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Political Consumption on Social Media in Portugal

Influence on political opinions and support for social movements

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Master Thesis

presented as partial requirement for obtaining a Master's Degree in Data-Driven Marketing

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by

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Master Thesis presented as partial requirement for obtaining the Master's degree in Data-Driven Marketing, with a specialization in Marketing Intelligence.

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STATEMENT OF INTEGRITY

I hereby declare having conducted this academic work with integrity. I confirm that I have not used plagiarism, any form of undue use of information or falsification of results along the process leading to its elaboration. I further declare that I have fully acknowledged the Rules of Conduct and Code of Honor from the NOVA Information Management School.

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ABSTRACT

Social media has become a substantial communication channel for obtaining political information, transforming the way in which this information is obtained and creating dynamics of interaction between politics, technology, and citizens. This study investigates how Portuguese people use social media to consume political content and how this consumption can influence their political opinions and their support for social movements. The study was conducted using a qualitative methodological approach, using interviews with active consumers of political content on social media and netnographic analyses of two movement pages. The results showed that social media can influence the formation of political opinions, but there are also other factors such as family, education, or personal experiences. In addition, social media is seen as a key tool for amplifying social movements and mobilizing people, although the sharing of radical actions by movements can condition support for causes and their legitimacy. This study thus contributes to exploring political consumption on social media in the Portuguese context, offering an insight into the impact of this consumption on political participation and public opinion. Finally, recommendations for future studies are offered, in order to have a more longitudinal and in-depth view of political consumption on social media in Portugal.

KEYWORDS

Political consumption; Social media; Digital political activism; Consumer Culture Theory; Social movements;

Sustainable Development Goals (SDG):



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LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS AND ACRONYMS

CCT	Consumer Culture Theory
PCP	Portuguese Communist Party

1. INTRODUCTION

First, it is important to define the term politics in order to introduce the topic of the thesis and to avoid any doubt about the meaning of politics in the context of this study. According to Schmitter (1965), politics can be understood as a hierarchy of forces established in all large and complex communities, as well as being a set of authority relations between individuals and groups. At the top of this hierarchy is the state or government, which is the organization the most power.

In this sense, this paper explores the topic of "Political consumption on Social Media in Portugal", with the aim of explaining the complex relationship between the way Portuguese people use social media to consume political content and how this consumption influence their political opinions and support for social movements.

Despite the continued dominance of traditional media, digital media are responsible for a substantial part of the public's knowledge of political issues in the hybrid media system (Mosca & Quaranta, 2021). Since the introduction of the Internet, there has been a great amount of interest in the relationship between political behavior and attitudes and the use of digital technology (Zhuravskaya, et al., 2020) and it is believed that using the Internet for political purposes increases citizen participation and involvement (Kruikemeier et al., 2014).

Therefore, it is impossible to overestimate the influence that social media have on public opinion and political participation in today's political context. The introduction of these platforms has changed the way people obtain information and created a dynamic interaction between politics, technology, and citizens (Vaccari et al., 2013; Bennett, 2012; Copeland, & Koc-Michalska, 2022; Boulianne et al., 2022; Cheng, Zhang, & Gil de Zuniga, 2023).

Having this in mind, Boulianne et al. (2022), from their study, realized that the online political debate, the participation in social media groups and searching for political information online contribute to increase political consumption, with online news content being the most popular and most trusted type of content, according to Newman et al. (2023).

In this sense, the research question for this study is: "How do Portuguese people use social media to consume political content, and how does this consumption influence their political opinions and their support social movements?". To address the research question, the

following goals were developed: understand how Portuguese opinions on politics are influenced by their political consumption on social media and understand how political consumption on social media can influence the support for social movements.

The theme of this thesis was chosen considering that there is a visible deficiency in research on this subject in the Portuguese context. In addition, some studies, such as Bimber and Copeland (2013), point out the generic nature of the studies and suggest that future research should focus on the specificities of content and context. For example, instead of asking how much time people spend online and whether they search for information online, we should be more specific and understand the type of content consumed, type of information, preferred sources of information, whether this information has generated debate, among others. This study attempts to fill these gaps by analyzing the impact of political consumption on social media in the Portuguese context and by providing a better understanding of this consumption in this same context.

The structure of this research report is divided into six points. Firstly, there is a theoretical approach to political consumption on social media in Portugal, based on Consumer Culture Theory. The second point deals with the concept of political consumption, political consumption on social media and digital political activism. Next, the methodological options were presented, explaining the method and techniques used in this research. Then the results and discussion. At the end, the conclusions and future research.

In this way, this study was sustained by important theoretical frameworks: Consumer Culture Theory, the concept of political consumption, political consumption on social media and digital political activism. Consumer Culture Theory will provide a context for the socio-cultural dimensions of consumption and the idea of Political Consumption will help to understand the relationship between political beliefs and consumption decisions. To understand these concepts in a digital sphere, this research will be supported by the notions of Digital Political Activism and Political Consumption on social media, which recognize the revolutionary power of online platforms in shaping and propagating political views.

To better understand the dynamics of political consumption on social media in Portugal, this study used a qualitative methodological approach. Qualitative techniques included

interviews with individuals who actively consume political content on social media, and netnography to interpret the content shared on social media platforms of two movements.

The results provided confirmation that social media has a daily or almost daily presence in the lives of Portuguese people. However, although some interviewees admitted to being influenced by political content on social media, others pointed out that other factors also influence them, such as family, education, or life experiences. In relation to social movements, social media is seen as a tool for mobilizing and amplifying causes, but more radical actions can damage support and call into question its legitimacy.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1. THEORETICAL APPROACH TO POLITICAL CONSUMPTION ON SOCIAL MEDIA

2.1.1. CONSUMER CULTURE THEORY AND ITS EVOLUTION

Consumer Culture Theory (CCT) is a theoretical approach that explains the "relationship between consumer actions, the market and cultural meanings" (Arnould & Thompson, 2005). Developed and reflected by Eric Arnould and Craig Thompson, this theory is not limited to specific consumption contexts and can adopt a mixed approach whenever justified, because is not based only on qualitative methods and can contribute more to theoretical research (Arnould & Thompson, 2005).

Regarding its evolution, consumption ended up evolving from an economic activity to a complex cultural phenomenon that influences and is influenced by several factors of social life such as politics, identity, and power relations (Arnould & Thompson, Introduction: consumer culture theory: ten years gone (and beyond), 2015). In this sense, the CCT investigates how consumption practices are shaped by economic, social, or cultural contexts and how these practices can affect society (Arnould & Thompson, 2005, 2007, 2015).

At the same time, CCT analyzes how consumption can generate political and social disputes (Arnould & Thompson, 2015). Sociological theories that address consumption are useful to analyze status conflicts in social relations mediated by markets, understanding how aspirations to a certain status influence consumer choice (Arnould & Thompson, 2015). This vision shows how consumption can be a form of resistance and social protest.

Academics extended the theory to marketing and management concepts, focusing on cultural influences on marketing practices and not just on consumer behavior (Arnould & Thompson, 2015). CCT studies also focus on localized reflections on consumer culture, considering cultural influences from different regions to explain consumer behavior and markets in specific cultural contexts (Arnould & Thompson, 2015).

With the emergence and rise of digital consumption, new dynamics of consumption have emerged. Digital platforms, such as social media, create new forms of identity and community

and can be considered extensions of people's "self" (Belk, Extended self in a digital world, 2013). At the same time, it can change the dynamics of power and politics, as social movements and political campaigns can mobilize support, disseminate information, and allow interaction with and from their followers through these platforms (Bennett & Segerberg, 2012).

In conclusion, CCT offers a comprehensive understanding of consumption, detailing its evolution, multidimensional approach, and its relationship with culture, consumption, and society.

2.1.2. THE CONTRIBUTION OF CONSUMER CULTURE THEORY TO POLITICAL CONSUMPTION ON SOCIAL MEDIA

Johnson et al. (2019) point to an approach to the concept of political consumption that guides this research. The idea that political consumption has a collective character, where actions are molded by the influence of others who share the same ideology, is contributed by CCT.

According to the definition of Arnould and Thompson (2005), indicated above, CCT places cultural meanings in the relationship between consumers and the market. Thus, in political consumption, individuals end up being influenced by the cultural meanings associated with the ideologies they share. For example, the meanings that an individual attaches to the principle of equality and freedom or to gender issues can define political decisions regarding the ideology with which they identify. Thus, this definition of CCT helps us to understand how individuals, through cultural meanings, organize themselves into groups with the same ideology and their consumption behavior. In this sense, when they see a certain political comment, content or article on social media that meets their cultural meanings, these end up having more influence on the individual because they share the same expressed ideology.

Considering Cheng et al. (2023), people's political behavior can be influenced by social media exposure to political information, but this also depends on how they understand the issue being discussed and the preexisting beliefs and meanings they may have about it. This is in line with Garrett (2009) who argues that although social media can influence opinions, often “when selecting from a variety of news stories representing a range of political opinions,

individuals consistently seek support for their own positions”, which may be based on these beliefs that Cheng et al. (2023) refers to.

Furthermore, one of Stolle, Hooghe and Micheletti (2005) key findings was that political consumption is mainly a tactic used by people who distrust political institutions. They observed that political consumers “are frustrated with mainstream political institutions and they value the efficiency of conventional forms of participation less than we would expect”. On the other hand, political consumers have higher levels of trust in their fellow citizens. In this sense, considering that CCT views consumers as individuals seeking means of expressing their identity and values, they can choose political consumption methods that enable them to express their beliefs or dissatisfaction like social media social movements, social media political forums or debates in comment sections. At the same time, these consumers end up trusting movements or individuals on social media that they trust and consider credible and who can have an influence on them, removing the power of influence from the traditional media (Chadwick, *The hybrid media system: Politics and power*, 2017).

Alongside this, according to Boulianne (2022), people are becoming more active in terms of their political consumption through social media, i.e. people are self-mobilizing to engage with political content. Social networks play a key role in enabling this process of self-mobilization, providing people with a range of political consumption options, including the ability to share political content online, take part in online political conversations, prepare manifestations and so on (Boulianne, 2022). This active participation through social networks ultimately demonstrates how these consumers are constructing meanings through the broadcast of political messaging, in the same way CCT emphasizes the production of cultural meanings.

Furthermore, sharing political content, participating in political debates and other forms of political consumption end up being forms of the social influence mentioned by Arnould and Thompson (2015) in the third axis of CCT.

In this third axis, Arnould and Thompson (2015) studied how different social groups can come into conflict over resources. Transposing this to political consumption, this helps to understand how this conflict manifests itself in political debates on social media, where users with different political ideologies seek to support, disagree with, or influence other users. For

Sunstein (2018), these disagreements on social media are creating polarization and fragmentation in society, as well as contributing to the creation of echo-chambers.

Furthermore, the fourth axis mentioned by Arnould and Thompson (2015), can help explain the political consumption of Portuguese users who are from certain regions of the country that are culturally associated with certain political ideologies and cultural beliefs. For example, the Ribatejo region, which is strongly influenced by bullfighting traditions, will easily come into conflict with people who are active and speak out in defense of animals and their rights.

