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SHOULD WE SELL POLITICIANS LIKE SOAP?

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Table of Contents

- 1. Introduction5
- 2. Literature Review6
 - 2.1. The Concept of Political Marketing6
 - 2.2. Political Product and Commercial Product11
 - 2.3. Machiavellian Origins of Persuasion.....13
 - 2.4. Persuasion and the Role of Media15
- 3. Method.....17
 - 3.1. Research design17
 - 3.2. Data collection and analysis18
- 4. Results19
 - 4.1. The Citizen Decision Journey.....19
 - 4.2. Projective Technique22
- 5. Discussion.....24
 - 5.1. Empirical Repercussions24
 - 5.2. Limitations and Suggestions for Future Research.....25
- 6. Main Findings and Conclusion.....26
- 7. References27
- 8. Appendices31

Abstract

Title: Should We Sell Politicians Like Soap?

Political Marketing became mandatory to ensure the functioning of modern politics. The way the political product is addressed by political marketers and conveyed by the media can be controversial when it's perceived a commercial intention behind. This study focuses on the poorly explored topics related to Political Marketing, more specifically on how the concept is perceived in Portugal together with the approach to the political product, plus the impact of media and marketing campaigns within the decision process before the political choice. Data was obtained through in-depth semi-structured interviews (n=39), to understand how citizens, make their political choice, their awareness of media persuasion and their perception on political marketing and the political product. After collecting and analysing the data, the results showed a decisive role of the media regarding the citizens process of gathering information, some skepticism towards the commercial perspective of the political product, discredit and low awareness on the concept of political marketing in Portugal.

Keywords: Political Marketing, Politics, Political Product, Persuasion, Political Choice, Media.

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1. Introduction

Political Marketing “is concerned with strategies for positioning and communications, and the methods through which these strategies may be realized, including the search for information into attitudes, awareness and response of the target audience” (Lock and Harris 1996, 21-22), which comes from the union of two different areas within Social Sciences, Political Science and Marketing. Different specialists believe that, on one side, political marketing can be a good bridge between the two areas, however, there are also specialists who think that marketing does not suit into the political process. Regardless of understanding this intersection as good or bad, there is a question about how the political product should be treated. For many, there is no possible connection of politics with commercial strategies of marketing since we are not just selling a product or a service. On the other side, marketing can be adjusted to the political process by improving the relationship between the parties/politicians and citizens. Meanwhile, it is not possible to discuss politics and marketing without the concept of persuasion. Persuasion echoes from the classics, but in modern times, the role of persuasion has been associated with the media as the main source of political information. The role of the media generates a lot of debate, is it a political tool or a political actor? Nevertheless, it contributes to spread the political message and, for that, they can recur to good or bad strategies. “The good citizen ought to triumph not by frightening his opponents but by beating them fairly in argument” (Thucydides 2008, 180), this means that persuasion is not necessarily connected to intimidate the opposition, it should be connected with the capability of proving better individual skills. Notwithstanding, the political demand has changed, the relationship between politicians and voters has shifted and, due to that, we formulate the main research question of this research project: **Should we sell politicians like soaps?**

Portugal was the country chosen for the study in hands due to the fact that it is now living a moment of intense political crisis, not only due to covid but, in general, Portugal has shown high rates of abstentionism when it comes to elections, while at the same time, the population seems to seek a change, showing dissatisfaction with the current situation. In order to better comprehend what characteristics two different generations value regarding the political product and political marketing, the following sub questions were developed: **Sub Question 1** “What are the motivations and sources of information that led Portuguese citizens to make a political choice and in what degree are they aware about media persuasion?” and **Sub Question 2** “How do Portuguese citizens perceive the concept of political marketing and political product?”.

In the current chapter the topic of research is introduced which, together with the research, allows to reach conclusions and the objectives exposed. Followed by that, I present the theoretical literature in the second chapter, then an explanation of the methodology, presentation, and discussion of results. Lastly, I conclude with limitations, future research recommendations and conclusions. Through the combination of a theoretical background with 1-1 interviews’ insights, it will be possible to answer the formulated questions of this project.

2. Literature Review

2.1. The Concept of Political Marketing

In this chapter it will be develop an overview approach to the concept of Political Marketing. The relevance of this concept is indenalieble when the main question of this work project is “Should we sell politicians like soap?”. All the strategies developed to present citizens with different parties and candidates can differ but the underlying planning by political marketers that exist is something

common to every political campaign. Due to this, it is mandatory to further develop this research, to first understand what means to join marketing and politics into one science.

Firstly, Marketing is the process of “(1) identifying customer needs, (2) conceptualizing these needs in terms of an organization’s capacity to produce, (3) communicating that conceptualization to the appropriate locus of power in the organization, (4) conceptualizing the consequent output in terms of customer needs earlier identified, and (5) communicating that conceptualization to the customer.” (Howard 1973, 1). But the general marketing concept does not arise from pure altruism, there is a self-interest behind what companies want to do. Companies are able at the same time to maximize consumer welfare and their long-term profits by producing what consumers need, want and are willing to pay for (Jocz and Quelch 2008, 202). With this symbiotic relation, both parts see their interests fulfilled. Moreover, we clearly understand that marketers benefit from having as many customers as possible, given the economic circle continuity, the demand and supply will balance each other with the help of an “invisible hand” that fuels the rich illusion of wealth (Smith 2006). Plus, “marketing in its broadest sense is the medium through which the material goods and culture of a society are transmitted to its members” (Kelley and Lazer 1967, 42), meaning that the role of marketing cannot be only related with economic interests, it is also responsible for the transmission of information to society.

The concept of general marketing can be applied to multiple segments of different areas of our daily lives. Among those, we have politics. It is quite evident that contemporary politics have become dominated using multiple marketing strategies, techniques, and principles (Savigny and Temple 2010, 1049). That application can be interpreted in both ways: marketing is an useful and fundamental tool to politics, or marketing is something harmful for politics by manipulating

citizens and removing doctrinal content to the subject. According to Margaret Scammell, marketing may be important in the process of democratising politics by making parties more responsive to voters' wishes and contributing to the design of more voter-friendly communications (Scammell 1999, 738). In this sense, smoothing the message makes it fit the modern concept of politically correct. On the other side, according to Heather Savigny there is empirical evidence in western democracies that there is an increasingly lack of trust in politics and a declining electoral turnout. This trend of skepticism shows that marketing has been failing both issues: abstention during elections and trust in politicians' motives. These current challenges have been forcing political marketers to find solutions, considering that none has been ideal, one of the most common being political branding (Savigny and Temple 2010, 1057-58). The need to brand political parties comes from the main goal of offering an easier product for citizens, by turning political parties into "brands" that citizens choose and can be loyal to or not. Therefore, we enter in a particular consumer decision journey, in this case the citizen decision journey.

