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**Mestrado em Gestão de Informação**  
Master Program in Information Management

**POLITICAL MARKETING**

IMPACT OF SOCIAL MEDIA ON VOTING BEHAVIOR

Joana Morais Folgado

Dissertation presented as partial requirement for obtaining  
the Master's degree in Information Management, with  
specialization in Marketing Intelligence

NOVA Information Management School  
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## **ABSTRACT**

Social media has become part of our daily routine. We scroll from the moment we wake up until we go to sleep, and we are overloaded with information on the most diverse subjects. Political parties are aware and are building election campaigns on political propaganda on every social media. Given the fact that we are exposed to massive amounts of information on our social media accounts every day, it becomes important to discover if this new type of advertisement is helping political candidates, by filling citizens' feeds with news, quotes and marketing interventions, to gather more votes. This study aims to investigate the impact of social media on voting behavior, especially if people feel more engaged with political parties who are more present on social media. In order to reach better conclusions, an experimental research was conducted with 101 social media users, with age above 18. For the analysis, we used SPSS 27.0. The results showed a significant positive relationship between social media and voting behavior, demonstrating that citizens' who vote regularly are in some way influenced not only by the things candidates posts online, but also by the millions of opinions spread every day on influencers' accounts. Given this, we can say that political parties can benefit from a good political propaganda on social media - people are getting more and more interested in politics, when it's appealing.

## **KEYWORDS**

Voting Behavior; Political Marketing; Social Media; Election Campaign; Opinion Leaders

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## **LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS AND ACRONYMS**

<b>SM</b>	Social Media
<b>EU</b>	European Union
<b>CCI</b>	Centro Comum de Investigação
<b>OL</b>	Opinion Leaders
<b>PI</b>	Political Interest
<b>PPSM</b>	Political Propaganda on Social Media

# 1. INTRODUCTION

What determines the way people vote? Are they influenced by the several appeals on social media? These questions have been studied for decades, through different angles. Nowadays, almost every single person has access to the internet and, consequently, are social media (SM) users. We spend most of our time on social networks, it is estimated that Portuguese people spend an average of 2 hours per day on their phones, according to a study made in 2020 by *Centro Comum de Investigação*.

Social media is considered one of the primary sources of information (Piyanthissa & Ratnayake, 2019), attracting all generations, and it can even be considered a “leading channel for ideologies and public opinion” (Wani & Alone, 2014). If used correctly, candidates can use social media platforms to disclose information to the population, and engage with them, in order to persuade and make them feel part of what the political party believes, as a way of political propaganda (Stieglitz, & Dang-Xuan, 2012).

When online, anyone that has an opinion can easily share it with the world. Aware of that, many brands hire the so called “influencers” to promote their products and services. As it is with businesses, so it is with politics, social media can increase the exposure to political information and personal opinion expressed by family and friends, but also by influencers and opinion leaders (Keating & Melis, 2017).

These variables mentioned above can affect voting behavior, among others, such as candidate image, issues and policies or religious beliefs.

This dissertation aims to study the impact of social media on voting behavior, applied especially in the Portuguese context. One of the objectives of this research is to help parties to recognize how important political propaganda on social media is. In order to have a fully understanding on this topic, the following research questions and respective hypotheses were formalized to this thesis:

1. Do Portuguese with higher levels of interest and knowledge in politics are more likely to vote?

- H1: Interest in politics have an impact on how voters behave.

2. Does age affect the way people vote? Are young generation less likely to vote?

- H2: Individuals’ age can impact their voting behavior.

3. Can the political campaign on social media have an impact on voting behavior?

- H3: A good political propaganda on Social Media has a positive impact on voting behavior

4. Are Portuguese citizens impacted by the social media influencers opinions and ideals shared online?

- H4: Opinion leaders positively impact voting behavior

For this purpose, this study conducted a questionnaire via online platforms. It reached an audience of 101 Portuguese citizens, social media users and all of them voted at least once for a Portuguese election. This survey allowed to draw conclusion about the voting behavior, in the country of Portugal. Besides that, it provides a guideline for future research about this topic or a similar one.



## **2. LITERATURE REVIEW**

### **2.1. POLITICAL MARKETING**

The concept of political marketing begins a long time ago, since Ancient Greece - where the ethics of persuasion were fundamental to democracy. Research on this area has been discussed by scholars throughout the years and is increasing over the course of history (O’Cass, 1996), however this terminology is still relatively new. As marketing helps businesses to be more profitable, it can be an advantage in the political sphere to get better results (Alam & Riva, 2019). Thus, the purpose of political marketing is to apply marketing concepts to the politics field (Milewicz & Milewicz, 2014) and is defined as the use of marketing techniques to influence the voters’ decision in political issues (Alam & Riva, 2019).

Some scholars treat political marketing as being something that politicians use to make them relevant to the electors (Lock & Harris, 1996), however other argue that both politicians and electors can benefit from that (O’Cass, 1996). Nielsen (2012) clarifies political marketing strategy as being “the identification of a political entity’s purpose and the scheme through which that purpose will be achieved”, since it’s the “most valuable asset for a candidate”.

Political parties don’t have to worry only about the inherent party organization to achieve people’s votes. Nowadays, the success of a political party on a certain election relies mostly on how effective their marketing communication tools are (Alam & Riva, 2019). Given the present context of lack of trust in politicians (Sepúlveda, 2000), the importance of communicating their ideas to the elector in an appealing way arises even more. And some political parties are actually following this “guideline”. If we take the Portuguese example into consideration, there are some parties that intervene using outdoors and posts on their social media accounts to engage in a “funnier” and improvised way.