To summarize, CCT offers us a theoretical lens for understanding political consumption practices on social media.

2.2. THE CONCEPT OF POLITICAL CONSUMPTION, POLITICAL CONSUMPTION ON SOCIAL MEDIA AND DIGITAL POLITICAL ACTIVISM

2.2.1. POLITICAL CONSUMPTION ON SOCIAL MEDIA THROUGH THE THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK OF CONSUMER CULTURE THEORY

For Micheletti (2003), the main promoter behind studies of political consumption, political consumption happens when consumers make conscious decisions about what they are buying to influence political, social, environmental, or other issues. She also characterizes these actions as "individualized collective actions" since they serve the individual's "self-interest" as well as the "common good" (Micheletti, Political virtue and shopping: Individuals, consumerism, and collective action, 2003).

However, while Micheletti (2003) highlights the individualized action of political consumption, Bossy (2014) emphasizes the collective dimension, considering it a social movement. In this regard, Bossy (2014) defines political consumption as a politicization of the act of buying in order to seek out and support new forms of consumption, carried out by a group of individual and collective actors who criticize and try to break away from traditional forms of consumption.

Meanwhile, Boulianne et al. (2022) highlight the power of political consumption in a global context, defining it as a form of political behavior that goes beyond borders and creates opportunities to influence global politics. In an increasingly globalized economy, this influence

is considered important because there are no formal spaces where people can express their political opinions or directly influence environmental and ethical business measures (Boulianne, Copeland, & Koc-Michalska, Digital media and political consumerism in the United States, United Kingdom, and France, 2022).

For this reason and according to Johnson et al (2019), the literature presents two approaches to define political consumption. The first sees political consumption as an individual behavior that is motivated by the consumer's personal values. The second, as mentioned in the previous topic, sees political consumption as a collective action, influenced by other people who share the same ideology (Johnson, Hall-Phillips, Chung, & Cho, Are you connected through consumption? The role of hashtags in political consumption., 2019).

So, these two approaches show that political consumption can be both a personal decision based on individual values and a collective action shaped by external influences such as friends, family or groups that share the same goals and thoughts on certain issues. As mentioned above, the latter approach guides this research.

In addition to this, we can also associate political consumption with social movements, as Bossy has already done (2014). Boulianne et al. (2022) by highlighting the impact of political consumption in the global context, underlining its ability to shape political, ethical, environmental and business issues worldwide, ends up indirectly linking it to international social movements that seek changes in these issues through "political behavior".

Micheletti (2003), on the other hand, considers political consumption as "individualized political actions", highlighting that although the actions are carried out individually, the aim is to bring about collective change, and ends up aligning the concept of political consumption with social movements. Because according to Weijo et al (2018), social movements are initiatives by ordinary citizens who seek social change in a conscious and determined way. The relationship between these two perspectives lies in both authors recognition of the potential collective impact that can result from individual efforts with shared goals, since even in the context of collective mobilization, everyone has an individual motivation and contributes to the overall goal. When these individualized collective actions become large movements, they are mostly organized through digital media, thereby aligning with Tarrow (1998), who believes in the fundamental role that the dissemination of information can play in mobilizing

supporters for social movements. Sometimes by political institutions and sometimes with masses using social media coordinate the movement (Bennett, 2012).

According to King and Pearce (2010), social movements can play several roles: attracting the media, creating new markets, legitimizing new categories and encouraging new entrepreneurs.

By attracting the media, activists use the media to gain public interest and support for their causes. Through these means, social movements can have an effect by attracting the attention of the media, since the media transmit public events into the public sphere (Oliver & Myers, How events enter the public sphere: Conflict, location, and sponsorship in local newspaper coverage of public events, 1999).

When it comes to creating new market forms, social movements seek to transform existing norms and values in market structures and establish new ideas and values (Rao & Giorgi, Code breaking: How entrepreneurs exploit cultural logics to generate institutional change, 2006), that is, new market alternatives. These social movements are also essential for legitimizing these new alternatives, "promoting innovation and helping entrepreneurs to overcome inertia" (King & Pearce, The contentiousness of markets: Politics, social movements, and institutional change in markets, 2010).

Thus, drawing parallels with more political and social issues, a social movement seeks new alternatives to existing social and political patterns, always trying to give a voice to those who want to make that change. These movements are considered successful in bringing about social change if they manage to raise the visibility of the cause they are promoting and if they manage to legitimize it (King & Pearce, The contentiousness of markets: Politics, social movements, and institutional change in markets, 2010).

In conclusion, the relationship between political consumption and social movements is intrinsic and shows the role that consumers can play in contributing to social change through their choices. In this sense, in the context of political consumption, social movements end up being a platform for collective expression in which individuals share the same discontent and intentions for change. When these social movements manage to legitimize their causes and

gain visibility, the inertia of social, environmental, political, or economic structures and institutions is overcome, bringing them closer to the transformations they are seeking.

2.2.1.1. DIGITAL POLITICAL CONSUMPTION

Given the prevalence of social media in current times, it's essential to comprehend how they influence political consumption. From this perspective, social media can be defined as a collection of apps built on Web 2.0 concepts and technologies that let users produce and distribute original content (Kaplan & Haenlein, *Users of the world, unite! The challenges and opportunities of Social Media*, 2010). Furthermore, individuals can access and use the information available on these platforms, as well as participate by offering their opinions (Hwang & Kim, *Social media as a tool for social movements: The effect of social media use and social capital on intention to participate in social movements*, 2015) and not only post videos and images. In this way, since social networks are platforms for interaction between people, there is a very favorable environment for the exchange of information that facilitates people's involvement in important issues in today's society (Hwang & Kim, *Social media as a tool for social movements: The effect of social media use and social capital on intention to participate in social movements*, 2015).

In this sense, electoral campaigns are becoming increasingly dependent on social media, as citizens and politicians include them in their forms of communication (Vaccari et al., 2013). This is becoming increasingly relevant for democracy, as a growing number of citizens use social media to find out about politics, get involved in the political process and take part in numerous large and small-scale public mobilizations (Vaccari et al., 2013).

In addition, by sharing their political views on social media, individuals end up promoting political debate and exposing themselves to new perspectives and information that can shape their views (Cheng, Zhang, & Gil de Zuniga, *Antecedents of political consumerism: Modeling online, social media and WhatsApp news use effects through political expression and political discussion*, 2023).

According to the results of the study carried out by Boulianne et al (2022) about France, the United States and the United Kingdom, activities such as discussing politics online, joining groups on social networks and searching for information on these platforms have a strong correlation with the behavior associated with political consumption.

In this way, by being integrated into users' daily lives and facilitating the management of various social relationships, social media can directly and indirectly promote political participation and information, acting as catalysts for online and offline dialogues between citizens (Vaccari et al., 2013). Bennett (2012) also emphasizes the role of social media as facilitators of collective action, as it is often from them that large-scale movements of both political institutions and individuals are born.

Through the study carried out by Bimber and Copeland (2013) in the American context, we can see how the relationship between political consumption and the internet has evolved over the years. Between 1996 and 2004, these two authors concluded that the use of the Internet to obtain political information had no influence on political participation. However, between 2000 and 2008, this relationship varied depending on political activity. For example, according to the results, there was a strong correlation between the use of the Internet to obtain political information and the ability to persuade other people politically. In other words, individuals who searched for political information on the internet were better able to influence other people's political opinions through various persuasive means. However, this relationship was less clear in political activities such as voting, working on campaigns, or attending political events. The year 2008 stands out with the influence of social media since the authors noted a significant correlation between viewing political information online and taking part in political activities. This is explained by the expansion and consolidation of social media at the time and the Obama campaign, which took advantage of social media to mobilize voters and get its message across, marking a turning point between social media and political participation.

Thus, according to Cheng et al. (2023), access to online news allows citizens to continuously stay informed about their government, companies, and public institutions, making them more likely to take political action in the context of political consumption. In this sense, citizens are more likely to be aware of essential information when using social media, which can trigger activist actions.

In this way, the role of social media in the political sphere is becoming increasingly important, transforming the dynamic between citizen involvement in politics and political consumption. By allowing users to create, share and discuss content, these platforms have

become essential for the exchange of political information and the active participation of citizens. The ability of social networks to promote political debates, expose individuals to diverse political perspectives, mobilize collective action and influence electoral campaigns shows the importance of these platforms in today's democracy and their impact on shaping public opinion, political behavior and mobilizing activist actions in the digital sphere.

2.2.2. DIGITAL POLITICAL ACTIVISM

Generally speaking, the term "activism" is used to describe citizen-led interventions in the public space that aim to improve society through political, economic, environmental or social change (Neumayer, Activism, 2020). For Marchetti (2016), activism is an action that supports or opposes a particular political or social issue.

Although activism is typically associated with sit-ins, strikes, riots, violent confrontations and various forms of civil disobedience, there are other alternatives for pressurizing governments and policymakers (Neumayer, Activism, 2020), such as the actions taken by the suffragettes.

The origin of the word "activism" dates to 1915, when a petition to end Sweden's neutrality in the First World War was presented by Swedish activists (Marchetti, 2016). However, it is believed that this term was used before this with the emergence of cinematographic activism (Marchetti, 2016). An example of this is the 1913 film "What 80 million Women want" by Will Lewis, which brought the suffragette movement mentioned above to the big screen. Since the newspapers of the time reported their actions very rarely and politicians refused to listen to their demands, these women decided to experiment with a new medium and interrupted a TV newsreel, getting their message across to the audience they wanted, working class women (Hutchinson, 2015).

However, in the studies of activism, the media played a reduced role, not being the main actors in the formation and promotion of social movements, but rather facilitators of this formation and promotion (Neumayer, Activism, 2020). With the emergence of the Internet, Web 2.0, social media and other digital media, studies began to focus on how these new ways of communicating and disseminating information could be used to mobilize support for certain causes and enable citizens who are not associated with any specific organization to act together (Neumayer, Activism, 2020). With this transition to digital, the term "Digital

Activism" was also born, used to describe different forms of activism that use digital technologies as a vehicle (Gerbaudo, From cyber-autonomism to cyber-populism: An ideological analysis of the evolution of digital activism, 2017).

According to Gerbaudo (2017), we can distinguish between two stages of digital activism. The 1990s saw the rise of the internet and anti-globalization movements during the first phase, while the rise of social media and their impact on online organizing and mobilization, along with the expansion of hacker movements, defined the second phase (Gerbaudo, From cyber-autonomism to cyber-populism: An ideological analysis of the evolution of digital activism, 2017). The author argues that the discussion around digital activism often takes a techno-deterministic approach, viewing technology as the primary driver of social change and activist efforts.

However, Hutchinson (2019) considers that we can't limit the term "digital activism" in this sense and states that "digital activism is, in many ways, a combination of various approaches to protest, visibility, mobilization and activity". By this, the author means that this phenomenon involves a combination of protests through digital channels, their visibility amplified by these channels and the mobilization of active members who also promote the movement in question.