While trying to connect democracy and political marketing, some theorists believe that the democratic context is key to intensify marketing capability. Only in a democratic context marketers can do their proper work, without the constrains of a dictatorial political system that will oppress the way campaigns work, doing so by being limited by rules and obligations. Although theorists acknowledge the beneficial role of democracy for marketing, there are also some challenges nowadays that change things slightly. The emphasis on key voters to hold political elites do influence democratic priorities, political decisions switched from focusing on the interests of society as whole a to the elite conveniences. Considering this new dynamic, the previous statement of democracy enhancing marketing's capability, makes it clear that we are facing the opposite, the political product comes from politics being subordinated to marketing. The

consequences are many. The self-promotion by changing beliefs/policies works based on self-interest, with the exclusive to attract votes and keep the current elite equilibrium. The risk of politics descending into populism increases day by day due to this (Savigny and Temple 2010, 1057-58). However, according to Adam Smith “we address ourselves not to their humanity but to their self-love” (Smith 1994, Volume 1) which means that self-interest and self-love are the basis for economic development since each consumer by searching for ways to satisfy their individual needs and interests is encouraging a healthy economy. The question is, should we apply the useful self interest in economic terms to the political sphere? Or should we have a distinction between the two different products, the commercial/economic and the one political?

Nowadays there are different perceptions, within academics, about the concept of Political Marketing. According to Scammell marketing may democratize politics in a way that it makes parties more responsible while answering voters needs and desires (Savigny and Temple 2010, 1057). However, the term is now generally used to describe the use of marketing techniques with the main goal of selling a political product in the same way as a commercial product (Savigny and Temple 2010, 1051). Notwithstanding, it is important to understand how Political Marketing works. Regarding what fuels the concept, we have information coming from communications, management, and political science. Those three sources focus on different topics. For instance, communications will privilege news and media strategies, while management will be supported in marketing theories and political science will be concerned with the impact of marketing in politics (Scammell 1999, 718-39). In theory, this triangle should be known by all parties, but in practical terms the communication is many times forgotten or just seen as an instrument rather than a key part of political marketing dynamics. This happens due to the assumption of the key relationship between politicians and voters. Nonetheless, as it will be further discussed, the role of media should

be as much important as the role of parties/voters (Savigny and Temple 2010, 1052). The communication of a product is certainly a key part of marketing. The question here is about the product itself, should the political product be addressed as a regular commercial product? Should media emphasis be the same as in the usage of paid media than in the process of selling a public good? Although, those questions may arise from a deep reflection on the values and origins of politics as a product, in modern times is undeniable that perhaps the most important stage for political actors is when they communicate the political product to guarantee votes (Savigny and Temple 2010, 1053).

Considering where the information comes from, it is also relevant to comprehend who is included in the process and who the actors are of political marketing. The expectations about businesses and society, plus the political polarization and the dynamics of the internet, social media and technology will demand a multi actor dialog between three distinct sets of actors: companies, citizen stakeholders, and political entities. Together, those actors will be the center of marketing and political activity. From this activity the outcomes are many - societal (election results, common good, legislation), collective (social movements, industry partnerships), political actors (performance, transparency), corporate (strategy and performance), individual outcomes (issue awareness, voting, behavior change, political and social involvement) (Appendix 1). All together in a complex dynamic we see these forces, actors and outcomes working with a general feedback effect that feeds all this process. The debate between all these actors may be questioned as a net cost or a benefit for society. As far as scholars have studied, the marketing and political activity development is positive since it boosts the dialog between companies, political entities and citizens. The democratic process becomes more inclusive and gives voice to smaller populations. However, there are undeniable costs: the loss of political values, the potential marginalization of

vulnerable populations, the self-interest relying on each actors needs and finally the arising populist movements (Korschun, Martin and Vadakkepatt 2020, 384).

2.2. Political Product and Commercial Product

This chapter will further infer about the political product and the role of information since one of the most fundamental questions for political marketers and consumers is about how political party managers, members and consequently citizens perceive the political product to be (O’Cass 2003, 67). “Political information is to democratic politics what money is to economics: it is the currency of citizenship.” (Carpini and Keeter by Kuklinski et al. 2003, 797) The level of information dictates a lot of the decisions made by politicians (Levy 2013, 132) as well as the decisions made by citizens. We have two different equilibriums: “Soothing Politics” (when citizens are in denial of the problems that a nation is facing, and regarding those politicians, shy away the necessary reforms to improve the economic condition) and “Realpolitik” (when voters face up to reality giving political support to politicians and parties to implement the necessary measures) (Levy 2013, 132). Considering these different levels of awareness on how the political situation is, citizens will show different predispositions towards the political product. Those can be more negative or more positive. Although marketing has developed over the years and its application by political parties is directed to win space in public debate and consequently notoriety in political agenda, the level of information varies through time and challenges are different day by day. As David Reid points out, the modern challenge of getting elected is fundamentally all about marketing and “parties must determine the scope and nature of their product and then find the most effective way of communicating its benefits to a target audience” (Reid 1988, 34). Despite the facts presented the question is: Should we sell politicians like soap?

Regarding marketing's focus on products, when applied to markets and politics' influence on government, society, and political campaigns we clearly see an advantage of taking a product orientation in order to ensure the potential impact on political parties and, consequently, political systems and society as a whole. Considering Montesquieu's conception of commerce as an activity that soothes customs, enabling some delicacy between the relations of different citizens while ensuring a notion of exact justice (Montesquieu 2011), the political product when perceived as a commercial product is something quite natural when concerning the characteristics of the electoral offering (O'Casey 2003, 69). On the other side, taking a perspective based on values and principles, the political product should not be perceived as an ordinary commercial product. On that way political values are lost by being commercialized. The political product, according to O'Casey, is perceived to be a blend of four key elements: party, policies, leader, and candidates. In result, we have a product/service being sold as soap, a mutable product that can be changed and adapted to market demand. The generic marketing emphasis on customer needs is a key requisite for competitive success, when applied to politics. A political party will achieve its objectives more efficiently by deeply understanding its target voters, their needs, wants and above all the political costs associated with satisfying those same wishes. Taking this approach by granted, the political product will be created with this basic economic principle of balancing the citizens needs with costs. The consequences of assuming such are many. Nowadays, this "political commerce" is not connected to people as Montesquieu argued, on the contrary, is directed to wealth which, in an extreme scenario, can lead to monopolies and despotism (Montesquieu 2011). This commercial orientation has been developing many ramifications due to market pressure made by political parties, politicians, voters, businesses and lobby groups. The pressure to meet the middle ground in politics is increasing day by day, which forces politics to move from ideology, values and

principles to regular propaganda and communication. The reduced reliance on ideology by giving room to the campaign and process of selling politicians as soap has increased the marketing strategy of targeting specific groups within communities. This approach will exclude some minorities, that are being caught by populist parties with the intent to seek a business opportunity within those the “excluded” groups of the major parties (O’Cass 2003, 70). As we can see, the issue is more complex than to commercialize politicians. Citizens are more judgmental about politics, which means that, although it does not directly cost them money (they are not being asked for a spendish decision), their political decision has an impact on their present and future lives. Politics is about personalities, public moves, institutions, complex social dilemmas, economic crisis and many more, considering that what political marketers are doing is manipulating a much more complex concept than selling a basic soap (O’Cass 2003, 80).

