

From grassroots movement to parliament: Strategic communication and the achievement of public legitimacy. Case Study: PAN (People – Animals – Nature)

Do movimento popular ao parlamento:
Comunicação estratégica e a conquista da legitimidade pública.
Estudo de caso: PAN (Pessoas – Animais – Natureza)

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ABSTRACT

Strategic communication has progressively claimed a broader role in society, and in fostering social capital, civic engagement, and democracy. Thus, activism has received much attention in public relations theory and practice. In the Portuguese case, PAN fits this concern in line with the new political parties founded bottom-up by activists' social opposition movements. In 2015, PAN managed to enter a parliamentary system that had remained inaccessible to new political parties for almost 20 years. This study is based on a qualitative methodology, anchored in the discursive analysis of public relations positioning elements in the original manifesto of the grassroots movement that originated PAN. A tag cloud-generating software (wordArt.com) was also used to analyze word frequency and identify the main themes of the document. In-depth interviews with PAN policymakers were carried out to analyze how the party communication strategies may have impacted its significant growth. Findings indicate that a strategic approach to communication influenced the tran-

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sition from a civic movement to a formal parliamentary party. PAN's manifesto was discursively constructed to position the movement as trustworthy with high ethical and moral standards. PAN used the possibilities of social media to build a collective identity, from the grassroots, based on specific narratives.

Keywords: Strategic communication, public relations, positioning, civic engagement

RESUMO

A comunicação estratégica tem reclamado progressivamente um papel mais amplo na sociedade e na promoção do capital social, do envolvimento cívico e da democracia. Assim, na teoria e na prática das relações públicas, o ativismo tem recebido muita atenção. No caso português, o PAN enquadra-se nesta preocupação, em consonância com os novos partidos políticos fundados de baixo para cima a partir de movimentos de oposição social compostos por ativistas. Em 2015, o PAN conseguiu entrar no sistema parlamentar português, que tinha permanecido inacessível a novos partidos políticos durante quase 20 anos. Este estudo baseia-se numa metodologia qualitativa, ancorada na análise discursiva dos elementos de posicionamento das relações públicas no manifesto original do movimento de base que deu origem ao PAN. Foi também utilizado um software gerador de nuvens de tags (wordArt.com) para analisar a frequência das palavras e identificar os principais temas do documento. Foram realizadas entrevistas aprofundadas com os responsáveis políticos do PAN para analisar de que forma as estratégias de comunicação do partido podem ter influenciado o seu crescimento significativo. Os resultados indicam que uma abordagem estratégica à comunicação influenciou a transição do PAN de movimento cívico para partido parlamentar formal. O manifesto do PAN foi discursivamente construído para posicionar o movimento como digno de confiança, com elevados padrões éticos e morais. O PAN utilizou as possibilidades dos meios de comunicação social para construir uma identidade coletiva a partir das bases, apoiada em narrativas específicas.

Palavras-chave: comunicação estratégica, relações públicas, posicionamento, envolvimento cívico

1. Introduction

The defense of humanitarian, ecological, and animal causes led to the creation of the Portuguese political party People – Animals – Nature (PAN). The party is in line with the new political parties that are founded “bottom-up by activists in social opposition movements” (Lucardie, 2000 *apud* Silveira & Nina, 2019, p. 84). This party elected its first member of Parliament (MP) to the Portuguese Parliament in 2015. In 2019, PAN elected its first member to the European Parliament (MEP) and strengthened its national representation, electing four MPs to the Portuguese Parliament. However, this phenomenon has not yet been studied from the perspective of strategic communication. The aim of this article is thus to analyze how public relations intentional positioning is present in the rhetoric of the grassroots movement that led to the formation of PAN, and to legitimacy in the public

sphere. Grassroots movements generally involve volunteers rather than paid staff, are smaller in terms of their bureaucracy and decision making, and involve people in their localities claiming for rights on their own behalf (Batliwala, 2002). This article likewise investigates how the communication strategies carried out by the party may have impacted its electoral results and significant growth between 2015 and 2019.

The research questions that we want to answer are: (1) What was the intentional positioning strategy and the main themes underlined in the original PAN manifesto? (2) How did PAN's communication strategies carried out between 2015 and 2019 contribute to its political growth?