Political parties want the citizens to know the differences between them and the other candidates and promote themselves, and the main reason why they use these marketing techniques is because they know it can change preferences and, consequently, voting behavior in their favor (French & Smith, 2010).

### **2.2. VOTING BEHAVIOR**

Since ages, researchers try to explain what determines the consumer behavior, - and consequently the voter behavior in electoral context. By the time, they don’t see significant differences between consumer behavior and voting behavior, as it seems to exist similar psychological and behavioral patterns that lead both voting and buying (Crosby & Taylor, 1983).

In 1985, Newman and Sheth made a study to clarify the voter behavior at the time, by using a primary voting behavior model (Sheth, 1975). The importance is understood since a significant part of political marketing consists of politics spending money on promoting themselves in a pursue of voter’s time and attention. This model pointed the seven distinct domains that drive the voter’s behavior, which are *Issues and Policies*, *Emotional Feelings*, *Candidate Image*, *Current Events*, *Personal Events*, *Social Imagery* and *Epistemic Issues* (Figure 1).

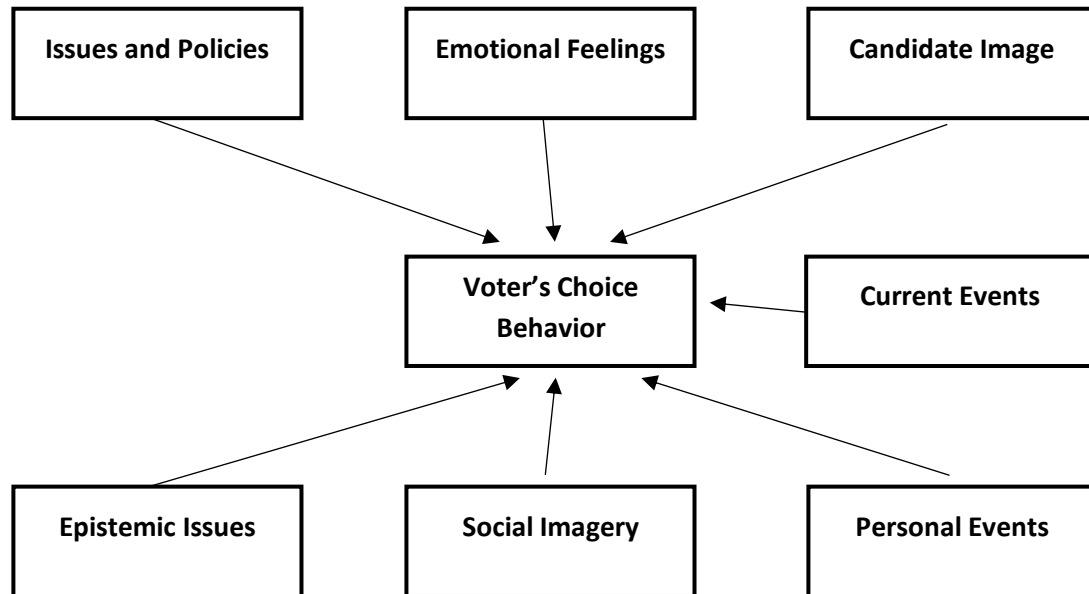


Figure 1 - Primary Voting Behavior (Newman & Sheth, 1985)

However, the authors themselves agreed that this model presented some limitations, as of the difficulty of assessing beliefs (Newman & Sheth, 1985).

Throughout the years, the criticisms piled up due to the gaps present in the Primary Voting Behavior. Many scholars empathized some limitations of this model and proposed some updates to that. One of the most glaring errors is the fact that, in this model, it's not taken into consideration factors such as opinion leaders or media influence. To fill this gap, and integrating various models of previous research works, Farrag and Shamma (2013) proposed another model, this one containing *Religious Beliefs*, *Social Pressure* (friends and family) and *Media Influence* (Morar & ., 2015) (Figure 2).