2.3. Machiavellian Origins of Persuasion

Persuading people to support a party or a particular politician is an essential part of any political campaign. As explained before, the level of information and even the individual beliefs are flexible and varies across time and circumstances. Due to that, in the political arena, voter awareness of specific issues is quite low, and hence susceptibility to persuasion is high (Zaller 1992). Considering that, and knowing that the focus of this project is politics and marketing, it is necessary to deepen our research regarding the concept of persuasion and try to first understand its origins.

In modern times any public organization, corporation or political entity can become victim of public opinion judgements or try to manipulate it as far as they are able to. Regarding this, the key role of persuasion, political marketing, and criticism about politicians is not something new, it has origins in earlier political analysis and reflections. For example, Plato’s accusations and criticism

about sophists for making no distinction between the truth and falsehood is only one of many examples of the criticism towards the educated masters of rhetoric (Plato 2017). Cicero wrote a political campaign manual on how his son could get elected to the Roman senate, behaved as a political marketer to his own time (Cicero 2018). The process of persuading others of the right to attain and hold office started with Machiavelli's handbook for rulers, as an early example of how to persuade a society to support a Politician (Machiavelli 2008). However, political marketing as a modern phenomenon in democracies begins in the twentieth century with the electoral franchise to the masses and the selling of parties and candidates to a mass audience (Savigny and Temple 2010, 1051).

O'Shaughnessy argues that only today we can speak of a persuasion culture, where only the ones who are most publicly organized thrive. Considering this, we can derive the following propositions about persuasion: 1) Emotion (the essence of persuasion is emotional); 2) Subversion (persuasion proceeds by subversion, slowly over time) 3) Fantasy (the idea of people believing in politicians as rational decision makers when there is no reason in political life; rather, the target is invited to join a mutual hallucination of solidarity as copartner in the production of hyperbolic meaning); 4) Myth (the plasticity that underlies the cultural, social, and economic values, those can be adapted and re shaped over time giving different meanings or interpretations). According to O'Shaughnessy, in business, government or media, the success of persuasion demands an error of asking for belief meaning there is no pretense of objectivity. Communication has turned into a tool, enabling those in power to avoid the confrontation of certain problems through performance. That performance leaves the public astonishingly credulous in a way that they regularly fall for the show they watch. Based on this, it is very clear that we are facing a symbolic government. The consequences in short and long term are many, but education can be highlighted as one of the most

important ones. The more the people are exposed to a symbolic government made of performances and illusions, the more they learn about it and the more skeptic they become towards politics and governing. Ultimately, “the obsession with advocacy-driven news management can lead to the wholesale abandonment of ethics by government.” (O’Shaughnessy 2005, 199-201).

2.4. Persuasion and the Role of Media

“Political persuasion occurs as a direct result of news media consumption” (Diehl, Weeks and Gil de Zúñiga 2016, 1878) Currently, the concept of political persuasion is directly connected to media consumption and that it is key to further comprehend the role of media today when talking about political marketing and political persuasion.

Firstly, we should acknowledge that the media, including public service broadcasters, are political actors in their own right, since media and politics are closely connected and cannot exist without each other (Ejupi, Siljanovska and Iseni 2014, 640). Besides, media should be the defender of democracy by being the one who distributes information in a context of freedom of speech, they do have their own interests lying under their work. The role of media is of much importance as of the work of politicians and citizens, without it the system would not work. The key question here is that the media many times is seen as a tool that politicians and parties can use. However, it is a business, with its own wishes, which means that it is not impartial or neutral actor while communicating, especially when it comes to political affairs. Secondly, there is a tension within the two different roles of the media: to protect their own interests and be the defenders of democracy. That tension can bring conflicts by the simple fact that politicians cannot simply present their “messages” about their product. They have been manipulating their messages together with political marketers so that they can present the message they want through the media (Savigny

and Temple 2010, 1054). The point is that media's influence goes far beyond their interpretation of party messages; their influence will shape voter's perceptions and their understanding of politics in general. Therefore, the role of media has as much importance as politicians than ever, they help to mobilize public opinion and they help set the agenda of the parties themselves (Savigny and Temple 2010, 1055). Thirdly, due to media influence, when voters make their choices during elections, they will be making options based largely on impressions created by media insights (Laczniak and Caywood 1987, 16). In that role, we see a major presence of television as one of the most relevant communication channels of modern times. "Television advertising has resulted in the transformations of the electorate into an audience of passive spectators" (Laczniak and Caywood 1987, 18).

The heavy use of Tv advertising has been a key strategy for parties to position their candidates with a positive image, although as it was discussed before, we know that it is not possible to control media, so a positive image can turn into a negative one by the blink of an eye (Laczniak and Caywood 1987, 18). Those negative images subvert the idea of a rational voter by causing emotional appeals. According to Anthony Downs, the rational voter is aware that political apathy and disinformation is the rational decision since there is a clear higher cost to collect information than just vote (Downs 1957). Due to that, voters will typically favor policies they perceive to be in the general interest of their nation (Caplan 2007) Citizens do not think ahead, they do not search for more information about their choices because preferences count more than beliefs. Considering that a rational citizen will behave like this, the emotional appeals of television will be decisive from increasing the voter turnout and skepticism towards the political debate (Laczniak and Caywood 1987, 21) ensuring that a democracy keeps functioning based on the principle that well

informed societies have benefits that are indivisible, so it's kind of mandatory to keep an ignorant system.

Based on this, and considering the TV interests of having more audiences, they do know that drama brings more viewers. For those reasons, the primary message of a politician is many times manipulated to sell more in the media perspective. Due to this, television can be appointed to be “the major reason for the decay of political debate into commercial spots that encourage negative rather than positive argument” (Schlesinger 1986, 36). Media are bale to vitalize voters, move nonvoter/undecided voters to participate in a political campaign but, on the other side, they do trivialize the complexity of many issues. They accentuate the importance of the candidate image while underestimating the candidate substance (Laczniak and Caywood 1987, 19). In order to ensure that the correct message gets to the audience, the party must market itself as much to the media as it does to the electorate because the media plays a major role in selling the political product to the electorate. There is a cycle of manipulation and persuasion, where the messages reaching the public about a commercial product are as marketed and controlled, as the messages given by the media to the public about a political candidate and party. Therefore, political candidates should market themselves as much to the news media as to the voter (O’Cass 2003, 90).

3. Method

3.1. Research design

The purpose of the study is to analyse people’s motivations that led them to make a political choice, how they were affected by media persuasion, and how that is related to personal perceptions about the concept of political marketing and political product. At the same time, it is going to be inferred

how far are political values/ideologies lost due to the modern strategies of political marketing. In an initial stage, it is essential to base the study in a theoretical foundation as it allows the researcher to support his/her assumptions on predetermined insights. The research was organized following 3 phases. The first regards the collection of secondary data through a deep research and analysis of different scientific articles, books, and institutional reports. Secondly, it was developed a primary data research that consisted of three steps: an initial preselection of the target segment studied through a prequestionnaire (Appendix 2) that will help to organize the demographics of the suitable sample for interviews; the second step regards the collection of the insights needed with a qualitative methodology through in-depth semi-structured interviews 1-1 to obtain individuals' insights. Through this approach, the deepness of the answers is bigger, which allows to better understand the motivations and beliefs of the sample instead of answering directly to questions asked in structured interviews or online surveys. The interviews were spread through the month of October and November 2021. The third and last phase is related to the discussion of results through the creation of one framework of analysis to explain how citizens do their political choice, together with the interpretation of the projective technique results.