This case study also provides clues to understand whether the symbolic discursive positioning of this civic association that has become a political party — with serious public responsibilities after the 2015 and 2019 election — can be related to the political voice conquest of a small movement, without political traditions or connections, with few financial resources and scarce media attention.

2. Strategic communication and civic engagement

The notion of strategic communication presents communication as deliberate, planned, and goal oriented. It also emphasizes that, although strategy and planning take place behind the scenes, “the goal is to communicate in the public sphere” (Holtzhausen & Zerfass, 2014, p. 34). Strategic communication is inevitably associated with the exercise of power in negotiations between different social actors, and the influence of this power in “contemporary society is an undeniable reality” (Kunsch, 2018, p.14).

As one of the areas covered by strategic communication approaches, traditional public relations research focuses on how to make organizations more effective. However, other traditions of thought have emerged in the field of public relations, namely, the sociological-interpretive perspectives (Ihlen, 2007; Ihlen, Van Ruler & Fredriksson, 2009), critical (L'Etang, 2008; Tyma, 2008; Alvesson & Spicer, 2016), postmodern (Holtzhausen, 2000; Smith, 2013) or rhetorical (Hartelius & Browning, 2008; Heath & Frandsen, 2008, Taylor, 2009). These approaches engage in the debate to challenge views focused only on efficiency, and to prove that the connection between strategy and success goes far beyond the purely functional control by management.

In this sense, public relations scholars have progressively claimed the broader role of public relations and strategic communication for society and for fostering social capital, civic engagement, and democracy (Taylor, 2009; Taylor, 2010; Zhang & Abitbol, 2014).

The concept of *social capital* was coined to stress the importance of community involvement in sustaining democracy (Zhang & Seltzer, 2010) and tends to be used to describe the “resources of a community and the degree of shared values and trust within it” (Ihlen, 2005, p. 2). *Civic engagement* involves the individual’s connections and actions to bring social changes and improvements to their communities (Ehrlich, 2000).

Social capital may legitimate, in different ways, social credentials affecting reputation and reinforcing identity and recognition (Lin, 2002). The value attributed to this *symbolic capital* differs between fields (Bourdieu, 1986), and organizational power positions are also attached to other types of capital, which are highly significant, such as knowledge economy and human capital (Ihlen, 2005).

Public Relations is defined as “the management function that establishes and maintains mutually beneficial relationships between an organization and the publics on whom its success or failure depends” (Cutlip *et al.*, 1999, p. 6). Public relations is directly linked to relationship building, and management (Heath, 2001; Ledingham & Bruning, 2000) and the relationships and connections that result from this management can be considered the social capital of an organization, a concept that can better explain the issues of power inherent into civic engagement processes (Ihlen, 2005).

Activism has also received much attention in public relations theory and practice, with a significant increase of authors writing about activism, civil society protests, and ways to subvert mainstream culture from the perspective of public relations (Adi, 2015; Coombs & Holladay, 2012a, 2012b; Curtin, 2016; Curtin, Gaither, & Ciszek, 2016; Heath & Waymer, 2009; Sommerfeldt, Kent & Taylor, 2012; Weaver, 2018).

These studies seek to explain how activists use public relations tools to organize themselves, overcome stereotypes, and generate social changes (Ciszek, 2017; Ali, Boddy, O’leary & Ewart, 2016), and how corporations respond to activism (Demetrious, 2013; Stokes & Rubin, 2010), with some authors arguing that public relations should play the role of activists within organizations (Berger, 2005; Holtzhausen, 2012).

The digital environment has redefined the relationship between political institutions and citizens (Ferreira, Correia & Espírito Santo, 2010; Lilleker, 2014). Earlier tendencies for collective commitment and global vision now depend on personal commitment and interest, with the relevance of voters’ individual opinions impacting more significantly on electoral processes. In an increasingly competitive context of communication, in order to connect with the electorate, communication strategies based only on persuasion are insufficient to obtain more consensus and visibility (Solito & Sorrentino, 2018). On the other hand, democra-

cies are shrinking worldwide; restrictions on freedom of expression are increasing with the growth of autocratization, giving rise to the emergence of pro-democratic protest movements (V-Dem 2020). This scenario and the spread of the coronavirus (Covid-19) and its economic consequences are leading to pessimistic predictions about the end of democracies as we know them (Levitsky & Ziblatt, 2018; Krugman, 2020).