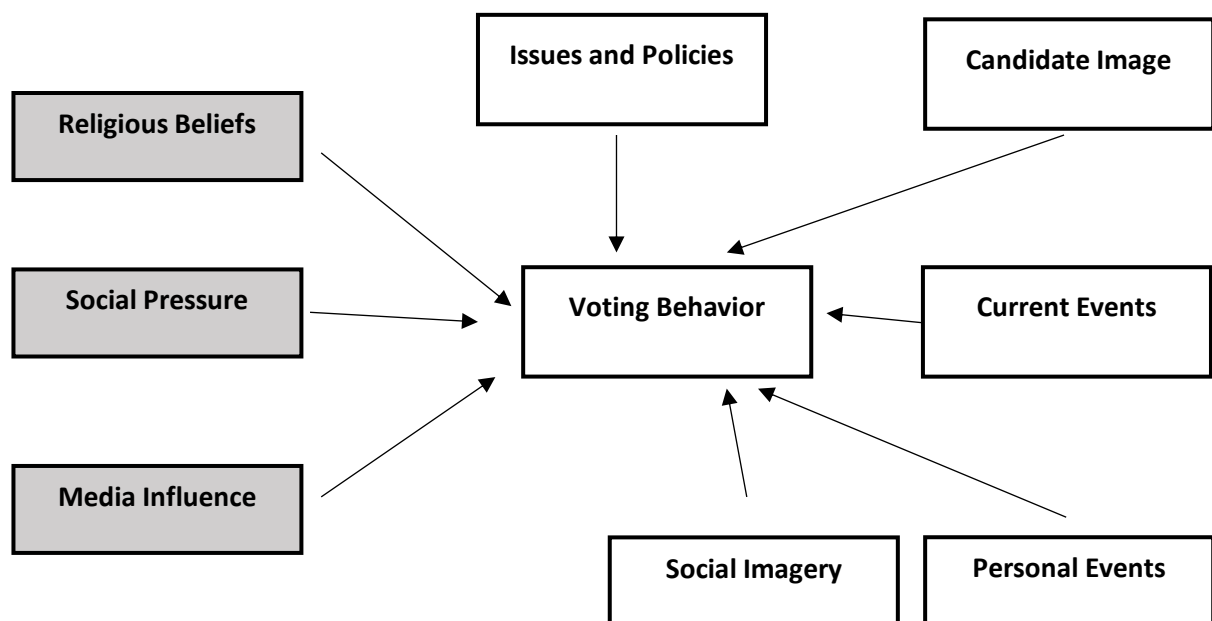


Figure 2 - A new Voting Behavior Model (Farrag and Shamma, 2013)

The model proposed by Farrag and Shamma excluded two variables previously included in the Primary Voting Behavior - Emotional Feelings and Epistemic Issues -, because they configure subjectivity to the model, and are also difficult concepts to understand for most citizens. In what concerns the addition of the three variables, it's not new that the opinion of family and friends has a big influence in our vision regarding many subjects, and politics is not an exception. Furthermore, media itself and opinion leaders, as everyone in the internet able to share their opinion can reach a lot of people, also have a huge impact on voters' perception and, consequently, on how they behave when it comes to voting.

But the discussion doesn't remain only on these topics. Political interest and knowledge about political concepts also takes a part on this matter (Gil de Zúñiga & Diehl, 2019). Delli Carpini and Keeter (1996) refer that individuals with higher knowledge about politics tend to participate more in elections. An informed citizen is able to easier gather reliable information, enabling a better understanding of the facts and to identify candidates who match with their political preference (Carmines and Stimson, 1980). In this sense, we are able to formulate the first research hypotheses in this study:

H1: Interest in politics have an impact on how voters behave.

Research made by the scholars Dermody and Hanmer-Lloyd (2005) showed evidence that young people are less engaged with politics, and tend to adopt a non-voting behavior ever since they are eligible to. For the 1997 British election, there's evidence that 43% of the age group of 18-24 year old didn't vote, and this percentage increased to 63% in 2005 elections (Mori, 2005). But this behavior isn't related just to the British elections. A Portuguese study affirms that young people are mostly averse to voting, contributing especially to abstention rate (Cancela & Vicente, 2019). However, some scholars have tried to remove the negative connotation given to younger people, since there's proof that younger generations have a greater tendency to sign petitions and discuss politics online, showing a more critical posture to the reality that surrounds them (Norris, 2002; Dalton, 2014; Cancela & Vicente, 2019). The objective of this dissertation is also to understand if there's any relationship between voting behavior and social media perception, having age as moderator. The second hypotheses formulated to study is then:

H2: Young generation are less impacted to vote.

### **2.3. SOCIAL MEDIA**

The way people communicate in these days is different from previous years. But isn't just communication that has changed. Nowadays, with the emergence of social networks, citizens gather information of all types of topics through the internet. On social media, everyone can easily share their opinions and influence other (Mangold & Fauld, 2009).

Powell (2009) defined Social Media (SM) platforms as networking sites where "individuals can create a personal profile, share photos, images and text with each other", consisting of one the primary sources of information (Piyanthissa & Ratnayake, 2019). These platforms occupy a large part of our day. According to a study made by *Centro Comum de Investigação (CCI)*, in 2020 48% of European Union (EU) used social media website every or almost every day. Portuguese people spent around 129 minutes, per day, on social media - more than two hours. Portugal is the fifth EU country with greater use of these platform. Such a higher usage usually leads to misinformation, that can have a negative impact on the politics field.

Many platforms are used nowadays by candidates to promote themselves. In Portugal, the most common social media platforms are Facebook, Instagram and Twitter, where candidates and political parties post the proposals for the mandate, quotes from interviews and, a phenomenon that is rising a few years from now, posts with jokes about oppositions' actions as marketing interventions. An example of this phenomenon and the engagement created with the followers is posts from the Portuguese political party *Iniciativa Liberal*, especially on their Instagram account. A post reporting a story about the party from a local newspaper had 1990 likes, whilst a post where the political party makes a reference about opposition, using some humor and improvised marketing intervention, had 7439 likes - a difference of more than 5000 likes (Figure 3).