Furthermore, Karatzogianni (2015) analyses the evolution of digital activism in four phases instead of two like Gerbaudo (2017). For this author, each phase is associated with specific movements between 1994 and 2014. Like Gerbaudo (2017), the first phase is associated with anti-globalization movements between 1994 and 2001, the second phase encompasses movements against the Iraq war between 2001 and 2007 and the third phase is related to the Brazil, India, Russia and China (BRICs) movement as having an important role in digital activism (Karatzogianni, Firebrand waves of digital activism 1994-2014: The rise and spread of hacktivism and cyberconflict, 2015). The fourth phase is marked by the consolidation of digital activism with the Snowden and Wikileaks movements, which is comparable to Gerbaudo's (2017) second phase with the emergence of hacker movements that challenge power structures, their security systems and data privacy with the disclosure of confidential information.

In this way, since the Internet and social media have become more prevalent in communication, activism, which used to be mainly linked to direct activities such as strikes, protests, or riots and using traditional media as message vehicles, has begun to include new channels for disseminating information. In this way, Neumayer (2020) considers that the way people express their activist identity and organize groups online and the mobilization of people to take part in campaigns or protests can be activist forms of digital action.

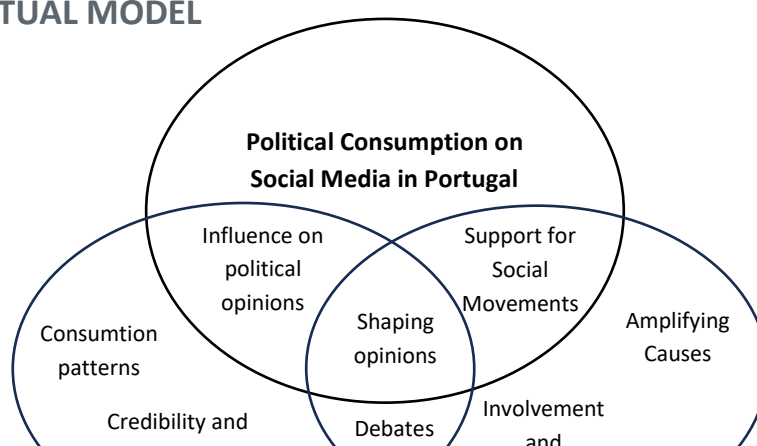
So, by using the potential of digital media to mobilize, communicate and promote causes, traditional activism has adapted to the digital sphere. With this adaptation comes the term "digital activism", which for some suggests that technology is the main driver of social change and technological activism is an inevitable consequence of technological advancement. For others, social change is the result of a complex collaboration between human actions and technology.

Thus, the term activism can be understood today as a form of resistance that takes place through different media, both traditional and digital, which have the power to transmit the narratives, values and information that are associated with a particular cause or social movement (Neumayer, Activism, 2020).

In addition to this, we realized with Weijo et al. (2018) that these social movements happen when people share similar concerns and organize themselves, mobilizing different resources in order to bring about change. In this sense, activism comes from individuals. In other words, it is an individual motivation, which unites with others and forms these collective movements.

In summary, political activism has changed substantially with the emergence of the internet and social networks, compared to its conventional form of protest in the past. The way activists have begun to organize themselves in the digital age has changed the way social movements organize, mobilize and communicate, reflecting not only technological advances in society, but also the collaboration between human action and technology.

3. CONCEPTUAL MODEL



Graphic 1 – Conceptual model

In the contemporary context, social media plays an increasingly important role in the political sphere. Thus, the conceptual model presented in graphic 1 portrait a framework for investigating political consumption on social media in Portugal, addressing their influence on users' political opinions and their relationship with support for social movements.

4. METHODOLOGY

4.1. RESEARCH METHOD AND TECHNIQUES

In order to accomplish the stated goals, a qualitative methodological approach was chosen. According to Bryman (2012), when gathering and analyzing data, the qualitative method places more emphasis on words than on statistics. It aims to gain an in-depth understanding by conducting research on different aspects of human experiences, including feelings, attitudes, and beliefs, within a particular group or situation (Kumar, Research methodology: A step-by-step guide for beginners, 2011). For achieving the two objectives, both semi-structured interviews and netnography are suitable techniques.

To analyze the data, we obtained by implementing these two techniques, we used qualitative data analysis, in particular category analysis. These categories, explained below, were created from the interview script and, in the case of the netnographic analysis, from the general dimensions of the interviews. For Auerbach and Silverstein (2003), the categorization technique is “the process of analyzing textual data with the aim of developing theory”. In this type of data analysis, categories are a construction made by the researcher in order to give meaning to the data obtained, to be able to interpret it and to be able to detect patterns (Saldaña, The coding manual for qualitative researchers, 2021).

4.1.1. SEMI-STRUCTURED INTERVIEWS

Compared to quantitative interviews, this kind of interview shows more interest in the interviewee's perspective on the topic under investigation (Bryman, Social research methods, 2012). Moreover, the investigator aims to acquire more comprehensive responses, which is accomplished by virtue of the adaptability inherent in the qualitative interview (Bryman, Social research methods, 2012).

In this sense, to understand the influence of political consumption on social media on the political opinions of the Portuguese people and its influence on support for social movements, an interview script was prepared. This script was based on five dimensions: consumption patterns, influence on political opinion, credible and trust, engagement, and support for social movements. The questions related to each dimension, which can be found in appendix 1, were developed to explore the five dimensions mentioned above and the flexible structure of the script allowed detailed answers. These five dimensions and their respective questions were used to create the following categories of analysis:

Table 1 – Interview analysis categories

Dimension	Category
Consumption Patterns	Frequency of consumption
	Type of content consumed
	Political pages and profiles followed
	Changes and impacts of political consumption caused by social media
Influence on political opinion	Influence on political opinion
	Factors of influence
	Existence of change of opinion by political content consumed on social media
Credibility and Trust	Credibility Assessment

	Trusted Sources
	Information Verification
	Impact of Credibility on Opinion Formation
Engagement	Types of interaction
	Participation in political debates on social media
	Existence of change of opinion after taking part in political debates on social media
	Importance of political debates on social media
Support for Social Movements	Social Movements pages followed
	influence of social media on support for social movements
	Participation on social movement action influenced by social media
	Influence of social media in the amplification of social movements
	Influence of social movements on social media in political or social change in Portugal

The categories indicated above were designed to have the maximum amount of information to understand the real influence of political content on Portuguese people, considering their political opinions and support for social movements.

Regarding study participants, they were selected based on comprehensive criteria that allowed different viewpoints and experiences about political consumption on social media and support for social movements. The criteria included:

- active consumers of political content on social media

- users of different social media
- diversity in terms of age, gender and political orientation

In total, 11 consumers of political content on social media were interviewed and following the interviews, the transcripts were created using fictional identities for each participant, as can be seen in table 2.

Before starting the interview process, an invitation was sent to potential interviewees via email, SMS or social media and Zoom videoconferencing platform was used for the interviews. Consent to record the interviews as well as data privacy were addressed.

Table 2 – Interviewees characterization

Name	Age	Gender	Consumption Frequency	Engagement with content
Ana	55	Female	Daily	High
Pedro	47	Male	Daily	High
Mafalda	36	Female	Daily	Moderate
Marta	28	Female	Daily	High
Diogo	26	Male	Almost everyday	Moderate
Rita	25	Female	Almost everyday	High
Joana	24	Female	Daily	Low
Miguel	24	Male	Daily	High
Margarida	23	Female	Daily	Moderate
Inês	23	Female	Almost daily	Moderate
Raquel	22	Female	Almost daily	Low

4.1.2. NETNOGRAPHY

Netnography is a term for a range of linked online research techniques that are based on ethnography and are designed for the study of the communities and cultures formed through

online social interaction (Bowler Jr, Netnography: A method specifically designed to study cultures and communities online, 2010).

In this thesis, netnography was used to analyze the online presence of two movements, “euvoto.pt” (non-party movement) and “climaximo.pt” (environmental social movement) as well as the actions of people in the comments sections.

The chosen profiles were analyzed between January 2024 and March 2024. This involved collecting and preserving a variety of content, including posts, comments, pictures, and videos, in addition to examining patterns.

The choice of these two profiles was motivated by their relevance to the research objectives since both are linked to the themes of politics and social activism. While the “euvoto.pt” movement represents a non-party approach to involve citizens in politics, “climaximo.pt” focuses on defending climate justice and mobilizing for climate action. This diversity of perspectives allows a comprehensive analysis of the different forms of political and social engagement on social media, providing valuable insights into how online political consumption influences support for specific causes. In addition, both movements demonstrate significant activity on social media platforms during the first trimester of 2024, ahead of Portuguese legislative elections, which makes them pertinent and current profiles to this netnography.

Since Instagram profiles were subject to more substantial activity in terms of comments than profiles on other social media, the research only analyzed the two Instagram profiles.

Regarding the data analysis, a categorical analysis was carried out based on the coding steps indicated by Saldaña (2021). Firstly, based on the dimensions of the interview script, an initial coding was carried out. According to Saldaña (2021), this first step serves as a “starting point to provide the researcher with analytical clues for later exploration”. In this sense, each comment or debate in the comments section was analyzed in order to understand its nature (negative, positive or constructive), as well as the content presented.

Then, axial coding was done to have a broader view or, as Saldaña refers to it, to have a “bigger-picture”. In this sense, the initial coding was grouped into broader categories, allowing us to identify relationships between the different codes. For example, examples of debate

were considered participation in discussions, messages of hate, support, criticism were grouped into types of reactions and comments, and the nature of the content into types of content. In this way, we were able to assign each category to a dimension, thus moving on to selective coding. The data were analyzed according to table 3.

After analyzing the data, they were interpreted considering the theoretical framework and research objectives, followed by triangulation with the interviews in order to identify convergences and divergences, strengthening the conclusion of the study.

Table 3 – Netnography analysis categories

Dimension	Category	Definition
Consumption	Types of content	News articles, opinion pieces, videos ...
Patterns	Frequency of content	Daily, weekly,...
Influence on Political Opinion	Examples of opinion change	Can individuals provide specific instances where their political opinions have changed as a result of consuming content on social media?
Engagement	Type of reaction and comments	Messages of support, constructive criticism, disagreements, personal attacks
	Participation in discussions	Examples of debates

5. RESULTS

After analyzing all the data with techniques proposed, in this chapter it's present the results to better understand the use of social media platforms by Portuguese people to consume

political content and understand how that consumption affects their political ideas and support for social movements.

5.1. INFLUENCE OF POLITICAL CONSUMPTION ON POLITICAL OPINIONS

5.1.1. CONSUMPTION PATTERNS OF POLITICAL CONTENT ON SOCIAL MEDIA

Considering the dimension of consumption patterns, there are four aspects to highlight from the interviews. Firstly, the use of social media to consume political content seems to be frequent among the interviewees, with many indicating that they consume political content on social media on a daily or almost daily basis. Secondly, they seek out and are impacted by different types of content such as opinion articles, news, posts by political parties, and also follow the opinions of political commentators on social media, as well as individuals with some notoriety. Furthermore, the profiles and pages they follow are also diverse, ranging from the pages of political parties with parliamentary seats to the pages of Portuguese newspapers, political personalities, humorists, non-partisan movements and individuals with frequent political opinions.