3.2. Data collection and analysis

Regarding the collection of primary data, for the preselection of suitable candidates to interview, it was created a list of target segments by age, level of education and nationality (Appendix 3). The focus was on finding a sample politically active according to age criteria (respondents above 18 years of age) based on article 49 (Constituição da República Portuguesa 2005). Considering the sample, the respondents were splited into two generations: the younger generation (ages between 19 and 28 years old) and the older generation (ages between 50 and 65 years old). In terms of level

of education, only people with higher studies or currently studying in university were interviewed since, in theory, those are more informed or at least they have more opportunities to make a conscious and capable political choice. When it comes to nationality, considering that the focus of this study is directed to Portuguese Politics, only Portuguese people were selected to proceed for the interviews. For the collection of the insights during the interviews some steps were followed (Appendix 4) and, to ensure the best outcome possible, it was crucial to prepare some hypothetical guide with some predefined open questions to conduct the interviews (Appendix 5). The 39 participants were all from Portuguese nationality and include both students and employed individuals with different levels of income. All the group interactions were conducted and recorded through the platform Zoom with an average length of 40 minutes. In the end, the information was summarized, and the top answers were selected. The information gathered from the interviews together with the evidence taken from the articles are the base of this study and will allow a better understanding of people's motivations that led them to make a political choice, how is related to modern strategy of political marketing and how those concepts are perceived, which will answer the question of "should we sell politicians like soap?".

4. Results

4.1. The Citizen Decision Journey

Regarding the decision process of each citizen, an hypothetical model was developed through the adaptation of the model of the consumer decision journey (Court et al. 2009). By doing this theoretical exercise, it is possible to create a model that exemplifies the citizens process to make their political choices by comparing the original role of consumer to the current responsibility of citizens and assuming that politicians/parties are being sold as brands. The model is the Citizen

Decision Journey (Appendix 6). In a simplified way we will have 4 moments: consider, active evaluation, political decision, and post decision political perception.

Having this model in mind (Appendix 7), the interviews showed different perspectives while they go through the citizen decision journey. One of the most interesting points especially for the younger generation, is the role of inner circle recommendations (family and friends' insights), during the stages before the political choice. As interviewee X1 says: "My family counts a lot, they were responsible to teach me the main political principles in which I believe in (...) I listen a lot to their opinions about today's topics and although they do not tell me where to vote they have a huge impact before I make my choice". But the inner circle can even have a stronger impact for younger generations. As interviewee B1 points out "my grandparent told to vote on that party (...) he is my grandpa, so I trust in what he says (...) he knows a lot about these things" or as interview C1 mentioned "I don't remember who I voted last time (...) I just voted in who my sister told me to". But the information does not come only from the inner circle, the media plays a major role during the first two stages of consideration and evaluation. Most interviews, focusing on age, appoint TV and Newspapers as a major source of influence while gathering information (Appendix 8). In general, those sources are trustworthy, but most interviewees show that while watching the news, a debate or read an article, it is necessary to take a step back and not trust every word. As interviewee I1 mentioned, "media are trustworthy if we know how to read them, that's why it's necessary to know as many sides and opinions as possible to be able to capture the truth" and interviewee L1 says "it's an absolute need to double check the sources, there are some who are paid by the government (...) that is definitely not impartial". The reasons why the media are accused of not being impartial is related with their own history, the source of payment, the values of the company and who is currently working there and above all the fact that they are people, they

will always have their own opinion and the hard work is in mitigating that while doing their job (interviewee O1).

On top of the inner circle recommendations and the media, some interviewees do pay attention to other ways of merchandising like outdoors or flyers. Those sources do not seem to have a decisive impact in the political decision of the sample, notwithstanding, there are some interviewees that use those to see how the candidates look. The importance of the candidates' image in citizens' choice is undeniable, as interviewee H2 explained "the candidates image has a decisive role, their presence and empathy completely define what I will think about that candidate and consequently in whom I will vote". However, the question is also related to their physical appearance, "I would never vote in some candidate that has damaged teeth or, that presents himself in a less formal way because that does not give neither a sense of trust nor credibility" (interviewee G1). When asked about what comes first to their mind when there is a need to make a political choice, if it is the candidate/party leader or the party itself, the sample was quite split in half. Half of the interviewees mentioned that firstly, they think about the political party because "the political parties have their own history and ideology which defines a lot of what they will or not support regardless of concrete proposals" (interviewee C2). The other half mentioned the ultimate role of the candidate since "more than half of what the party will say is defined by the leader, if that leader is honest and credible the party will have more honest and credible proposals" (interviewee L2).

After making their choice on election's day, most interviewees showed low party loyalty, which means that most of them do not enter the loyalty loop. While the older generation consider themselves loyal to a political wing, the younger generation showed even less loyalty. Nonetheless, this generation expressed low interest in politics, pointing the media as a decisive contact to the

“most known/mentioned” parties/candidates, as interviewee C1 explains “I am not much interested in politics but usually at dinner the tv is on (...) they talk a lot about the most known parties (...) they only speak about the most important ones they do for football (...) they do not talk that much about someone from the third division as they talk about Ronaldo (...) for politics is the same thing”. Although the media are a major source of information, the “negative news” are noticed by the sample, as most of the information is associated with some scandal, personal or unfortunate situation. That shows less impartiality from the media, which can influence tremendously the audience. Within the younger generation, there is a clear lack of interest about politics, which is directly related to the fact that the younger generation is the least informed. However, as the least informed generation, we could expect some neutrality of opinions or consciousness about the lack of information, notwithstanding, the younger generation shows to have the most negative, pessimist and distrustful insights.

4.2. Projective Technique

The projective technique was used to help the respondents to project their own attitude and feelings unconsciously towards the concept of political marketing. Before the projective technique, the interviewees were asked if they have ever heard of “political marketing”. The majority said “no” showing a low awareness of the concept. However, all of them tried to explain what they thought political marketing is, resulting in expressions as “selling ideas”, “promoting the message”, “increasing votes”, “persuading citizens”, “take advantage of a target”, “strategies in short and long term”, “influence”, “transmit the message”, “adapt to the context to ensure the best outcome”. The main outcome of those speculations is the commercial character that underlies those words, which led to a confirmation question “Do you perceive the political product as a commercial

product?”, where most of the answers were “yes”. As interviewee P2 argues, “marketers project one image that is going to create a need to acquire that product, the product is the political candidate” and as interviewee O1 explains “the political product and the commercial product are the same, everything is about the money that they ensure”. Nonetheless, there were some negative answers explaining that “the political product is not negotiable, there is not a context of imperfect information since every party and candidate has the same opportunities” (interviewee Z1) or arguing that “politics does not behave with a mercantilist principle” (interviewee T1). Interviewees were surprised with the question as they never thought of politics in those terms, some respondents even showed that, although the political product is a commercial product, that should not be like that because “we are day by day getting closer to a commercialization of politicians, that only happens when politicians and citizens have a low level of education” (interviewee O2).