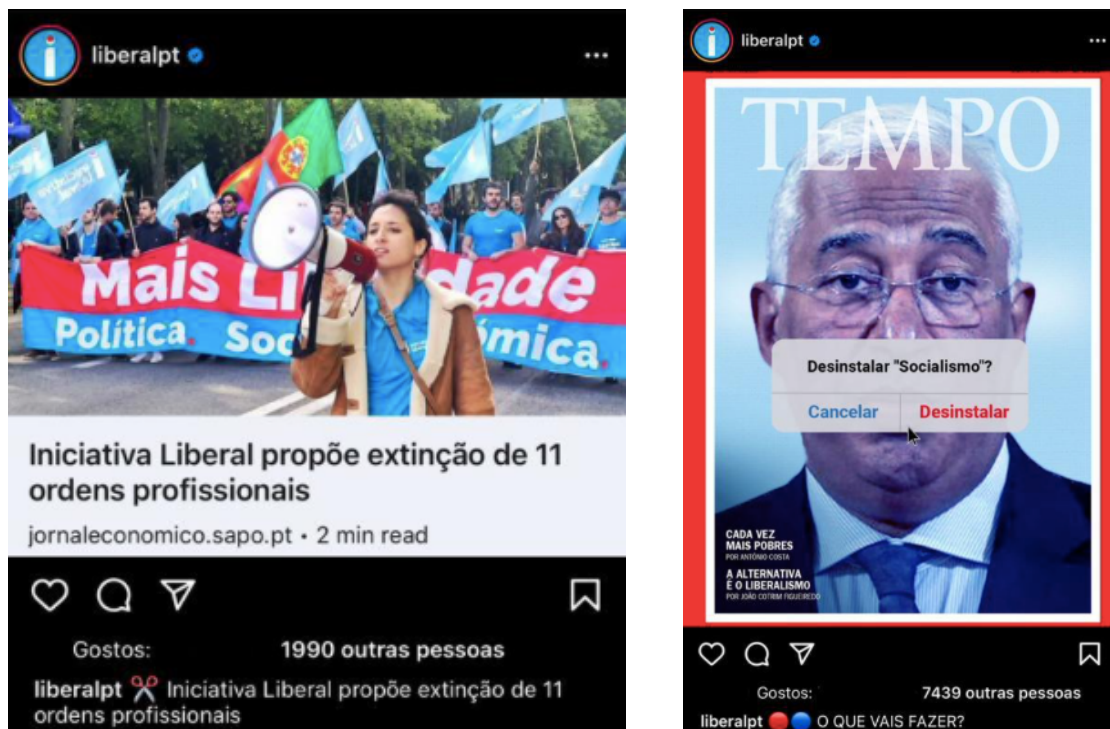


Figure 3 - Instagram posts @liberalpt

This specific example shows the investment that candidates and political parties have been making to create better political propaganda, to engage with a higher percentage of possible voters on favor.

The third hypotheses to be studied is:

H3: A good political propaganda on Social Media has a positive impact on voting behavior.

### 2.3.1. Opinion Leaders

Everyone that spends some time on the internet nowadays - and even those that are not interested in SM, but have access to the most traditional ways of communication, as television and radio - is familiar with the concept of *influencers*. The truth is that term is everywhere. Influencers were basically “born” in social media platforms. Despite the various definitions, we can define an influencer as someone who “has a constantly growing reputation online and communicates with his/her followers via social media platforms” (Childers et al., 2019; Khamis et al., 2016). Even though the recognition of the specific term

of an influencer is a quite recent topic, the concept of opinion leader was introduced by Katz in 1955, presenting a definition like that.

The main role of influencers is to bridge the gap between people and brands they trust and support. They promote products and services through their social media accounts, leading their followers to engage and, at the final stage and main goal, buy those products/services.

But this influence doesn't stand only for products or services. Opinion leaders play an important role also when it comes to politics, since they can influence their followers to engage with their opinion and ideals (Eirinaki, Pisal, & Singh, 2012; Oliveira et al., 2017). For this reason, the fourth and last research hypotheses for this study is:

H4: Opinion leaders positively impact voting behavior.

### 3. METHODOLOGY

The ultimate goal for this research topic is to understand which factors can influence how voters behave, especially in which measure the participation of political parties on social media affects voting behavior in electoral period.

With the previously written hypotheses, a conceptual model was developed (Figure 4). This model aims to understand how the independent variables - political participation on social media, opinion leaders and political interest - will affect the dependent variable - voting behavior. We will also study age, as a moderator factor.