Regarding the impact of social media on political consumption, many pointed to the way in which these platforms have democratized access to information, “with more information to share with more people” (Rita), “as content is much more accessible, quicker and easier to consume” (Pedro). This change “the way people consume and experience politics because before, citizens mainly had access to traditional sources such as newspapers and television, but now, through social media, they can get a variety of perspectives and opinions in real time” (Marta).

This democratic role pointed out by some interviewees can be supported by Cheng et al. (2023), mentioned earlier, about how access to online news allows citizens to stay informed about various political issues, showing the democratization of access to information.

However, those interviewed also showed some concern that social media also allow easy access to false information and “help polarize politics, in which people already have some lack of power to reflect” (Mafalda) due to “...very fast consumption, often decontextualized” (Mafalda). Furthermore, these platforms also help to “fragment public opinion, as people are often only exposed to points of view that confirm their own ideas” (Marta). This can happen

due to algorithms, that “often highlights sensationalist content that can favor entertainment over the political debate itself” (Raquel) and “echo chambers, that can cause people to become radicalized on certain issues” (Joana). This is in line with the Sunstein (2018) and with the filter bubble theory developed by Pariser (2011) , which theorizes that algorithms expose users to information that only reinforces what they already think, without any contradiction.

5.1.2. INFLUENCE OF POLITICAL CONSUMPTION ON OPINION FORMATION

Regarding the influence that the consumption of political content on social media can have on people's political opinions, the interviewees' responses show different perspectives. While some admit to being influenced at certain times by what they consume, others attribute this influence on other factors as well, such as family and their education, social circles, their life experiences, or the communication broadcast on television. Nine of the interviewees also admit to reconsidering their opinions as a result of their consumption of political content. The reasons highlighted are the fact that they are often presented with “different perspectives to the ones they had” (Raquel), which end up making sense to them, especially if they don't have “much knowledge about the subject” (Diogo) and they realize that the ideas they had on a certain subject may not be so right. It should also be noted that the interviewees value the fact that different points of view are submitted on social media, as they believe this helps them to have a more “sustained and informed opinion” (Raquel) on the issues under discussion.

5.1.3. CREDIBILITY AND TRUST OF POLITICAL CONTENT ON SOCIAL MEDIA

When evaluating the interviewees' answers to the question of the credibility of the content, a common practice was noted. Many of the interviewees check the content of the information presented to them on social media, consulting different sources in order to realize the authenticity of the information.

Furthermore, Mafalda highlights the importance of the context of the image, of the quotes mentioned in the posts, videos... For her, “it is important to understand the situation and circumstances of certain images, certain speeches” in order to evaluate the credibility. It is also noticeable that many mentions mainstream media (CNN Portugal, SIC Notícias, BBC, Expresso, Público, ...) as credible sources because they believe them to be media that present reliable information. Ana, Pedro, Mafalda and Raquel for example, made it clear that they

prefer sources with historical accuracy, “mainly reliable news media with a history of accurate reporting and context-appropriate coverage”, mentioning pages from traditional media and profiles of academics in the case of Mafalda. Others also add profiles of journalists and prominent individuals in the field since they value their approaches and perspectives on political issues.

Regarding the influence of this credibility on the formation of opinions, all interviewees agree that it will always have an impact because “credible information leads to an informed and fact-based opinion, but false information leads to an unfounded opinion and misinformation” (Raquel), again showing concerns about these negative impacts with Margarida mentioning the danger that “lack of information can shape opinions”.

These results ultimately refute the findings of Flanagin and Metzger (2000) which indicated that people generally don't check the information they find on the internet, with respondents answering ‘rarely’ or ‘occasionally’. The few people who check focus on aspects that are easy to assess, such as whether or not the information is current or incomplete. Factors such as the source, which our interviewees point out as being important, are not considered by these respondents.

5.1.4. LEVELS OF ENGAGEMENT WITH POLITICAL CONTENT AND ITS INFLUENCE ON CHANGING OPINIONS

Regarding the interaction they make with political content on social media, different types of engagement are presented such as sharing, liking, commenting and in the case of Mafalda publishing personal reflections/opinions, “I've done a little text, a little reflection in a story, but it's rare. But I don't know, I feel like now maybe I'll start doing more...”. Interviewees, such as Ana and Pedro, are more active consumers, sharing and commenting on content, “I usually share and comment”, “I react or sometimes comment on Instagram”, as well as Miguel, “I think what I do most often is likes and comments on posts” and Rita, “I interact in the comments section of posts, I like a lot of posts, I share, almost always on Twitter”. Others such as Joana (“I never interact with anything and I don't like anything apart from publications related to mobility policies”), and Margarida (“only like and share with friends”) prefer to consume more passively without interacting so actively. Inês and Diogo often prefers private

group chats to share political content and comment on them there, proving the range of political consumption options pointed out before by Boulianne (2022).

When it comes to participate in political debate on social media, the answers vary. Ana and Marta, for example, if in these debates they find opinions that differ greatly from their own, they “feel the need to comment to offer a different perspective” and Rita chooses to participate when she “disagrees with the points of view presented”. On the other hand, Mafalda thinks “it's very exhausting because there are people who hide behind certain profiles and don't have a constructive opinion” and Joana sees these debates as “dangerous because they can get into echo chambers and can become radicalized on certain issues”, choosing not to participate in public debates on social media, showing some concern about the negativity in these forums, the lack of constructive dialogue and the potential for conversations that are not productive at all. Diogo only do it “in private groups of family and friends”, where he feels “more comfortable discussing matters”, Miguel “don't really like to participate in comment boxes because the people who live there quickly escalate the discussion to personal attacks” and prefers “to talk and discuss in person and in controlled spaces”. Inês never participated “publicly”, just “in private forums with friends and family”.

On the impact of these debates on changing the political opinions of those interviewed, the answers also vary. Ana, Pedro and Marta don't remember changing their minds after a debate. Ana because she believes that what she reads in comments is “a lot of personal opinion that varies according to ideology”, which is in line with Joana's opinion who don't participate in debates and doubts about the impact that these debates can have on changing opinions due to the prevalence of echo chambers. Pedro, because he says that when he participates, he already has his own opinion on the subject (“when I take part, it's because I already have an opinion.”) and Marta, although she doesn't change her mind, she values the different perspectives she can find in these discussions, “some conversations can promote greater understanding and even show different points of view on the same subject”. Diogo and Raquel admit having already changed their minds after a political debate and the reasons are the exposure to “different perspectives” and new information on the subject and due to a lack of knowledge of the topics, in Diogo's case specifically, “yes, it has happened, especially in debates on financial matters that I have less knowledge of”. Miguel doesn't admit having changed his mind, but he does admit having “become sensitive to certain arguments”.

Additionally, the interviewees expressed their view on the importance of taking part in these debates and the responses were polarized in two ways. While some value these debates as they offer an exposure of different perspectives and allow misinformation to be corrected as mentioned by Cheng, Zhang and Gil de Zuniga (2023), others doubt their role, as they believe it is a space where there are no constructive dialogues and where people who live in echo chambers come into conflict.

Table 4 – Results of the influence of political consumption on political opinions

Dimension	Category	Results
Consumption Patterns	Frequency of consumption	Daily or almost daily
	Type of content consumed	Opinion articles, news, political party posts, opinions of political commentators, opinions of individuals with some notoriety in politics
	Political pages and profiles followed	Political parties, Portuguese newspapers, political figures, comedians, non-partisan movements, personalities
	Changes and impacts of political consumption caused by social media	Positive: democratization of access to information, more accessible and faster content Negative: easy access to fake news, political polarization, fragmentation of public opinion
Influence on political opinion	Influence on political opinion	Some admit to being influenced by what they consume, others attribute this influence on other factors: family, education, social circles, life experiences, communication broadcast on television

	Factors of influence	Exposure to different perspectives leads to reconsideration, especially if they have little knowledge in the area under discussion
	Existence of change of opinion by political content consumed on social media	Nine out of eleven interviewees admit to having already changed their mind because of something they saw on social media
Credibility and Trust	Credibility Assessment	There is an assessment by the interviewees
	Trusted Sources	Profiles of traditional media outlets, profiles of political figures who are referenced and academics
	Information Verification	Verification of information is unanimous
	Impact of Credibility on Opinion Formation	All interviewees agree that have an impact because credible information leads to an informed opinion, false information leads to an unfounded opinion and misinformation
Engagement	Types of interaction	Shares, likes, comments and in the case of Mafalda publishing personal reflections/opinions
	Participation in political debates on social media	Some participate to offer different perspectives; others avoid due to negativity and lack of constructive dialogue
	Existence of change of opinion after taking part in political debates on social media	Ana, Pedro and Marta don't remember changing their minds after a debate. Joana, Inês e Margarida don't participate in debates. Pedro, when he participates, he already has his own opinion on the subject

	and Marta, although she doesn't change her mind, she values the different perspectives she can find in these discussions. Diogo and Raquel admit having already changed their minds after a political debate. Miguel doesn't admit having changed his mind, but he does admit having become sensitive to certain arguments.
Importance of political debates on social media	Some value the exposure of different perspectives and allow misinformation to be corrected, others doubt their role, as they believe it is a space where there are no constructive dialogues and where people Who live in echo chambers come into conflict.

The results, presented in summary in table 4, showed that the consumption of political content on social networks among those interviewed is daily and that what they consume can indeed influence their opinions, but there are also other factors. Ultimately, the democratization of access to information and exposure to different perspectives are seen as benefits. However, misinformation, the polarization of opinions that these platforms can provoke, as well as the risk of echo chambers are challenges to be considered.

To better understand how political content on social media can influence Portuguese people, the next chapter provides a netnographic analysis of the Instagram page of the non-partisan movement "euvoto.pt".

