been witnessing a decline in political involvement altogether.

With regard to values, according to the Inglehart Index, again the B.E. and the CDS-PP electors take a more radical position: 20.7% of B.E.'s voters are post-materialists (the figure for the PCP-PEV, also a left wing party, is 20%) and 75% of CDS-PP voters are materialists (ISCTE - Participation and Deliberation Project, 2006).

According to several authors, the use of web campaigning has little, if any, impact on political behaviour, even when analyzing the empirical evidence of the application of the SES model, that links the socio-economic status of voters to political participation (Verba, Schlozman & Brady (1995).

From Cabral (1995), we note that CDS-PP voters have the highest economic status (37% have high and middle-high income) and PCP-PEV voters the lowest (62% have low and middle low income); as for social status, CDS-PP voters have the highest (data for the party B.E. are not available). In a more recent study undertaken by the ISCTE - Participation and Deliberation Project (2006), the B.E. had 73% of voters earning between €750-€2500, against 59% for PPD/PSD, 50% for PS, 42% for CDS-PP and 52% for PCP-PEV. Our study revealed that the SES model did not prove itself to be useful in explaining the obtained results, probably due to the particular profile of the B.E. voters, composed mainly of well-educated urban civil servants and the geographically scattered voters of the PPD/PSD party.

The final results of the present study have been summarized in the following table. The percentages were calculated based on the set of the five parties:

Table 4 – Final results

	PPD/PSD	PS	CDS-PP	PCP-PEV	B.E.
HOME PAGE					
Website hosting	autonomous	autonomous	autonomous	party website	party website
Professionalism	high	high	high	medium	low
Discourse	factual	sensationalist	opinion-based	opinion-based	factual
STRATEGY					
Party					
Textual prominence	medium	medium	medium	medium	high
Visual prominence	high	high	high	high	high
Candidate					
Textual prominence	high	high	medium	low	low
Visual prominence	high	high	high	low	low
Campaign news					
Textual prominence	medium	high	low	low	high
Visual prominence	high	high	high	high	low
Opposition					
Textual prominence	high	high	low	absent	absent
Visual prominence	medium	medium	low	N/A	N/A
Strategic orientation	defensive	offensive	neutral	neutral	neutral
Type of discourse	promising	empty	testimonial	ideological	ideological
NEW MEDIA					
Different types of new media	28%	16%	14%	14%	28%
Use of audio-visuals	20%	52%	3%	1%	24%
INVOLVEMENT					
Website: No. of «likes»	99%	0%	N/A	1%	N/A
Facebook: No. of fans	17%	13%	48%	0%	22%
Twitter: No. of followers	22%	18%	32%	0%	28%

Note: N/A – not applicable; No. – Number

During the 2011 legislative elections in Portugal, parties did use new media as a strategic tool: the rate of recourse to new media was 51% out of a maximum possible recourse to new media by the set of five political candidates being 70. The normalization hypothesis was not confirmed, but rather the equalization hypothesis and the SES model did not hold when linking socio-economic status with participation.

The approach to web campaigning was found to be predominantly a one-way top down communication with the voter, and participation was virtually non-existent. Additionally, it should be noted that the involvement of the voter was almost exclusively passive and not active; that is to

say that the website predominated as a new medium within the field of social networks as a vehicle for communicational impact.

In terms of effective votes, PPD/PSD was the winning party (39%), followed by the PS (28%), the CDS-PP (12%), the PCP-PEV (8%) and, last but not least, the B.E. (5%). The online strategy of the winning party PPD/PSD did not differentiate itself from other parties by the number of different types of new media used, the amount of audio-visual information included or the involvement and participation of the voters.

Taking into consideration the final rank of the competing parties, three factors varied in accordance to the rank number of each party: 1) the degree of professionalism of the party's website (PPD/PSD high, PS high, CDS-PP high, PCP-PEV medium and B.E. low); 2) the textual and visual prominence given to the candidate (PPD/PSD high, PS high, CDS-PP medium-high, PCP-PEV low and B.E. low), and 3) a clear positioning in terms of strategic orientation (PPD/PSD defensive, PS offensive, CDS-PP neutral, PCP-PEV neutral and B.E. neutral). Only the winning party PPD/PSD used a type of discourse based on "promises": Passos Coelho, the candidate with "the right qualities to become Prime minister"; "Passos Coelho pointing us toward the future".

6. CONCLUSIONS

In the case of the Portuguese legislative election in 2011, as in others studied in recent years by a variety of scholars, once again new media has served the purpose of the Web 1.0 in conveying a high volume of visual attractive multimedia content information. Throughout the relevant literature voter's involvement is seen as an important feature that distinguishes the Web 2.0 from the Web 1.0 in web campaigning. Campaign managers seem to search for greater voter participation levels during campaigns, most probably as an indicator of promising future results. Nevertheless, greater attention should be paid to these unplanned forms of communication, perhaps even more so than to the planned ones. The control over the communication process can easily get lost, requiring effective crisis planning and reputation management, so as not to lose the political brand's credibility and image.

As can be seen by the present study, the campaign managers of the 5 major political parties running for the legislative elections in Portugal seem to believe that the presence of the political parties/candidates in the new media has become important, given that the new media were used as a strategic tool. At its full potential, web campaigning could offer parties and candidates a means of enhancing and mobilizing involvement of potential voters in the political public sphere.

Looking beyond the specific picture, the primary issue in web campaigning should focus on the real impact on voters, after visiting any of the election-related new media, in view of the fact that parties relate to media, amongst others, to maximize effective votes. Each web campaign raises the questions on how that specific goal can be achieved online, how effectively contents are presented, and what exactly is the significance of a specific web campaign. Is it only a matter of being present in cyberspace and keeping up with ICT trends or is it a question of implementing an integrated strategic marketing plan based on a solid segmentation of the voters and a serious targeting campaign in order to achieve the multiple qualitative and quantitative communication objectives previously defined?

Political web campaign managers need to keep in mind that in order to manage their political brand successfully, be it a party or a candidate, a clear psychographic profile of voters' segments needs to be drawn so that different messages can be sent through different media to chosen targets. This task has become more and more complex in view of the fact that nowadays voters become aware of and judge political messages to form opinions and vote their intentions based on a panoply of scattered information delivered through an impressive set of distinct traditional communication channels and new media tools and applications. Media fragmentation leads inevitably to the need for building strong political brands, with solid brand equities in order to win over new voters and assure a current voter's loyalty.

The next step in the evolution of the World Wide Web, the so-called semantic web (Web 3.0) will further empower voters to configure the content they want to read and to compose their own mix of media, moving away from the folks-onomy to a new paradigm: the me-onomy. It is clear that political marketing, branding and communication will become a more and more intricate matter;

each voter will become one single segment. The way in which this scenario will shape political web campaigning is yet to be seen.

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