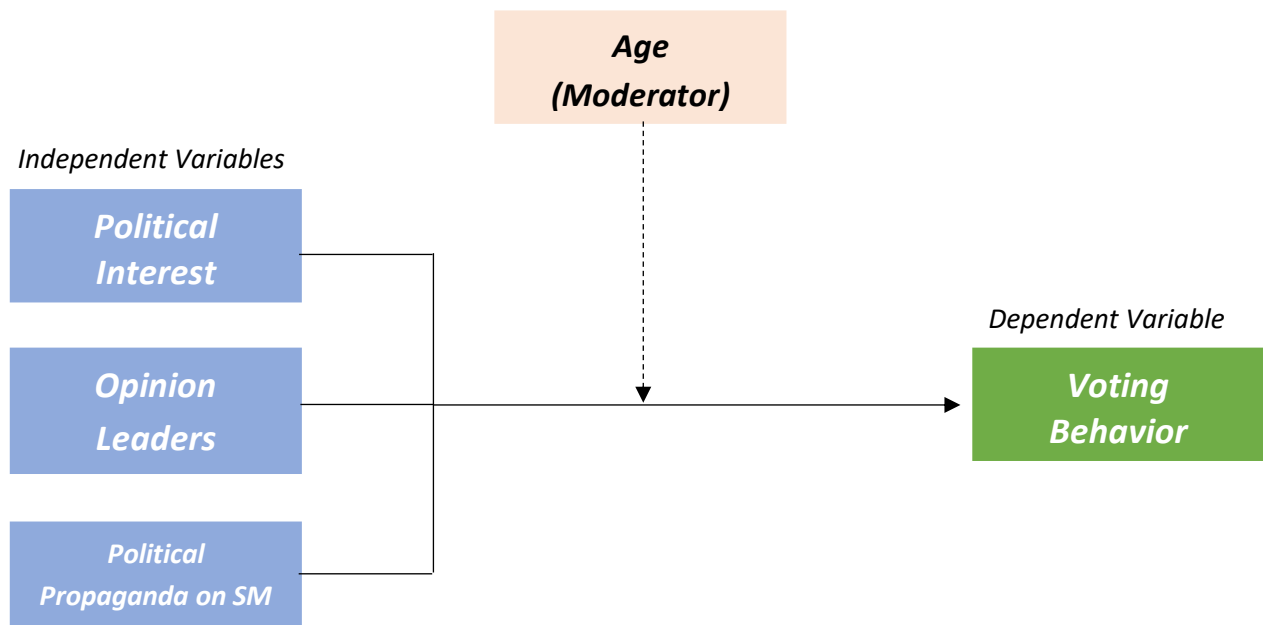


Figure 4 - Conceptual Model

In order to effectively answer to our research question, we firstly used data from secondary resources - we collected knowledge about this topic through studies made in journal articles and publications. This gave us the opportunity to give a context to this research problem and to formalize hypotheses to analyze.

After assembling all the hypotheses we want to study, a quantitative research was done with the aim of understanding how social media influences voting behavior. At this stage, a descriptive analysis was organized by elaborating a questionnaire. Quantitative research will help understand the intentions and predict possible political outcomes (Dean, 2004). Also, this type of data is more accurate to comprehend which factors have more importance in decision making process. After the data collection is concluded, it's necessary to analyze the data through statistical programs, in order to make correlations between hypotheses and dependent and independent variables.

The survey was conducted through an online platform and shared via social media, to ensure we reach only the sample we want - social media users. It was also conducted in Portuguese, since the objective

is to draw conclusions from the Portuguese population. The questionnaire can be found in Appendix A, where the questions are translated to English.

This questionnaire was divided into 3 distinct parts. The first part had the intent to have a demographic perspective of the sample, where it was asked for the participants to deliver personal information about gender, age and studies. This part was especially helpful to understand the if there are differences between younger generations and older generations, in terms of how they vote and what impacts their decisions. For the second part, we tried to understand the social media habits of the participants, asking if they had social media accounts and if yes, which of them. It was an excluding factor if the participant didn't have social media. Since the questionnaire was distributed only via social media accounts, this problem was mitigated.

Finally, for the third and last part of the survey, we focused on the most important topic of this research - how the participant feels about political parties participating online, opinion leaders and their voting behavior. In this part, our aim was to divide into three sections - Political Interest, Social Media and Opinion Leaders -, which are the exact constructs defined for this study based on the previous literature review (Table 1).

<b>Constructs</b>		<b>Sources</b>
Political Interest (PI)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Political Interest</li> <li>• Political Knowledge</li> <li>• Voting Behavior</li> </ul>	(Gil de Zúñiga & Diehl, 2019)
Political Propaganda on Social Media (PPSM)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Research about politics</li> <li>• Interest in social media accounts</li> <li>• Influence on opinion</li> <li>• Interaction with social media accounts</li> <li>• Affinity with candidates more active in SM</li> </ul>	(Mangold & Fauld, 2009)
Opinion Leaders (OL)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Interest in social media influencers</li> <li>• Interaction with influencers' accounts</li> <li>• Influence on opinion</li> </ul>	(Eirinaki, Pisal, & Singh, 2012) (Oliveira et al., 2017)

Table 1 - Constructs based on Literature Review

Firstly, regarding the Political Interest section, we wanted to understand mainly if the participant had a special interest for politics and how they measured they understanding about political terms. It was helpful to also understand how they classify their voting behavior, in terms of how often they vote.

The second sub-section is regarding the Political Propaganda on Social Media. Here, we wanted to comprehend the participants' interest in political candidates' social networks. Do they feel interested in searching more about the political parties on social media? Do they feel like social media accounts are a way to feel more engaged with that party? We can consider this as the core section of this survey, since it focuses on the power of social media. Finally, in the last part of the third section, and last part of this questionnaire, we wanted to understand about Opinion Leaders, especially if respondents' have the feeling that these social media influencers are added values to the formation of self opinions.

For this last section of the questionnaire, where the participants were asked to rate their engagement with political parties, social media and opinion leaders, we decided to use a 7 point Likert Scale, where 1 corresponds to "Strongly Disagree" and 7 corresponds to "Completely Agree". This type of Likert Scale was chosen since it's necessary to analyze the position of agreement or disagreement with each statement (Malhotra et al., 2006).

Questionnaire's answers were exported into Excel and IBM SPSS - Statistical Package for Social Sciences version 27, in order to analyze the data collected. This analysis consisted of multiple tests. First, we realized a reliability analysis, so that we could study if the variables chosen were reliable to proceed with further study. Then, we performed a descriptive analysis, in order to comprehend the importance of each construct to the participants. Finally, in order to study the hypotheses previously formulated and the correlation to the independent variable, an ANOVA test was performed.