5.1.5. NETNOGRAPHIC ANALYSIS OF “EUVOTO.PT” INSTAGRAM PAGE DURING JANUARY 2024 AND MARCH 2024

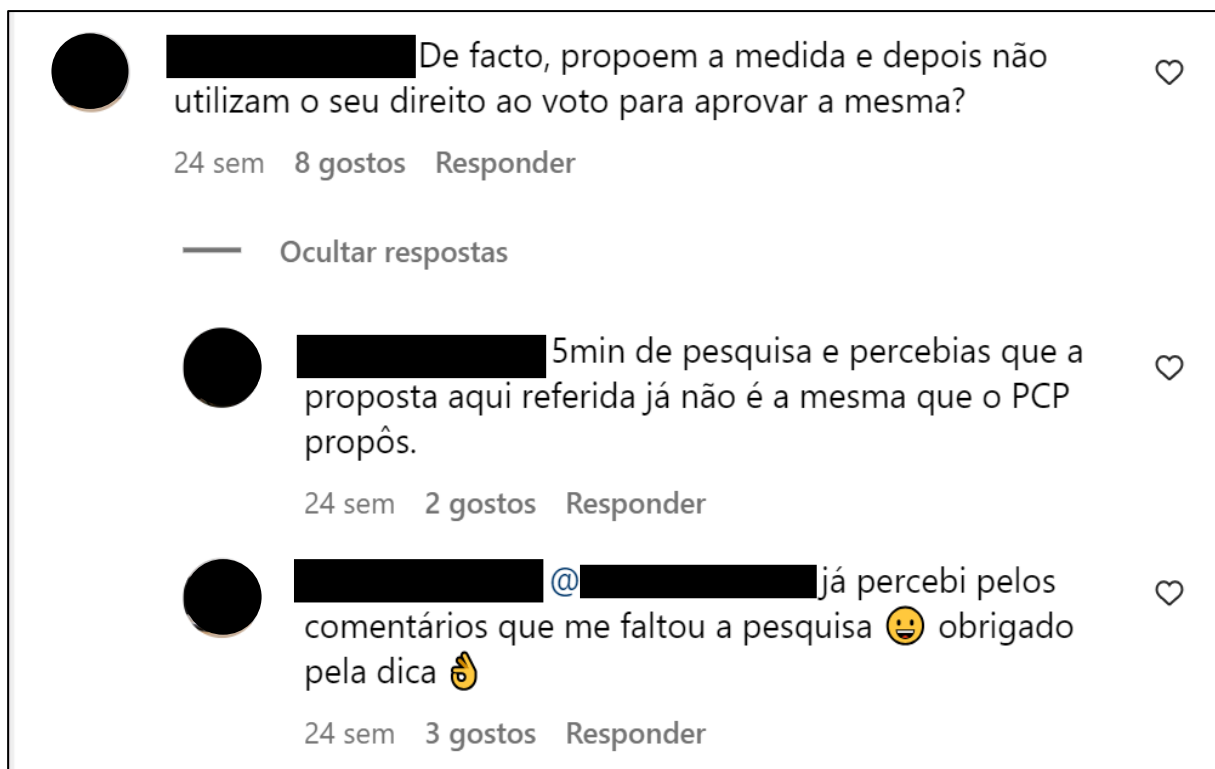
In terms of the frequency of publications, the page was assiduous in its content over the three months in question, with almost daily publications. In accordance with the period of

analysis, a meticulous analysis was also made of the comments made on the posts to see if any changes of opinion could be verified in relation to the published posts. In this sense, there was only one potential change of opinion (figure 1) in one of the posts that dealt with party votes on measures presented in the assembly. In one of these posts, a lady expressed her disappointment with the Portuguese Communist Party (PCP), as she realized that the party had presented a measure and then voted against it, condemning it for doing so. However, another follower took the initiative to clarify that the proposed policy was no longer the same, but had undergone changes, leading the person to understand why they voted against it.

Despite this occurrence, there were hardly any instances of people reconsidering their political opinions through the page's posts.

However, there was no shortage of debates in the comments throughout the publications analyzed. Actually, the debates prove to be a kind of peaceful exchange of opinions, in which people try to understand the reasons for certain votes expressed in the publication, argue

Figure 1 – Potential change of opinion



civily against comments that in their views don't make sense or defend their point of view on the issues presented. In this type of debate, you can see valid and structured arguments on the subject under discussion.

In other debates, the tone of the discussion escalated due to a lack of consensus in opinions, interfering with the quality of the debate and affecting mutual understanding. In many, there were offence comments against the person who disagreed, which reinforces Sunstein's (2018) study and Pariser (2011). For example, in an informative post with information on the days and schedules of the political debates prior to the elections, a follower expressed his opinion in a provocative way, suggesting that "... voting in left-wing parties is being a clown". This statement triggered an equally provocative response from another follower, who replied that "to be a clown is to vote for the right-wing parties...", escalating into a more heated ideological debate, but without showing much argumentation. Similarly, another debate in which offence was shown was in a post presenting the electoral program of "Bloco de Esquerda" party, in which a person with an openly right-wing political orientation expressed dissatisfaction with the program presented, resulting in the following response from another user: "... I know that your group of right-wing pigs has no serious proposals for the country...".

In this sense, there are two main types of comments identified: opinion comments (figure 2) and offensive comments (figure 3). Opinion comments revolve around certain approved and unapproved measures, election results and responses to other comments. These are important comments to understand public opinion on important political topics, thus expressing the views and ideals of the followers, whether they are in favor or against what is being presented.

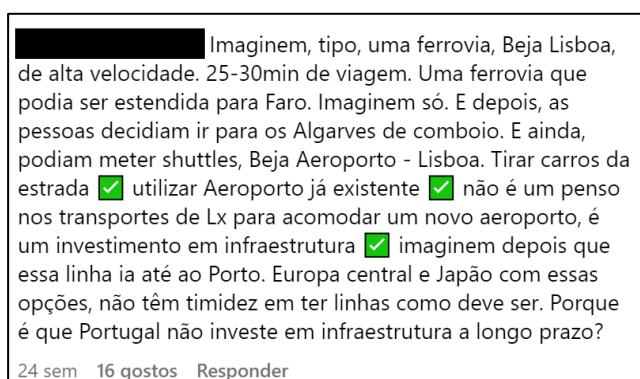


Figure 2 – Example of opinion comment

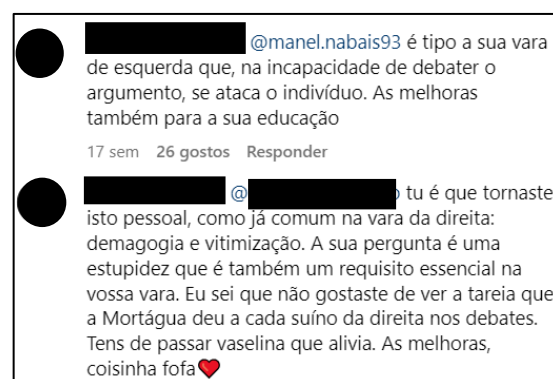


Figure 3 – Example of offensive comment

As the exchange of opinions is important for understanding public perception, it is important to distinguish opinion comments from those with aggressive language, insults, or

personal attacks. Offensive comments, such as those identified on the "euvoto.pt" page, as mentioned by the interviewees, do not contribute to a constructive debate, and can generate a negative atmosphere.

Given these comments, debates are also divided into constructive (figure 4) and polarizing (figure 5). In constructive debate, where the exchange of ideas is done with respect, the ideas that are transmitted end up showing different points of view, enriching the debate, and can lead to learning between the participants and also for the people who read them. Polarizing debates are marked by unnecessary offences and a lack of argumentation to really discuss the issues.

In this way, the results of the analysis of this page are in line with the negative and positive aspects of political debates on social media pointed out by the interviewees.

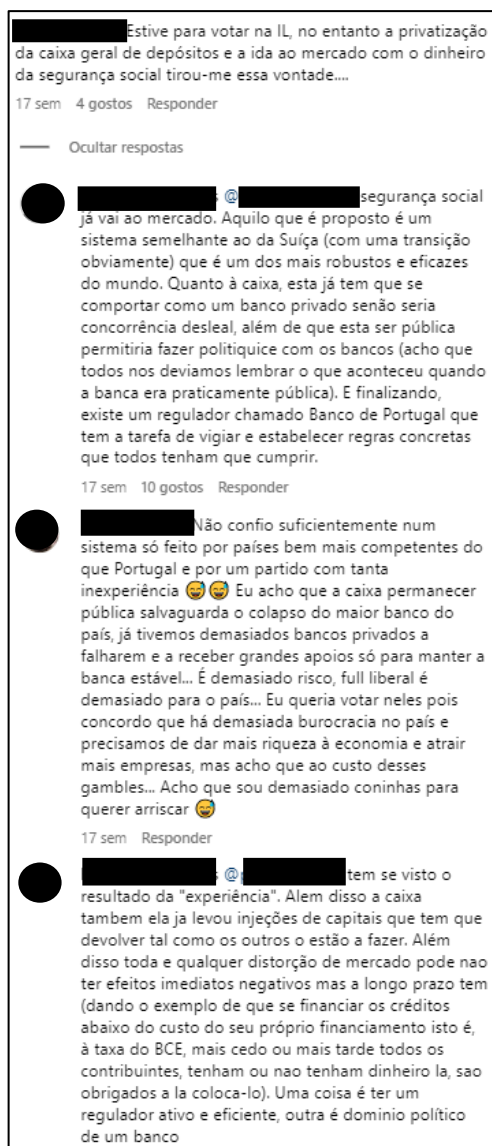


Figure 4 – Example of constructive debate

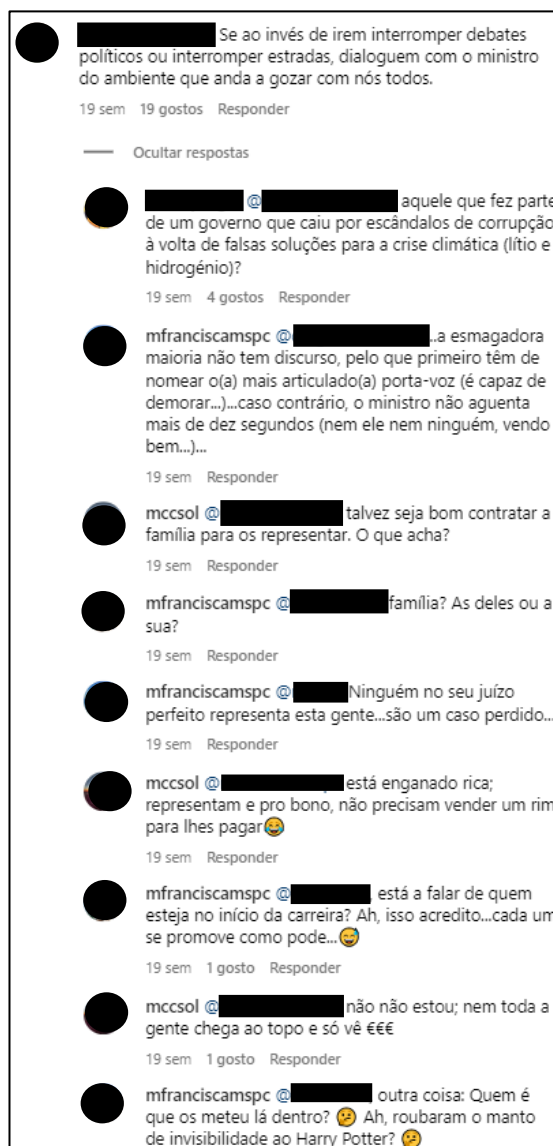


Figure 5 – Example of polarizing debate

In this way, the "euvoto.pt" page exemplifies how social networks can be a stage for productive debate, as well as helping to create a polarizing environment through the ease of commenting and replying to other users.

Table 5 – Results of netnographic analysis of "euvoto.pt" Instagram page

Dimension	Category	Results
Consumption Patterns	Types of content	Informative posts: measures of each political party, TV elections debates. Informative graphics on how parties with voted on certain measures, on the results of the elections.

		Short informative videos, short videos interviews with candidates.
	Frequency of content	Almost daily publications
Influence on Political Opinion	Examples of opinion change	Only one potential change of opinion in one of the posts that dealt with party votes on measures presented in the assembly
Engagement	Type of reaction and comments	Two main types of comments identified: opinion comments and offensive comments.
	Participation in discussions	While some debates prove to be constructive, others are marked by unnecessary offences and a lack of argumentation to really discuss the issues

This netnographic analysis illustrates how social media can have a dual role in political discussions. On one hand, they provide an environment for disseminating information and allowing constructive debates, with the exposure of different points of view, politically enriching users. On the other hand, they also provide an environment prone to polarization of opinions, with the existence of negative comments that end up interfering in the quality of the debates.