In the context of public relations, the impact of narratives in building collective identity for a specific purpose from what what is being said (in speech, through actions, and through texts of all types). The purpose is to have audiences create the meaning that the producers of the narrative intend for them (Daphi, 2017).

Speech, acts/actions have the “power to shape certain aspects of the social world” (Harré & Van Langenhove, 1999, p. 6) and they are used to achieve a desired positioning in the minds of the publics. This intentional positioning strategy can impact positively the social capital of an organization (James, 2014), leveraging its public legitimacy.

The debate on the health of civil society has focused on the steady decline of “social capital” (Putnam, 1995, p. 664). However, besides Zhang and Seltzer’s (2010) work, in general, there is a lack of scholarly attention on how public relations and strategic communication impact citizens’ social capital and civic engagement.

3. Intentional Positioning in Public Relations

Positioning has emerged as a new theoretical area within the field of psychology. In strategic communication, it is frequently associated with marketing studies, which focus almost exclusively on interrelated components of differentiation strategies in the minds of stakeholders, in order to increase sales of products and services. Within public relations literature, positioning is an under-explored concept, and is limited to corporate and commercial fields (James, 2011).

In politics, traditional marketing positioning models require that political parties in a democratic system can be viewed as analogous to competitive commercial organizations in industrial markets (Butler & Collins, 1996; Baines, Harris & Lewis, 2002). In this sense positioning/repositioning is achieved through the management of the 4Ps of marketing – product, price, place, promotion – focusing on either product differentiation, being the lowest cost product, or being a niche product (Egan, 2007).

Focused on the legitimation process of certain adopted positions, public relations positioning aims to articulate “links between the position taken, the framing of an issue, and the ability to reposition others, thus enabling other story frames to be heard and other actions to be taken” (James, 2011, p. 97). The objective is to

both position an issue and reposition opposing views, even if those with opposing views didn't want to be repositioned.

Political parties and candidates are continually changing their public identities and voters identify “themselves with the discursive constructions of their potential representatives” (Roper, 2005, p. 142). Furthermore, evidence in Roper's (2005, p.145) investigation “strongly proposed that discursive repositioning is a key function of public relations” in that practice and public relations professionals are “discourse technologists.”

Public relations tools allow organizations intentional representation processes in “contested sites in which information is exchanged, meaning constructed and managed, and consensus, consent, and legitimation gained or lost with others.” These deliberate representations are “the purposeful expression of organizational voice(s) and appearance(s) to influence others” (Berger, 1999, p.186).

In this context, positioning in public relations can be defined as the “strategic attempt to stake out and occupy a site of intentional representation in the contested space where meanings are constructed, contested, and reconstructed” (James, 2011, p. 98). Through this definition it is possible to address the relevance of positioning theory to social capital and civic engagement practices.

The works of Melanie James (2010, 2011, 2014) demonstrate how positioning, and, particularly, the positioning theory of Harré and Van Langenhove (1999), offers additional insights into the field of public relations. Positioning is a discursive practice in which the initiator of interaction can impose positions upon others or can refuse positions others assigned to him. These positions are fluid, and they change to cope with different situations (Harré & Van Langenhove, 1999, p. 10).

This idea of fluidity, a point of view present in Bauman (2000) on post-modernity, is one of the most significant aspects of the theory for public relations in fostering social capital and civic engagement: whenever positioning is happening, numerous other forms of positioning will be happening at the same time. Based on the work of Harré and Van Langenhove (1999), Melanie James (2011, pp. 101-105), developed a provisional conceptual framework for intentional positioning in public relations, identifying four main positioning domains: (1) The positioning triangle domain; (2) The positioning type domain; (3) The positioning purpose domain; (4) The positioning goal domain.

Stories and narratives may facilitate the mobilization of activists and strengthen the resonance of their claims within public discourse and institutional politics, helping them to achieve public legitimacy (Daphi, 2017). In this perspective, the “construction of an ideological world view” (Berger, 1999, p.185) that better defines positioning in public relations, represents a critical lens through which we can observe the origins of the movement that led to the formation of PAN.