## 4. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

### 4.1. DEMOGRAPHICS ANALYSIS

The sample collected from this questionnaire was constituted by Portuguese citizens, with over 18 years old, from both genders. All the respondents' have access to the internet and at least one social media account. Also, a condition to participate in this study was to have voted in at least one Portuguese election, no matter what type. From the 101 answers gathered from this survey, 54 were women, who represent around 53.5% of the sample, and 47 were men, representing 46.5% of the participants. Most of the respondents are in the age range between 18 and 24 years old, corresponding to 29.7%, being immediately followed by individuals with age between 45 and 54 years old, precisely 28%. Considering the younger generation comprehends the citizens in the age range between 18 and 34 years old, this means that almost half of the participants are part of that "special sample" (46.5%). The level of education more representative is bachelor's degree (53%). When it concerns to their employee status, most of the participants are employed full-time (71%), meaning that most of the participants from the age range 18-24 years old are already employed (See Table 2)

<i>Sample Description</i>		<b>Count</b>	<b>N % of column</b>
Age	• 18 - 24	30	29.7%
	• 25 - 34	17	16.83%
	• 35 - 44	15	14.85%
	• 45 - 54	28	27.72%
	• 55 - 64	8	7.92%
	• >65	3	2.97%
Gender	• Male	47	46.5%
	• Female	54	53.5%
Education Level	• High School or less	19	18.8%
	• Bachelor's Degree	53	52.5%
	• Master's Degree	26	25.7%
	• Doctoral Program	3	3%
Employer Status	• Employed Full-Time	72	71.3%
	• Unemployed	3	3%
	• Student	23	22.8%
	• Retired	3	3%

Table 2 - Demographic Analysis

It was a requirement to participate in this study that all the participants had social media. Since this questionnaire was shared only on SM accounts (Facebook and Instagram), we were able to select only social media users. When asked about the most used SM platforms, the most expressive ones were Instagram and Facebook.

After gathering information about the demographics of the participants of this study, we will begin to analyze most deeper questions.

Then, it was important to understand individuals' behavior towards elections, especially in this case the Portuguese Legislative Elections of 2019. In this precise Elections, 58% of our participants voted in the same political party than the previous Election of 2015, meaning 59 citizens, while 42 of them chose a different party. Of those 42% of participants that didn't voted for the same political party than before, they were asked about the reason why. The majority felt some bad political performance of the political party they voted for, leading them to vote for a different one on the next elections (56%). The next bigger reason was the loss of affinity for that particular party.

#### 4.2. DESCRIPTIVE ANALYSIS

To measure the relevancy of the variables in this research, we performed a reliability test for each variable. Most of the constructs (Political Interest and Social Media) show a high consistency, since each Cronbach's Alpha is higher than 0.8. The construct Opinion Leaders has Cronbach's Alpha of 0.701. Even though it's not as high as the others, it is still considered reasonably consistent, since the recommended value is 0.7 (Nunnally, 1978) (Table 3).

	Cronbach's Alpha	Cronbach's Alpha Based on Standardized Items	N of Items
Political Interest	.954	.955	2
Social Media	.844	.839	5
Opinion Leaders	.701	.702	3

Table 3 - Reliability Test

To understand how relevant each of the construct were to the respondents, we performed a descriptive statistics analysis. When it comes to the descriptive statistics of this study, we can say that overall the participants in this study have interest in politics (M=4.42, SD=1.329), and they also consider to have a good knowledge on this topic (M=4.17, SD=1.217). Given this, we can conclude that most of the participants have at least interest about the politics themes that are most relevant at that time in their countries.

Although people regularly follow political parties' social media accounts (M=4.29, SD=1.344), the impact is a little less evident (M=3.24, SD=1.078). This can mean that people usually follow political parties' accounts, but just to get information and catch up with the latest news and developments, which is a normal behavior of a not so interested individual. Though, a citizen more interested and engage with the party will certainly feel more impacted by their publications. However, the engagement with their post becomes higher (M=3.71, SD=1.458), demonstrating the interest of individuals in political parties' posts, especially the "funny" and related with the present ones.

The study demonstrates that public figures - meaning journalists, actors, influencers - take a huge part on this topic, since a lot of people follow and engage with their content ( $M=5.03$ ,  $SD=1.044$ ). A relevant percentage of people demonstrate to be influenced by their opinion, not just regarding the usual content on advertisement of products and services to brands, but also on their political opinions about the country's government and political issues all over the world ( $M=4.10$ ,  $SD=0.671$ ), showing once again the importance that social media and influencers are gathering nowadays in people's lives. Though, given the difference of means between these two statements, we can conclude that even though the social media users follow public figures (and most particularly those who demonstrate their positions and are considered opinion leaders) and engage with their content, people are aware and take into consideration influencers' opinions on this matter, but still from a certain distant point.

All of these findings are consistent with what was stated previously during the study, since we found that participants have a good voting behavior ( $M=4.72$ ,  $SD=1.193$ ) (See Table 5 - Appendix B).

### **4.3. CORRELATION ANALYSIS BETWEEN CONSTRUCTS**

In order to analyze the constructs of Political Interest, Political Propaganda on Social Media and Opinion Leaders, comparing those between the participants who vote regularly and those who don't, we used an One-Way ANOVA test. With this, we want to understand if there's a statistically significant difference between them, that support our hypotheses that these constructs have a positive influence on the voting behavior.

In this ANOVA test, two distinct groups were created: those who vote on a regular basis (which means the ones that, when asked about how regularly they voted, chose 4 or more points) and those who don't vote very regularly. This said, there's a difference between these two groups, meaning they are independent from each other.