In this sense, these results, summarized in Table 5, end up confirming the positive and negative aspects of the consumption of political content on social media pointed out by the interviewees. Furthermore, it helps to better understand how this consumption can influence support for social movements, which will be the focus of the next point.

5.2. INFLUENCE OF POLITICAL CONSUMPTION ON SUPPORT OF SOCIAL MOVEMENTS

From the interviewees' answers, we realized that half of them (Ana, Rita, Joana, Diogo, Margarida and Raquel) don't follow social movements on social media, which doesn't mean that they don't recognize their importance, as Raquel pointed out, "No, at the moment I don't follow or participate in social media groups or pages, although I recognize the importance of these groups in defending social and political issues". Pedro, Mafalda, Marta, Miguel and Inês confessed to following and even taking part in some social movement's actions.

Regarding the influence that social media can have on the support they give to social movements, Pedro, Mafalda, Marta, Diogo and Inês admit that they are influenced by what they see on these platforms, as drivers for action. In Pedro's case to 'take action by signing petitions and sharing content' and to feel more "connected to the ideas that represent the social movement" in question, in Diogo's case. Ana, on the other hand, believes that the content posted on these platforms helps her understand the cause better, but her support depends on how sensitive she is to the issue, "I think it helps me more to try to understand the causes of these groups and how they act or have an impact on society. The support comes from my sensitivity to the cause". Miguel and Joana only feel that the issues they are concerned about are urgently reinforced, "It doesn't influence my support, it's more of a reminder that these movements exist and it helps me to reinforce the principles" (Joana), "I think it reinforces what I already see as an urgency". Margarida says she feels more empathetic when people share their stories, "It influences me simply because I empathize with the stories and lives, I meet every day through social media".

With regard to taking part in actions promoted on social media by social movements, Pedro, Mafalda, Marta, Margarida and Inês revealed that they had already taken part in actions that they had seen promoted on these platforms, namely in protests on issues that were more sensitive to them. Joana had already intended to take part.

As for the amplification that social media can give to social movements, the interviewees' responses were unanimous, highlighting that social networks can give these movements more visibility and allow the message to reach a larger number of people, while also helping to mobilize people around important issues reinforcing the idea of Tarrow (1998), who believes in the power of disseminating information to mobilize supporters for social movements.. As

Raquel said, “social media provide an accessible and democratic platform” for people. In addition to this, Mafalda shows another view that social networks help to amplify social movements since they allow people living in smaller communities to “feel less alone and more accompanied in their struggles by seeing people and movements on these platforms with whom they identify”.

Finally, when it comes to the impact that getting involved in social movements on social media can have on political or social change in Portugal, all the interviewees believe that social media can contribute to bringing about change. The reasons pointed were the mobilization and awareness of people in relation to certain issues that lead them to act and the influence that these movements can have on public opinion and the pressure that these large groups of people can put on politicians to act and thus bring about change. However, for Mafalda, “this change can't just happen on the social networks”, which she says, “are just a complement”, but must also take to the streets. Margarida also gives an example of a change in the Portuguese party paradigm through social media, referring to the Chega! party and its growth in digital media, which helped it grow in the Portuguese political context.

Thereby, the results of this analysis, summarized in table 6, show that there is an awareness of the power of social media in helping to amplify social movements and that almost half of those interviewed admitted to feeling influenced to take action through content they consume. In this way, this shows the influence that these platforms can have.

Table 6 - Results of the influence of political consumption on the support of social movements

Dimension	Category	Results
Support for Social Movements	Social Movements pages followed	Ana, Rita, Joana, Diogo, Margarida and Raquel don't follow social movements on social media, which doesn't mean that they don't recognize their importance. Pedro, Mafalda, Marta, Miguel and Inês confessed to following and even taking part in some social movement's actions.

Influence of social media on support for social movements or political causes	Pedro, Mafalda, Marta, Diogo and Inês admit that they are influenced by what they see on these platforms, as drivers for action. Ana, on the other hand, believes that the content posted on these platforms helps her understand the cause better, but her support depends on how sensitive she is. Miguel and Joana only feel that the issues they are concerned about are urgently reinforced. Margarida says she feels more empathetic when people share their stories
Participation on social movement action influenced by social media	Pedro, Mafalda, Marta, Margarida and Inês revealed that they had already taken part in actions that they had seen promoted on these platforms
Influence of social media in the amplification of social movements	Responses were unanimous, highlighting that social media can give these movements more visibility and allow the message to reach a larger number of people, while also helping to mobilize people
Influence of social movements on social media in political or social change in Portugal	All the interviewees believe that social media can contribute to bringing about change because of mobilization and awareness of people in relation to certain issues the pressure that these large groups of people can put on politicians

To complete this analysis, in the next point, the results of the netnographic analysis of the "climaximo.pt" Instagram page will be presented. Being a movement that generates both agreement and disagreement, we were able to complement the analysis of the interviews,

with a more detailed understanding of the communication and mobilization strategies of a social movement, with concrete data on the reactions and dynamics of debates on this page. Furthermore, we were able to identify positive points and challenges of digital activism, better understanding the role of consumption on social networks in supporting these movements.

5.2.1 NETNOGRAPHIC ANALYSIS OF “CLIMAXIMO.PT” INSTAGRAM PAGE DURING JANUARY 2024 AND MARCH 2024

By analyzing the “climaximo.pt” social movement's Instagram page during the first trimester of 2024, we were able to identify two main types of content: images and videos of the actions, events and protests carried out by the movement. In this content, the focus is essentially on directly addressing climate change with posts about environmental impacts and possible solutions. Many also highlight climate justice, with posts denouncing social inequalities and defending a fairer and more sustainable system, as well as asking people to mobilize and be part of the movement.

Regarding the frequency of posts, the number of posts varied throughout the analysis period, with an increase in the number of posts in February and March. This increase coincided with the presentation of the electoral programs of the parties running in the legislative elections on 16 March. Additionally, the electoral campaign was marked by actions taken by this movement against electoral posters, party headquarters and also against candidates.

In terms of a change of opinion, the analysis of posts from the established period did not find any kind of comment in which this happened, or any possible change, as happened in the analysis of the previous profile.

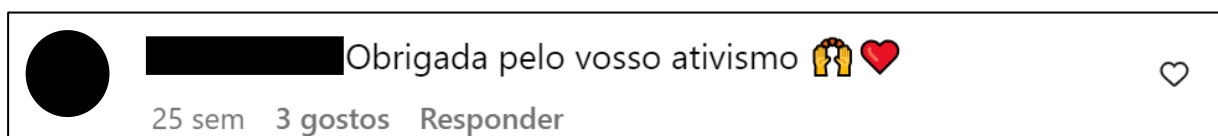


Figure 6 – Example of support comment

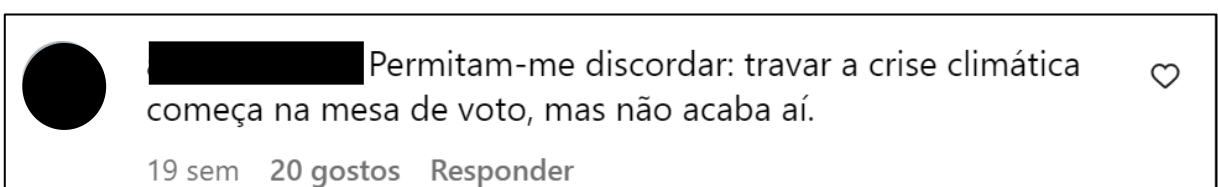


Figure 7 – Example of constructive comment

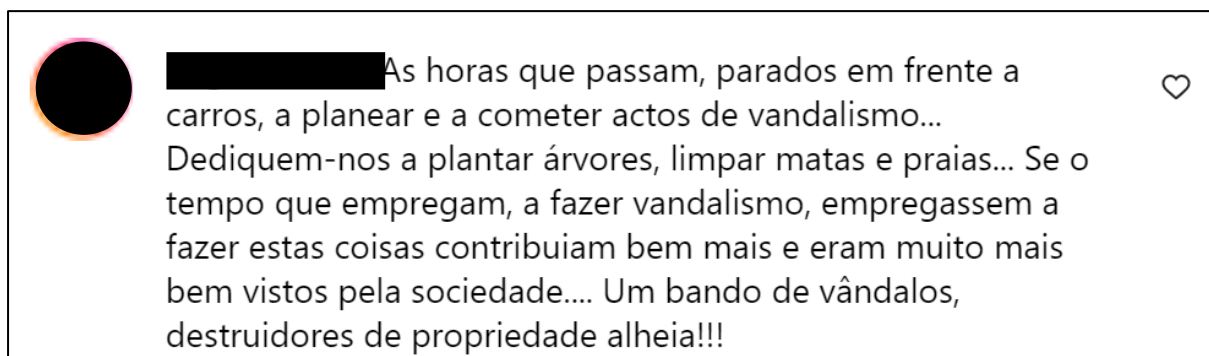


Figure 8 – Example of condemning comment about the movement actions

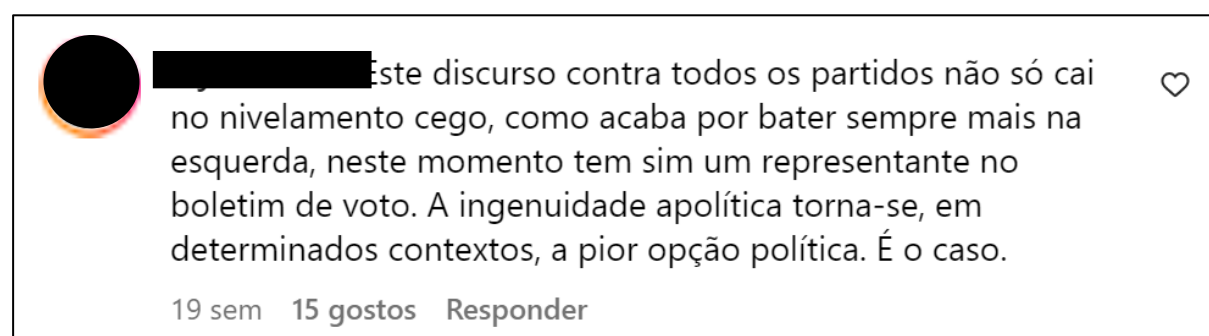


Figure 9 – Example of condemning comment about the attempt to boycott the elections

Even so, with regard to the reactions that the posts triggered, it is possible to identify three types of comments: support of the movement and its actions (Figure 6); constructive comments (figure 7) in which many people question the effectiveness of the actions to block roads, paint thrown at people and buildings and suggest alternatives that in their view are less evasive; and condemning comments about these two actions mentioned (figure 8) and the attempt to boycott the elections (figure 9), encouraging people not to vote. This is because in the movement's opinion, there is no party that is genuinely concerned about the climate.

In this sense, the main topic of debates in the comments section are about these actions considered more radical by the condemners, leading followers that are against these actions to question their effectiveness. Many of the comments against consider the actions to be “vandalism” and point out that there are “other forms of activism” or “protest”, considering these forms of protest to be “wrong forms of struggle”. However, supporters say that “the fight against climate change can't go on doing the same old thing, it has to be radicalized”.