All that reflection on the concept led to the projective technique itself where the interviewees were asked to point out an animal and feeling, that they thought it would fit the concept of political marketing (Appendix 9). As main takeaways, firstly, we have the younger generation with more negative perception of political marketing since they associated it as mostly dangerous, distrustful, underhanded animals like snakes, peacock, or chameleons and, regarding feelings they mentioned distrust, anger, annoyance or indifference. Secondly, the older generation showed a more neutral or even positive perception of the concept. The animals were not much different from the others, but the feelings changed slightly as well as the justifications given. For example, the chameleon was mentioned as a calm and quiet animal able to adapt, while the horse was mentioned together with seduction, perceiving the concept as conciliator, sweet and strong. Finally, it was also possible to infer, with the justifications given, that the different generations show different levels of maturity towards the acceptance of political marketer’s work. The older generation grants space

for political marketing assuming its utility to inform and educate citizens (when it is well developed), on the other side, the younger generation distrusts the political marketer's work, even if the work is well done, highlighting a negative perception with marketing as lies, fake news or attempts to manipulate the audience.

5. Discussion

5.1. Empirical Repercussions

Although the academic approach to political marketing studies shows that at its core there is a belief in the democracy enhancing capability of marketing (Savigny and Temple 2010, 1061), there are a lot of implications while joining politics and marketing. The emphasis on key voters and short-term goals means that the public sphere is less informed, especially the younger generation, because they only have access of the information worked and developed by marketers, which is always less than the original. Also, the focus on the politician's commercial part is ending the focus on the society, since there is an economic principle underlying the marketers' action, which leads to a subordination of politics to marketing. (Savigny and Temple 2010, 1061). And when everyone is marketing themselves, changing beliefs or policies at the drop of a hat to attract votes, politics risks descending into populism – which has the potential to alienate the electorate further (Savigny and Temple 2010, 1061). The wave of skepticism, frustration and dissatisfaction by the citizens is harming marketers, media and politicians' work. The audience is difficult to please, there is a general displeasure and distrust with how things are being done. Notwithstanding, while the older generation can see political marketing as something that exists and with its utility to keep the audience informed, to transmit a message and above all to harmonize the information, the younger generation has more negative prejudices.

5.2. Limitations and Suggestions for Future Research

This research gave a lot of insights on the topic, nevertheless, as for all empirical studies, it is important to understand its limitations. Firstly, it is important to mention that only a small population was interviewed and analyzed acknowledging that more participants could have revealed other insights. Secondly, the study was based on two generations, young and old, but to ensure more concrete results, the middle generation should also be interviewed as their priorities are different from the other two generations. Thirdly, the sample number between the two generations is different. To take better conclusions, at least the number of interviewees of both generations should be approximated. Lastly, as one of the main limitations of in-dept interviews is the risk of biased information by uninformed/unexperienced interviewees, that was confirmed since many of the younger interviewees were not familiarized and did not had any interest in politics. Although the insights and contributions of this project were many, there is always space for improving and continuing studies on these topics. For instance, extra research should be developed to comprehend why ideologies stopped being the main distinctive asset between different parties since they are not the focus of media according to the interviewed sample. Secondly, as many respondents mentioned the media focus on personal issues, more research should be developed to find a way to bring more political doctrine into modern media communication. And last but not least, since most of interviewees expressed their discontent with the fact that political product is a commercial product, upcoming analysis should focus on the advantages and disadvantages of that perception.

6. Main Findings and Conclusion

To conclude, this study helped to explore different perceptions about the main concepts of political marketing and political product plus shedding a light on how Portuguese citizens make their political choice. Considering the Sub Question 1, about the journey to make a political choice, the obtained responses from the interviews showed that the theory section about the role of media was verified. All participants mentioned the media as a major source of information and most of them recognized the need to filter information, showing that the media are not fully impartial. The difference between generations here lies in the role of the inner circle recommendations, since the younger respondents are much influenced by the opinions of those closer to them. Regarding the Sub Question 2, about the different perceptions of the political product and the concept of political marketing, the results from the interviews and the projective technique showed that there is a low awareness of the concept of political marketing, notwithstanding the respondents have ideas of what that might be. The older generation showed a much more realistic approach towards the usefulness of political marketing, while the younger generation is much more skeptic and mostly has negative prejudices. Considering the concept of political product, most of the interviewees, regardless of their age, perceive it as a commercial product. Concerning the Research Question, “Should we sell politicians like soaps?”, the results from the projective technique plus the insights collected from the testimonies of interviewees and the literature review showed that today we see a clear trend to sell politicians like soap. Those who can afford and keep a better political marketing team will be able to secure more votes and guarantee their place in political decisions. Nevertheless, the skepticism and need for change mentioned in almost all interviewees reveals that maybe this strategy will not thrive in a long-term perspective, as citizens are becoming less interested in political affairs and there is less hope in the Portuguese political future.