TABLE 1. A provisional conceptual framework for intentional positioning in public relations, adapted from James (2011, p.105)

POSITIONING TRIANGLE DOMAIN				
Evidence of <i>position</i> , i.e., the entity's point of view of its own and stakeholders' actual and potential positions, e.g., the entity determines the desired position	Evidence of <i>speech-act=action</i> , i.e., language/action used to achieve a specific consequence or outcome. To declare the desired position	Evidence of <i>storyline</i> , i.e., a style of narrative that the entity has chosen to broadcast. The construction of meaning through storylines about the position declared.		
POSITIONING TYPE DOMAIN				
Evidence of situations of <i>deliberate self-positioning</i>	Evidence of situations of <i>forced self-positioning</i>	Evidence of situations of <i>deliberate positioning of others</i>	Evidence of situations of <i>forced positioning of others</i>	
POSITIONING PURPOSE DOMAIN				
Evidence of positioning for <i>ingratiation</i> – entities want to be perceived as likable and agreeable. Such behaviors may lead ingratiators to be perceived as flatterers.	Evidence of positioning for <i>intimidation</i> – entities want to be seen as strong and threatening, and emphasize their ability to bring about negative consequences to others. Entities that intimidate run the risk of appearing bossy, or if they are unable to enforce negative consequences, as ineffectual.	Evidence of positioning for <i>self-promotion</i> – entities that use self-promotion want to be seen as competent, and emphasize abilities and accomplishments. However, entities who self-promote may be viewed as conceited, or, should claims of competence be unsubstantiated, as fraudulent.	Evidence of positioning for <i>exemplification</i> – entities who use exemplification go above and beyond the normal call of duty to appear dedicated, upstanding, and highly moral. However, if exemplifiers fail to live up to these standards, others may perceive them as hypocritical.	Evidence of positioning for <i>supplication</i> – indicative adjectives that tap into supplication and include weakness and dependence.
POSITIONING GOAL DOMAIN				
Evidence of intended positioning related to a desire to achieve a specific goal				

4. From grassroots movement to the Parliament

PAN's history begins in 2006 with the foundation of *DNA – Associação Desenvolvimento Natura* – that mobilized animal rights' defenders around a petition against the use of real furs in fashion. This petition obtained more than 10,000 signatures in two months, revealing the strong civil society empathy with the sub-

ject. However, the usual challenges to organizations that emerge from civil society, such as the lack of funding and little media exposure, demonstrated that the association's goals could only be achieved with the formation of a political party that managed to bring the issues to a public debate level. In this sense, four activists, also linked to other associations, organized themselves in order to deliver to the Constitutional Court in December 2009 9,000 signatures that made it possible to transform the mobilization already existing in different movements and civil society associations into a political force, with the aim of placing animal rights into the national political agenda (Silveira & Nina, 2019, p. 81).

The origin of PAN (formally legalized in 2011) is in line with the new political parties that are founded “bottom-up by activists in social opposition movements” (Lucardie, 2000 *apud* Silveira & Nina, 2019, p. 84). The combination of humanitarian, ecological, and animal causes has broadened the party's spectrum of action since its initial designation, which was “Party of the Animals.” The party came to the conclusion early that its goals — “change minds, set the environmentalist and animal causes on the public agenda and change the laws” — could only be achieved with a message that included broader social and environmental topics (Silveira & Nina, 2019, p. 85).

Despite not having elected any deputies in the first legislative elections to which it stood, just four months after its legal formalization in January 2011, the high adhesion that PAN obtained was surprising. As Susana Rogeiro Nina (Silveira & Nina, 2019, p. 85) explains, apart from being a very new party “the disenchantment of the Portuguese with politics in general, and political parties, in particular, was notorious.” However, even so, the results of PAN in these elections allowed it to become the seventh national political force.

The memorable legislative elections of 2015 marked a turning point in the Portuguese political party system with the election of André Silva, an unknown civil engineer with no history of political party connections, as Member of Parliament for PAN. For the first time in 16 years, a new party entered the parliamentary arena. Portugal has a proportional electoral system. The distribution of mandates is made proportionally (Hondt Method) in relation to the number of votes in each party (Carreira, 2019, p. 180). It brought “a major innovation to one of Western Europe's most stable party systems” (Silveira & Nina, 2019, p. 104).