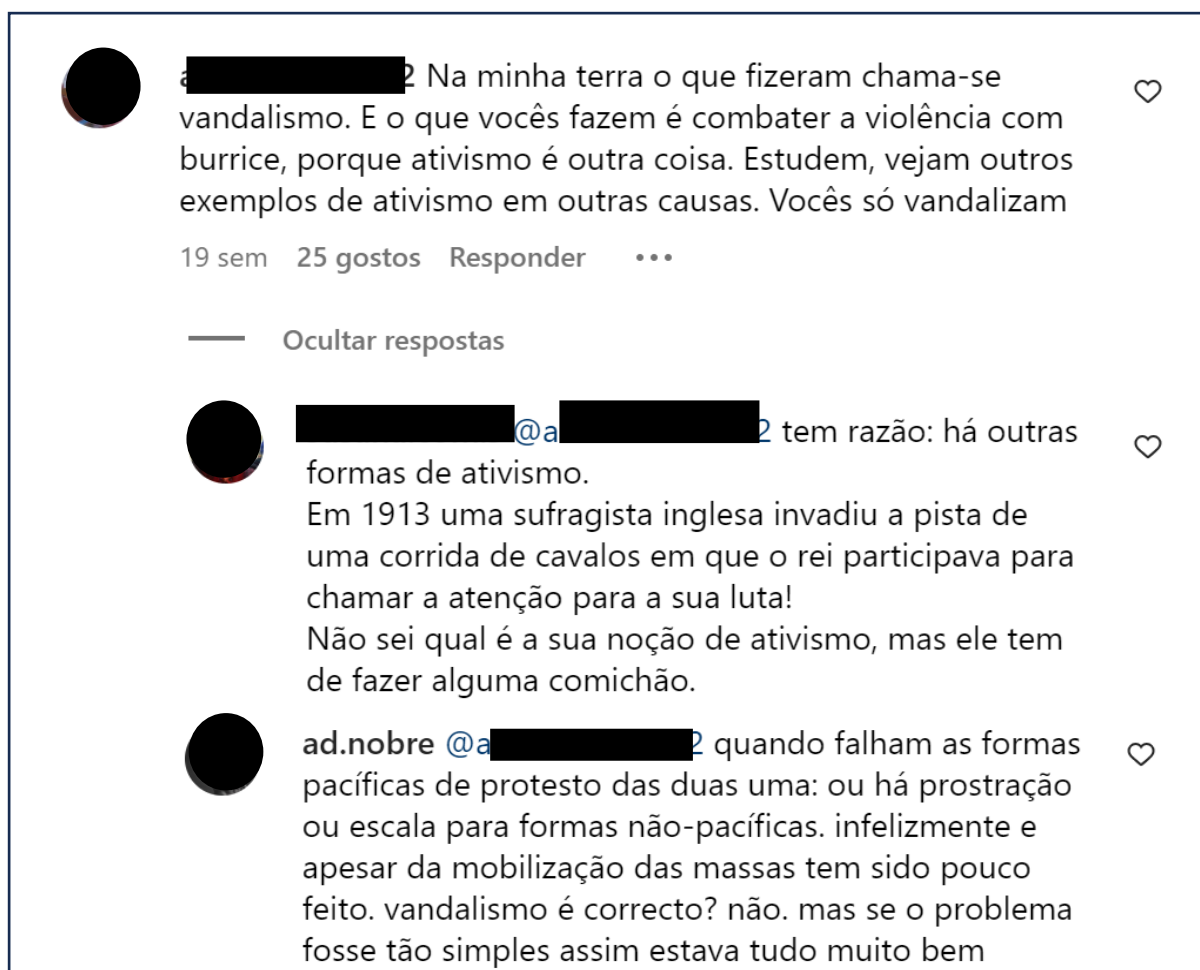


Figure 10 – Supporter and non-supporter debate

They also add that “when peaceful forms fail, they turn to non-peaceful forms” to stand a chance. An example of this kind of debate can be seen in figure 10.

In this way, through these results, summarized in table 7, it’s possible to understand that the "climaximo.pt" stands out for the impact it has on public opinion. Although the movement's actions are considered radical, they end up putting the climate cause at the center of discussions, helping to mobilize supporters, but also their opponents to defend the cause with less radical actions.

Table 7 – Results of “climaximo.pt” netnographic analysis Instagram page

Dimension	Category	Results
Consumption	Types of	Images and videos of the actions, events and protests.
Patterns	content	Many also highlight climate justice, with posts

		denouncing social inequalities and defending a fairer and more sustainable system
	Frequency of content	The number of posts varied throughout the analysis period, with an increase in the number of posts in February and March
Influence on Political Opinion	Examples of opinion change	The analysis of posts from the established period did not find any kind of change of opinion
Engagement	Type of reaction and comments	Three types of comments: support of the movement and its actions, constructive comments and condemning comments
	Participation in discussions	The main topic of debates in the comments section are about these actions considered more radical by the by the condemners, leading followers that are against these actions to question their effectiveness

6. DISCUSSION

6.1. POLITICAL CONSUMPTION ON SOCIAL MEDIA AND ITS INFLUENCE ON OPINION FORMATION

By analyzing the results of the interviews and the netnographic analysis, it is possible to point out the following insights.

Regarding consumption patterns, according to the data collected, social media is a frequent source of consumption of political content and political information, which reinvigorates the studies of Newman, et al. (2021) highlighting the role of online platforms, including social media, in news consumption, with news content being the most mentioned by the interviewees in the type of content they are impacted by or seek out. As well as news, this consumption includes other types of content such as opinion articles, posts by political parties,

opinion posts by political commentators or well-known personalities, among others. This diversity of content, where users can be impacted by information in different ways and from different perspectives, reflects the democratization of access to information and the dissemination of information that social media provide, also mentioned by some interviewees, and is in line with what Chadwick (2017) observed in relation to new forms of power. According to this author, media power has decentralized from traditional media and individuals or groups outside traditional institutions can influence a large audience through digital platforms. However, as noted in the analyzes, there is still a use of traditional media of communication for information.

However, some interviewees also expressed some concern about the disinformation and polarization of opinions that social media can generate, largely as a result of fake news and echo chambers respectively. This view is in line with Sunstein's (2018) work on the like-minded groups that social media can create. Together with fake news, these two negative points that the interviewees point out reveal the dual nature of social media with a democratizing force, but at the same time polarizing opinions.

While some admit to being influenced by the content they consume, others also give importance to other factors such as family, education and personal experiences, which corroborates the conclusions of Garrett (2009) and Cheng et al. (2023) that individuals' beliefs and positioning also help to form opinions and not just what they see on social media.

Despite these concerns, some interviewees valued the ability of social media to show multiple points of view in online debates, indicating that exposure to different perspectives on a given issue can help lead to more informed and sustained political opinions. This view thus supports the deliberative potential that Dahlberg (2001) suggests, indicating that this exposure can promote greater rationalization of issues, since users can analyze the arguments presented, which can lead to a more thoughtful discourse.

However, even though some appreciate this exposure, when it comes to participating in these debates, some are dissuaded by the negativity, extremism and lack of constructive dialogue that they point out exists in these forums, thus supporting the work of Sunstein (2018), mentioned above, which shows how the Internet today is fostering political division, extremism and polarization.

This type of interaction with the content, such as shares and likes, varied between the interviewees, with some assuming that they actively participate and others saying that they prefer a more passive consumption. So, we can see that in digital political consumption there are two types of users: those who actively participate, commenting and reacting to posts, and others who participate more quietly, preferring private forums to comment and react to content. This variation in the levels of involvement shown by the interviewees refers to the different types of social media users identified by Brandtzaeg (2012) who vary exactly between highly active consumers and passive consumers.

Credibility was recognized as an important factor in the content that is presented, among the interviewees who admit that they check the information they receive through the content with credible sources, but when it is already published by a media organization that they already consider credible, they don't do so. Among these credible sources, many mention renowned media companies in Portugal (CNN Portugal, SIC Notícias, Expresso, Público, ...) and abroad (BBC), believing that these news media present reliable information, confirming the data from the report by Newman, et al. (2023) which places Portugal as one of the best-ranked markets in terms of trust in news. However, there are also those who point to official political party websites as credible, which ends up refuting the arguments of Stolle, Hooghe and Micheletti (2005) that political consumption is a tactic used by those who don't trust political institutions.

The importance of context in evaluating the credibility of content, as pointed out in the analyses, it's also important and reflects the issue of media richness studied by Daft and Lengel (1986). These authors define richness, in the context of communication, as the capacity that a medium can have to transmit detailed and contextual information. This richness can vary from medium to medium.

Looking at the results of the analysis of the "euvoto.pt" page, they offer an insight into how political content is consumed on social networks in Portugal and end up revealing both the positive and negative sides of these platforms as a space for political involvement and opinion formation.

The regularity of posts on the page and the diversity of types of content show an effort on the part of those running the page to inform, once again demonstrating the power of social networks to disseminate information.

Analyzing the comments doesn't reveal any major conclusions regarding changes in opinion through political debates in these forums, with only one potential change being observed. However, this potential change of opinion, where one follower ends up clarifying to another the context of a PCP vote, ends up reflecting that individuals being exposed to more context and additional information can, in some cases, make them reconsider opinions, once again reinforcing the power of the richness of communication (Daft & Lengel, Organizational information requirements, media richness and structural design, 1986), with the context that is given to the information disseminated on social media.

As for the political debates in the comments, they vary in terms of civility and quality. In some cases, there is a civilized and constructive exchange of opinions and arguments, which is positive for the public discussion of politics. However, many debates end up descending into offence and a lack of valid argumentation, reflecting a hostile and polarized environment that does nothing to enhance debate and political participation. Thus, this duality in the debates goes hand in hand with the third axis defended by Arnould and Thompson (2015) explained in the literature review of how different social groups can clash while having different ideologies.

In this sense, although social networks have their positive side and potential to foster quality and informative political debates, this analysis also shows that the opposite can happen, in line with the response of some interviewees and the studies by Sustein (2018).

This duality of roles shows the need for intervention mechanisms on social media to prevent and discourage hate speech and gratuitous offences and to promote a civilized environment.

These insights help us understand that social media can indeed influence the political opinions of Portuguese people, but they do not act alone, and there may be other influencing factors. Given this power of influence, there needs to be more media literacy, combating disinformation and polarization, and promoting constructive debates. As for media literacy, this can be done through educational programs that teach people to evaluate sources, identify fake news, and critically evaluate the content presented to them. As for disinformation and

polarization, social media platforms should invest in fact-checking mechanisms, for example the ability to provide context to what is written, as is already the case on X, formerly Twitter, as well as in moderation mechanisms for comments boxes or video and image content to help reduce the spread of fake news and hate speech. In relation to promoting constructive debates, awareness campaigns are needed for civilized debates, as well as regulation in social media. If a person offends, defames, publicly attacks someone and is punished, these punishments must also be regulated on social networks so that there is no feeling of impunity, and tools on social networks themselves that facilitate this civility.