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8. Appendices

Appendix 1 – Marketing and Political Activity Framework

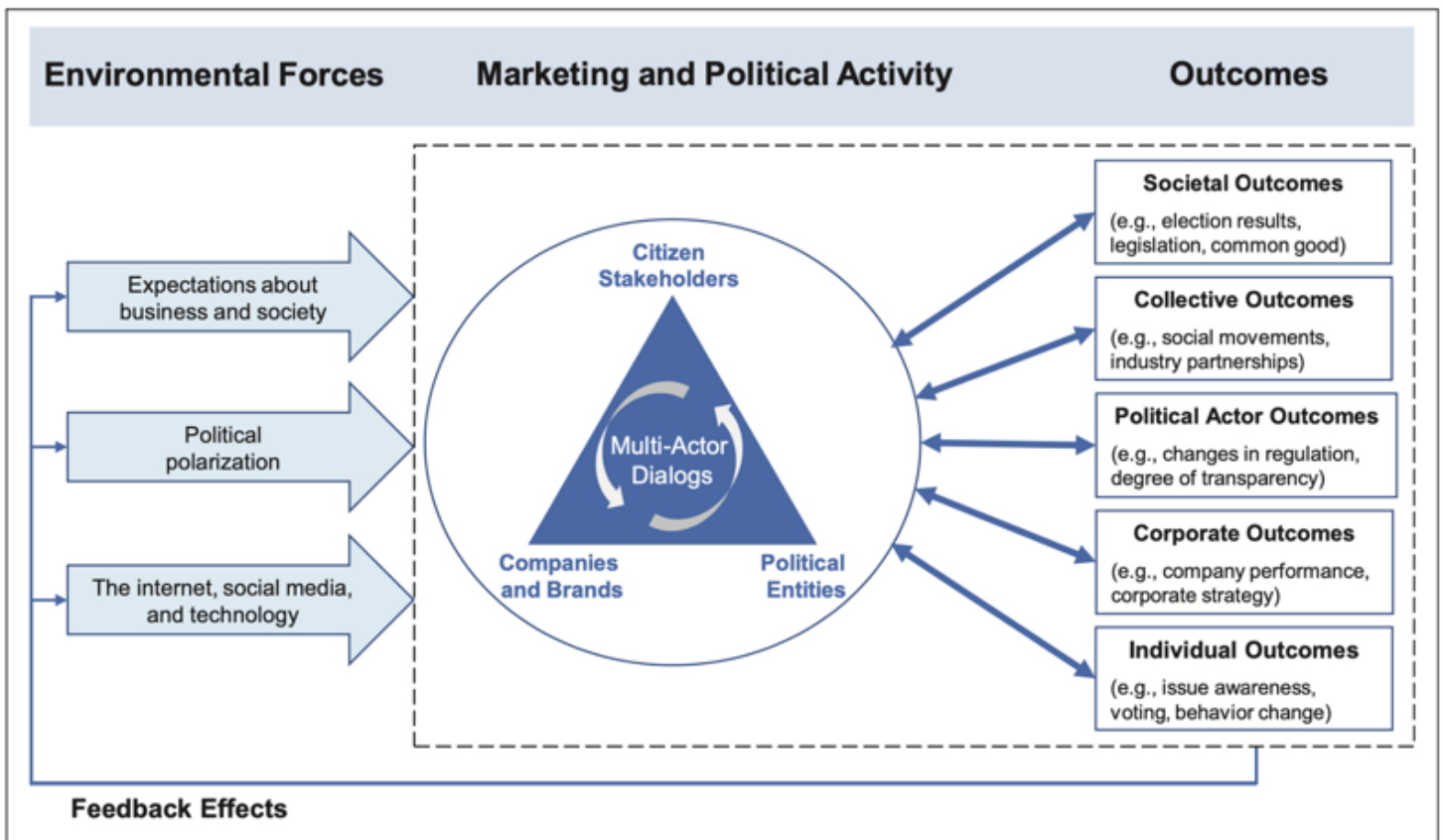


Figure 1: Marketing and political activity framework (Korschun, Martin and Gautham 2020, 379)

Appendix 2 – Prequestionnaire Questions

- Age
- Gender
- Nationality
- Employability Status (Employed, retired, student)
- Level of Education (early childhood education (level 0); primary education (level 1); lower secondary education (level 2); upper secondary education (level 3); postsecondary non-tertiary education (level 4); short-cycle tertiary education (level 5); bachelor's or equivalent level (level 6); master's or equivalent level (level 7); doctor or equivalent level (level 8) (UNESCO Institute of Statistics for Statistics 2013)
- Level of income (0-500, 500-1000, 1000-2000, 2000-3000, 3000-4000,4000-5000,5000-6000,7000-8000,+8000)
- Do you vote when there are elections? (yes or no)
- Do you search for information in order to make your political choice? (yes or no)
- How much time do you spend searching for information?
- Where do you look for information? (friends or family, tv, radio, social media, newspapers, articles, books, ...)

Appendix 3 – Overview Interviewed Sample

| ID | Age | Gender | Nationality | Employability Status | Level of Education | Level of Income | Do you vote when there are elections? | Do you search for information in order to make your political choice? | How much time do you spend searching for information? | Where do you look for information? |
|----|-----|--------|-------------|----------------------|--------------------|-----------------|---------------------------------------|---|---|---|
| A1 | 24 | Male | Portuguese | Student | Level 7 | 1000-2000 | Yes | Yes | Some | Parties websites, news, newspapers |
| B1 | 21 | Female | Portuguese | Student | Level 6 | 1000-2000 | Yes | No | None | Nowhere |
| C1 | 22 | Male | Portuguese | Student | Level 7 | 0-500 | Yes | No | None | Nowhere |
| D1 | 19 | Female | Portuguese | Student | Level 5 | 0-500 | Yes | Yes | Almost none | Family, Social Media |
| E1 | 24 | Female | Portuguese | Student | Level 7 | 1000-2000 | Yes | No | None | Nowhere |
| F1 | 20 | Male | Portuguese | Student | Level 5 | 0-500 | Yes | Yes | Almost none | Newspapers |
| G1 | 26 | Female | Portuguese | Worker | Level 7 | 500-1000 | Yes | No | None | Nowhere |
| H1 | 25 | Female | Portuguese | Worker | Level 7 | 0-500 | Yes | No | None | Nowhere |
| I1 | 64 | Male | Portuguese | Worker | Level 8 | 4000-6000 | Yes | Yes | A lot | Tv, Newspapers |
| J1 | 22 | Female | Portuguese | Worker | Level 6 | 500-1000 | Yes | Yes | A lot | Newspapers, Tv |
| L1 | 18 | Male | Portuguese | Student | Level 5 | 0-500 | Yes | Yes | Some | Tv, Youtube |
| M1 | 24 | Female | Portuguese | Worker | Level 7 | 0-500 | Yes | Yes | Almost none | Parties websites, newspapers |
| N1 | 23 | Female | Portuguese | Worker | Level 7 | 500-1000 | Yes | Yes | Some | Parties websites, newspapers |
| O1 | 27 | Female | Portuguese | Worker | Level 6 | 500-1000 | Yes | Yes | A lot | Media |
| P1 | 28 | Female | Portuguese | Worker | Level 8 | 1000-2000 | Yes | Yes | Some | Parties Websites, TV |
| Q1 | 24 | Male | Portuguese | Worker | Level 7 | 1000-2000 | Yes | Yes | Almost none | Social Media, Newspapers |
| R1 | 22 | Male | Portuguese | Worker | Level 7 | 1000-2000 | Yes | Yes | A lot | Parties Website, Tv, Newspapers |
| S1 | 25 | Female | Portuguese | Student | Level 7 | 0-500 | Yes | Yes | Some | Parties Websites, Tv |
| T1 | 23 | Female | Portuguese | Student | Level 7 | 0-500 | Yes | Yes | Some | Parties Websites, Radio, TV, Newspapers |
| U1 | 53 | Female | Portuguese | Worker | Level 7 | 3000-4000 | Yes | Yes | A lot | Newspapers, Linkdin |
| V1 | 18 | Male | Portuguese | Student | Level 5 | 0-500 | Yes | Yes | Almost none | Tv, Newspapers |
| X1 | 23 | Female | Portuguese | Student | Level 7 | 0-500 | Yes | Yes | Some | Tv, Social Media |
| Z1 | 23 | Male | Portuguese | Student | Level 7 | 0-500 | Yes | No | Zero | Nowhere |
| A2 | 59 | Female | Portuguese | Worker | Level 7 | 2000-3000 | Yes | Yes | A lot | Tv, Newspapers, Parties Websites |
| B2 | 58 | Female | Portuguese | Worker | Level 7 | 1000-2000 | Yes | Yes | Some | Tv |
| C2 | 22 | Female | Portuguese | Student | Level 7 | 0-500 | Yes | Yes | A lot | Tv, Social Media |
| D2 | 65 | Male | Portuguese | Worker | Level 7 | 5000-6000 | Yes | Yes | A lot | Tv, Newspapers |
| E2 | 58 | Female | Portuguese | Worker | Level 7 | 2000-3000 | Yes | Yes | Some | Tv |
| F2 | 60 | Male | Portuguese | Worker | Level 7 | 3000-4000 | Yes | Yes | Some | Newspapers, Flyers |
| G2 | 19 | Female | Portuguese | Student | Level 5 | 0-500 | Yes | Yes | Almost none | Newspapers |
| H2 | 55 | Female | Portuguese | Worker | Level 7 | 2000-3000 | Yes | Yes | Some | Tv |
| I2 | 54 | Female | Portuguese | Worker | Level 6 | 1000-2000 | Yes | Yes | Some | Tv, Friends and Family |
| J2 | 55 | Male | Portuguese | Worker | Level 7 | 6000-7000 | Yes | Yes | A lot | Tv, Newspapers |
| L2 | 62 | Male | Portuguese | Worker | Level 6 | 1000-2000 | Yes | Yes | A lot | Tv, Newspapers |
| M2 | 64 | Male | Portuguese | Worker | Level 7 | 3000-4000 | Yes | Yes | A lot | Tv, Newspapers |
| N2 | 53 | Male | Portuguese | Worker | Level 8 | 2000-3000 | Yes | Yes | A lot | Tv, Newspapers |
| O2 | 51 | Male | Portuguese | Worker | Level 6 | 2000-3000 | Yes | Yes | A lot | Tv |
| P2 | 50 | Female | Portuguese | Worker | Level 7 | 3000-4000 | Yes | Yes | Some | Tv, Radio, Newspapers |
| Q2 | 60 | Female | Portuguese | Worker | Level 7 | 2000-3000 | Yes | Yes | Some | Tv, Internet |