At the 5th PAN Congress that took place in Lisbon on January 7th, 2017, the ideological premises of the party were reaffirmed: to eliminate anthropocentrism, and promote the principle of non-violence in all its forms, asserting itself as a transformer of the social, cultural, and economic patterns of the country, with a “post-left-right” political position that opposes the current economic model (André Silva: “As forças políticas percebem que o PAN já conta”, *Público*, June 1st,

2019). In the 2017 municipal/local elections, PAN competed autonomously, without a supporting coalition with other parties, and elected 27 local MPs.

Two years later, on May 26th, 2019, Francisco Guerreiro, the party's communications coordinator and parliamentary adviser, was elected to the European Parliament, and, in the legislative elections of October 6th, 2019, the party strengthened its position in the national Parliament with the election of four Members of Parliament (MPs).

5. Methodology

Initially, we applied the framework for intentional positioning in public relations (James, 2011) to analyze the original PAN manifesto. The manifesto was written by four activists in May 2009 (before the legal formation of the political party) and, until today, remains the same document, available to the public. We choose to analyze specifically this document because it represents the origins of the movement that led to the formation of political party PAN, and it reflects precisely a more political inexperienced approach to the defense of causes typical of grassroots movements and associations.

By identifying the four main positioning domains within the original PAN manifesto, we better understand the positioning efforts of a grassroots movement, regarding the rights and duties which are jointly constituted through discursive practices (Harré & Van Langenhove, 1999). This analysis also gives us clues to understand whether the original positioning can be related to the political voice conquest of a small movement, without political traditions or connections, with few financial resources, and scarce media attention.

To reinforce this discursive analysis, a tag cloud-generating software (WordArt.com) was used to examine word frequency and identify the main themes of the manifesto. A tag cloud allows a visual notion of the key terms in a piece of writing. Each cloud visually represents the number of times a writer uses certain words in a piece of text. The words are listed alphabetically and weighted to allow easy identification of the use frequency for each key word. The larger the font size, the more frequent the key word. In this sense, creating a tag cloud of an existing document can produce simple information about its main themes and rhetorical techniques (DePaolo & Wilkinson, 2013; Suleiman & Salim, 2014; DeNoyelles & Reyes-Foster, 2015). This is a new and recent methodology that is being used in different scientific areas to analyze textual data, revealing textual messages in a pictorial form (Gill & Griffin, 2010).

Thereafter, in December 2019, we conducted in-depth interviews, approximately one hour each, with the politicians who were most directly involved in defining the strategies that marked the rise of PAN between 2015 and 2019. They were André Silva, the main public figure and PAN Member of the Portuguese

Parliament since 2015, and Francisco Guerreiro, who was elected a PAN Member of the European Parliament in 2019 and was the party's Communication Coordinator since 2014. Interviews were conducted in Portuguese. Content has been translated into English with the permission of the interviewees.

The method applied to analyze the interviews was thematic content analysis (Neuendorf, 2016), which considers the goal of examining three central variables (here separated into subcategories), outlined from the previous literature review of the topic: (1) Strategic communication and social change; (2) Differentiating choices in strategic communication; (3) Articulation between traditional and new media.

The research questions to answer were: (1) What was the intentional positioning strategy and the main themes underlined in the original PAN manifesto? (2) How did PAN's communication strategies carried out between 2015 and 2019 contribute to its political growth?

6. Analysis

As we can see in Table 2, evidence for intentional positioning in public relations was found in the four domains identified and analyzed in the original 2009 PAN manifesto.

TABLE 2. Analysis of intentional positioning in public relations (James, 2011) in the Manifesto of the movement that originated PAN

POSITIONING TRIANGLE DOMAIN		
<p>Evidence of position – PAN's desired position:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. The Party assumes "to be at the service of the development of the human being, in the practice of a new mental, ethical and civilizational paradigm". 2. The Party "thus supports all initiatives aimed at improving the living conditions of human beings, in harmony with nature and other species". 	<p>Evidence of speech-act-action: action used to achieve a specific consequence or outcome:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. The Party "will particularly support and promote actions aimed at increasing human awareness and sensitivity regarding the evident fact that all sensitive beings equally desire happiness and well-being and do not wish to suffer". 	<p>Evidence of storyline, i.e., a style of narrative the movement that originated PAN has chosen to broadcast:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Starts presenting the negative impacts of human activity on nature, on humans, and animals: "Respect for life is not yet sufficiently developed in beings"; "This has led and still leads to enormous brutality and neglect to regulate human behavior". 2. Also presents the positive changes aimed for by the party: "it is of great importance that people acknowledge the ecological limit"; "Respect for the physical and mental integrity of all kinds of life on earth is the basis for a more peaceful relationship among humans and with animals and nature in general". <p>The manifesto's narrative is structured in a way that emotionally impacts readers/ voters' perceptions.</p>