6.2. INFLUENCE OF POLITICAL CONSUMPTION ON SOCIAL MEDIA ON SUPPORT OF SOCIAL MOVEMENTS

The results presented above regarding the interviewees' involvement with social movements on social media offer a broad view of their perceptions and experiences.

The finding that half of the interviewees do not follow social movements on social media, despite recognizing their importance, reveals the diversity of degrees of involvement within a population, which suggests that participation in social movements and the consumption of content can be influenced by individual factors. A fact already addressed in the literature review of this study on the individual nature of political consumption and social movements (Johnson et al., 2019; Micheletti, 2003; Weijs et al., 2018). Bennet and Sagerberg (2012) argue that “people may still join actions in large numbers, but the identity reference is more derived through inclusive and diverse large-scale personal expression”, arguing that this variation in the level of involvement with social movements may be linked to the fact that individuals relate and express their identity in various ways on social media, rather than having a commitment to the cause. We can therefore support the fact that not all interviewees are involved with social movements on social media, but still recognize their social importance.

As for the influence of the content of the movement's pages, the interviewees who usually follow their movements say that they are influenced when it comes to taking action. This result is in line with Tarrow (1998) who argues in his work that the dissemination of information is fundamental to mobilizing support for social causes. The fact that some interviewees admitted to having already taken part in actions promoted by social movements through social media suggests that these platforms are effective as mobilization tools,

confirming what Bennett (2012) also highlighted in his study about social media being facilitators of collective action and where major movements are often born.

The interviewees' general perception of the ability of social media to help amplify social movements strengthens the effective role of these platforms, thus helping movements to reach a regional, national or even global scale.

In this sense, the interviewees' belief in the contribution of social media to political and social change in Portugal reflects a perception that movements on these platforms can influence public opinion and put pressure on political decision-makers. However, as pointed out, these demonstrations on social media must be complemented by offline actions.

By analyzing the Instagram page of the 'climaximo.pt' social movement, the main content identified was images and videos of protests, actions and events, revealing the movement's desire to get its message across. The emphasis they place on the urgent need for impactful measures, the proposed solutions and their protests show the urgency they have in mobilizing people for their cause. This, once again, confirms the work carried out by Bennett e Segerberg (2012) where they argue that social media fosters new forms of activism that are characterized by the possibility for individuals to engage with the content shared in a personalized way.

The increase in the number of posts in February and March shows the movement's ability to take advantage of specific political contexts, such as the legislative elections. In this sense, there was a strategic use of the electoral calendar to maximize the impact of their messages and implement actions with visibility, such as interrupting an electoral debate.

However, despite this strategic use, there has been no change in opinion towards the movement, showing that opinions towards this group are polarized. Those who like it support it, those who don't, make constructive or disapproving comments. This polarization, which is also reflected in the debates, ultimately reveals perceptions of the strategies adopted by the movement.

In this sense, the negative feedback on the protests that this social movement makes and the lack of legitimacy that non-supporters give it is frequent in movements with more radical and less peaceful strategies, as documented by Chenoweth e Stephan (2011), which ends up becoming a barrier to increasing the support base for the cause. As seen above, these

movements only become successful if they gain legitimacy from the people (King & Pearce, The contentiousness of markets: Politics, social movements, and institutional change in markets, 2010).

On the other hand, the defense by some followers of these more radical actions with arguments such as "the fight against climate change can not continue with the same tactic" shows that there is dissatisfaction among some people with the ineffectiveness of traditional forms of activism.

Thus, with this analysis, it is possible to see that the use of social media by social movements has strengths such as amplification and the ability to mobilize people, but also encounters challenges in the public's perception of the actions of a certain movement. However, it is up to the forces motivating the cause to consider strategies that balance these dualities.

In this sense, the results show that the consumption of content on social networks can influence support for social movements in a positive or negative way, considering the actions of the movement and the way in which the movement communicates with the audience. At the same time, this consumption has different levels of involvement, being linked to the different ways in which people express themselves online, which can call into question the commitment they give to causes, even if they are in favor of them.

Thereby, there are both positive and negative implications for this consumption. The consumption of content such as that on "climaximo.pt" can quickly increase the visibility of the cause and even if some do not agree on the way of acting, it ends up making buzz around the topic and the opponent's expressing less radical forms of activism that can also help to pressure for change and involve people in finding solutions, even if only for more peaceful forms of protest.

On the other hand, this radicalization helps polarizing environments, ending up delegitimizing the cause in the eyes of those who do not agree with the actions.

Therefore, to have a higher quality of engagement, movements can explore ways to personalize their messages and legitimize their cause, for example using content that users can see themselves reflected in. At the same time, to mitigate conflicts, movements may engage in building bridges with their non-supporters. This may involve promoting constructive dialogue and valuing different perspectives. The issue of radicalization that is presented in this

analysis can be resolved in this sense, but also through the self-responsibility of these actions by these movements.

7. CONCLUSION AND FUTURE RESEARCH

By analyzing the consumption of political content on social media by Portuguese people and the influence this consumption can have on shaping their opinions and the support they give to social movements, this study confirmed that social media are present in their lives and can play a significant role in influence their political opinions but not alone. Other factors may also underlie political opinions.

The results show that the consumption of political content on social media by the Portuguese people is frequent and diversified in terms of the type of content, including news, opinion articles, posts by political parties or personalities linked to politics, comments by personalities linked to political commentary, among others. The democratization of access to information and the possibility that social networks give people to be exposed to different points of view were valued. However, some concerns were also highlighted, such as the misinformation and polarization of opinions that social media can also provide, showing that the chosen interviewees are vigilant about what appears to them on social media and have a critical spirit towards it, as the credibility of information sources was highlighted as something crucial to take into account.

The interviews show that while some interviewees admit to being influenced by the political content they consume on social media, others mention the importance of other sources of influence, such as family, education, and life experiences. At the same time, the study also showed that exposure to political content on social media can help reinforce existing ideas and, in some cases, mold opinions. However, it was not possible to find a significant number of examples in which the political content seen on social media led the person to change their opinion, especially in debates, which leads us to conclude that people enter these political discussions with their opinions and ideals already well defined. However, with the examples that exist both from the interviews and from the netnographic analysis, it can be seen that these changes occur because there is total or partial ignorance of the subject being addressed or its context.

In relation to social movements, the study showed different levels of involvement, although there was recognition of the importance of being present on these platforms. Among those who follow these movements, social networks are seen as a way of mobilizing people and amplifying the causes they defend. However, more radical actions on the part of the movements can influence support negatively, generating divisions of opinion and a loss of legitimization for the cause.

7.1. LIMITATIONS

Although the qualitative study gives us the opportunity to better understand the opinion of the Portuguese on the subject, the analysis was based on a small number of interviews, which may not be a significant representation of the experiences and perceptions of the Portuguese population that consumes political content on social networks.

Furthermore, the study focused on just two social movement profiles, which may not reflect the diversity of content and media available to Portuguese users, and what was not seen in these two profiles in the period under analysis, such as a change of opinion, may be seen in other profiles.

7.2. FUTURE RESEARCH

For future studies related to this topic, it would be important to include a larger sample of participants in order to have a better representation and understanding of the behavior of Portuguese people who consume political content on social networks and support social movements.

A longitudinal analysis could also be interesting in order to understand how the consumption of political content and involvement with social movements on social media can vary over time. With all the political and social events that can occur in that period of time.

Furthermore, since this study was based on two Instagram profiles for the reasons given in the methodology, comparing different social networks can offer important insights into how consumption is carried out through different digital media.

It would also be interesting to analyze different age groups to see if there are variations in the consumption of political content and involvement with social movements in different age segments of the population.

In conclusion, this study contributes to a greater understanding of the influence of political consumption on social media on political opinions and support for social movements in Portugal. The analysis ultimately highlighted the role of platforms in informing and mobilizing, as well as influencing political opinions in some cases. However, for others there are other factors shaping their opinions, and by observing the results of debates, people end up already having an opinion when they comment and can tell that they form it through other factors. When opinions change, it's because they are totally or partially unaware of what is being discussed. At the same time, this study shows that there is an awareness of the challenges these platforms face, such as misinformation and the polarization of opinions. In this sense, this study provides an opportunity for future studies to delve deeper into this issue in the Portuguese context.

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APPENDIX

APPENDIX A - INTERVIEW SCRIPT

Dimension	Questions
Consumption patterns	1. How often do you use social media to consume political content? 2. What types of political content do you look for or are impacted by on social media? 3. Do you follow specific pages or profiles related to politics on social media or news? If so, which ones? 4. How do you think social media has changed the way people consume politics? 5. Do you think this change has been positive or negative? 6. What do you think are the biggest impacts of social media on political consumption?
Influence on political opinion	1. Do you think that the political content you consume on social media influences your opinions on political issues? If so, in what way? 2. Do you believe that your political opinions are mainly influenced by the political content you consume on social media, or do other factors have a greater influence? 3. Have you ever changed your mind about a political issue after consuming political content on social media? Can you give me an example?

Credibility and trust	1. How do you rate the credibility of the political content you find on social media? 2. Are there any pages or profiles that you find particularly trustworthy? 3. Do you usually check the veracity of political information shared on social media before forming an opinion? 4. Do you believe that the credibility of political content on social media plays a significant role in the formation of political opinion? Why do you think so?
Engagement	1. Do you usually interact with the political content you consume on social media? If so, what kind of interaction do you do most? 2. Apart from simply liking or sharing, do you usually take part in political discussions on social media? How do you decide to participate in these discussions? 3. Have you ever changed your mind about a political issue after taking part in a political discussion or debate on social media? 4. How important is it for you to take part in political discussions online? Do you think that contributing to these discussions can lead to a greater understanding or change of opinion? 5. How do you see the role of political discussions on social media in shaping people's political opinions?

Support for social movements

1. Do you follow or participate in groups or pages on social media related to social movements? If so, which ones?

2. How do you think the content you consume on social media influences your support for social movements?

3. Have you ever taken part in a social movement action or demonstration inspired by something you saw or read on social media? Can you share that experience?

4. Do you feel that the political content you consume on social media helps to amplify the voices of specific social movements? Why?

5. Do you believe that engaging with social movements on social media can effectively influence political or social change in Portugal? Why do you think so?

APPENDIX B – ETHICS COMMITTEE REPORT

Project No.: DDMKT2024-3-132300

Project Title: Political Consumption on Social Media in Portugal

Principal Researcher: Maria Inês Fialho Mariz Coelho

according to the regulations of the Ethics Committee of NOVA IMS and MagIC Research Center this project was considered to meet the requirements of the NOVA IMS Internal Review Board, being considered **APPROVED** on 22/03/2024.

It is the Principal Researcher's responsibility to ensure that all researchers and stakeholders associated with this project are aware of the conditions of approval and which documents have been approved.

The Principal Researcher is required to notify the Ethics Committee, via amendment or progress report, of

- Any significant change to the project and the reason for that change;
- Any unforeseen events or unexpected developments that merit notification;
- The inability of the Principal Researcher to continue in that role or any other change in research personnel involved in the project.

Lisbon, 22/03/2024

NOVA IMS Ethics Committee
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