The results disclose the existence of significant differences between the individuals that vote regularly and the ones that do not, regarding the political interest ( $F=11.361$ ,  $p<0.001$ ), social media ( $F=10.892$ ,  $p<0.001$ ) and opinion leaders ( $F=3.098$ ,  $p=0.001$ ). These findings support our hypotheses H1, H3 and H4, in which we mentioned that voting behavior was positively influenced by individuals' political knowledge and interest, their ease with social media concepts, stimulus and the way they feel engaged and interested in political parties' networks, and finally the positive influence of opinions shared online by people who are online (and offline) relevant. However, even though we can see that opinions shared by opinion leaders on their social media accounts have a positive impact on voting behavior and are relevant to our respondents, it is not so consistent as the others constructs. The results are shown in the table 4.

		Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
<b>PI</b>	Between Groups	90.607	1	8.237	11.361	.000
	Within Groups	64.527	99	.725		
	Total	155.134	100			
<b>OL</b>	Between Groups	19.140	1	1.740	3.098	.001
	Within Groups	49.993	99	.562		
	Total	69.133	100			
<b>PPSM</b>	Between Groups	59.902	1	5.446	10.892	.000
	Within Groups	44.496	99	.500		
	Total	104.398	100			

Table 4 - ANOVA test

Before, when building our conceptual model with the hypotheses, we have put an extra variable - Age - as a moderator, meaning that the impact on voting behavior could be more expressive or less significant, depending on what age group the respondents were in. Contrary to what was once said, that young generation are less likely to vote, the contrary was demonstrated.

In order to test this, an analysis was made with all the 47 participants with age range between 18 and 34 years old (a grouping of the age groups of 18-24 and 25-34), where we analyzed their voting participation rate. Out of the 47 respondents in the young generation, we concluded that 79% vote regularly. Thus, H2 doesn't receive consistent support, concluding that actually the younger generation is getting more involved in the present political situation of the country and more interested about the concepts.

## **5. CONCLUSIONS**

As we already know from previous research, social media is trending since a few years ago from today's day, with the usage of electronic devices and social networks growing by leaps and bounds every day. Becoming one of the most important marketing channels, social media helps businesses to increase brand awareness and exposure, allowing them to reach larger audiences, that may potentially by their products or services, and, consequently, create and increase the number of sales (Statista, 2021). But this doesn't happen only with businesses. Nowadays, political parties are aware of this impressive numbers, and are giving more value to the power of social media in their political campaigns. In this sense, candidates and their affiliates are trying to increase their presence on social networks, raising awareness to their ideas and political plans.

In this respect, the research made in this study gives some important theoretical and practical conclusions that may contribute to a greater knowledge of social media by political candidates.

### **5.1. THEORETICAL IMPLICATIONS**

The main purpose of this thesis was to understand what can affect the voting behavior of a population. Especially the impact of social media on voting behavior, meaning how can candidates and political parties use social media in order to get the attention of citizens. In this way, this dissertation contributes with some important theoretical conclusions that converge in this positive direction.

Even though political marketing is already studied from a long time, it still misses some implications and important variables, and that is the reason why so many researchers follow this topic and try to improve and gather more knowledge. Also, it's a phenomenon yet poorly understood and studied in the Portuguese country. In this direction, this study gives also great contribution to the Portuguese political parties and citizens.

We found that indeed an informed citizen is able to easier gather reliable information, enabling a better understanding of the facts and to identify candidates who match with their political preference (Carmines and Stimson, 1980). Another finding we made with this study is that social media is, in fact, a big component of voting behavior, as citizens feel more engaged with a political party that shows an enhanced performance on social networks. Therefore, it's proved that social media can trigger positive attitudes towards voting behavior. Whilst this happens with social media, we found that opinion leaders' participation on voting behavior is not so consistent as we thought it was.

This study shows that there's a positive correlation between each of these variables and the voting behavior, meaning that political parties with a regular and appealing use of social media have higher chances of being noticed by the population.

### **5.2. PRACTICAL IMPLICATIONS**

As we already mentioned previously in this study, social media is taking a huge part of our days. Most of the people wake up and the first thing they do is to go on their social media accounts to check their feeds. This study is also able to offer practical conclusions that can contribute not only to a better understanding of how people behave while voters, but also for a higher comprehension of how social

media can impact their choice, and what can political parties do to enhance their social media accounts, engaging with more citizens and improving their ideals in people's minds.

One of the biggest achievements of the internet is how fast it can spread information, being this good or bad. And SM helps on this, creating the right environment to the dissemination of information relevant for the individuals, but also by giving the opportunity to everyone to give their opinion about every matter. Some individuals are more recognized on social media, either the reason can be the relevance of their professional work outside of the internet world or the influence they get by first working with their social networks, that is then projected to other platforms. These individuals, commonly known as influencers or opinion leaders, have such a great power and reach such a wide and diverse audience, that they can make a brand sell way more. And the behavior is the exact same for opinion related with politics, elections and the affinity with a certain political party and the disinterest for other. For politicians, social media can be not only a way to disseminate their ideals, but also to engage with their followers, and attract those who aren't completely convinced about their work.

Our study demonstrates that people are invested in political participation on social media, and there's evidence that this interest is even higher when this intervention is done with a sense of humor and a good timing, taking advantage of the country's political situation at the moment. Political parties that are not invested in social media, in making their posts as interactive, creative and appealing as they can, are losing big chances to improve their results.

It's shown in our study that the higher the knowledge of politics, the most likely people are to vote. As a result, politicians could take advantage of this situation, and start using their social media accounts to spread more knowledge about small concepts and meanings of political terms. In this way, they could not only leverage their audiences' knowledge and interest in politics, while also at the same time, engaging with them, creating a *top-of-mind* moment whenever those individuals think about a place where they get good information.