POSITIONING TYPE DOMAIN

Evidence of situations of deliberate self-positioning “The Universal Declaration of Human Rights, the Declaration of Animal Rights and the Earth Charter, are practical starting points for how human beings can relate with other humans, animals and nature. This starting point is used in the Party for Animals and Nature’s electoral program”.	We found no evidence of forced self-positioning in the manifesto	Evidence of situations of deliberate positioning of others: “Future generations will be confronted more with the consequence (of exploiting nature) than the current generation.”	Evidence of situations of forced positioning of others “The use of animals for non-vital human interests can be repressed and banned” and “it is morally unacceptable that people exploit nature so intensely”.
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POSITIONING PURPOSE DOMAIN

We found no evidence of positioning for ingratiation	We found no evidence of positioning for intimidation	We found no evidence of positioning for self-promotion	Evidence of positioning for exemplification : “alternatives to testing with animals and animal products should be applied; The Party “will particularly support and promote actions aimed at increasing human awareness and sensitivity”; The Party “assumes to be at the service of the development of the human being, in the practice of a new mental, ethical and civilizational paradigm.”	We found no evidence of positioning for supplication
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POSITIONING GOAL DOMAIN

To achieve social change and shift to a new civilizational paradigm based on a solid relationship and respect for all forms of life on the planet

6.1 Word frequency analysis

The observation of the word frequency in PAN’s original manifesto clarifies the main themes and topics present in the ideological position of the grassroots movement that led to the formation of the political party.

The words that were most frequently repeated in the original manifesto of the grassroots movement that originated PAN are, by this order: “animals” – repeated 31 times, “human” (21), “being” (19), “life” (14), “form” (14), “nature” (12). We can also observe, with a lower number of repetitions, the utilization of words like “earth” (8); “respect” (7) “use” (7) and “species” (6).



FIGURE 1. Examination of word frequency and identification of the main themes of PAN's original manifesto (The word count was made from the original text in Portuguese, to avoid possible changes in meaning resulting from the full translation of the manifesto document).

7. Interviews

7.1 Strategic communication and social change

We have grouped questions and answers into three subcategories in order to understand the path followed by the party concerning strategic communication approaches, resources management, and the relation between strategic communication, social change, and civic participation.

After changes in the party leadership in 2014, “a more professional approach to communication was set as a priority” by André Silva (AS) and Francisco Guerreiro (FG). As FG explained, an external communication/Public Relations agency was hired before the 2015 elections, to “support in managing media relations, issues’ priority, storytelling, graphic design, and public image management.” Regarding

Resource Management, the public funding plays a critical role in the financing of the party, and this enables PAN, according to Francisco Guerreiro, “to be more independent of the various interests” (FG). The total budget for the legislative elections of 2015 (before parliamentary representation) was 30,000.00 Euros, so “the fee with the PR agency was widely negotiated appealing for the civic interest of this challenge” (AS). “The voluntarism and motivation of the people who were involved in the campaigns were crucial,” and “informal connections, creativity, and imagination were greatly stimulated making the most of social media” (FG). The relevance of strategic communication for *social change and civic participation* is understood as the need to deeply analyze “what interests are we serving and what impacts these interests have on society” because “communication, especially in politics, is very much aligned with political interests of business sectors” (FG). That requires a “lot of closeness to civil society, actively listening to their expectations and needs” (AS), and the “messages conveyed by citizens must materialize into concrete actions” (FG).

7.2 Differentiating choices in strategic communication

The three subcategories analyzed were: goal setting and strategic issues; construction, and deconstruction of meanings; and interaction with the public.

Because PAN had an inexperienced team, “initially the goal setting was organic and common sense” (FG). In this way, “the communication goals followed the political ones, very aligned also with the need for internal organization” (AS). The prioritization of issues (Botan & Taylor, 2004:655) was made “based on the idea that a substantial part of society did not feel represented in parliament and Portuguese politics” (AS) and the priority of PAN was “to bring environmental and biodiversity protection to the center of the political debate” (FG).