Table 1: Overview of participants' socio-demographic characteristics

Appendix 4 – Interview General Steps

Step 1) Identification of possible motivations and ways to make a political choice;

Step 2) Correlate the process of political choice with different levels of trust in media while inferring about media persuasion;

Step 3) Gather political product and political marketing perceptions through the application of projective technique;

Step 4) Infer about political values, political ideology awareness and representation of those by the media.

Appendix 5 – Interview Guide

1. Check up prequestionnaire answers
2. Warm up

“...for this research, we are using a particular technique: the non-directive method; it means that I will not ask you specific questions about the subject, as in a standard questionnaire. After the first question that I will introduce now, you will be free to tell me whatever comes to your mind on the subject... If you don't mind, I will record the interview. This interview will last approximately 40 minutes...”

3. First question

- Last time you vote in elections, can you tell me which political party did you choose and why?

4. Topics for the interview

- Choice behavior (criteria and drivers: ideology, values, history, tv program, candidate aesthetics, etc)
- Impact of marketing campaigns, media, recommendations, etc.

- Citizen decision journey (n° of different parties considered, evaluation, criteria, etc.)
 - Party loyalty → Are you available to choose a different party?
 - Family and friends persuasion → Do you trust your family and friends to influence your political choice? Why?
 - Political media persuasion awareness → Are media trustworthy when conveying the political message?
 - What are the media sources that you trust the most and why? (tv, radio, newspaper, social media...)
 - What are the media sources that you trust the less and why? (tv, radio, newspaper, social media...)
- Parties and political product perceptions and opinions
- Political Marketing awareness → Have you ever heard about the concept of political marketing? What do you think it is about?
- Political Product Perception → Do you consider the political product as commercial product?
- Political Perception → How would you briefly define politics?
- Political Marketing image (projective technique - animals, feelings) → How do you feel when you think about the concept of political marketing? If the political marketing could be an animal what would it be?
- Awareness of the concept of political values and political ideology → Do you know what are political values? Do you know what is a political ideology? Do you think the media convey them?

Appendix 6 – Citizen Decision Journey Vs Consumer Decision Journey

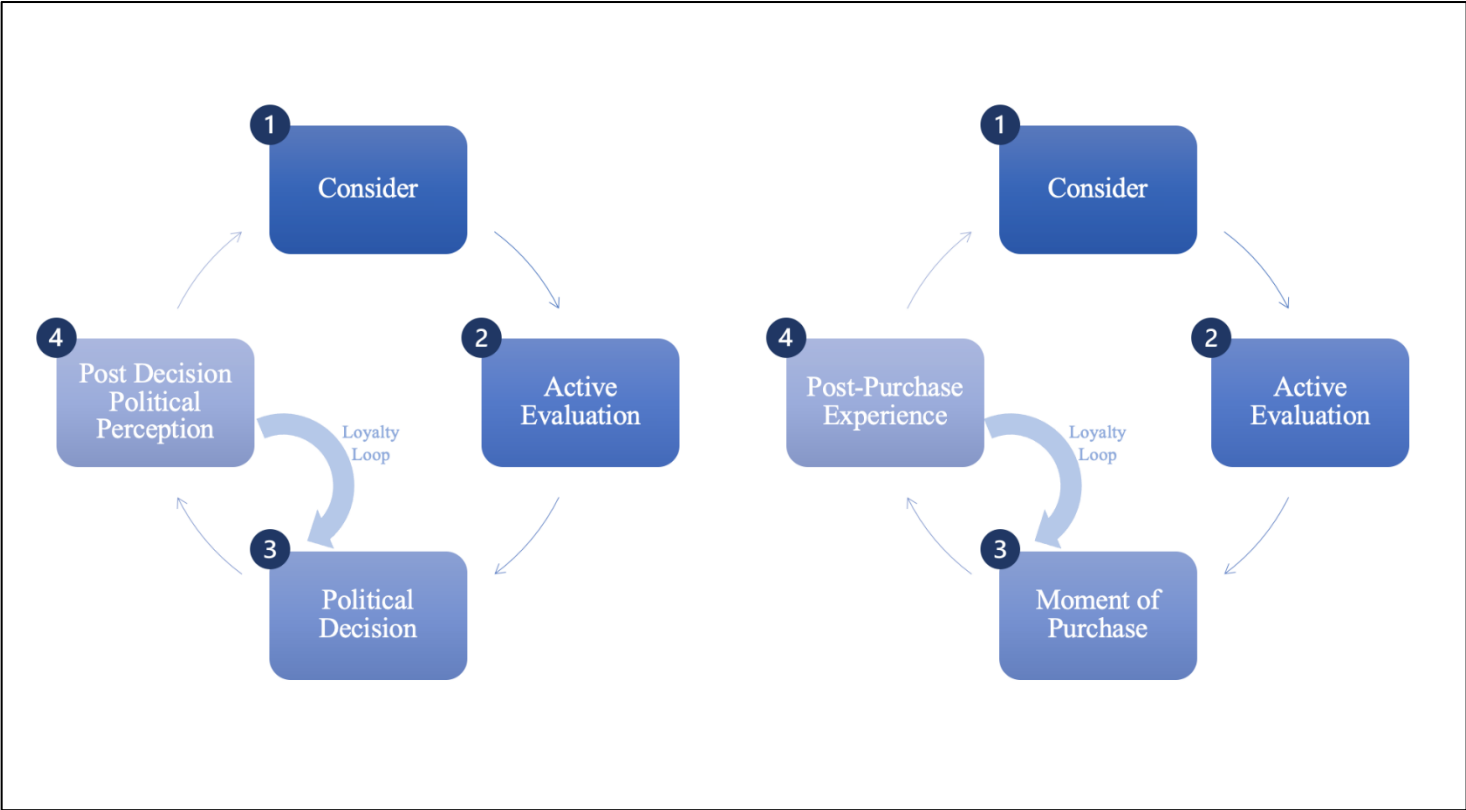


Figure II: "Citizen Decision Journey" and Mckinsey's Consumer Decision Journey (Court, Elzinga, Mulder and Vetvik 2009)