Also, it is important to mention that respondents shown to feel positively impacted by influencers' opinions. Even though politics is a sensitive topic, for everything good and bad that it can bring to a person, we think that political parties could take advantage of the figures that choose to share their political opinions on the internet, and somehow bridge up these two worlds.

With that being said, our recommendation is for political parties to make use of these findings and engage more with citizens online. Candidates that are not using the advantage of social media platforms are missing the opportunity to engage and come closer to the population, losing the advantages of one of the most rising variables in voting behavior.

## 6. LIMITATIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS FOR FUTURE WORKS

The present study allowed us to understand that voters feel more engaged with politics and parties that not only communicate on their social media accounts, but also use some humor on their publications. Beyond that, opinion leaders take a huge part on how voters behave. Considering these findings, political parties can have something to rely on while preparing their campaigns and how to get voters' attention.

However, this study has a number of limitations that may lead to future works. Firstly, we focused only on the influence of social media in voting behavior, which may not be sufficient inclusive. This knowledge can already serve as an enrichment to further investigation on how voters feel affected by marketing tools.

The survey used for methodology was conducted only for the Portuguese voters. Although it is interesting to have a point of view from a specific country, - and taking into account that there's yet not enough research for this topic on Portuguese context - it would be appealing to extend this study to a wider context. Also, it would be interesting to relate these findings with a specific election.

Still related to the audience reached, despite the number of participants was considered a relevant sample, further research should consider a larger sample, and also segmented by regions to generate more insights.

Another limitation found in this dissertation, that is also a recommendation for further ones, is that we could benefit from interviews or focus groups, in order to have a complement for the survey implemented and also for a better sentiment analysis.

Even though political marketing itself is not recent, the studies about them and how it can affect voting behavior are. The factors influencing voters' behavior have as well an undiscovered path. This study may serve as a beginning to future studies, where more independent variables are included.

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## 8. APPENDIX

### 8.1. APPENDIX A - SURVEY

On a small note before the attachment, since the objective of this study was to have a better comprehension of the Portuguese voting behavior, the following survey was distributed in Portuguese. Despite that fact, here it is available the English version of the survey.

This survey is done to the development of my dissertation integrated in the Master of Information Management with specialization in Marketing Intelligence, at NOVA IMS. The aim of this survey is to understand the impact of social media on voting behavior. The estimated time to complete is 7 minutes.

All responses will be anonymous, and the data collected will be used only for academic purposes.

Your participation is extremely important. In case of any doubt, please contact me through: m20190656@novaims.unl.pt.

Thank you in advance for your time and cooperation.

1. Nationality (only responses from Portuguese nationality citizens count)

2. Age

- 18-24
- 25-34
- 35-44
- 45-54
- 55-64
- 65 or more

3. Gender

- Female
- Male
- I rather not say

4. Education Level

- High School or less
- Bachelor's Degree

- Master's Degree
- Doctoral Program
- Other:

5. Employer Status

- Employed Full-Time
- Employed Part-Time
- Unemployed
- Student
- Retired

6. Do you have any social media platform?

- Yes
- No

6.1. If yes, which ones?

- Instagram
- Facebook
- Twitter
- LinkedIn
- YouTube
- Other:

7. Have you ever voted in any Portuguese elections (Presidential, Legislative or Municipal)?

- Yes
- No

8. Please, bear in mind the Portuguese Legislative Election of 2019. Did you vote for the same political party as in Legislative Election of 2015?

- Yes
- No

8.1 If you answer is no, why?

- I felt more engaged with another candidate
- Bad political performance
- Bad electoral campaign

I rather not say

9. Indicate your level of agreement regarding the following statements, using a scale of 1 to 7 where 1 = Totally Disagree and 7 = Totally Agree

#### Political Interest

- I am interested in politics.
- I have good knowledge regarding politics terms.
- I vote regularly.

#### Online Political Propaganda

- I use social media to make some research about political parties.
- I regularly see political parties' social media accounts.
- I have already changed my opinion about a political party by the way it communicated on social media.
- I regularly interact with political parties' accounts on the internet.
- I feel more affinity with political figures who are active on their social platforms.

#### Opinion Leaders

- I follow several public figures (journalists, actors, influencers, ...) on social media that show their political opinion.
- I interact with posts containing opinions of public figures on social media.
- I have already changed my political opinion influenced by the posts and opinions of a public figure.

## 8.2. APPENDIX B - ANALYSIS

	N	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Std. Deviation
<b>Political Interest</b>					
I have interest in politics	101	1	7	4.42	1.329
I have good knowledge of political terms	101	1	7	4.17	1.217
<b>PP on Social Media</b>					
I use social media to search for political parties	101	1	7	3.95	1.352
I follow political parties on social media	101	1	7	4.29	1.344
I already changed my mind on some political party due to its posts	101	1	6	3.24	1.078
I engage with political parties' posts	101	1	7	3.71	1.458
I feel more engaged with political figures active on SM	101	1	6	3.43	1.244
<b>Opinion Leaders</b>					
I follow public figures that share their political opinions	101	2	7	5.03	1.044
I engage with posts containing opinions of public figures on SM	101	2	7	4.65	1.034
I already changed my mind on some political party influenced by OL's posts	101	3	6	4.1	0.671

Table 5 - Descriptive Statistics