Concerning *construction and deconstruction of meaning*, the two interviewees agree that PAN’s progressive message does not reach the general Portuguese population, but “as we present a new social, cultural, and economic paradigm, other barriers begin to fall” (FG). “There are a lot of blockages, power fights, misrepresentation, false news, and counter-information/rumors, so the speech had to be more sophisticated without losing authenticity and we had to know well the arguments of our critics to build founded counter-argument discourses” (AS). PAN’s values and communicative positioning in the public space were well defined as “we favor empathy and non-violence” (FG), and PAN politicians are very concerned about consistency. Their lifestyle must be in line with what they publicly advocate (sustainable and conscious consumer practices). Social media constitute the main channels for informal interaction with different publics. André Silva (AS) is on Instagram and Facebook, and Francisco Guerreiro (FG) on Instagram, Twitter, and

Facebook. Both manage their social media activity. Besides the strong presence in online social networks, they also “use petitions, participation in marches and protests and joining other collective movements” to mobilize society (FG).

7.3 Articulation between traditional and new media

The three subcategories analyzed for the answers are *differences in communication approaches*, *online engagement*, and *online content management*.

Traditional media focus on “reporting irregularities and scandals [and this] makes it difficult to mark the agenda for the positive” (FG). “We have to deal with elitism, prejudice, and an increasingly obsolete view of reality by a significant part of the Portuguese press” (AS). The interviewees agree that traditional media have a fundamental role in filtering information, securing information credibility, and honoring ethical codes. On the other hand, social media “allow a democratization of information, a proximity contact, and they are sources of information for journalists too,” but “they also brought greater risks and uncertainties regarding the truth of what is being said” (FG). The fact that PAN was in Parliament has forced other “traditional political forces and traditional media to approach issues that were considered secondary, mainly related to climate change, consumption habits, and animal rights,” and that provoked a legitimization of these causes in the public space (AS).

Concerning *online engagement*, PAN is institutionally on Facebook, Instagram, Twitter, and Youtube. On September 14th, 2015 (before elections), the party’s Facebook profile was followed by 77,000; on January 14th, 2020 (after 2019 elections), the number increased to 162,003. “Facebook guarantees more interaction in Portugal; in the European Parliament, we use Twitter more” (FG). In December 2018, a Portuguese economic newspaper title was as follows: “If Facebook likes were taken into account PAN would be Government” (in Portuguese: “Se os ‘likes’ do Facebook contassem o PAN era Governo”). André Silva agrees that “social media is a fundamental tool to give voice to contemporary activists” and mentions Greta Thunberg as an example. They have been determinant in PAN’s political path, but to reach larger audiences, traditional media, mainly television news, is fundamental. Francisco Guerreiro points out that “whether or not technology can positively or negatively influence a system has to do with how people use it”. “PAN’s website was renewed in 2019, since it was one of the main information sources for citizens and journalists. PAN’s rhetoric in all its online interactions is informal and proximity based. “We also looked for and got the support of online influencers (artists, activists from other movements, students) during and between political campaigns in the form of video advocacy, posts, and sharing of PAN online contents” (FG).

In their *online content management*, PAN's members seek to publish stories based on credible sources using quality videos and photos. They recognize that the so-called “fake news weakens people and pose a serious threat to informed democratic participation (AS)”. But PAN understood too, as Francisco Guerreiro explained, that human beings respond to emotions, and PAN tried to differentiate itself from the offensive and hostile traditional political battles by incorporating overall positivity, and humanizing online interactions with emotional and significant storytelling. It is possible to read on PAN's Facebook page (About-Story, January 2020) statements like: “We defend a free, fair, and inclusive society, and a democracy based on participation, ethics, consensus, respect, and equality”. The rejection of violence, intolerance, and inappropriate language is expressed in the conditions of participation on PAN's online forums, and “positive responses are privileged by encouraging what we are for and not so much what we are against” (FG).

8. Discussion

The intentional positioning strategy revealed in the original 2009 PAN manifesto is a call for change and action, discursively constructed to position the party as trustworthy with high ethical and moral standards. The decisions as to the categorization of these positioning elements were constructed on the subjective textual analysis, and we recognize that this is a limitation of this study. From a public relations perspective this method, nevertheless, allows a more comprehensive approach to ideological positioning than the marketing models could eventually provide (more focused on the image perceived by target audiences and competitiveness in the market for ideas).