Appendix 7 – Description of Citizen’s Decision Journey

In the first moment of consideration, the citizens start to consider an initial set of parties/ politicians based on recent exposure to information through the media (especially television) and personal perceptions related to their education and influence from friends and family. That stage is connected to the trigger moment when, for example, they are announced elections. On the second stage of this journey, citizens will gather information, add, or subtract parties as they evaluate what they want. Ultimately, the citizen selects a party/politician at election day when facing the ballot paper, that moment is the political decision. After that, citizens build expectations based on their choice, those will inspire or not the next decision journey. If the work developed from a party/politician is according to the expectations, that same citizen will be exposed to more information but, as it was satisfied with its choice, he will probably enter in a loyalty loop. That means that, for the next elections, that same citizen will not feel like he needs to consider and evaluate what is proposed, his choice will be the same as previously. Although, in politics everything is always changing, new information, debates, challenges are constantly appearing, when citizens are not satisfied with their choice, they will start the journey from the beginning to make a better political decision next time.

Appendix 8 – Criteria about Level of Trust in Media

- Source (considering that television and newspapers are the most mentioned, the newspapers are appointed as more trustworthy than television)
 - Television (depends on the channel)
 - *RTP* (medium trust since it is a public channel some interviewees mentioned that they show what is the government interest)
 - *SIC* (high trust since it is appointed as the most neutral and realistic)
 - *TVI* (medium trust since sometimes is appointed as sensationalist)
 - *CMTV* (low trust since it is all about gossip and scandal)
 - Newspapers (depends on the newspaper)
 - *Expresso* (high trust since they try to give a wide range of opinions)
 - *Publico* (medium trust they have more left-wing insights)
 - *Observador* (medium trust they have more right-wing insights)
 - Social Media
 - Radio
- Journalists or Political Analysts (attention to who is talking or writing, their professional background and beliefs define the interviewees level of trust)
- Information Format (some respondents believe that the written information has more credibility and better theoretical principles than spoken information)

Appendix 9 – Projective Technique Results

| | Animals | Feelings | |
|---------------------------|-------------------|--------------------------------------|---|
| Younger Generation | Peacock | Indifference | "it is what it is, the peacock thinks, it's not aggressive and he lives from marketing himself" |
| | Cockroach | Contempt | "everyone wants to scream or kill a cockroach, I hate them" |
| | Cory's shearwater | Detachment | "they made a lot of noise at night, the same time that I ear the news on tv, they don't let us sleep" |
| | Horse | Annoying | "they have specific goals and they are very exhibitionits" |
| | Fox | Frustration | "they are very shifty, that makes me feel frustrated because things could be better" |
| | Wolf | Alert | "doble faced character which leds me to be alert and conscient about what they do" |
| | Owl | Curiosity | "the wisdom while campaigns makes me feel curious about how they are done" |
| | Bear | Headache | "very aggressive, unpredictable and unnecessary" |
| | Chameleon | Incompetence | "they adapt to their own needs and do not look the real problems" |
| | Peacock | Anger | "they live on their beauty, they no longer exalt themselves they just attack the opposition" |
| | Peacock | Discrediting | "it's everything about the show and not the content" |
| | Cat | Devious | "looks cute but if he doesnt get what he wants it will act against us" |
| | Snake | Uncomfortable | "sneaky and poison, it's a business of interests that is not reliable" |
| | Chameleon | Frustration | "adapts to circuntances but it's not easy because people are difficult" |
| | Tiger | Heartburn | "can be harmless and cute but it can take you a limb by not showing the true intentions" |
| | Penguin | Passivity | "slow, does not do much" |
| | Koala | Admiration | "I admire the political marketing when it's well thought which does not mean that is correct" |
| | Snake | Distrust | "Dishonest, changes skin and transforms all the time so I can never predict anything" |
| | Gorilla | Hope | "strong and capable of change the course of things" |
| | Fox | Distrust | "when marketing and politics are together it is possible to say things that are not the truth" |
| Chameleon | Irrelevant | "it adapts but does not affect me" | |
| Fox | Curiosity | "smart, alert animal that innovates" | |
| Lion | Indifference | "strong but not significant to me" | |
| Older Generation | Chameleon | Wiseass | "calm and quiet it does the job by adapting to different circuntances" |
| | Peacock | Ambition | "it is a garish aanimal with ambition to be someone" |
| | Owl | Belonging | "educates people, making them feel like they belong" |
| | Cat | Trust | "independent and selfish but we can trust when is good" |
| | Mosquito | Choking | "it is very annoying" |
| | Horse | Seduction | "sweet and conciliator while tries to attract us" |
| | Monkey | Observation | "flexible and quick, I like to observe them" |
| | Fox | Distrust | "dangerous and highlights the general disbelief on the system" |
| | Lion | Agressive | "can attack in many ways and many people" |
| | Mole | Revolt | "hidden in our subconscious, I would rather know eveything and decide myself" |
| | Ostrich | Stolen | "they do things and then they hidden their heads in the sand while making us pay to watch" |
| | Fox | Distrust | "cunning in way they act" |
| | Eagle | Awakening | "they can fly very high, very keen eyes, quickly they achieve what they want" |
| | Chameleon | Disbelief | "I am not sure if political marketing is necessary because (...) they are not straightforward they adapt" |
| | Parrot | Empathy | "the colours of the parrot remind me of the art of transforming ordinary people into leaders" |
| | Dog | Honesty | "they are loyal, informative and sincere when they give us the truth" |

Table II: Overview projective technique results

Appendix 10 – Extra Analysis: Political Values and Political Ideology

By the end of the interviews, if they never mentioned the concept of “political values” and “political ideology”, it was asked if they have ever heard about those concepts. If the answer was positive, they were asked to explain the concepts, plus questioned if they thought the media were conveying them. Although almost none of the respondents have ever heard of political values, the older generation showed a better awareness of at least the concept of ideology. Regarding that, the majority explained that the media do not convey the political ideologies because “they are not aligned with what ensures a good audience (...) the media need to address what the audience asks and that is definitely not related with ideologies (...) its rather related with facts or trifles” (interviewee E2). However, there were some respondents that believe that the political ideologies that are talked about within the media are those who are represented in the Assembly, especially the ideology of the current government (interviewee J2). Many answers were also related to the fact that there is a dilution of the different ideologies (interviewee U1) between the different parties due to disinformation (interviewee A1), the lack of doctrine (interviewee F2), the need to address as much citizens as possible (interviewee D2) or to the fact that we are in a stable and comfortable position that does not require the same effort from the citizens as in historical moments like the Revolution of April, 25 or the EU/Euro joining (interviewee I1). A small part of the sample, especially among the younger generation thinks that the media convey the different ideologies but in a subtle way (interviewee F1) or through a negative perspective where they only show the negative points of different parties to stimulate debate and confrontations (interviewee L1).