Findings reveal that the ideological positioning elements of the movement that originated PAN are in line with the trajectories of movement-born parties that integrate the changes of both communication and political new conditions (brought by the digital environment) to create formal organizations and advance their goals (Kitschelt, 2006). Answering the first research question: PAN positions itself as the defender of causes and themes like “animals”, “life”, “human” and “nature”, possible to confirm through the word frequency analysis. The original movement manifesto allows them to position in relation to other parties that approach socio-economic issues in the traditional left-right way, expanding their possibilities to get voters from other parties. The discursive combination of the four positioning domains made it possible for the activists that created PAN to “credibly maintain the image of the political ‘outsider’ in order to retain the loyalty of their core sympathizers” (Tossutti, 1996), while pursuing larger, more diverse, electoral constituencies.

PAN's "post-left-right" ideological positioning, in opposition to the current economic model, presents a rhetoric that questions the primacy of human beings over animals and nature. This positioning meets the ethical dilemmas of a part of society, especially young people, demanding authenticity and awareness in public life (Melé, 2018), in a context in which the Portuguese citizens do not feel represented nor enlightened, in relation to the debates in the parliament and the political problems of the country (Teixeira, 2018, pp. 73-92).

Regarding the second research question, PAN respondents perceive strategic communication as an opportunity to invest in a professional approach to communication before electoral periods, creating meaning through "informal connections" and "making the most of social media". In external relations, mainly grounded in interaction on social networks, they work on an image based in consistency and proximity with publics, in order to achieve credibility, reinforcing the identity of the organization through several differentiation approaches (Spínola, 2014).

From the point of view of online political relations management (Karlsson, Clerwall & Buskvist, 2013), PAN has sought to achieve its public legitimacy by creating a strong social support base over time, bringing issues that were considered niche or secondary to the public debate. The party favored a nonviolent contentious rhetoric, "building social capital in the digital age of civic engagement" (Mandarano, Meenar & Steins, 2010, p. 123), based on the idea that citizens, especially the younger ones, are tired of the traditional conflicts between left and right, and sterile political and personal attacks.

Grounded in post-materialist values (value orientation that emphasizes self-expression and quality of life over economic and physical security, (Encyclopedia Britannica, 2016), the party succeeded in spreading its message and impacting society by paying close attention to the characteristics of its supporters and militants: young individuals (25-45 years), especially women, who grew up in a post-materialist, highly educated, politically informed sphere, and willing to participate in new social movements, such as the ecologist. The communication approaches that have impacted the electoral results are related to the use of democratic tools to mobilize society and the strong presence in online social networks, both critical aspects that PAN used to overcome its main difficulties: very little or no media attention by the traditional press and small financial resources. The use of petitions that, with a vast online support network, quickly gain visibility, participation in marches and protests, and joining other collective movements. These solutions allowed the party to associate with the claims of an unhappy youth with the lack of solutions by traditional parties, but highly mobilized and motivated to

change the *status quo* (Silveira & Nina, 2019, pp. 93-95), and ready to launch candidates unknown in the Portuguese political landscape.

9. Conclusion

PAN's case study represents a way of looking at how the conceptual framework for intentional positioning in public relations may be used for the observation of civic dynamics and ideological positioning. The results and analysis allow contextualization on the strategic communication approaches that were relevant for the emergence and development of the so-called movement parties at the boundary of institutional and non-institutional politics.

Focused on the legitimation process of certain adopted position, public relations positioning was a useful communication framework to analyze the path of PAN from a grassroots movement to a party with parliamentary representation. The original narratives and positions were the basis for their achievement of legitimacy in the public sphere. This legitimacy was confirmed at the polls, by the party's results at different election times, with a significant increase in national representation and in the European Parliament.

Within the framework of this case study activists appear as producers of strategic communication for social change. This confirms the findings of Ciszek (2017), that activism and public relations are not antagonistic but occupy a fluid space influenced by cultural and economic forces. Nevertheless, further research is needed, not only regarding positioning in public relations, but on the broader role of public relations and strategic communication in society, and in fostering social capital, civic engagement, and democracy.

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